

Śraddhā श्रद्धा

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24 November, 2011

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Contents

Sri Aurobindo's Teaching And Method Of Sadhana	Sri Aurobindo	7
Two Master-Conceptions Of The Gita: Purushottama And Para Prakriti	Kireet Joshi	9
Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata In Sri Aurobindo's <i>Savitri</i>	Prema Nandakumar	14
<i>Savitri</i> , Book I, Canto I, The Symbol Dawn, Pt.2	Debashish Banerji	23
Sri Aurobindo's Perspective On Reality	Martha SG Orton	40
Syncretism In Sri Aurobindo's Thought	Sandeep Joshi`	47
Intuition And The Limits To Reason: A Cross-Cultural Study	Richard Hartz	61
The Present Situation And The Need To Change The Political System	Kittu Reddy	78
Sarasvati And Her Vedic Symbolism	Sampada Savardekar	87
Language: A Means Of Spiritual Realisation	Ananda Reddy	97
Being Human And The Copernican Principle	Georges Van Vrekhem	107
Inayat Khan And The Mystic Nada	Nancy A Barta-Norton	124
Notes On Authors		148

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Śraddhāvāml labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Cover : Usha R Patel's painting *Voice Of The Higher Mind*

Editorial

Sri Aurobindo once said that he had been sent to bring down the Supermind into the earth-consciousness. The Supermind or the Divine Gnosis is the Divine's own Power, Knowledge, Will, Bliss not only in its supreme status or absolute self-existence but in its dynamis as well; it is the 'Wisdom-Power-Light-Bliss by which the Divine knows and upholds and governs and enjoys the universe'. No amount of personal effort or tapasya, however hard and long, can help one to attain this Supreme Truth-Consciousness; a descent of the Supreme Divine Nature, Parama Prakriti, alone can effect the divinisation of the human instrument. For this, self-surrender to a 'supreme transmuting Power', the Divine Mother, is called for. The key-word – the first word, the middle term and the last word — in the supramental yoga is surrender to the Supreme Divine Mother. Let us then make a firm resolve to keep ourselves completely open at all times on all the planes of our being to the presence and power of the Mother so that the uninterrupted workings of her light and force can transform our half-lit, obscure earth-nature into the undying radiance of her luminous nature.

Moving away slightly from the usual nature of articles featured in **Śraddha**, we take pleasure in including in this issue a paper by Nancy Barta-Norton on music and its centrality in the development of consciousness and sadhana in general. We hope readers will find this a welcome break and take an interest in the new slant given to the publication. We resume our series on Debashish Banerji's expositions on *Savitri* which we could not publish in the August number as it was devoted predominantly to the social and political writings of The Master.

We are grateful to the Sri Aurobindo Trust, Pondicherry, for its permission to reproduce the extract on '**Sri Aurobindo's Teaching and Method of Sadhana**' from SABCL, vol.26, pp.95-97, the selections of writings by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on music, the photograph of Sri Aurobindo taken from the Ashram catalogue of photos and the painting ***Voice Of The Higher Mind*** by Usha R Patel on the cover of the journal. We specially thank Ms Anjali Jaipuria, Managing Trustee, Mother's Institute of Research, New Delhi for her kind permission to reproduce the selected extract from Dr. Kireet Joshi's book '***The Gita and its Synthesis of Yoga***', published by the Institute in 2009. Our usual words of thanks and gratitude to Samata in the Studio for once again helping us to choose the right painting for the cover of our journal and to Chaitanya in the Archives for providing its high resolution image. Finally, a word of apology to our long-time friend and regular contributor, Georges van Vrekhem, for omitting to mention in his last two essays in the Feb and Apr '11 issues that these were based on talks given earlier at Auroville. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgements and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

Readers of **Sraddha** will be interested to know that we have started a Facebook page for **Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata**. The page can be accessed by all Facebook users, to exchange views and share information. This way we will be able to share news about events, lectures and other programmes that are regularly held on our premises. Members or other interested people who are not on Facebook, can also access our site through the following link :

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sri-Aurobindo-Bhavan-Kolkata/192973247443055>

Sri Aurobindo's Teaching And Method Of Sadhana

Sri Aurobindo

The teaching of Sri Aurobindo starts from that of the ancient sages of India that behind the appearances of the universe there is the Reality of a Being and Consciousness, a Self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that One Self and Spirit but divided by a certain separativity of consciousness, an ignorance of their true Self and Reality in the mind, life and body. It is possible by a certain psychological discipline to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true Self, the Divinity within us and all.

Sri Aurobindo's teaching states that this One Being and Consciousness is involved here in Matter. Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself; consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient, and once having appeared is self-impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection. Life is the first step of this release of consciousness; mind is the second; but the evolution does not finish with mind, it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental. The next step of the evolution must be towards the development of Supermind and Spirit as the dominant power in the conscious being. For only then will the involved Divinity in things release itself entirely and it become possible for life to manifest perfection.

But while the former steps in evolution were taken by Nature without a conscious will in the plant and animal life, in man Nature becomes able to evolve by a conscious will in the instrument. It is not, however, by the mental will in man that this can be wholly done, for the mind goes only to a certain point and after that can only move in a circle. A conversion has to be made, a turning of the consciousness by which mind has to change into the higher principle. This method is to be found, through the ancient psychological discipline and practice of Yoga. In the past, it has been attempted by a drawing away from the world and a disappearance into the height of the Self or Spirit. Sri Aurobindo teaches that a descent of the higher principle is possible which will not merely release the spiritual Self out of the world, but release it in the world, replace the mind's ignorance or its very limited knowledge by a supramental Truth-Consciousness which will be a sufficient instrument of the inner Self and make it possible for the human being to find himself dynamically as well as inwardly and grow out of his still animal humanity into a diviner race. The psychological discipline of Yoga can be used to that end by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or transformation through the descent and working of the higher still concealed supramental principle.

This, however, cannot be done at once or in a short time or by any rapid or miraculous transformation. Many steps have to be taken by the seeker before the supramental descent is possible. Man lives mostly in his surface mind, life and body, but there is an inner being within him with greater possibilities to which he has to awake—for it is only a very restricted influence from it that he receives now and that pushes him to a constant pursuit of a greater beauty, harmony, power and knowledge. The first process of Yoga is therefore to open the ranges of this inner being and to live from there outward, governing his outward life by an inner light and force. In doing so he discovers in himself his true soul which is not this outer mixture of mental, vital and physical elements but something of the Reality behind them, a spark from the one Divine Fire. He has to learn to live in his soul and purify and orientate by its drive towards the Truth the rest of the nature. There can follow afterwards an opening upward and descent of a higher principle of the Being. But even then it is not at once the full supramental Light and Force. For there are several ranges of consciousness between the ordinary human mind and the supramental Truth-Consciousness. These intervening ranges have to be opened up and their power brought down into the mind, life and body. Only afterwards can the full power of the Truth-Consciousness work in the nature. The process of this self-discipline or Sadhana is therefore long and difficult, but even a little of it is so much gained because it makes the ultimate release and perfection more possible.

There are many things belonging to older systems that are necessary on the way — an opening of the mind to a greater wideness and to the sense of the Self and the Infinite, an emergence into what has been called the cosmic consciousness, mastery over the desires and passions; an outward asceticism is not essential, but the conquest of desire and attachment, and a control over the body and its needs, greeds and instincts are indispensable. There is a combination of the principles of the old systems, the way of knowledge through the mind's discernment between Reality and the appearance, the heart's way of devotion, love and surrender and the way of works turning the will away from motives of self-interest to the Truth and the service of a greater Reality than the ego. For the whole being has to be trained so that it can respond and be transformed when it is possible for that greater Light and Force to work in the nature.

In this discipline, the inspiration of the Master, and in the difficult stages his control and his presence are indispensable — for it would be impossible otherwise to go through it without much stumbling and error which would prevent all chance of success. The Master is one who has risen to a higher consciousness and being and he is often regarded as its manifestation or representative. He not only helps by his teaching and still more by his influence and example but by a power to communicate his own experience to others.

This is Sri Aurobindo's teaching and method of practice. It is not his object to develop any one religion or to amalgamate the older religions or to found any new religion — for any of these things would lead away from his central purpose. The one aim of his Yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the One Self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature.

(Reproduced from *Sri Aurobindo On Himself*, SABCL, vol.26, pp.95-97)

Two Master-Conceptions Of The Gita: Purushottama And Para Prakriti

Kireet Joshi

Two master conceptions of the Gita are those of Purushottama and of Para Prakriti, the supreme Lord and his supreme power; these two concepts are not new, and they are not arrived at by any philosophical speculative process. They are based on yogic experiences to repeat which and to verify which yogic methods of the synthesis of yoga in which works, knowledge and divine love are harmoniously blended have been laid down. They also confirm the yogic experiences which have been recorded in the Veda and the Upanishads, although the words used in the Gita are novel. Some of the corresponding words used in the Veda for the Gita's Purushottama are: "*tad ekam*" (That One),¹ "*tad adbhutam*" (That wonderful),² "One, who is neither today nor tomorrow but has motion in the consciousness in another",³ "*catvāśrīṅga*" "*trayoasya pāda*" (the four-horned bull with three feet),⁴ and Purusha described in the Purusha Sukta.⁵ The words used in the Upanishads are: "*tad ejati tad na ejati* (That moves and That which does not move),⁶ "*avyaktāt parah puruṣah*" (the highest Purusha above the Unmanifest).⁷ "*akṣarāt parā tah parah*" (Supreme beyond the Immutable).⁸ The words in the Veda, which correspond to Gita's *parā prakṛti*, are mainly: "*dhenu*" (the Cow), "*Aditi*" (Original Indivisible Mother); those in the Upanishads are mainly: "*Aditi*", as also "*stree*", "*Uma*", (the Woman, Uma, who guides Indra to discover the Supreme Lord).⁹ These two concepts resolve the difficulties which are found in the Sankhya in regard to the relationship of the Immobile and luminous Purusha with the Mobile but unconscious Prakriti. These concepts also resolve the difficulties in relating the Immobile Brahman with dynamic manifested world within the framework of the Vedantic Monism. They also enable the transcendence of Vedavada and its ritualism. They bring into the forefront the esoteric teaching of the Vedic yoga and show how Karmakanda can be uplifted into Karma Yoga in which work and knowledge can be united and where the concept of sacrifice is enlarged into the concept of offering of all actions (*sarva karmāṇi*) as sacrifice through which desire can be eliminated and where the motivation of desire is replaced by that of sacrifice and surrender to the Divine.

The concept of *parā prakṛti*, as the higher nature of Purushottama, establishes the Vedic and the Upanishadic experience of oneness both in diversity and above diversity. The concept of *parā prakṛti*, as the one Supreme Power, which manifests not only in all as the One, but in each as the Jiva, the individual spiritual presence, and which also manifests the essence of all qualities of Nature, brings out in sharp focus the complexity of

the Ultimate Reality as at once transcendental, universal and the individual. The mystery of the individual soul, Jiva, which is quite veiled elsewhere, finds in the Gita its explicit position and its relationship with the Immobile Purusha along with its relationship with all that is mobile and also with the transcendental Purushottama as His eternal portion (*mama eva amīśah sanātanaḥ*).¹⁰ Prakriti is conceived in Sankhya as one of the two independent and ultimate realities, even though that Prakriti consists of three dissimilar qualities; but in the Gita this Prakriti finds a subordinate position, as a derivative of higher Prakriti in which all qualities are properly harmonised. How Purusha which is self-luminous gets entangled and eclipsed in its consciousness by mere association with unconscious Prakriti, remains enigmatic in the Sankhya; but this enigma gets a proper reply and explanation in the Gita. The Immobile Purusha in the Gita remains ever-luminous and inactive; but it is the Jiva, the individual soul, which in its dynamic poise, *ksara*, that gets entangled by its descent from the *Parā Prakriti* into *Aparā Prakriti*.¹¹ The status of the immobility of Immutable Purusha can always be recovered by the Jiva by an active will in its dynamic aspect by the process of Yoga; the Jiva can also ascend back into *Parā Prakriti* and rise also into relationship with the Supreme Lord as its eternal portion.

One great difficulty in reconciling the Sankhya with the Vedanta is that although the Purusha in the Sankhya and the Brahman in the Vedanta are both luminous and immobile, the Purusha in Sankhya is plural, while the Brahman in the Vedanta is One without the Second. The Sankhya was obliged to posit in its intellectual philosophy the plurality of the Purushas because of two important facts which needed to be explained satisfactorily in any metaphysical system. The first is the fact that each individual in the world, despite many common characteristics with other individuals, has such a distinctive outlook of its experience in the world that its uniqueness can be explained only if each individual is ontologically different from the others. The second fact that had to be explained by the Sankhya was that when one individual gets liberated, all others do not thereby get liberated; this can happen only if each individual is separate from all the others and if each individual is individually bound to Prakriti and gets individually liberated. The Vedanta of the Gita resolves this problem by affirming, first, that the Purusha or the Brahman is always non-dual or non-plural in its immobile status; on the other hand, the Gita affirms that it is only in the *kshara* aspect of the reality, the One Supreme Reality, Purushottama, that multiplicity of individual souls or Jivas is put forth¹² without abrogating their oneness in the Brahmic consciousness. The Gita accepts the multiplicity of the individual souls but not their plurality, since plurality would amount to the independent existence of each individual without any kind of dependence on one Source.

Under the premises of the pure Sankhya alone, the combining of works and liberation is impossible. Under the premises of the immobile Brahmic monism in Vedanta, the permanent continuation of works as a part of yoga and the indulgence of devotion after perfect knowledge and liberation and union are attained, become impossible or at least rationally unsustainable. But the Gita transcends both the Sankhyan dualism and pure Vedantic Monism by discovering, by a higher yogic knowledge which is also in conformity with the synthesis of the yogic realisations of the Veda and the Upanishad, the vision and experience of Purushottama. We have in the Gita the Vedantic yoga of works, which is rooted in the complex and integral Monism; as a result, action is not in the Gita merely a preparation but itself the means of liberation, and action continues even after liberation, since action thereafter becomes a part of divine action itself. Similarly, Gita's Vedantic yoga

of devotion and divine love is not only a preparation but itself the means of liberation, and devotion continues even after liberation, since the Jiva, as distinguished from ego, who is an eternal portion of the Purushottama, can continue to subsist as that portion in a state of divine love with all its intensity and permanence in the state of liberation. The integral knowledge continues to be the immortal foundation of works and devotion, and as Sri Krishna points out, the divine lover who is also the divine knower is dearer to the Divine than all other categories of devotees. The Vedavada, which emphasised ritualistic work of sacrifice as an exclusive and as the only path (*na anyad asti iti vādinah*)¹³ is also transcended by the Gita, and while it admits the justification for works, it provides a sure foundation for all works (*sarvakarmani*), and it also uplifts the meaning of works as sacrifice by insisting on the renunciation of desires which are normally to be found to be inescapably associated with works and even with ritualistic works in the framework of Vedavada. In transcending the Vedavada, the Gita admits the utility of the Veda as a Scripture but it appeals to a deeper source of knowledge by pointing out that the Supreme Lord is in the heart of every man and from Him is the knowledge. In that context, the Gita points out: “When thy intelligence shall cross beyond the world of delusion, then shalt thou become indifferent to Scripture heard or that which thou hast yet to hear, ‘*tadā gantāsi nirvedam śrotavyasya śrutasya ca*’. When thy intelligence which is bewildered by the shruti, ‘*śrutivipratipanna*’, shall stand unmoving and stable in Samadhi, then shalt thou attain to Yoga.”¹⁴ This is how the Gita places Yoga as superior to religious ritualism and to the authority of the Scripture, and this justifies the description of the Gita as yogashastra, systematic science of yoga. In other words, the Gita provides a sound basis for the untrammelled truth-seeking of the free and illumined mind and God-experienced soul, and in this way the Gita rings with the message with the all-liberating quest that irrespective of what is heard or unheard before, one must always seek the truth in the illumined depths of the heart where knowledge can be unfolded in a yogic process, not only from Ignorance to Knowledge, but even of Knowledge proceeding to a still higher, profounder and wider Knowledge, the intimations of which can always be heard directly from the Supreme Lord, who is the inmost Guide and Master of all knowledge.

The discovery of the *Parā Prakriti*, the higher nature that we find in the Gita, — or rather the rediscovery, since this higher nature was already discovered in the Veda and also in the Upanishads and formulated in the concept of Aditi, the infinite Mother, — is central to the solution that Sri Krishna provides to Arjuna. Arjuna had come to the battlefield with the confident sense of the Right in regard to the role that he wanted to play in the battle of the Kurukshetra; he was acting according to the dharma of kshatriya, the dharma of the warrior that was recognised in his Age to fight and even to massacre, if need be, his enemies, who were judged in the highest light available to him to be a source of *adharma*. — of injustice and uncivilised passions, which were leading the society towards degradation. He knew that he was acting according to dharma and his action was right and just. But when confronted physically with the situation, he found that what he had thought was dharma was actually *adharma*, since he was to massacre his own grandfather and his teachers in whose service it was his dharma to give up his own life; even if he thought that it was his dharma to seek his own happiness or the happiness of all to whom he owed so much, his brethren and his relatives and friends and others, in whose company alone and sharing happiness with whom alone, happiness had to be sought and enjoyed, were the very people whom he was to massacre; to avoid the massacre was his dharma

in preference to what he had thought was dharma; in other words, his dharma to fight was, he now thought, *adharma*; but even if that *adharma* had some justification, what about the *adharma* that was to arise in the entire society as a result of massive massacre of enemies whose wives would be rendered into the state of widowhood and would be obliged by the force of the human nature to take recourse to immoral ways of life that would generate generations of people who would be born through immorality? That would be a total collapse of dharma. Which dharma, he had asked, that he had to follow? And is it not true that, after all, *sannyasa*, renunciation of all works was the right thing to do, as was advocated by Sankhyan philosophy and seers? He had felt that that was his dharma, — to renounce the entire field of work, to renounce the desire for happiness, the desire for kingdom, and even to allow himself to be killed unarmed and without resistance by his own enemies. But even this renunciation, even if it was seen for a moment to be the right solution — was it truly the right solution? Arjuna was not sure. He confessed his confusion and his bewilderment and turned to Sri Krishna for light and for a true solution so as to be able to do what was perfectly right and to which no blemish could apply. Arjuna was in complete bewilderment, where dharma collided with dharma, and where standards of conduct erected within the circle of human consciousness stood in sharp conflict with each other. This confusion and bewilderment was also the cause of all-consuming sorrow, and Arjuna found no way of relief from that sorrow. In that hour of terrible crisis, Sri Krishna assured him to show the way by which he could act and fight in the battle with such a new consciousness that there would be in his action such purity that it would be devoid of any blemish.

If ultimate reality consisted of only two independent principles of Purusha and Prakriti, and if all movement of energy and action were to be only in the realm of Prakriti, there could be no action which would be free from the obscurity of Prakriti, free from desire and free from the operations of ego. Within the circle of the nature of Prakriti, the very operations of which are a disequilibrium of three *gunas*, one can never arrive in that circle any possibility of harmonious action, an action where dharma and *adharma* and dharma and dharma could ever cease to collide with each other, since all dharmas and *adharms* are the unavoidable parts of the disequilibrium of inertia, *tamas*, impulsion to act, *rajas* and striving for light and harmony, *sattwa*. Prakriti is a constant field of disequilibrium; how can one find in that field anything that can be judged to be entirely right or entirely wrong? And how can any decisive action follow in which there is true and justifiable and totally right action? It is only if the action of energy of Prakriti that is described in Sankhya is not all, if it is only a derivative, incomplete and imperfect movement flowing from a higher source of energy in which all is totally harmonious with all that is released from its source, then it is only by renouncing the workings of lower Prakriti, the Sankhyan Prakriti, and only by embracing the higher Prakriti that there is a possibility of action that would be totally good. The Gita affirms that the Sankhyan account of Prakriti is an account of lower Prakriti, but there is a higher Prakriti of which the lower Prakriti is a subordinate derivative, and that the higher Prakriti, *Parā Prakriti*, is the luminous and conscious will and power of the supreme Purusha, in every movement of whom there is inherent harmony and fullness of spiritual purity.¹⁵ The entire drift of Sri Krishna’s argument in answer to the questions of Arjuna is directed towards the affirmation of *Parā Prakriti* and towards the way and the method by which Arjuna can perceive that will and unite himself with that will so that that will can spontaneously flow through Arjuna as that *Parā Prakriti*’s will, which is always the totally luminous will of the Purushottama.

Notes and References

1. RV., X.129..2
2. Ibid., I.170.1
3. Ibid
4. Ibid., IV.58.3
5. Ibid., X.90
6. Isha Upanishad, 5
7. Katha Upanishad, II. 3.8
8. Muṇḍaka Upanishad, II.1.2
9. Kena Upanishad, III.12
10. BG., XV.7
11. Ibid., IX.8
12. Vide., Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, 1971, vol.18, pp.146-7, where we find a statement describing the supermind, which is, in the language of the Gita, *Parā Prakriti*, and where the divine consciousness, which is in the language of the Gita, Purushottama, is stated to be standing back in the idea from the movement which it contains, occupying and inhabiting its works, seeming to distribute itself in its forms. Sri Aurobindo states, “This concentration supporting the soul-form would be the individual Divine or Jivatman as distinguished from the universal Divine or one all-constituting self”. This statement is important, because in the Gita itself we do not find any philosophical statement explaining or describing as to how multiplicity of individual souls or jivas is put forth without abrogating their oneness in the Brahmic consciousness. What is clear in the Gita is that the individual is the eternal portion of Purushottama or divine consciousness (XV.7) and that it is the *Parā Prakriti* which manifests itself as individual souls or jivas. (VII.5)
13. BG., II.42
14. Ibid., II.52-3
15. Vide., Ibid., VII.4-14

(Reproduced from the author's book, entitled *The Gita and its Synthesis of Yoga* , 2009, pp.56-64, with the kind permission of The Mother's Institute of Research, New Delhi)

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

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prema Nandakumar

10. The Vrata and the Yoga

From the legend of Vyasa down to the most recent recreation of the Savitri legend, there is always a reference to how Savitri ‘prepared’ herself to meet the day when Satyavan was fated to die. What was this discipline that gave Savitri the overwhelming self-confidence and power to meet the Lord of Death himself?

Vyasa's description of the vrata is brief and chimes in well with the Mimamsa theory of yore which gave precedence to Vedic chants and the fire sacrifice. The Mimamsa School engages itself on the authority of the Vedas which, according to the School, are revealed texts and hence infallible. The Brahmanas and the Samhitas deal with the importance of word-utterance extensively as also ritualism. The rituals have to be performed following the strict rules of observance. By its very application, the Mimamsa School has no patience with asceticism. It is based on the rituals performed by an adherent from birth onwards and moves through his becoming a student wearing the Brahmacharin's girdle, marriage, *pumsavana seemantha*, rituals performed on the birth of children and so on till his death when the baton is handed over to his successor. Special rituals are indicated for obtaining various results. The *Putra-kameshti* yajna performed by King Dasaratha, for instance, had the aim of getting sons for the continuation of the Sun dynasty.

It is but natural that as the days go by, we tend to take it easy when following the rituals, and grow lax with observing strictly the traditional commands. Another problem is the misunderstanding of the texts by the priests, one of the reasons why animal sacrifice (and even human sacrifice at times) came to be included in the rituals. This evoked a reaction from great thinkers and mystics like Gautama Buddha and Vardhamana Mahavira. As counter to the reaction which led to the near decimation of Vedic rituals, Vedic scholars like Kumarila Bhatta and Prabhakara came to the fore in the 7th century and revived them.

When Vyasa was writing the Mahabharata, sacrifice (of animals) had no doubt become part of Vedic rituals. Since we come across the sacrifice of Iravan before the Kurukshetra war to ensure a Pandava victory, and also the story of Sunahshepa, even human sacrifice is indicated. But as Rishi Markandeya tells Yudhistira in the Mahabharata, the story of Savitri belongs to very ancient times when Vedic ritualism in its pure form was extant. This is how we see Savitri undertaking the *tri-ratra vrata*.

Four days prior to the date indicated by Rishi Narad Savitri undertook a “*tri-ratra vrata* of standing night and day at one single place”. Dyumathsena heard of her vow and became worried. He had no idea why she was undertaking such a difficult vow. He told her that this particular vrata was very hard and severe. The vrata called for standing straight all the time and was certainly very difficult for a young girl like her. Savitri replies with great humility:

“Be not disturbed about it, please; I shall be able to carry the vow without blame; only a firm resolve makes it go through successfully and I have initiated it with that resolve.”

Dyumathsena is well versed in the Vedic rituals and knows that once it has been resolved to undertake a ritual with an aim, it was best to go through it with sincerity. So he does not ask her to change her mind. Instead he blesses her that she may perform the chosen ritual successfully. He had watched her living in the hermitage and knew that she was a woman of few words but firm in action. Rishi Markandeya now describes the vrata to Yudhistira:

“Saying so, the great-minded Dyumathsena retired and Savitri, standing erect on a fixed spot, appeared to be as though she was a straight wooden post.

O Yudhistira, ‘Tomorrow the husband is to die’ – it was with this thought, and filled with an intense grief, Savitri remained standing even as the last night of the vow was about to be over.

Next day, knowing that it had arrived, well with the sunrise she completed the morning rituals and lit a bright fire and made to it sacrificial offerings.”

Presently Savitri respectfully made salutations to her parents-in-law and the elders and sages who lived in the hermitage. She then stood respectfully before them with folded hands. With a united voice all these forest-dwellers who were full of tapasya blessed her to remain an auspicious wedded lady (*avaidhavya*), a *sadaa suhaagin*. Immediately she entered a state of meditation (*dhyaanayoga paraayanaa*) praying for their words to come true. Though her parents-in-law, feeling anxious for her, request her to take food after having gone through the strenuous vrata, Savitri makes excuses saying she will do so once her desire is fulfilled.

Such is the vrata of Savitri, seemingly simple. But then in ancient times, even before the age of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, people believed entirely in the rituals set down by the scriptures. There was no particular deity which was elevated so that one offered one’s total devotion there. All the Vedic gods were respected and those who performed such rituals had full faith in the gods granting their wishes. This total faith in Vedic ritualism is known as Purva Mimamsa now. According to this Path, it is not merely faith in one receiving the fruits of the rituals. We are told that a power descends into the person performing it and remains with him till the fruits are realised.

“The Mimamsakas have attempted to answer the question how a remote result, say, the attainment of heaven, is obtained by an action such as a sacrifice, which belong to and in fact ceases in the present. Injunctive texts ordain that the fruits, namely, heaven

and the like, should be achieved by sacrifices such as *darsa-paurnamasa*. And this implies that the sacrifice is means to the fruit, viz. Heaven. A sacrifice is the nature of an action which is very soon lost. Hence the instrumentality of the sacrifice to the fruit which is to take place at a distant time is hardly possible. To establish this instrumentality, which is propounded by the Sruti, between sacrifice and heaven, an invisible potency is admitted which issues from the sacrifice and which endures till the fruit is generated and which resides in the soul of the sacrificer. This is called *apurva*. It ceases on producing the result... It is a power in the sacrifice.”¹

No doubt Savitri’s aim had been non-widowhood (*avaidhavya*). She needed a power to help her achieve it and the Vedic ritualism gave her such a power. There is no other explanation for Savitri’s ability to follow Yama beyond the earth when the dire god was taking away Satyavan’s “thumb-sized life”. This is mentioned clearly by Vyasa. *Niyamavrata samsiddhaa mahabhaagaa pativrataa*.

In course of time, the important phrase, *Niyamavrata samsiddhaa*, in this sloka, seems to have been forgotten. Taking the term ‘*pativrata*’ as the main agent, Savitri has been described as having the power of chastity (one who remains wedded to her husband). Of course, Savitri was an ideal wife and would not think of anyone else in Satyavan’s place. Indeed such was the high idealism of Indian womanhood that has remained so till this day, inspite of a variety of assaults, both external and internal. When Sita is afflicted by the demonesses in the Ashoka grove in Lanka and asked by them to marry Ravana, she says she is a *pativrata*, wedded to her husband alone. And she gives several such names, *Yathaa sachi mahabhaagaa*. Like Sachidevi following Indra, Arundhati following Vasishta, Rohini following Chandra, Lopamudra following Agasthya, Sukanya following Chyavana, Savitri following Satyavan, Srimati following Kapila, Madayanti following Saudasa, Kesini following Sagara, Damayanti following the Nishada king Nala, Sita would also follow Rama to the end of earth and will never swerve from this high idealism.

The idea of such a wife gaining mastery over nature is familiar enough in the Indian clime. We have the Puranic Nalayani preventing the sun from rising at dawn; and the ancient Tamil epic **Silappadhikaram** describes the heroine Kannaki as reducing to ashes the city of Madurai by the fire of her chastity. Thus Savitri’s *pativratya* is a potent power. If it had been the only power, Vyasa would not have inserted a Vedic ritual before she left for the forest with Satyavan on the day of Fate. Apparently, in the Mahabharata world the vrata chimes in with the faith that Savitri had prepared herself by the ritual, received the power of the sacrifice, *apurva* and meditated upon the blessings of the elders and sages for her *avaidhavya*. Sri Aurobindo’s epic transformation of the Upakhyana has taken place millennia since Vyasa wrote about the *tri-ratra vrata*.

Sri Aurobindo had full faith in the Vedic Path. Unfortunately, the intervening millennia had corroded the Vedic Path very badly. Repeated external aggression had effected wholesale destruction of our scriptures. We are told that only a portion of the original number of Vedas are now available. A good deal may have survived the devastating assaults by Buddhism and Jainism thanks to persons like Kumarila Bhatta and Mandana Misra who raised high the flag of Purva Mimamsa. But in the last thirteen hundred centuries Islamic destruction of Hindu religious places and libraries and wholesale

conversion by the sword have effected the weakening of the Vedic Path. English education has also had a major hand in making us strangers to our own heritage.

Fortunately Sanatana Dharma has a way of renewing itself periodically because of its innate spiritual strength. One has only to compare 1910 with 2010. Many scholars, mystics and inspired devotees have been removing the obstructions in the Vedic Path, and repairing it and restoring it in a creative manner. Among such savants has been Sri Aurobindo. When writing *Savitri* he must have meditated upon the *tri-ratra vrata*. He was no stranger to philosophical systems. He may have wondered what kind of a ritual was this *tri-ratra vrata* mentioned by Vyasa in brief and what was the *apurva*, the power that came to be bestowed upon the doer by the sacrifice.

A term used by Vyasa to describe Savitri is *dhyana yoga paraayana*. When Dyumathsena is agitated by the absence of Satyavan, the sages of the forest console him. Why should he worry when Savitri was a tapasvin? Hadn't they seen her these three days undergoing patiently a very difficult vrata? The sage Suvarchas says:

"His wife Savitri, I know, is engaged in tapasya, and has control over the senses; and is of a good well-poised conduct; from that I can proclaim that Satyavan is alive."

Other rishis assure him that Savitri is endowed with the signs of auspiciousness (*avaidhavya*) and so Satyavan must be alive. In fact all of them are very sure about what they say for all of them know that this Vedic ritual cannot fail. They had seen her performing the vow and following Satyavan without taking her food, such had been her singular focus on the future. It is not what we would call faith in the grace of the Supreme, but the positive strength of mind which would compel the Supreme to act in favour of the doer of the vrata. Bharadhwaja says:

"His wife Savitri, I know, is engaged in askesis, and has mastered the senses: and is well-poised in her manner of action; I can hence affirm that Satyavan is living."

These sages are famous for uttering only the Truth-word, *Satyavagmi tapasvins*. And so it comes to be that Savitri and Satyavan return safely to the hermitage. Thus it is not only the *tri-ratra vrata* but the total faith reposed by the rishis in it that must have made Sri Aurobindo go in search of the tapasya that had made Savitri invincible, and he found it in Dhyana Yoga. Through meditation she had gained mastery of herself. What are the phases of meditation? How deep does one move within? When does one gain the power of the sacrifice (*apurva*), the aim of the tapasya? Thus was the Book of Yoga born.

As she remains "the same perfect Savitri" without, inly she is full of anguish. Should she give in and perform suttee? What would happen to the elders then? In any case how can she admit defeat without ever going to the battle? During one of the sleepless nights, a voice issuing out of her *Ajña Chakra* (the space between the brows) is heard. "Arise, O soul, and vanquish Time and Death." She was born to lead, not lament. In her trance Savitri says that she sees no point in the struggle as Fate is incorrigible. The voice within rejects this abdication of the responsibility with which she was born. She will know what to do once she finds her soul, when she recovers her hidden self. Sri Aurobindo presents this search as a parable in the second canto of the Book of Yoga.

Savitri accepts the admonition and advice. The needed strength comes from within herself: The conversation within her are from her own two selves, one above, one below.

"...Remember why thou cam'st:
Find out thy soul, recover thy hid self,
In silence seek God's meaning in thy depths,
Then mortal nature change to the divine.
Open God's door, enter into his trance."

(*Savitri*, 1993, 4th ed., p.476)

Immediately she sits beside Satyavan in a yogic pose, rigid, motionless. From where did I come? Where am I now? Where am I going? The evolutionary past appears before her in all its steady working upwards.

"A dream disclosed to her the cosmic past,
The crypt-seed and the mystic origins,
The shadowy beginnings of world-fate:
A lamp of symbol lighting hidden truth
Imaged to her the world's significance.
In the indeterminate formlessness of Self
Creation took its first mysterious steps,
It made the body's shape a house of soul
And Matter learned to think and person grew;
She saw Space peopled with the seeds of life
And saw the human creature born in Time."

(*Savitri*, 1993, 4th ed., p.476)

With the birth of the mind man seemed to become the unstoppable conqueror but mind was not enough. A restless instrument it began to do more evil than good. Is there then no way for him to put Mind to the right use? But no matter. We will definitely overcome our evil propensities that seek to make the world a hell. For the light divine is very much there in the regions beyond the mind:

"Our greater self of knowledge waits for us,
A supreme light in the truth-conscious Vast:
It sees from summits beyond thinking mind,
It moves in a splendid air transcending life.
It shall descend and make earth's life divine."

(*Savitri*, 1993, 4th ed, p.485)

What Savitri had to do now was to get her psyche out to influence her action with right decisions. What is the nature and power of her psyche? Savitri now enters a deeper meditation, a figure like Vyasa's Savitri standing like a block of wood (*kaashtabhuteva*), still and unmoving. Her experiences from now onwards are presented as a parable, an allegory which personifies the various powers that lie within us, the

possibilities of recognising them and growing in consciousness despite the hurdles that block our way to know the truth about ourselves.

As she enters deep meditation, she is confronted by a dark gate. A voice denies her entry : “Back, creature of earth, lest tortured and torn thou die.” Horrible creatures like slimy serpents and wicked goblins, symbolising material passions, desires and greed disturb her. But she moves forward, unafraid. There is here life where the senses rule and it is all chaos. No real satisfaction is derived from the sense pleasures. Seeking release from the threatened bondage of senses, Savitri takes recourse to the time-tested help of *nama-japa*:

“Hour after hour she trod without release
Holding by her will the senseless meute at bay;
Out of the dreadful press she dragged her will
And fixed her thought upon the saviour Name;
Then all grew still and empty; she was free.

(Savitri, 1993, 4th ed, p.491)

Now Savitri finds herself in a world where the senses are controlled by certain ideals like honour, faith and duty. Though high ideals, when pushed to the extremes, they are counter-productive too. One of the major reasons is man’s egoistic nature which leads to hesitations and half-truths. Such characters can be seen in the epics of our heroic age like Ravana, Bhishma and Aswaththama. What use all the glory surrounding their careers if they had not utilised their lives for the good of man? Nor are the spaces where Reason rules high can bring satisfaction. They are soul-less indeed. A sage-like person accosts her, and she finds that “tradition’s petrified wisdom carved his speech” as he invites her to become a permanent member of this world. But Savitri excuses herself as she would never be satisfied with a space where the heart had no place and a well-ordered intellect reigned supreme. Others in the world are astonished. Does she not realise that there is nothing like a soul which is perhaps just a “gland or a secretion’s fault” that disturbs the mind from its works? A few laugh saying the spirit is but the “Holy Ghost of Mind”. There was also one who was unhappy for having given up the path of search by killing his faith. “Is there one left who seeks for a Beyond? / Can still the path be found, opened the gate?”

As she progresses further, Savitri finds some goddesses coming her way. She calls out:

“O happy company of luminous gods,
Reveal, who know, the road that I must tread,—
For surely that bright quarter is your home,—
To find the birthplace of the occult Fire
And the deep mansion of my secret soul.”

(Savitri, 1993, 4th ed, p.501)

The goddesses tell her that they are from her own soul and it is within herself that she will find what she has been seeking so far. Savitri goes into a deeper meditation and we have now the magnificent personification of certain powers latent in the human

being like compassion, strength and beauty.

The canto, ‘The Triple Soul-Forces’ is a glorious drama. Here Sri Aurobindo lists three major facets that are found in the human soul. First Savitri meets the Mother of Sorrows who is an image of compassion:

“A divine pity on the peaks of the world,
A spirit touched by the grief of all that lives,
She looked out far and saw from inner mind
This questionable world of outward things,
Of false appearances and plausible shapes,
This dubious cosmos stretched in the ignorant Void,
The pangs of earth, the toil and speed of the stars
And the difficult birth and dolorous end of life.”

(Savitri, 1993, 4th ed, p.503)

The Mother of Sorrows assures Savitri that the character of one’s soul is compassion. But from the depths comes up the cry of the Man of Sorrows telling Savitri that mankind has no future. God has built this world so that he can watch people suffer. This description of God reminds one of Prince Asamanja of the Solar dynasty who found perverted pleasure in watching babies being drowned in water. However, Savitri assures the Mother that because of the presence of sorrow accompanied by compassion, man attempts to ascend the evolutionary ladder to reach out to a better tomorrow. Further on she comes to the Mother of Might, the image of Durga so familiar:

“Here on a boulder carved like a huge throne
A Woman sat in gold and purple sheen,
Armed with the trident and the thunderbolt,
Her feet upon a couchant lion’s back.
A formidable smile curved round her lips,
Heaven-fire laughed in the corners of her eyes;
Her body a mass of courage and heavenly strength,
She menaced the triumph of the nether gods.”

(Savitri, 1993, 4th ed, p.508)

While this goddess says she is the true nature of Savitri’s soul, the Dwarf Titan from the depths makes a dark forecast that the demon in man alone will succeed. Savitri says strength is needed as much as compassion, they are both portions of a man’s soul. She then meets the Mother of Light who says that the beautiful dreams and visions imaged by her form the true nature of the soul. At once the Mental Man counters what she says as simply a dream and no more. But Savitri assures the Mother that visions are needed for man’s progress and goes further pursuing the search for her real soul.

The canto, ‘The Finding of the Soul’ opens with the ‘night of god’. Armed only with the faith deep in her, “in a simple purity of emptiness / Her mind knelt down before the unknowable.” After a while, she is overwhelmed by a sense of sweetness. The spaces around her glow now and we get to have a fantastic image. Savitri draws near the cave of her secret soul. Two golden serpents are wrapped around the lintel, a huge eagle, the Garuda, is seen above as if guarding her secret soul with the “conquering wings.” At

the cornices there are doves. Inside are images of sculpted gods and goddesses: Shiva-Parvati, Radha-Krishna and so on. The presence of the divine in this cave is palpable. She feels one with them and the feeling becomes a settled fact when she sees the Supreme Shakti. This World-Mother is the one who sends a segment of herself as the jivatman, to help man by being so close to him all the time:

“But since she knows the toil of mind and life
As a mother feels and shares her children’s lives,
She puts forth a small portion of herself,
A being no bigger than the thumb of man
Into a hidden region of the heart
To face the pang and to forget the bliss,
To share the suffering and endure earth’s wounds
And labour mid the labour of the stars.”

(Savitri, 1993, 4th ed, p.526)

Sri Aurobindo presents this concluding part of Savitri’s yoga sadhana and her meeting the Supreme Shakti in the idiom of the kundalini which rises to meet Rajarajeswari at the *sahasrara* at the top of the crown. The honey of life from the Mother’s Grace now flows downward enriching the limbs of Savitri. She realises that it is the Mother Supreme who is also her soul and that she carries no mere mortal body. The body is the casket that carries the divine soul. The immortal power within her is now capable of burning down Death itself. Thus is the ancient ritual of the *tri-ratra vrata* performed by Savitri in the Upakhyana transformed by Sri Aurobindo. But the central significance of the Vedic ritual which speaks of “an invisible potency” issuing from the sacrifice and “which endures till the fruit is generated and which resides in the soul of the sacrificer” has been retained in the Book of Yoga. The potency known as *apurva* which she no doubt gained by following the exacting *tri-ratra vrata*, will now remain with Savitri till Death is chased away from Satyavan.

The infusion of this brings Savitri the gain of a cosmic comprehension that is described in the following canto, ‘Nirvana and the Discovery of the All-negating Absolute’:

“This bright perfection of her inner state
Poured overflowing into her outward scene,
Made beautiful dull common natural things
And action wonderful and time divine.
Even the smallest meanest work became
A sweet or glad and glorious sacrament”

(Savitri, 1993, 4th ed, p.532)

But she will not allow her mind to be lulled by the joy for the question of death still remains unsolved. Death is final! Fortunately, the new power within her sends forth soldiers of Light that help her realise that she is going to face Death not only to rescue Satyavan but to rescue the world itself. This gains for her “God’s timeless calm” that would be her strength when she faces Death later on. The Book of Yoga concludes with

a canto on ‘The Discovery of the Cosmic Spirit and the Cosmic Consciousness’. Having learnt through intense meditation that death is never final, nor is it the end, the time was now come for making a firm gesture to usher in the future. So we see her now as verily Mahasaraswati risen to destroy Evil forces like Shumbha and Nishumbha:

“From this she rose where Time and Space were not;
The superconscient was her native air,
Infinity was her movement’s natural space;
Eternity looked out from her on Time.”

(Savitri, 1993, 4th ed, p. 557)

Such is the vast expansion of the *vrata* in the upakhyana of Vyasa. Down the millennia this faith that Savitri by herself can face Fate has been established in the psyche of India. A ritual, a ‘felt’ promise of strength and Savitri’s yogic calm can be seen in all retellings. The Vedic ritual undergoes a few changes in subsequent versions. It is projected as an intense faith of Savitri in the Supreme Mother. The traditional recitation in South Indian brahmin houses celebrating Savitri *vrata* (a recitation that has now been more or less given up) remembers Savitri performing *Gauri Vrata* :

“Savitri with her heart firm,
Began severe tapasya of Gayatri;
Remembering the day foretold by Narada,
As well as the exact time he had noted,
Rejecting jewels and all kinds of desires,
Wearing bark and animal skin
She served her in-laws with sincerity.
She offered loving service to her husband too.
She performed vrata invoking Goddess Gauri.
On new moon and full moon nights, ashtami,
Chathurti, the first of every month
She worshipped the Supreme Mother.
For three days in silence the good lady
Went without food and performed tapasya
Invoking Goddess Parvati ...”²

So we have here a year-long *vrata* with an intensified three day ritual. It is based on the firm belief that such practices as silence and going without food along with meditation on the Supreme intensified one’s ability to gain a wider comprehension, steely strength and self-confidence. Ultimately the human aspiration and the answering Grace from above are the same and help man overcome any crisis. Whether *tri-ratra vrata* or *Gauri pooja* or Book of Yoga, we have the image of Savitri’s determined bid to get help from within to combat Fate; and also how the strength that flows into her because of such tapasya (the answering Grace from above) remains with her in the dark spaces of Night and Twilight and helps her emerge victorious in the end.

(To be continued)

1 ‘Purva Mimamsa’, **The Cultural Heritage of India, Volume III** (1969), p.165

2 Translated by Prema Nandakumar

Savitri
Book I, Canto I
The Symbol Dawn (Pt. 2)

Debashish Banerji

It was the hour before the Gods awake.
Across the path of the divine Event
The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone
In her unlit temple of eternity,
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence' marge.
Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,
In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse
The abysm of the unbodied Infinite;
A fathomless zero occupied the world.
A power of fallen boundless self awake
Between the first and the last Nothingness,
Recalling the tenebrous womb from which it came,
Turned from the insoluble mystery of birth
And the tardy process of mortality
And longed to reach its end in vacant Nought.
As in a dark beginning of all things,
A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown
Repeating for ever the unconscious act,
Prolonging for ever the unseeing will,
Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force
Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns
And carries our lives in its somnambulist whirl.
Athwart the vain enormous trance of Space,
Its formless stupor without mind or life,
A shadow spinning through a soulless Void,
Thrown back once more into unthinking dreams,
Earth wheeled abandoned in the hollow gulfs
Forgetful of her spirit and her fate.

The impassive skies were neutral, empty, still.
Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;
A nameless movement, an unthought Idea
Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,
Something that wished but knew not how to be,
Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance.
A throe that came and left a quivering trace,
Gave room for an old tired want unfilled,
At peace in its subconscious moonless cave
To raise its head and look for absent light,
Straining closed eyes of vanished memory,
Like one who searches for a bygone self
And only meets the corpse of his desire.
It was as though even in this Nought's profound,
Even in this ultimate dissolution's core,
There lurked an unremembering entity,
Survivor of a slain and buried past
Condemned to resume the effort and the pang,
Reviving in another frustrate world.
An unshaped consciousness desired light
And a blank prescience yearned towards distant change.
As if a childlike finger laid on a cheek
Reminded of the endless need in things
The heedless Mother of the universe,
An infant longing clutched the sombre Vast.
Insensibly somewhere a breach began:
A long lone line of hesitating hue
Like a vague smile tempting a desert heart
Troubled the far rim of life's obscure sleep.
Arrived from the other side of boundlessness
An eye of deity peered through the dumb deeps;
A scout in a reconnaissance from the sun,
It seemed amid a heavy cosmic rest,
The torpor of a sick and weary world,
To seek for a spirit sole and desolate
Too fallen to recollect forgotten bliss.
Intervening in a mindless universe,
Its message crept through the reluctant hush
Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy
And, conquering Nature's disillusioned breast,
Compelled renewed consent to see and feel.
A thought was sown in the unsounded Void,
A sense was born within the darkness' depths,

A memory quivered in the heart of Time
 As if a soul long dead were moved to live:
 But the oblivion that succeeds the fall,
 Had blotted the crowded tablets of the past,
 And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt
 And old experience laboured out once more.
 All can be done if the god-touch is there.
 A hope stole in that hardly dared to be
 Amid the Night's forlorn indifference.
 As if solicited in an alien world
 With timid and hazardous instinctive grace,
 Orphaned and driven out to seek a home,
 An errant marvel with no place to live,
 Into a far-off nook of heaven there came
 A slow miraculous gesture's dim appeal.
 The persistent thrill of a transfiguring touch
 Persuaded the inert black quietude
 And beauty and wonder disturbed the fields of God.
 A wandering hand of pale enchanted light
 That glowed along a fading moment's brink,
 Fixed with gold panel and opalescent hinge
 A gate of dreams ajar on mystery's verge.
 One lucent corner windowing hidden things
 Forced the world's blind immensity to sight.
 The darkness failed and slipped like a falling cloak
 From the reclining body of a god.
 Then through the pallid rift that seemed at first
 Hardly enough for a trickle from the suns,
 Outpoured the revelation and the flame.
 The brief perpetual sign recurred above.
 A glamour from unreach'd transcendences
 Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,
 A message from the unknown immortal Light
 Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,
 Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues
 And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.
 An instant's visitor the godhead shone.
 On life's thin border awhile the Vision stood
 And bent over earth's pondering forehead curve.
 Interpreting a recondite beauty and bliss
 In colour's hieroglyphs of mystic sense,
 It wrote the lines of a significant myth
 Telling of a greatness of spiritual dawns,

A brilliant code penned with the sky for page.
 Almost that day the epiphany was disclosed
 Of which our thoughts and hopes are signal flares;
 A lonely splendour from the invisible goal
 Almost was flung on the opaque Inane.
 Once more a tread perturbed the vacant Vasts;
 Infinity's centre, a Face of rapturous calm
 Parted the eternal lids that open heaven;
 A Form from far beatitudes seemed to near.
 Ambassadors twist eternity and change,
 The omniscient Goddess leaned across the breadths
 That wrap the fated journeyings of the stars
 And saw the spaces ready for her feet.
 Once she half looked behind for her veiled sun,
 Then, thoughtful, went to her immortal work.
 Earth felt the Imperishable's passage close:
 The waking ear of Nature heard her steps
 And wideness turned to her its limitless eye,
 And, scattered on sealed depths, her luminous smile
 Kindled to fire the silence of the worlds.
 All grew a consecration and a rite.
 Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven;
 The wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind
 Arose and failed upon the altar hills;
 The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky.
 Here where our half-lit ignorance skirts the gulfs
 On the dumb bosom of the ambiguous earth,
 Here where one knows not even the step in front
 And Truth has her throne on the shadowy back of doubt,
 On this anguished and precarious field of toil
 Outspread beneath some large indifferent gaze,
 Impartial witness of our joy and bale,
 Our prostrate soil bore the awakening ray.
 Here too the vision and prophetic gleam
 Lit into miracles common meaningless shapes;
 Then the divine afflatus, spent, withdrew,
 Unwanted, fading from the mortal's range.
 A sacred yearning lingered in its trace,
 The worship of a Presence and a Power
 Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts,
 The prescience of a marvellous birth to come.
 Only a little the god-light can stay:
 Spiritual beauty illumining human sight

Lines with its passion and mystery Matter's mask
 And squanders eternity on a beat of Time.
 As when a soul draws near the sill of birth,
 Adjoining mortal time to Timelessness,
 A spark of deity lost in Matter's crypt
 Its lustre vanishes in the inconscient planes,
 That transitory glow of magic fire
 So now dissolved in bright accustomed air.
 The message ceased and waned the messenger.
 The single Call, the uncompanioned Power,
 Drew back into some far-off secret world
 The hue and marvel of the supernal beam:
 She looked no more on our mortality.
 The excess of beauty natural to god-kind
 Could not uphold its claim on time-born eyes;
 Too mystic-real for space-tenancy
 Her body of glory was expunged from heaven:
 The rarity and wonder lived no more.
 There was the common light of earthly day.
 Affranchised from the respite of fatigue
 Once more the rumour of the speed of Life
 Pursued the cycles of her blinded quest.
 All sprang to their unvarying daily acts;
 The thousand peoples of the soil and tree
 Obeyed the unforeseeing instant's urge,
 And, leader here with his uncertain mind,
 Alone who stares at the future's covered face,
 Man lifted up the burden of his fate.

It was the hour before the Gods awake.

Sri Aurobindo begins the epic *Savitri* and its first canto 'The Symbol Dawn' with this line. This line which is the beginning of the epic is also about the beginning of creation. Literally, the hour before the Gods awake connotes in India the time when the temples start their day with the waking of the gods. It is known as the *Brahmamuhurta*, about 4 am in the morning. This is a literal understanding, but we see the cosmic significance of this hour as the time when the cosmic powers stir from a state of quiescence and initiate the various activities of the day. Beyond that, at a more profound level, the hour before the Gods awake connotes the beginning of creation itself. It refers to a new dawn of creation, the appearance of the Divine in a new Becoming. Sri Aurobindo expands on this particular movement of the coming of a new cosmic becoming out of an original seed of disappearance, Nothingness, a Void symbolled by the Night in the next few lines.

Across the path of the divine Event
 The huge foreboding mind of Night, alone
 In her unlit temple of eternity,
 Lay stretched upon Silence's marge.

On the margins of Silence – spelt with a capital 'S'— in other words, an original and infinite Silence, the eternally Unmanifest — there sits a power of Night, which is like an unlit temple of eternity. This is the night that marks the end of the present Becoming at the margin of the Unmanifest. This night carries in itself the presage, the prophecy of a new Becoming, a new Divinity which is held within its bosom. The image of an event to come, the birth of a Day from the womb of the Night, is a profound cosmic image that goes back to the Vedas and evokes the eternal succession of days and nights. The successions of days and nights is a symbol through which the paradox of time and eternity is represented. When we think about the Divine as an Eternity, the Silence on whose margin this profound night of Ignorance is stretched, we sense the infinity of the Divine, the inexhaustible content it offers to Becoming and, therefore, its infinite remainder that will always remain unmanifest. At the borders of this Unmanifest is an original Non-Being, a Non-Being in terms of expression, not in terms of the identity of Supreme Being. Out of this Infinite there emerge ever newer powers of Becoming. This is the image of the emergence of a Day as an event, a phenomenon, an eternal event against the backdrop of eternity creating time, moving into manifestation.

Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,
 In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse
 The abyss of the unbodied Infinite;

The 'eyeless muse' refers to a beginning of things where the power of sensing has not arisen. There is no power to experience here. In the *Aitareya Upanishad*, the whole creation begins out of a dark state of the Unmanifest where the Being that is latent within it first emerges through its properties of experience, the sense organs. The *Purusha* awakens, they say, with its powers of sensing. So here, prior to that awakening there is an eyeless muse, a muse which precedes the power of experience. This is a reflection, a shadow of the unbodied Infinite, which is the original Unmanifest, the eternal Unmanifest, which to the Being in the Becoming, is tantamount to a Non-Being. It is a shadow because there is already an entrance into the realm of Being, the shadow cast by Non-Being in the realm of Being.

Almost one felt, opaque, impenetrable,
 In the sombre symbol of her eyeless muse

That symbol is the night. Night is the symbol of Non-Being in Being. So this is how we first arrive at this image which is an event not in time but in eternity, an event in eternity, like an image out of which a succession that relates to time will emerge, a

succession of days and nights, of births and deaths, of the ages, of the rebirths of the creation.

A fathomless zero occupied the world.

This is the pregnant zero filled with the contents of Eternity but concealed from experience. Sri Aurobindo talks about the two major powers, of Sat and Asat, Being and Non-Being relating to two activities of consciousness, *pravritti* and *nivritti*, *pravritti* the tendency to become, to unfold, to reveal the contents of the Infinite in a Becoming; and *nivritti* the tendency towards the enfolding, the concealment, the latency of the Infinite Powers of Conscious Being. Here the zero represents that *nivritti* which hides manifestation preparing a new emergence. Within this latency of things one finds Being involved in Non-Being. Dawn on the other hand represents *pravritti*, the emergence and evolution of Being in a Becoming. This involution and evolution is an eternal recurrence that is the very basis of creation. It is the paradox which initiates Time; Sri Aurobindo is drawing us to the image of that beginning. It is a paradox of beginnings such as we find in the old question, which came first the chicken or the egg, the seed or the tree, the night or the day? Beginnings belong to a quantised duration; Eternity is beginningless and endless. Yet through an act of consciousness it can image itself as an eternal beginningless and endless succession of days and nights, of coming into becoming and of enfolding itself into its own unmanifest condition.

A power of fallen boundless self awake
Between the first and the last Nothingness,
Recalling the tenebrous womb from which it came,
Turned from the insoluble mystery of birth
And the tardy process of mortality
And longed to reach its end in vacant Nought.

We encounter here a profound Nothingness, but within it there is a power of consciousness stirring in the form of an arche-memory. It is

A power of fallen boundless self awake
Between the first and the last Nothingness

The first and the last Nothingness draws us once more to the beginningless and endless paradox which envisages the possibility of the limit condition, the image of a beginning or an ending in the fact of this dark night of all things. This is what it recalls as the tenebrous womb from which it came, the limit condition of Thanatos which stirs as an arche-memory. There is also a reference here to the great Vedic hymn of Creation, the Nasadiya Sukta, in which Being arises out of the Unmanifest Waters by his own power, Swayambhu. But the awakening that is spoken of in this canto, the power that is awake in the night, is not this Original (or should we say, originary?) Power of Being hymned in the Veda. It is a specific manner of becoming, the manifestation subject to

Death in which we find ourselves. This is one in which Being has awoken out of Non-Being and been compelled to return to Non-Being innumerable times. This power is not the Original Power that has arisen by its own strength, swayambhu, as in the Nasadiya Sukta; it is a power compelled to awake and compelled to die repeatedly. This is the condition of the manifestation in which we find ourselves, in which the days and nights, the becomings or rebirths are a progression reaching towards increasing fulfilments of Self-knowledge through an experienced compulsion which is an act of Consciousness. Thus, this fallen boundless self that is awake within the night experiences a double pull — a desire to awake and a desire to return to sleep, a weariness, a memory of innumerable wakings and innumerable failures, and a deep reluctance to become. It 'longed to reach its end in vacant Nought.'

As in a dark beginning of all things.

In this canto, in keeping with the paradox at the heart of this border crossing between eternity and time, we find Sri Aurobindo repeatedly using phrases which refer to the similitude of an original beginning — because from a different vantage of the paradox, this beginning is a middle. It is a beginning which is a middle in the epic *Savitri*, standing between Savitri's past, the prelude to her birth and her life growing up and with her husband, which will be reconstructed in the epic as if in flashback — and her future as she readies herself for the Event which will test the limits of her spiritual capacity to interrupt the order of reality and initiate a new order. It is a middle also because there is no beginning and no end to reality, yet the limit condition, the possibility, the image in the eternity of the Divine Event is what it recalls.

A mute featureless semblance of the Unknown
Repeating for ever the unconscious act,
Prolonging for ever the unseeing will,
Cradled the cosmic drowse of ignorant Force
Whose moved creative slumber kindles the suns
And carries our lives in its somnambulist whirl.

Once again, an image of similitude, 'a semblance of the unknown' — the unknown here is the original Night, that dark beginning of all things, Non-Being whose shadow we encounter as Inconscience, Death, in the Becoming. The Tantric text *Devi Mahatmyam* speaks of three kinds of Night; these are *kalaratri*, *maharatri* and *moharatri*. We may say *kalaratri* is the night of Time and Timelessness, where Time sinks into Timelessness, the Original Night, Non-Being, Asat, Avyakta, that night out of which everything begins, the dark beginning of all things. But then there is a cosmic night, *maharatri*, what may be called the shadow of that Original Night in the Becoming. This is what we may call Inconscience, where everything is still in a state of latency, insentient but run by automatisms, the laws of material phenomena. This is what Sri Aurobindo refers to here as a somnambulist whirl; this is the night of Inconscience, the dark seed of the cosmos.

Athwart the vain enormous trance of Space,
 Its formless stupor without mind or life,
 A shadow spinning through a soulless Void,
 Thrown back once more into unthinking dreams,
 Earth wheeled abandoned in the hollow gulfs
 Forgetful of her spirit and her fate.

In this condition, this cosmic condition of material Inconscience, earth is brought to attention now by Sri Aurobindo as a beautiful foundling globe, a sphere with consciousness latent in it but which seems extinct at this time. It has forgotten its destiny and the manifestations of mind and life are no longer present in it. They had emerged but have returned to an involved condition in a new cycle.

The impassive skies were neutral, empty, still.
 Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;

This completes the first movement of this passage because here we find the beginnings of something awaking in this Inconscience, a stirring. In the Tantrik tradition or in Kashmir Shaivism, this original stir is known as *spanda*, a vibration of chit. Consciousness is sat, Pure Being, reflected here in the form of the awakening of a memory of Consciousness within the Inconscient.

A nameless movement, an unthought Idea
 Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,
 Something that wished but knew not how to be,
 Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance.

This memory which doesn't even know what it is, leave alone who it is, this consciousness which is a beginning of some semblance of the possibility of self-knowledge, is teasing, gently stirring the dumb Inconscient, the *maharatri* of the cosmic Inconscient to wake up Ignorance. Here we find Consciousness waking from the Inconscient. This power of consciousness is so rudimentary and unknowing of its truth that it is marked by a conflicted will, a will to Love and a will to Death, a will to Consciousness and a will to remain ignorant and sink back into Inconscience. This will to remain ignorant opens the possibility of Evil or Falsehood. This is the third night of the *Devi Mahatmyam*, *moharatri* or the False Night of the Becoming out of which Truth must emerge through contest and struggle.

A throe that came and left a quivering trace,
 Gave room for an old tired want unfilled,
 At peace in its subconscious moonless cave
 To raise its head and look for absent light,
 Straining closed eyes of vanished memory,
 Like one who searches for a bygone self
 And only meets the corpse of his desire.

This power in its awaking stirs with the faint memory of an innumerable repeated past of births and deaths, a vague memory without sense of identity. It is the corpse of his desire, a dead man waking with only the ghostly traces of its erased memory banks returning to haunt it. It strains its closed eyes of vanished memory, retaining within itself the urge to look for absent light, the will to truth co-existing with the will to return to the Inconscient. This seed of aspiration is the divine element, the intuition of conscious Being which is a Power, chit-shakti, at the heart of the Inconscient. This first movement in the Night's profound will call down Divine Grace from above in response to its aspiration. This introduces for the first time the double movement which forms the central pattern to the symbol of *Savitri*, the dynamic of the Event that is awaited and the symbol of the intervention in time that is represented by the incarnation of Savitri. This is also the central dynamic in Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's own teaching being introduced here. Sri Aurobindo speaks of these two movements at the centre of the evolving creation which is invoked as an accelerated form of conscious evolution at the heart of the integral yoga. Sri Aurobindo's concentrated text on yoga, *The Mother*, begins with a reference to this dynamic at the centre of his yoga: "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." At the start of creation, we encounter the first vibration of the aspiration from below.

It was as though even in this Nought's profound,
 Even in this ultimate dissolution's core,
 There lurked an unremembering entity,
 Survivor of a slain and buried past
 Condemned to resume the effort and the pang,
 Reviving in another frustrate world.

In these complex few lines Sri Aurobindo introduces us to the fact that this power of awakening is an entity, a being in the heart of the appearance of Non-Being, we move from the What to the Who, a will to individuation at the centre of the cosmic will to consciousness. This Being carries the memory of innumerable births and deaths and the knowledge of its compulsion to be born and die, condemned to this unending Sisyphian repetition with its burden of repeated failure and its sense of frustration. Like Sisyphus in the Greek myth who was doomed eternally to push a stone up a mountain, and have it roll back to the bottom before he could take it to the peak, the days and nights recur, labouring without success to release some ultimate godhead that will transcend this property of compulsion.

An unshaped consciousness desired light
 And a blank prescience yearned towards distant change.

This survivor entity, traveller from birth to birth, now reveals its primary property of psychic aspiration. We see it now as a spark of the divine, carrying an intuition of a distant evolutionary goal and reaching out towards it. To this psychic understanding of the

aspiration, the vast cosmos of Inconscience becomes the semblance of the Divine Mother to whom its call goes out. It is as if it tugs at her hem reminding her that her child has awoken and needs now her attention and intervention. This, as we saw, is the central message of *Savitri*, the intervention of the Creative Consciousness of the Divine. In the epic, Aswapati represents that aspiration and the birth and life of Savitri will be the response of the Divine Mother.

As if a childlike finger laid on a cheek
Reminded of the endless need in things
The heedless Mother of the universe,
An infant longing clutched the sombre Vast.

This aspiration reveals itself here to be a divine child's call to its Transcendental Mother and evokes the beginning of her response.

Insensibly somewhere a breach began.

This line concludes the next section of the canto. In response to the infant aspiration of the earth consciousness, the cosmic presence of the Divine Mother becomes active. A fringe of light intervenes tearing the darkness along the horizon.

Arrived from the other side of boundlessness
An eye of deity peered through the dumb deeps;
A scout in a reconnaissance from the sun,
It seemed amid a heavy cosmic rest,
The torpor of a sick and weary world,
To seek for a spirit sole and desolate
Too fallen to recollect forgotten bliss.

The canto now proceeds to detail the progress of the intervention, the rim of light discloses a peering eye of deity scouting the condition of resistant torpor in search of the being whose aspiration has invoked its response. This is the response of the Divine Mother seeking out its child, of the ray of the sun entering the night to claim its own portion, the psychic element within the evolving Ignorance.

Intervening in a mindless universe,
Its message crept through the reluctant hush
Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy
And, conquering Nature's disillusioned breast,
Compelled renewed consent to see and feel.

There is a wide universal stir resulting from this intervention. All the senses wake up, there is a sudden hope that arises in the heart of the creation and there is a consciousness that a god-power has arrived. The weariness and reluctance of the

earth consciousness is overcome and the assent of Nature to the evolutionary urge is secured.

A thought was sown in the unsounded Void,

The response from "above" missions a new Idea into the waking Ignorance, a seed sown in the night which is the seed of a new law and principle of consciousness.

A sense was born within the darkness' depths,
A memory quivered in the heart of Time
As if a soul long dead were moved to live:
But the oblivion that succeeds the fall,
Had blotted the crowded tablets of the past,
And all that was destroyed must be rebuilt
And old experience laboured out once more.

Thus there is the stirring of a hope and the entry of a New Idea to inspire a manifestation. However, every death is a loss, a dense amnesia from which the achievements of the past seem irrecoverable and need to be re-engineered through laborious steps. There is a ring of universal truth to these lines, carrying the tragic impress of the entropic waste from life to life. Then, as if in reassurance, Sri Aurobindo has this wonderful line:

All can be done if the god-touch is there.

If the Grace is here, and faith is kindled in our hearts, the impossible becomes possible. As per the Sanskrit adage, the blind can see and the lame can leap over mountains. There is the presence of a power that can overcome all odds.

A hope stole in that hardly dared to be
Amid the Night's forlorn indifference.

We witness now the beginnings of this new creation which will transcend the recurring cycles of unconscious days and nights, that is the law of the Ignorance. The special Intervention represented by this Symbol Dawn brings with it the Power of a new Divine Manifestation. Usha comes, the daughter of the sun and she effects an eradication of the Powers of Darkness.

The darkness failed and slipped like a falling cloak
From the reclining body of a god.

The appearance of Inconscience is a mask of God, latent within it the Divine sleeps. This is the condition initiating the creation of Ignorance, the sacrifice of Purusha, in which that which was infinitely conscious chooses to lose its property of

consciousness. But with this Intervention, this appearance is shed and the body of the Divine within the Inconscience comes to light in its conscious glory. The tendency to consciousness of the cosmos is revealed, the *pravr̥tti*, or the self-becoming of the Supreme Being.

Then through the pallid rift that seemed at first
Hardly enough for a trickle from the suns,
Outpoured the revelation and the flame.
The brief perpetual sign recurred above.

Now this intervention, which was at first only an influence, then an active presence, turns into a messianic Revelation, with its splendour and its mark of identification. The phrase 'the brief perpetual sign' can be taken at face value to be the sun, because the sun repeats every morning, perpetually. Its dawn-appearance carries a brief glory in which we may behold a symbol of divinity. But in a more recondite sense, we can take it to be the symbol of Sri Aurobindo, the ascending and descending triangles which represent the involution and the evolution of consciousness, the double movement of aspiration and the Grace, conjoined like the dynamic union of Spirit and Matter, God and Man, Nara and Narayana and forming the condition for a divine manifestation. At the centre of this union is the house of the New Creation and within it, the expressive lotus of the avatar blooming through all the planes of consciousness. This brief perpetual sign flashes the promise of the Perfect World.

A glamour from unreach'd transcendences
Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,
A message from the unknown immortal Light
Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,
Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues
And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.

The movement of an involution of divinity, leaving a seed within the Ignorance which will give it a direction, a teleology in its development, whose intimation we first received in the line about "the thought" which was "sown in the unsounded Vast," reaches here its culmination, when the full-blown Divinity reveals itself and becomes immediately an indelible memory missioning the future. It buries "its seed of grandeur in the hours."

An instant's visitor the godhead shone.
On life's thin border awhile the Vision stood
And bent over earth's pondering forehead curve.

Sri Aurobindo transforms now the symbol of the Sun, expanding to significances of increasing Divinity into that of the Divine Mother, the messianic or avataric Incarnation of the Divine Shakti, a precognition of Savitri herself who is to make her fate-defying stand on this day. The image is now explicitly termed a "vision" and is

given a stance which is unmistakably maternal — bending over the earth like a mother over her children. For those familiar with the historical reality of the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at their ashram in Pondicherry, this image is also an unmistakable hint of the daily appearance of The Mother, bending, with a little stoop over all the activities of the Ashram and all her children who followed and adored her as the Divine Mother. This almost uncanny physical resemblance is followed by the sense of the active power of divinity taking over the leadership of the creation. A new Presence is felt opening the gates of an unveiled divine life .

Once more a tread perturbed the vacant Vasts;
Infinity's centre, a Face of rapturous calm
Parted the eternal lids that open heaven;

What we find here is a complex and surreal symbol, in which the image of the sun is compounded with the face of the Divine Mother who has incarnated. Her eyes opening are also the solar lids that open heaven.

A Form from far beatitudes seemed to near,

The reference to the Divine Incarnation continues to be drawn closer to an earthly manifestation. It is as if after the glorious solar revelation, this miraculous and alien divinity, leaving its origin, is arriving into the mortal world. .

Once she half looked behind for her veiled sun,

From the solar godhead now, as if its essence emanating in the form of a ray, the Daughter of the Sun, Savitri, incarnation of the Supramental Power descends, leaving her home in an act of divine sacrifice. The term avatar literally means "one who descends" and this inner portion of the Divine separating itself from its Origin now descends into Nature. Sri Aurobindo draws the subtle sentiment of this separating goddess as she looks behind to see her source. Then she turns to her new work, acting as a Divine Power within Nature:

Then, thoughtful, went to her immortal work.
Earth felt the Imperishable's passage close:
The waking ear of Nature heard her steps
And wideness turned to her its limitless eye,
And, scattered on sealed depths, her luminous smile
Kindled to fire the silence of the worlds.

Suddenly her presence kindles everything to blazing aspiration. The entire expression of Nature on earth becomes one of the adoration of the Divine.

All grew a consecration and a rite.
 Air was a vibrant link between earth and heaven;
 The wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind
 Arose and failed upon the altar hills;
 The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky.

Having described the action of the Divine Power in Nature, Sri Aurobindo now pauses to take stock of the significance of this Event for the consciousness of the earth:

Here where one knows not even the step in front
 And Truth has her throne on the shadowy back of doubt,
 On this anguished and precarious field of toil
 Outspread beneath some large indifferent gaze,
 Impartial witness of our joy and bale,
 Our prostrate soil bore the awakening ray.

The Divine Intervention visiting the earth which has released so far only powers of Ignorance – Matter, Life, Mind, at most a power of knowledge dogged by doubt—represents a miraculous Event. The Supramental Power of full knowledge, Truth and self-consciousness has entered this condition as a seed. Our earth bears this awakening ray.

But this entire Event remains occult, a hidden destiny waiting its hour and leaving little trace on the surface of things. The next few lines speak of the receding of this power. This passage is reminiscent of the Mother's description of her experience of the Supramental Manifestation of 1956, an Event which to her vision had cosmic proportions, but which was hardly even noticed by anyone else. The Mother also mentions how this Divine Transcendental Power rupturing the conditions of the earth consciousness, was swallowed up by the Powers of Darkness rising from the Inconscience.

The messianic, avataric power arrives and leaves, but it leaves a seed determining the invisible trajectory of the future. It cannot express itself in an enduring fashion in the present, because the state of present Ignorance cannot assimilate it at once and needs preparation. The Intervention is like a freak that comes for a moment but it is also a promise, a prophecy of the future when man will assimilate it through time.

Then the divine afflatus, spent, withdrew,
 Unwanted, fading from the mortal's range.
 A sacred yearning lingered in its trace,
 The worship of a Presence and a Power
 Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts,
 The prescience of a marvellous birth to come.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of intervention throughout *Savitri* and in his teaching, the intervention of a messianic nature, a future that is not a predictable past is carried in the

idea of the avatar. Sri Aurobindo deals with a variety of possibilities and aspects of the avatar, one of which is the aspect represented by the Christ, the aspect of Sacrifice, of the arrival of a miraculous Presence and Power, of its unwanted tragic reception by the earth nature and of its resultant withdrawal leaving in its wake a seed for a future, a future perfection. A similar story of sacrifice comes in a feminine key from India, in the legend of Sati. Sati is the Shakti Avatar, the Shakti of the Divine Lord, but what she represents is incomprehensible to the earthly milieu in which she is born. Her sacrifice results in the great destruction, *pralaya*, but the net result is the distribution of her body parts across the land, sanctifying and fertilising it for a future Divine Manifestation. In contrast to these narratives of sacrifice is the narrative of the Victory, which Savitri represents, an eventuality which redeems the Sacrifice. Mythically this is what is represented by the idea of the Second Coming, the victorious Return to reclaim the glorified creation which has been prepared by the Sacrifice. In this initiating Canto, The Symbol Dawn, both these potencies of Sacrifice and Victory are juxtaposed as possibilities inhering in the Origin represented by this special cosmic Dawn. But Revelation and Concealment ever succeed in the manifestation, as the very essence of the infinity of Being, and hence, however we may understand the specialty of the Event represented by this Dawn, and its presage of Savitri's inauguration of a new cycle with new laws, this too is mysterious and couched in the dual terms of *pravritti* and *nivritti*. This is how the starting canto of Savitri moves to its end, the disappearance of this God-Power. Sri Aurobindo writes:

That transitory glow of magic fire
 So now dissolved in bright accustomed air.
 The message ceased and waned the messenger.
 The single Call, the uncompanioned Power,
 Drew back into some far-off secret world
 The hue and marvel of the supernal beam:
 She looked no more on our mortality.
 The excess of beauty natural to god-kind
 Could not uphold its claim on time-born eyes;
 Too mystic-real for space-tenancy.

The divine and miraculous reality of this power of intervention is not something we are accustomed to. It is, in a sense, a symbolic and veiled reality that we take to be real.

Her body of glory was expunged from heaven:
 The rarity and wonder lived no more.

There is here a note of psychic sadness, a sublime melancholy at the recognition of the tragic treatment of the divine in an ignorant world and the lost opportunity, which the earth is not even in a position to appreciate. Yet this intervention leaves its seed for the future to unfold. Things revert to their routine unconscious rounds and the miraculous revelation which the dawn represented is soon forgotten.

There was the common light of earthly day.
Affranchised from the respite of fatigue
Once more the rumour of the speed of Life
Pursued the cycles of her blinded quest.
All sprang to their unvarying daily acts;
The thousand peoples of the soil and tree
Obeyed the unforeseeing instant's urge,
And, leader here with his uncertain mind,
Alone who stares at the future's covered face,
Man lifted up the burden of his fate.

Humanity stumbles on in the role of its leadership of the earth, the unknowing bearer of the legacy of the Intervention.

Sri Aurobindo's Perspective On Reality

Martha SG Orton

Introduction

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy consists of the formal expression of spiritual realisation and truth which he has shared with us. As such, it forms the basis for the perspective which he expresses throughout his works. Sri Aurobindo's view of the nature of reality is especially relevant as the foundation for understanding his yoga and his writings on the psychology of yoga, as well as for understanding his works on social and political themes. Moreover, it constitutes the basis from which Sri Aurobindo develops his conceptualisation of the evolution of consciousness. His major philosophical work, *The Life Divine*, is the primary source for gaining an understanding of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, including his perspective on reality. In addition, this can be discovered throughout numerous other writings, including his letters to his disciples, published as *Letters on Yoga*. This article examines this perspective, the core of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, which has its origins in traditional Vedanta, yet also differs in some particularly meaningful respects.

Brahman and Sachchidananda

The concept of Brahman is essential to understanding traditional spiritual beliefs which are centred in Hinduism or derive from it. Brahman is the term used to refer to the Absolute, the Supreme Being. Brahman is also considered to be everything, the All, and it is believed that there is nothing which is not Brahman. In the scriptures, it is referred to frequently as "The One without a second," meaning that Brahman is all there is and that there is nothing else. Sri Aurobindo endorses this understanding of Brahman and it forms the foundation of all that follows in his philosophy as well as in the thought and teachings of others whose spiritual basis is in the Vedas and Upanishads.

Brahman is inseparably linked with Sachchidananda, which is the Divine Being comprised of a trinity of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. These three conjoined aspects of the Divine are considered to be what the Divine consists of. The Divine is Existence itself. Existence necessarily implies and consists of Consciousness. Then the scriptures explain that Existence itself is Bliss, that Consciousness itself is Bliss — essentially that Bliss is the very heart and essence of Existence, of All. The three are not only intertwined, but merge and are One. There is differentiation, but not difference.

Therefore we have a view of reality in which: (1) There is nothing but the Divine. The Divine is All, the Divine is in All, and All is the Divine. (2) The Divine is Sachchidananda. The All is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. From this we can only

(DVDs of the complete series of talks are available at a price from Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, 8 Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata 700 071. For details, please contact Arup Basu, Editor, *Śraddhā* at 98032 58723)

conclude that, at least from this perspective of the ancient texts, there is nothing but existence, consciousness, and bliss and nothing else exists or is real.

Sri Aurobindo's Perspective on Reality

Sri Aurobindo affirms the perspective described above. He fully endorses the concept of Brahman, affirming throughout his philosophical writings the belief that the Divine is All, the Divine is in All, and that All is the Divine. He also affirms the reality of Sachchidananda. From these two concepts, which need to be seen as conjoined and inseparable, with each necessarily implying the other, wide-ranging implications follow. For Sri Aurobindo, the reality of Brahman is unequivocal, as is the reality of Sachchidananda. These are the great truths which exist without qualification or exception. As a result, from his perspective we can take the statement of them completely literally: Everything is Divine. The Divine is in everything. The Divine is everything. Where Sri Aurobindo's perspective differs from more traditional scholars and seers is that he considers even matter to be Divine. The reality of Brahman is complete, absolute, pervasive. This view is especially exceptional when considered in relation to the traditional Hindu concept of Maya in which the world and life in it are considered to be an illusion and the only true reality to be the Divine, with the Divine seen as the Absolute, the Transcendent, existing above and apart from the manifestation.

In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo weighs the perspectives of the materialist and the ascetic, carefully considering the merits and problems of each. He considers the materialist perspective, in which only the material world is considered to be real, as having benefited humanity by helping to dispel superstition and encouraging rational thought and inquiry. This has led to significant scientific advances, for example, which have been of great help to humanity and to life in the world, increasing our knowledge of material phenomena and our ability to cope with this level of reality. To the extent that the ascetic perspective, the mystic view which considers only the spirit to be real, regards the world as unreal, as an illusion, Sri Aurobindo describes this as resulting in neglect of the physical world and life within it, consequently leading to degradation of life on the material plane. He also explains how the mystic or spiritual seeker who has experience of the Absolute can become so absorbed in this realisation that he or she comes to consider only this to be real. High spiritual experience can result in all lesser consciousness and the things associated with it appearing to be unreal and completely inconsequential. Yet, most importantly, the ascetic perspective acknowledges the truth of the Divine. Consequently each of these two apparently opposite perspectives has both merits and disadvantages, and each contains elements of truth. Sri Aurobindo creates a new synthesis of the two perspectives, an integral perspective which incorporates the strengths of both.

In Sri Aurobindo's view of reality both matter and spirit are real. Also both are divine. This conclusion derives directly from a complete, wide and comprehensive perspective on Brahman. Therefore, instead of understanding Brahman as "the One without a second" to mean that there is only the Spirit, all else is unreal, Sri Aurobindo understands this statement to mean that all is real, all is Divine — Matter, Spirit — everything.

Involvement of the Divine in Matter

We need next to consider how the divinity of matter relates to its creation and to the creation of the universe and our world. While the reader is referred to *The Life Divine* for a more complete and subtle explanation, a simplistic one is given here. Sri Aurobindo describes Reality in a series of levels or expressions. It is not a hierarchy as such, since the Divine is indivisible, yet when we come to the manifested physical world, we necessarily regard this as a lower order, since it is not the pure Divine. Essentially there is the Absolute, the Transcendent — the vast Silent One which is and always has been. The Absolute is vast, eternal, limitless in every sense imaginable. Its power is Sachchidananda. By this dynamic power the Absolute extends Itself to create and sustain the universe. In this original extension into the creation matter was formed. Before the creation of matter there was only the one unmanifest Divine. In Its extension creating the manifest universe, the Divine used its unlimited power to limit itself and create from part of Itself the world of forms. Consequently matter is necessarily, inherently, Divine since it derives from the One. The Divine is all that is. Matter is Its creation. The universe and our world are expressions of It. Therefore the Divine is within matter, as well as having created it, and supports its continuance through Its omnipotence. This involvement, literally, of the Divine in matter, is what Sri Aurobindo calls the involution of the Divine in the creation. Hence we see that Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the meaning of Brahman is the most complete and comprehensive which can be proposed. In his view, the Divine is literally All, The Divine is literally in All, and All is literally, unquestionably, the Divine. For Sri Aurobindo, the complete and total reality of Brahman underlies the entire conceptualisation of his philosophy and his yoga.

The Purpose of the Creation

A central question of human thought is "Why are we here?" This is sometimes expressed as "If there is a God, why did he make us, why did he put us here?" The Vedas tell us that the Divine created the world and all its creatures for His delight. This is also spoken of as the Divine play or Lila, in Sanskrit. Sri Aurobindo describes this view:

... if we look at World-Existence... in its relation to the self-delight of eternally existent being, we may regard, describe and realise it as Lila, the play, the child's joy, the poet's joy, the actor's joy, the mechanic's joy of the Soul of things eternally young, perpetually inexhaustible, creating and re-creating Himself in Himself for the sheer bliss of that self-creation, of that self-representation, —Himself the play, Himself the player, Himself the playground.¹

Since the Divine is infinite and has limitless capacities for expression, one of the forms this took was to create our universe, our world, and all the forms of life and matter within it. However, the creation was not made only for His amusement, though that in itself could be sufficient, but has a profoundly meaningful purpose. Most interpretations of the Vedas see this purpose in terms of human beings coming to the understanding that they can seek enlightenment and ultimately become absorbed into the Absolute,

becoming freed from life on earth, including the chain of life, death and rebirth, according to the belief in reincarnation. Therefore the traditional view of mankind's purpose is to discover and unite with the Divine, ultimately being reabsorbed into the Absolute, essentially returning to the divine Origin.

Sri Aurobindo accepts the view that the human purpose is spiritual development and realisation with the goal being to discover and unite with the Divine. However, he takes this significantly further than previous spiritual thought has envisioned. Based on his comprehensive view of Brahman, Sri Aurobindo sees the involution of the Divine in matter as impelling a comprehensive evolution of mind, life and matter. Calling this the evolution of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo envisions a complete transformation of mind, life and matter from their original expression in the creation to the realisation of their full divine potential. This is a gradual evolutionary process in which consciousness and matter itself reveal their inner divinity. The involution of the Divine in the manifestation not only enables, but actually makes inevitable, its ultimate evolution. The fulfilment of this process is the union of the individual being with the Divine. While this initially resonates as similar to the traditional interpretation of the Vedic view, Sri Aurobindo does not see the goal as the absorption of the individual consciousness back into the Absolute from which it once came. Instead he envisions the divinised individual being transformed into its divine expression and continuing to live in the world and, by its influence, facilitating the continued evolution. This is not only an individual process, but also a generalised one in which, ultimately, life on earth can become completely transformed.

Perfection and Imperfection

In looking over daily life as well as reflecting on human history, it is obvious that life on earth is imperfect and fraught with problems. We might then ask how this can be if human beings and, in fact, matter itself, contain an element of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo describes a process of separation as occurring with the creation of the manifested world. According to this description, the perception of separate forms, as separate objects and beings, cloaks our ability to perceive the actual oneness which, nevertheless, pertains. The perception of separateness is necessary to enable interplay and interaction, without which there could be no growth and development, no evolution. Therefore individuation, both of objects and of human consciousness into the form of individuals, is essential for the divine play of life on earth, to enable the interaction which provides the field and opportunity for growth of consciousness and evolution in general. In the perception of separateness, then, we move away from a complete sense of union with the Divine, even having this completely concealed or masked from our view. Sri Aurobindo describes this process as moving into the ignorance, with ignorance being described as separation from the truth of oneness and union with the Divine. With human beings, this separation, and hence ignorance, becomes complete with the development of the ego.

There is, quite appropriately, much denigration in Eastern spiritual thought of the role played by the ego. It is seen as the primary obstacle between the individual and his or her soul, that which obstructs the spiritual vision and realisation in the individual. Sri

Aurobindo also regards the ego as an obstacle to spiritual development for much the same reasons. However, he also recognises that it has an essential role to play in the process of individuation and the consequent growth of the individual. It is necessary for the full development of the individual, as one builds one's personality and individual competencies in life and also one's initial identity or sense of self in the formation of the outer being. However, once an individual has developed at the mental level, the time comes when the ego needs to be transcended for further growth and development to take place, for the potential for spiritual growth to be realised.

Human beings have an innate drive for growth and progress. Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Life Divine* of the dissatisfaction inherent in humanity, describing it as a restlessness and disquiet in the face of imperfection and disharmony. He explains that Nature seeks harmony in all things and so human beings, driven as creatures of Nature, also seek harmony in their lives. Moreover, because human beings have a spark of the Divine within them, they are driven to seek perfection, to seek to liberate their inner divinity, to release their divine potential into life and action. It is in this way that we then come to understand how there is so much imperfection in beings, while the world is imbued with the Divine. The imperfection is the ignorance, the sense of separation from oneness, from divinity, and cloaks the inner Divine and its potential for realisation and fulfilment. The impulsion for perfection is there. It is the light and power of the innate divinity within the manifestation. It is this that drives the evolution of consciousness, revealing the inner divinity eternally present.

The Psychic Being

Sri Aurobindo explains that the specific presence of the Divine in the individual human being is the psychic being. Having been a distinguished classical scholar while studying at Kings College, Cambridge, Sri Aurobindo uses the term "psychic" based on its original Greek meaning, where "psyche" means "soul." He identifies the psychic being as "the soul developing in the evolution."² It is a tiny element, "the spark of the Divine"³ within the being. It is the presence of the psychic being which enables and, in fact, drives the evolution of the individual. This presence of the Divine impels the individual to seek self-perfection, to be dissatisfied with the lower aspects of his or her nature, and drives the individual toward the ultimate goal of union with the Divine. Where the human individual is concerned, the psychic being is the direct and clear evidence of the involution of the Divine in the creation. It is this involvement which both enables and impels the evolution of consciousness.

The Divine and the Manifestation

In order to understand Sri Aurobindo's conception of Reality further, we need to consider how he sees the Divine as relating to the manifestation. We have briefly considered the Divine as creator and also noted that Sri Aurobindo regards the Divine as literally involved in Its creation, present there even at the level of matter itself. Next we need to explore what this means in terms of the role and presence of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo explains the Divine in terms of the silent, or passive, and active Brahman.

The Divine, as the Absolute, the Transcendent, IS. This is a great state of being, infinite and vast beyond human conception. As such, It is also called the Unknowable, meaning that It is beyond the range of human knowledge. However, it should also be noted that Sri Aurobindo asserts that the Unknowable can be known. By this he means that human beings have the inner potential to attain spiritual knowledge, the true knowledge which consists of spiritual realisation and is unrelated to intellectual accomplishment or capacity.

The Absolute expresses Itself through its active power of Sachchidananda, the great trinity of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss which is the foundation of the universe. Through his extensive research in the Vedas and his own exceptional spiritual realisation, Sri Aurobindo discovered a great power and consciousness which he called the Supermind. This is the extension which Sachchidananda puts forth to enable the creation. In Supermind, there is still oneness, though Supermind enables differentiation, hence creating the multiplicity of forms for life in the world. Sri Aurobindo makes it clear that though there is differentiation at the level of Supermind, there is no division. All remains as Oneness. Division enters at the level of what he terms the Overmind, below which are several levels of consciousness (Intuition, Illumined Mind, Higher Mind) descending to what we usually consider to be mind. Sri Aurobindo explains that these levels of consciousness are actually levels of being. Sri Aurobindo also explains that the Divine extended Itself through the power of Sachchidananda, through the dynamic creative action of Supermind, and involved Itself in successive levels of expression down to the level of mind as we usually think of it (the active intellect), and life and matter. Also, Brahman is Brahman regardless of where and how it is expressed, conceals or reveals Itself, and whether active or passive. So all these levels are Brahman, though Brahman is concealed further and further through the descent into matter.

Brahman is One, eternal, undivided. However, It exists in two aspects: passive and active. The vast silent immutable Brahman, the passive aspect, is the support of the creation. It maintains and sustains the universe. Through Its active role, Brahman contains and extends Itself into the manifestation, dynamically asserting its influence. In Its expression and involvement in the life of the world, Brahman also sends forth emanations of Itself. These are the avatars who have come through the ages to offer the direct intervention of the Divine in the life of the world, doing so by their concrete physical presence. When we consider these aspects of the divine Reality, we see that it ranges from the Absolute, the Transcendent, completely and pervasively down through all levels of being to Its actual presence in matter, with the Divine being involved actively and comprehensively throughout, including taking a direct interest and involvement in life on earth.

Sri Aurobindo writes extensively of the nature of Brahman and Its relation to the universe and to the individual. The following passage comprises a brief summary:

In relation to the universe the Supreme is Brahman, the one Reality which is not only the spiritual, material and conscious substance of all the ideas and forces and forms of the universe, but their origin, support and possessor, the cosmic and supracosmic Spirit. All the last terms to which we can reduce the universe, Force and Matter, Name and Form, Purusha and Prakriti [Soul and Nature], are still not entirely that which the

universe really is either in itself or its nature. As all that we are is the play and form, the mental, psychic, vital and physical expression of a supreme Self unconditioned by mind, life and body, the universe too is the play and form and cosmic soul-expression and nature-expression of a supreme existence which is unconditioned by force and matter, unconditioned by idea and name and form, unconditioned by the fundamental distinction of Purusha and Prakriti. Our supreme Self and the supreme Existence which has become the universe are one spirit, one self, one existence. The individual is in nature one expression of the universal Being, in spirit an emanation of the Transcendence. For if he finds his self, he finds too that his own true self is not this natural personality, this created individuality, but is a universal being in its relations with others and with Nature and in its upward term a portion of the living front of a supreme transcendent Spirit.⁴

Conclusion

We can summarise Sri Aurobindo's perspective on reality as being based on a complete and comprehensive view of the reality of Brahman. All is the Divine. The Divine is in All. The Divine is All. From this we see that Sri Aurobindo regards Sachchidananda, the sublime trinity of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss as the pervasive omnipresent power emanating from the Transcendent, the Absolute. The Divine has used its freedom to limit itself to create the universe and the world of separate forms, all of which is an expression of Himself. He has done this for the delight of the play, the delight of existence. This can also be explained in terms of the joy of self-finding. For when the apparently separate beings rediscover their divine Origin and unite with It, they experience the bliss of that union. This has been regarded as the purpose of human life from the literature of the Vedas. Sri Aurobindo envisions even more than this, conceiving of a complete transformation, a divinisation, of the individual and also of the collective life on earth in the evolution of consciousness.

References:

All quotations are from: Sri Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL), Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1970.

1. SABCL, vol. 18 (*The Life Divine*), pp. 102-103.
2. SABCL, vol. 22 (*Letters on Yoga*), p. 301
3. Ibid., p. 296.
4. SABCL, vol. 20, (*The Synthesis of Yoga*), p. 282.

Syncretism In Sri Aurobindo's Thought

Sandeep Joshi

The ordinary human mind has a propensity for exaggerating one side of the Truth and ignoring the other. Those who are benevolent by nature tend to prescribe compassion to ameliorate every problem while those who are endowed with dynamism advocate taking action in every instance. Likewise, some propose that one must aid business development and let the poor uplift themselves while others suggest helping the poor and letting the businessmen take care of themselves. One of the pleasures of reading Sri Aurobindo's works is that such contradictions are non-existent because he traces every contradiction to its Divine origin and reconciles it as part of a larger Truth. He explicates how every principle has its play in a certain context but when we over-generalise, it loses its value. This article outlines some oppositions resolved by Sri Aurobindo.

chittim-achittim chinavad vi vidy ān prṣṭeva vīta vrjinā cha martān
(Rig Veda 4.2.11)

Let the knower discriminate the Knowledge and the Ignorance, the straight open levels and the crooked that shut in mortals.

The Rig Veda in the verse shown above observes that the phenomenal world is crooked because every Truth gets distorted over here. The primary element causing this distortion is the human mind which misleads us by building a fractional representation of the world, cutting the whole into partial Truths, and then (mis)using its reasoning faculty to argue from only one side of the Truth. It is only the Enlightened One who, by virtue of attaining the Overmind and more, gains the ability to see the Truth behind distortions.

The mind of mortal man is led by words,
His sight retires behind the walls of Thought
And looks out only through half-opened doors.
He cuts the boundless Truth into sky-strips
And every strip he takes for all the heavens.
(Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Book VI, Canto II, p. 457)

We will cover ten contradictions synthesised by Sri Aurobindo in this article.

1. Ethical Man versus Aesthetic Man
2. The Subject-Object Dichotomy
3. Individualism versus Communism
4. Materialism versus Ascetism
5. Pleasure versus Pain
6. Self-esteem versus Humility
7. Good versus Evil
8. Various formulations of the Divine
9. Nature versus Nurture
10. Evolution versus Creationism.

1. The Ethical Man vs The Aesthetic Man

One of the frequent conflicts we see in society is between the ethical and the aesthetic temperament. The ethical man values good character in life whereas the aesthetic man seeks beauty in life. The Divine instinct behind ethics is the principle of Tapas (inward concentration of consciousness) whereas the Divine instinct behind aesthetics is the principle of Ananda (Delight) in life. In the perfected spiritual man, both tendencies would balance each other and reach their consummation. However, in partially self-aware men, psychological and social problems occur when either of these conflicting tendencies are exaggerated; the ethical man may degenerate into the moralist, puritan and fanatic whereas the aesthetic man may degenerate into the vulgar and obscene individual.

The conflict arises from that sort of triangular disposition of the higher or more subtle mentality which we have already had occasion to indicate. There is in our mentality a side of will, conduct, character which creates the ethical man; there is another side of sensibility to the beautiful, – understanding beauty in no narrow or hyperartistic sense, – which creates the artistic and aesthetic man. Therefore there can be such a thing as a predominantly or even exclusively ethical culture; there can be too, evidently, a predominantly or even exclusively aesthetic culture. There are at once created two conflicting ideals which must naturally stand opposed and look askance at each other with a mutual distrust or even reprobation. The aesthetic man tends to be impatient of the ethical rule; he feels it to be a barrier to his aesthetic freedom and an oppression on the play of his artistic sense and his artistic faculty; he is naturally hedonistic, – for beauty and delight are inseparable powers, – and the ethical rule tramples on pleasure, even very often on quite innocent pleasures, and tries to put a strait waistcoat on the human impulse to delight. ... The ethical man repays this natural repulsion with interest. He tends to distrust art and the aesthetic sense as something lax and emollient, something in its nature undisciplined and by its attractive appeals to the passions and emotions destructive of a high and strict self-

control. He sees that it is hedonistic and he finds that the hedonistic impulse is non-moral and often immoral. It is difficult for him to see how the indulgence of the aesthetic impulse beyond a very narrow and carefully guarded limit can be combined with a strict ethical life. He evolves the puritan who objects to pleasure on principle; not only in his extremes – and a predominant impulse tends to become absorbing and leads towards extremes – but in the core of his temperament he remains fundamentally the puritan. The misunderstanding between these two sides of our nature is an inevitable circumstance of our human growth which must try them to their fullest separate possibilities and experiment in extremes in order that it may understand the whole range of its capacities ^[1].

Sri Aurobindo points out that neither of these predilections leads to the complete truth. The perfected man has to be able to combine both these tendencies into a holistic disposition. The ethical man must begin to dissolve the rigid mind-vital linkage which causes him to issue severe judgments while the aesthetic man must practise austerity in order to exalt the vital with the touch of the psychic being.

We can combine them; we can enlarge the sense of ethics by the sense of beauty and delight and introduce into it to correct its tendency of hardness and austerity the element of gentleness, love, amenity, the hedonistic side of morals; we can steady, guide and strengthen the delight of life (i.e. aesthetic side) by the introduction of the necessary will and austerity and self-discipline which will give it endurance and purity. These two powers of our psychological being, which represent in us the essential principle of energy and the essential principle of delight,— the Indian terms are more profound and expressive, Tapas and Ananda,— can be thus helped by each other, the one to a richer, the other to a greater self-expression ^[2].

2. The Subject-Object dichotomy

The process of human perception creates a dichotomy between the subject and the object or, in the words of Vedanta, between the triple of the Knower, the Known and the Knowledge. Sri Aurobindo reconciles this subject-object dichotomy based on the hidden unity of Consciousness which lies latent behind the Nescience. The Divine, in its desire to express itself, objectified and created the Universe much as a poet creates a poem and views that poem as separate from himself. The Divine Consciousness separating and fragmenting itself into various gradations of consciousness has given rise to this phenomenal differentiation between the subject and the object. How can we recover the unity? It occurs when, through the process of Yoga, we develop the power of Intuition which re-awakens the latent connection between the subject-consciousness and the object-consciousness.

Intuition is a power of consciousness nearer and more intimate to the original knowledge by identity; for it is always something that leaps out direct from a concealed identity. It is when the consciousness of the subject meets with the consciousness in the object, penetrates it and sees, feels or vibrates with the

truth of what it contacts, that the intuition leaps out like a spark or lightning-flash from the shock of the meeting; or when the consciousness, even without any such meeting, looks into itself and feels directly and intimately the truth or the truths that are there or so contacts the hidden forces behind appearances, then also there is the outbreak of an intuitive light; or, again, when the consciousness meets the Supreme Reality or the spiritual reality of things and beings and has a contactual union with it, then the spark, the flash or the blaze of intimate truth-perception is lit in its depths ^[3].

In his book *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo traces the power of separation induced in the Mind to the original power of Apprehension which originates on the plane of Vijnana or Supermind. The Supramental Truth-consciousness divides into two powers, Apprehension and Comprehension, and it is the secondary power of Apprehension which creates the distinction between the Knower, the Known and Knowledge.

But what then is the origin of mentality and the organisation of this lower consciousness in the triple terms of Mind, Life and Matter which is our view of the universe? For since all things that exist must proceed from the action of the all-efficient Supermind, from its operation in the three original terms of Existence, Conscious-Force and Bliss, there must be some faculty of the creative Truth-Consciousness which so operates as to cast them into these new terms, into this inferior trio of mentality, vitality and physical substance. This faculty we find in a secondary power of the creative knowledge, its power of a projecting, confronting and apprehending consciousness in which knowledge centralises itself and stands back from its works to observe them ^[4].

3. Individualism vs Communism

In the organisation of society, we veer towards two extreme forms of organisation. One is communism where the individual is forcibly and mechanically subjugated to the needs of the State and other is individualism (e.g. capitalism) where individual enterprise is regarded as more important than care for the poor and the downtrodden.

For the vice of individualism is that in insisting upon the free development and self-expression of the life and the mind or the life-soul in the individual, it tends to exaggerate the egoism of the mental and vital being and prevent the recognition of unity with others on which alone a complete self-development and a harmless freedom can be founded. Collectivism at least insists upon that unity by entirely subordinating the life of the isolated ego to the life of the greater group-ego, and its office may be thus to stamp upon the mentality and life-habits of the individual the necessity of unifying his life with the life of others ^[5].

Sri Aurobindo points out that there is a Truth behind both these principles which gets distorted in practice. Society is necessary for the practice and perfection of the soul as per the rule “I am my brother’s keeper” (Genesis 4:9) while individual freedom is necessary from an evolutionary perspective if Man must fulfil himself, however

haphazardly, and grow into Divinity. The reconciliation of these two extremes then lies in the development of a spiritual society which bases itself on the recognition that man is in his essence Spirit. Such an association, Sri Aurobindo says, must be founded on the soul's brotherhood and death of egoism rather than the chauvinistic solidarities advocated under communism.

The second psychic truth the individual has to grasp is this, that he is not only himself, but is in solidarity with all of his kind,—let us leave aside for the moment that which seems to be not of his kind. That which we are has expressed itself through the individual, but also through the universality, and though each has to fulfil itself in its own way, neither can succeed independently of the other. The society has no right to crush or efface the individual for its own better development or self-satisfaction; the individual, so long at least as he chooses to live in the world, has no right to disregard for the sake of his own solitary satisfaction and development his fellow-beings and to live at war with them or seek a selfishly isolated good. And when we say, no right, it is from no social, moral or religious standpoint, but from the most positive and simply with a view to the law of existence itself. For neither the society nor the individual can so develop to their fulfilment. Every time the society crushes or effaces the individual, it is inflicting a wound on itself and depriving its own life of priceless sources of stimulation and growth. The individual too cannot flourish by himself; for the universal, the unity and collectivity of his fellow-beings, is his present source and stock; it is the thing whose possibilities he individually expresses, even when he transcends its immediate level, and of which in his phenomenal being he is one result. Its depression strikes eventually at his own sources of life, by its increasing he also increases. This is what a true subjectivism teaches us,—first, that we are a higher self than our ego or our members, secondly, that we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others; for there is a secret solidarity which our egoism may kick at and strive against, but from which we cannot escape ^[6].

4. Materialism vs Ascetism

The materialist denies the Spirit by asserting that only that which is visible to the physical senses is true. He asserts that only matter and energy exist and everything else which falls outside the range of sensory interpretation or scientific instrumentation do not exist and therefore are untrue. Consequently, the age where Science rules also becomes the age where reductionism is in vogue.

Modern Science, obsessed with the greatness of its physical discoveries and the idea of the sole existence of Matter, has long attempted to base upon physical data even its study of Soul and Mind and of those workings of Nature in man and animal in which a knowledge of psychology is as important as any of the physical sciences. Its very psychology founded itself upon physiology and the scrutiny of the brain and nervous system ^[7].

The ascetic takes his stand on the other extreme from the materialist. He says God alone is true and the phenomenal world is an illusion from which we must escape as quickly as possible. The ascetic mentality stems from the temporary need to withdraw from the exigencies of life to concentrate within, but dissatisfaction with the hardships on earth can lead to a violent recoil from life followed by the inevitable and harsh denial of Matter itself. Alternately, a purely static realisation of the Divine and a deep absorption into Nirvana after which one becomes incapable or unwilling to recover the reality of Matter again can also cause one to declare the phenomenal world is an illusion.

Sri Aurobindo says both these perceptions are extreme and can be reconciled. He states, based on his own spiritual experience, that the whole Creation is a self-extension of the Divine in Time and Space. Matter and Spirit are two poles of Creation, both of which are real, and it is possible to attain a Divine Life here on Earth through conscious evolution. This is the goal of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.

5. Pleasure vs Pain

It is self-limitation of consciousness which has induced the triple sensations of pleasure and pain experienced in the phenomenal world. Our ego identification constricts us to a physical body, assigns us an individual memory which retains the impressions of past contacts, and utilises these impressions to create the illusion of pleasure and pain. Behind these dualistic sensations, there exist pristine, primordial streams of Bliss and Delight which eternally course through the Universe, which have the capacity to nourish the traumatic and suffering souls. We remain cut off from this cascading waterfall of Delight because of the division within our consciousness, because of our solipsistic absorption in the superficial phenomenal world. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

... This is the fall of man typified in the poetic parable of the Hebrew Genesis. That fall is his deviation from the full and pure acceptance of God and himself, or rather of God in himself, into a dividing consciousness which brings with it all the train of the dualities, life and death, good and evil, joy and pain, completeness and want, the fruit of a divided being. This is the fruit which Adam and Eve, Purusha and Prakriti, the soul tempted by Nature, have eaten. The redemption comes by the recovery of the universal in the individual and of the spiritual term in the physical consciousness. Then alone the soul in Nature can be allowed to partake of the fruit of the tree of life and be as the Divine and live forever. For then only can the purpose of its descent into material consciousness be accomplished, when the knowledge of good and evil, joy and suffering, life and death has been accomplished through the recovery by the human soul of a higher knowledge which reconciles and identifies these opposites in the universal and transforms their divisions into the image of the divine Unity ^[8].

From the spiritual perspective, pain is a welcome instrument of Nature and a necessary prod to our inner soul to awaken and free itself from its self-imposed

limitations. Once we expand in consciousness, the emotional residues of the past are cleansed, the soul no longer identifies solely with the physical body but centres itself in the higher subtle body opening itself into communion with the vaster, lucid planes of the Universe. As a result of this transformation, the senses bathe in the inner fire of the soul and every new sense contact becomes an occasion for delight.

In the egoistic human being, the mental person emergent out of the dim shell of matter, delight of existence is neutral, semi-latent, still in the shadow of the subconscious, hardly more than a concealed soil of plenty covered by desire with a luxuriant growth of poisonous weeds and hardly less poisonous flowers, the pains and pleasures of our egoistic existence. When the divine consciousness working secretly in us has devoured these growths of desire, when in the image of the Rig Veda the fire of God has burnt up the shoots of earth, that which is concealed at the roots of these pains and pleasures, their cause and secret being, the sap of delight in them, will emerge in new forms not of desire, but of self-existent satisfaction which will replace mortal pleasure by the Immortal's ecstasy. And this transformation is possible because these growths of sensation and emotion are in their essential being, the pains no less than the pleasures, that delight of existence which they seek but fail to reveal,— fail because of division, ignorance of self and egoism ^[9].

6. Self-esteem versus Humility

Faced with a rapidly globalising and hyper-competitive world, people impulsively seek security by identifying with some social aggregate (family, club, corporation) coupled with the inculcation of pride in their personal accomplishments. This nagging feeling of insecurity is the basis for the self-esteem movement which emphasises self-worth as a basic need for living a well-adjusted and happy life in society. On the other hand, traditional spirituality considers any affirmation of the ego as an abomination. How to reconcile these conflicting needs of the soul who wishes to live in society? Sri Aurobindo points out that the development of the ego (and by that, we mean the soul's absorption and sole identification with the physical body) is a necessary, albeit transient, development which guards the individual and allows the growth of the personality without being smothered by the decrees of society.

... the great evolutionary periods of humanity have taken place in communities where the individual became active, mentally, vitally or spiritually alive. For this reason Nature invented the ego that the individual might disengage himself from the inconscience or subconscience of the mass and become an independent living mind, life-power, soul, spirit, co-ordinating himself with the world around him but not drowned in it and separately inexistent and ineffective. For the individual is indeed part of the cosmic being, but he is also something more, he is a soul that has descended from the Transcendence. This he cannot manifest

at once, because he is too near to the cosmic Inconscience, not near enough to the original Superconscience; he has to find himself as the mental and vital ego before he can find himself as the soul or spirit ^[10].

In the following passage, the Mother Mirra Alfassa elucidates on the various stages in Man's earthly evolution, from the undistinguished clannish man who lives as part of some collective to the individual egoistic man and then to the man who is consecrated to the Divine.

... the first state of your being is a state of an almost total mixture with all things from outside, and that there is almost no individualisation, that is, specialisation which makes you a different being. You are moved — a kind of form which is your physical being is moved — by all the common universal forces, vital forces or mental forces, which go through your form and put it in motion. So that is the universal being.

And all that you have wrested from this general semi-consciousness, and have crystallised into a more or less independent being, conscious of itself and having its own qualities, all this is your individual being. And this individual being is full of all the movements of obscurity, unconsciousness, and of the limitations of ordinary life, and that's... and that's what you must gradually open to the divine influence and bring to the consciousness and understanding of things.

That's what Sri Aurobindo says.

In fact, the first victory is to create an individuality. And then later, the second victory is to give this individuality to the Divine. And the third victory is that the Divine changes your individuality into a divine being.

There are three stages: the first is to become an individual; the second is to consecrate the individual, that he may surrender entirely to the Divine and be identified with Him; and the third is that the Divine takes possession of this individual and changes him into a being in His own image, that is, he too becomes divine ^[11].

7. Good versus Evil

In *The Life Divine*, the contradiction of good and evil is reconciled in the chapter on Origin and Remedy of Falsehood, Error, Wrong and Evil [12]. We will briefly summarise the arguments here.

At the outset, we have to examine whether evil exists in Creation. There is nothing inherently evil in the Transcendent Divine but in the Universe, there do exist malevolent beings in various occult worlds, as can be adduced from the spiritual experience of various sages and even people afflicted by psychiatric disorders. Coming to the level of earthly life, one observes no evil intent in organisms such as plants and animals; animals are endowed with the instinct of survival and kill others only when necessary,

except for cases when they turn violent after being corrupted under the influence of men.

Given all the above, how does the notion of evil emerge in Man? Evil, Sri Aurobindo says, is engendered in man's vital instincts – in the sensations of pain and pleasure. When these sensations are submitted to the mind, it arrives at some capricious ethical judgment which is contingent on the disposition of the individual personality — a personality which is the cumulative outgrowth of cultural, genetic and past-birth influences. Such judgments tend to be invariably subjective and vary across the masses. In the collective life of society, these ethical judgments are eventually aggregated and elevated to collective notions of morality which serve to cement public opinion and create conflicts between men. What ultimate purpose is served by the instilling of such erroneous mind-sense linkages within Man? They have been instilled within us to awaken the soul and to goad us towards greater Divine perfection. If we look at this problem from the holistic perspective, there are two primary reasons why Man engages in evil acts: lack of knowledge and egoism. Our lack of knowledge originates in the half-evolved human mind which is an evolutionary intermediary between the animal mind endowed with impeccable instincts and the spiritualised mind empowered with lightning intuition. By itself, lack of knowledge would not give rise to evil actions if the soul within had been propelled by the aspiration to learn rapidly, but in the collective vital life of society any such aspiration is usually submerged by lesser aspirations. As a result, lack of knowledge gets combined with the second factor – egoism – creating a potent combination which foment errors of self-affirmation and self-justification that gradually lead to the degradation of the soul in Man. These errors are only corrected when the psychic being within Man is awakened and begins to lead evolution.

Thus, Sri Aurobindo concludes that Evil is a phenomenal and evolutionary mechanism in the Universe and not an absolute truth. It exists for the purpose of goading human beings to awaken to their spiritual journey. The Divine who created the Universe is not only extra-cosmic but also immanent in Creation. The Universe was created because the Divine wishes to discover itself through evolution and Becoming.

8. Various formulations of the Divine

Different schools of Indian philosophy such as Vishishtadvaita, Dvaitadvaita, Dvaita, Shuddhadvaita sprung in the past bearing dissimilar formulations of the nature of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo points out the Divine can be realised in multitudinous ways, and those who experience only a single aspect of the greater Reality are bound to come up with incomplete theories. The Supramental or Vijnana world which supports Creation assumes three poises – unity (comprehending), unity in multiplicity (apprehending) and multiplicity (projecting). When the spiritualised mind catches a reflection of the first poise (unity), one assumes that there is no individuality and concludes “Only God exists and no individuals exist”. When the spiritualised mind attains the second poise (unity in multiplicity), one states “All beings are One but there is also multiplicity” as adduced by Vishishtadvaita. Those who catch a reflection of the third poise (multiplicity) will state “All beings are separate from the Divine but supported by it” as exemplified

by Dvaita. One can also realise the Cosmic Divine in its Static aspect which is called Nirvana, and in its Dynamic aspect which is called Cosmic Consciousness, and in its Transcendent aspect which may be called the Supreme Realisation described in the Bhagavad Gita. As Sri Aurobindo points out, all these realisations are necessary to fathom the multi-faceted nature of the Divine Reality:

It is indeed only when our human mentality lays an exclusive emphasis on one side of spiritual experience, affirms that to be the sole eternal truth and states it in the terms of our all-dividing mental logic that the necessity for mutually destructive schools of philosophy arises. Thus, emphasising the sole truth of the unitarian consciousness, we observe the play of the divine unity, erroneously rendered by our mentality into the terms of real difference, but, not satisfied with correcting this error of the mind by the truth of a higher principle, we assert that the play itself is an illusion. Or, emphasising the play of the One in the Many, we declare a qualified unity and regard the individual soul as a soul-form of the Supreme, but would assert the eternity of this qualified existence and deny altogether the experience of a pure consciousness in an unqualified oneness. Or, again, emphasising the play of difference, we assert that the Supreme and the human soul are eternally different and reject the validity of an experience which exceeds and seems to abolish that difference ^[13].

9. Nature versus Nurture

What can we glean from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on the ongoing “Nature versus Nurture” debate? We are given the understanding that nature and nurture can be reconciled in the greater spiritual truth that states that there is a soul within Man which is gradually evolving towards Divinity. It is this soul which persists across incarnations, putting forth a distinct personality in every life while concomitantly being influenced by the genetic makeup of the parents as well as by the prevailing Zeitgeist.

Man is a soul evolving in Time through various forms across different races, countries and parents. We are born to parents based on the level of our consciousness. Highly evolved souls are able to form their own mental and vital sheaths in the occult worlds and make a judicious choice of parents, while those who are not completely conscious are subjected to the vagaries of destiny at rebirth. By virtue of being born in a certain family, one inherits certain hereditary traits as well as the subconscious atavisms of one's parents. During the lifetime, the soul puts out an inchoate combination of a mental, a vital and a physical Purusha which governs the personality and determines our subjective reactions and choices. It is due to the interaction between these Purushas that even little children seem to have individual personalities and are not exactly tabula rasa as is naively expected.

10. Darwinian Evolution vs Divine Creation

Darwin's theory of evolution proposes that all life on earth has evolved from a common ancestor, that there is individual variation within every species, and that

evolution is mediated by the process of natural selection due to which, in due course of time, certain traits become established in the species due to ‘survival of the fittest’.

During Darwin’s time, the field of genetics was in a nascent stage, with his contemporary Gregor Mendel, now known as the father of modern genetics, just initiating cross-breeding experiments on pea plants. The study of genetic traits has now substantially expanded into the development of the booming field of genetics. Today, Darwin’s theory of evolution has been integrated with Mendelian genetics to form what is called Neo-Darwinism or the evolutionary synthesis. Evolutionary biology now recognises that aside from natural selection, other evolutionary mechanisms such as adaptation, genetic drift, gene flow and speciation are also involved in evolution; it differentiates between microevolution and macroevolution^[14]. The theory of evolution is expanding to encompass evolution of minerals as well. Scientists at the Carnegie Institution’s Geophysical Laboratory have observed that minerals have also become more complex with time. They have found that the mineral kingdom co-evolved with life, and that up to two thirds of the more than 4,000 known types of minerals on Earth can be directly or indirectly linked to biological activity. Today there are about 4,400 mineral species but 4 billion years ago, there were only a dozen minerals on Earth^[15].

Neo-Darwinism has been challenged by the movement known as Intelligent Design(ID), whose primary contention is that Darwin’s theory does not explain the ‘irreducible complexity’ seen in Nature. ID posits the existence of an extra-cosmic entity which must have created the world, as adduced by the latent intelligence seen in various instinctive mechanisms found in Nature. It must also be mentioned that ID is derived from and sustained by an earlier movement known as Creationism, which sought to invalidate Darwinian evolution by proposing that the world was created as described in the first three chapters of the Book of Genesis in the Bible.

Now we will briefly outline, based on the works of Sri Aurobindo, what we perceive to be the synthesis between scientism and literalism – between Neo-Darwinism and Intelligent Design. The Universe can be seen as a Manifestation of the Divine, a conscious Being evolving itself through self-extension in Time and Space for the purpose of self-discovery and joy. The Upanishad gives us the illustrative analogy of a spider spinning a web out of itself. Sri Aurobindo identified a double movement of involution and evolution in which Spirit first involves itself through self-absorption in the Inconscience to create Matter and then Matter evolves the latent Spirit within through the mechanisms of Life-principle(Vitality), Mind-principle and so on^[16, 17]. The Divine has become the Universe; it has split itself into souls in order to take part in self-finding. It clothes itself in new forms (minerals, plants, animals and man) that are developed in successive stages to represent new forces breaking out of primordial Inconscience. In a nutshell, we can say that the Universe was created by a “Differentiation of Consciousness” and in its upward evolutionary movement, it tries to recover the lost unity through an “Integration of Consciousness”. Therefore, it can be said that the Universe is involved in a giant “Calculus of Yoga” course.

Sri Aurobindo contextualises Darwin’s trope ‘survival of fittest’ while discussing the development of the Life principle (i.e. vitality). Sri Aurobindo identified three stages of existence: the dumb will of energy, the urge to possess, the urge to love. These three

stages correspond to the three defects perceived in individualised evolving life-forms: death, desire and incapacity. The dumb will of energy is observed in the first stages of life, where the subconscious will in primitive life-forms is driven by purely mechanical laws. The second stage is exemplified by higher life forms which are driven by the instinct to live, and this necessarily induces in them the principle of struggle as well as adaptation to the environment. The third stage is discerned in collective packs of animals which exhibit primal form of love and band together to survive. The preservation of individuality is moderated with the necessity and desire for interchange and fusion with other individuals. These three principles are also inherited and visible in the early stages of human life. As Sri Aurobindo points out, it is struggle for vital development in evolution which was expressed in Darwin’s theory of evolution.

The phenomenon of hunger and desire involves a struggle towards a status of satisfaction and security, since desire is only the stimulus by which Life tempts its own positive being to rise out of the negation of unfulfilled hunger towards the full possession of the delight of existence. The phenomenon of limited capacity involves a struggle towards expansion, mastery and possession, the possession of the self and the conquest of the environment, since limitation and defect are only the negation by which Life tempts its own positive being to seek for the perfection of which it is eternally capable. The struggle for life is not only a struggle to survive, it is also a struggle for possession and perfection, since only by taking hold of the environment whether more or less, whether by self-adaptation to it or by adapting it to oneself either by accepting and conciliating it or by conquering and changing it, can survival be secured, and equally is it true that only a greater and greater perfection can assure a continuous permanence, a lasting survival. It is this truth that Darwinism sought to express in the formula of the survival of the fittest^[18].

Intelligent Design raises valid questions about abiogenesis (i.e. how life arises out from inorganic matter) and speciation (i.e. how do new species arise) but is unable to satisfactorily answer them with a suitable teleology, other than to posit the existence of an extra-cosmic entity which must be managing the Universe. On the other hand, Neo-Darwinism only examines the superficial evolution of forms, and remains unaware of the greater aeonic evolution of souls as they are reborn in progressively more complex forms, (plant, animal and human) as determined by the evolution of soul consciousness.

We present the synthesis of the above ideas as discovered in the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Speciation is explained by the fact that consciousness precedes form in evolution^[19]. There exists what is denoted as the ‘generic prototype’ behind every species, which is like a mould; it creates the general form that every member of the species will manifest. What evolutionary biologists describe as sudden variation or mutation of the species and whose cause or genesis they are at a loss to trace, is precisely due to an occult change in the consciousness and will of this prototype^[20]. Behind the physical world, there exist gradations of occult worlds in

which the subtle sheaths which correspond the physical body seen on earth are first prepared and embodied by the reincarnating soul.

From karana to sukshma, from sukshma to sthula, and back again, that is the formula. Once manifested in matter the world proceeds by laws which do not change, from age to age, by a regular succession, until it is all withdrawn back again into the source from which it came. The material goes back into the psychical and the psychical is involved in its cause or seed. It is again put out when the period of expansion recurs and runs its course on similar lines but with different details till the period of contraction is due ^[21].

We end this article with a quote which illustrates that Sri Aurobindo may have anticipated that the field of genetics would one day discover the evolutionary mechanism of artificial mutation. (discovery of another sadhak , V. Arvind).

Modern man has not yet succeeded in discovering or using the laws of Life, but there is no reason to suppose that he will not one day make that discovery also. *The day must inevitably come when he will be able even to originate no less than to modify freely both plant life and animal life in matter and govern them for his purposes* (emphasis added) as he now originates mechanisms of material force and modifies and governs its currents, combinations and separate workings so as to abridge distance, to invade the air, to economise the expenditure of his own life energies or to serve a hundred other purposes of human construction, destruction or development ^[22].

There all the truths unite in a single truth,
And all ideas rejoin Reality.
There knowing herself by her own termless self,
Wisdom supernal, wordless, absolute
Sat uncompanioned in the eternal Calm,
All-seeing, motionless, sovereign and alone.
There knowledge needs not words to embody Idea;
Idea, seeking a house in boundlessness,
Weary of its homeless immortality,
Asks not in thought's carved brilliant cell to rest
Whose single window's clipped outlook on things
Sees only a little arc of God's vast sky.

(Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Book I, Canto III, p. 32)

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Intuition And The Limits Of Reason

A Cross-Cultural Study

Richard Hartz

No activity is more distinctively human than the pursuit of knowledge. This perennial seeking has taken many forms reflecting the cultural and temperamental diversity of humankind. But certain common problems arise from the nature of our consciousness itself. What exactly do we mean by knowledge? How and where should we look for it? To what extent can we hope to arrive at it? Over the ages, such questions have elicited sometimes similar, sometimes contrasting responses in different parts of the world.

The relation of reason to intuition is one of these recurrent questions. Which is more reliable, discursive thought or immediate insight? Is one superior to the other or do we need both? Formulated and answered in various ways, this basic question regarding our means of cognition is connected to the difference between subjective and objective knowledge. That distinction is imposed by the very structure of our awareness. We have intimate access to our own being, at least in its surface movements, while external objects and other beings are presented to us more indirectly through the machinery of sensation.

Accordingly, one view of the proper orientation of the quest for knowledge is represented by the ancient Greek injunction, “Know thyself” (*gnōthi seauton*). But the Greeks were also among the first to systematically investigate the world perceived by the senses. Indeed, Eurocentric historians have traced the antecedents of modern science almost exclusively to the Greeks, disregarding or minimising the contributions of the Arabs, Egyptians, Chinese and Indians, whose influences converging in early modern Europe helped to make the Scientific Revolution possible.¹

In fact, both subjective and objective knowledge have been cultivated in every civilisation. Usually, however, there has been an emphasis on one or the other. In India, for example, the Upanishads spoke of the knowledge of this world as the lower knowledge (*apara vidya*). This included subjects such as astronomy and linguistics, to which ancient India made major contributions. But the knowledge of brahman, the universal Spirit, attained through self-realisation, was regarded as the higher knowledge (*para vidya*), “which being known, all is known.”² At the other end of the spectrum, modern Western culture has tended to reverse this ranking and treat science as the key to understanding everything. Even in psychology, introspection was rejected by

behaviourists and has hardly been rehabilitated by cognitive psychologists. If not Spirit but Matter is that “which being known, all is known”, the logical conclusion is that mental processes including thought, art and spirituality can be adequately explained by analysing the brain.

Inward-looking and outward-looking approaches to the pursuit of truth need not be mutually exclusive. On the contrary, a synthesis of the results of subjective and objective, intuitive and rational methods ought to offer the most complete and balanced perspective on our existence in this perplexing universe. Even in the “hard” sciences, as we will see, the most decisive advances have sometimes been achieved by a fusion of rigorous mathematical thinking with almost mystical insight.

Plato, Aristotle and Quantum Physics

Before considering the role of intuition in the process of scientific discovery, let us return for a moment to ancient Greece. The origins of two sides of Western thought are often associated with the names of Plato and Aristotle. The stereotypes of these founding fathers of the occidental tradition are summed up in a piece of doggerel suggesting a dichotomy between Aristotle’s down-to-earth empiricism and Plato’s intoxication with pure Ideas:

Said Aristotle unto Plato,
“Have another sweet potato?”
Said Plato unto Aristotle,
“Thank you, I prefer the bottle.”³

On a higher level of culture, the figures of Plato and Aristotle are central to Raphael’s monumental fresco *The School of Athens*, painted on a wall of a room in the Vatican between 1509 and 1511. Richard Tarnas comments in *The Passion of the Western Mind*: “There, in the centre of the many Greek philosophers and scientists gathered in lively discussion, stand the elder Plato and the younger Aristotle, with Plato pointing upward to the heavens, to the invisible and transcendent, while Aristotle motions his hand outward and down to the earth, to the visible and immanent.” Thus we find artistically rendered “a certain elegant balance and tension between empirical analysis and spiritual intuition”.⁴ This Hellenic balance was recovered in the Renaissance, when it was embodied most splendidly in the many-sided genius of Leonardo da Vinci (on whom Raphael modelled his Plato). In other periods of European culture, the delicate balance has sometimes been less successfully preserved by the Greeks’ intellectual descendants.

Raphael’s visual characterisation of the two great philosophers, broadly justified as it is, could not but simplify a complex relationship. Intuition of the transcendent does not account for the whole of Plato’s thought; there was also the aspect of rigorous analytical thinking that paved the way for Aristotelian logic. Aristotle, for his part, was not quite as earth-bound as his gesture in the painting seems to indicate. He once wrote in the exalted spirit of his teacher: “We must not listen to those who urge us to think human thoughts since we are human, and mortal thoughts since we are mortal; rather



we should as far as possible immortalise ourselves and do all we can to live by the finest element in us – for if in bulk it is small, in power and worth it is far greater than anything else.”⁵

European philosophy was famously described by Whitehead as a series of footnotes to Plato.⁶ On the other hand, Western science would appear to be much more indebted to Aristotle, who was a pioneer of the investigation of the natural world and the founder of biology, among other achievements. Yet Plato has been surprisingly influential at certain critical junctures in the history of science. With regard to the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, the physicist Werner Heisenberg noted: “It is certainly no accident that the beginnings of modern science were associated with a turning away from Aristotle and a reversion to Plato.”⁷

No doubt this was partly because the official Aristotelianism of Galileo’s time was a fossilised orthodoxy that had to be challenged if science was to progress. Aristotle himself can hardly be blamed for the distortion of his legacy by the misguided zeal of his admirers. Galileo, whose lifelong quarrel was with Aristotelian philosophers more than with the Church, remarked: “I often wonder how it can be that these strict supporters of Aristotle’s every word fail to perceive how great a hindrance they are to his credit and reputation, and how the more they desire to increase his authority, the more they actually detract from it.”⁸

But there was a more fundamental reason why Plato’s role in inspiring the Scientific Revolution – and later, quantum physics – paradoxically overshadows in some ways that of Aristotle, the father of Western science. Aristotelian empiricism, as Heisenberg explained, was prone to accept sensory experience at face value. At a certain point, science had to liberate itself from the kind of experience that tells us, for instance, that the earth is at rest and the sun moves around it, or that the ground

beneath our feet is solid. This was replaced “by an idealisation of experience, which claims to be recognised as the correct idealisation by virtue of the fact that it allows mathematical structures to become visible in the phenomena.”⁹ This idealisation is closer to the spirit of Pythagoras and Plato than to that of Democritus and Aristotle. At the same time, as Heisenberg acknowledged, pure mathematical speculation is as unfruitful as pure empiricism for arriving at the correct representation of natural phenomena. Giving both Aristotle and Plato their due, he concludes: “Only from the tension, the interplay between the wealth of facts and the mathematical forms that may possibly be appropriate to them, can decisive advances spring.”¹⁰

Heisenberg’s own role in several decisive advances in quantum physics gives a particular interest to his observations. His comments on the process of scientific discovery are especially pertinent. Describing such discovery as the “shining forth of the beautiful into exact science”, he asks how it is that “the great connection becomes recognisable, even before it is understood in detail and before it can be rationally demonstrated? In what does the power of illumination consist, and what effect does it have on the onward progress of science?”¹¹ To answer these questions he draws on Plato.

The “immediate recognition” of what Heisenberg calls “the great connection” is, he maintains, “not a consequence of discursive (i.e., rational) thinking.”¹² Rather, “the apprehension of Ideas [in the Platonic sense] by the human mind is more an artistic intuiting, a half-conscious intimation, than a knowledge conveyed by the understanding. It is a reminiscence of forms that were already implanted in this soul before its existence on earth. . . . [S]omething is evoked in it that was not imparted to it from without by the senses but has always been already laid down there in a deeply unconscious region.”¹³ Heisenberg supports this view with a quotation from another pioneer of quantum theory, Wolfgang Pauli, who also refers to Plato:

The process of understanding in nature, together with the joy that man feels in understanding, i.e. in becoming acquainted with new knowledge, seems therefore to rest upon a correspondence, a coming into congruence of pre-existent internal images of the human psyche with external objects and their behaviour. This view of natural knowledge goes back, of course, to Plato and was . . . also plainly adopted by Kepler. The latter speaks, in fact, of Ideas, pre-existent in the mind of God and imprinted accordingly upon the soul, as the image of God. These primal images, which the soul can perceive by means of an innate instinct, Kepler calls archetypes. There is a very wide-ranging agreement here with the primordial images or archetypes introduced into modern psychology by C. G. Jung. . . .¹⁴

Heisenberg’s reminiscence of the breakthroughs in which he participated as a young man in his twenties was written half a century after the events in question. Here we see how deeply Plato can still speak to some of the most brilliant and original minds of our age. After Planck’s discovery of the quantum properties of light in 1900, a crisis had overtaken physics during the first quarter of the twentieth century as the Newtonian model began to break down. We might have expected Heisenberg to narrate in the first

person his own contribution to the resolution of this crisis. Instead, he offers us a Platonic account of the phenomenon of understanding.

Despite its impersonal form, this brief statement is vibrant with the recollection of powerful experience. Heisenberg describes how a protracted period “inaugurated by processes in the unconscious long before the content of consciousness can be rationally formulated” leads to the point where “the true Ideas rise up” in one’s awareness:

At that moment . . . there occurs in the soul of him who sees them an altogether indescribable process of the highest intensity. It is the amazed awe that Plato speaks of in the *Phaedrus*, with which the soul remembers, as it were, something it had unconsciously possessed all along.¹⁵

Logical Positivism and Truth

“Truth dwells in the deeps,” wrote Schiller in a line that was a favourite of Niels Bohr, to whom we largely owe the present model of the structure of the atom. In a conversation with Heisenberg and Pauli, Bohr commented on the logical positivism that has dominated much of modern philosophy:

For my part, I can readily agree with the positivists about the things they want, but not about the things they reject. . . . Positivist insistence on conceptual clarity is, of course, something I fully endorse, but their prohibition of any discussion of the wider issues, simply because we lack clear-cut enough concepts in this realm, does not seem very useful to me – this same ban would prevent our understanding of quantum theory.¹⁶

Bohr’s reflections led him to formulate a proposition he called “the complementarity between clarity and truth”. As reported by Pauli, this states that “if an assertion is too clear, then there is something wrong with its accuracy, and if an assertion is true, then its clarity is limited. For every truth also contains in part something unknown, only glimpsed and therefore also a hidden opposite to its conscious meaning.”¹⁷

Heisenberg, Pauli and Bohr were not the only physicists in the early twentieth century whose philosophical outlooks were incompatible with a narrow positivism. Albert Einstein considered the true spirit of the scientific search for knowledge to have a religious dimension, inspired by something akin to Spinoza’s *Amor dei intellectualis* or “intellectual love of God”. Spinoza’s “ecstatic rationalism”, as his philosophy has been characterised,¹⁸ exerted a profound influence on Einstein. Spinoza associates the “intellectual love of God” with intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*). In his system this is the highest of three levels of cognition, superior to ordinary reasoning. He does not, however, elevate intuition at the expense of reason, but regards it as supremely rational in its nature.

Einstein, speaking of scientific discovery, writes in the spirit of Spinoza that “whoever has undergone the intense experience of successful advances made in this domain is moved by profound reverence for the rationality made manifest in existence.” Clarifying his conception of the relationship between science and religion, he continues:

By way of the understanding he achieves a far-reaching emancipation from the

shackles of personal hopes and desires, and thereby attains that humble attitude of mind toward the grandeur of reason incarnate in existence, and which, in its profoundest depths, is inaccessible to man. This attitude, however, appears to me to be religious in the highest sense of the word. And so it seems to me that science not only purifies the religious impulse of the dross of its anthropomorphism, but also contributes to a religious spiritualisation of our understanding of life.¹⁹

Louis de Broglie, whose work led to the development of wave mechanics, reflects like Einstein on the nature of the “mysterious attraction” that leads some to dedicate themselves to science:

The great epoch-making discoveries in the history of science (think, for example, of that of universal gravitation) have been like sudden lightning flashes, making us perceive in one single glance a harmony up till then unsuspected, and it is to have, from time to time, the divine joy of discovering such harmonies that pure science works without sparing its toil or seeking for profit.²⁰

A well-known analysis of these events that alter the course of science was proposed by Thomas Kuhn. “Paradigm shifts” have become a cliché in the half-century since the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, but this has not diminished the profound impact of Kuhn’s work on the philosophy of science. His distinction between “normal” and “revolutionary” science provides a useful context for comparing how reason and intuition contribute to scientific progress:

Paradigms are not corrigible by normal science at all. Instead . . . normal science ultimately leads only to the recognition of anomalies and to crises. And these are terminated, not by deliberation and interpretation, but by a relatively sudden and unstructured event like the gestalt switch. Scientists then often speak of the “scales falling from the eyes” or of the “lightning flash” that “inundates” a previously obscure puzzle, enabling its components to be seen in a new way that for the first time permits its solution. On other occasions the relevant illumination comes in sleep. No ordinary sense of the term “interpretation” fits these flashes of intuition through which a new paradigm is born.²¹

Flashes of intuition are, of course, not restricted to scientists. Nor do all intuitions come in flashes, though the image of lightning piercing the darkness suggests effectively the way a certain kind of intuitive insight is typically experienced. Whereas paradigm shifts occur when the collective practice of normal science has reached a point of crisis, intuitions of the “lightning flash” variety are not confined to such situations. An intuition may be a private revelation that seems to come out of the blue and is immediately meaningful only to the person who has it.

Ernst Mach, for example, whose philosophy of science was extremely influential in the early twentieth century, had such an experience in the 1850s at the age of about seventeen. This is how the forerunner of logical positivism, whose principal exponents

formed the Vienna Circle – originally the “Mach Circle” – explains the origin of his system of thought:

On one bright summer day in the open air, the whole world with my ego suddenly appeared to me as a coherent mass of sensations, only more strongly coherent in the ego. Although the actual working-out of this thought did not occur until a later period, yet this moment was decisive for my whole view of the world.²²

A feature that Mach’s epiphany has in common with the revolutionary scientific discoveries described by de Broglie and Kuhn is the comparative suddenness of these events. This characteristic is often attributed to intuition – or at least to some of the diverse psychological phenomena grouped under that heading. The seemingly instantaneous cognition that sees things all at once is called intuition to distinguish it from the slower process of reasoning, as in Mach’s later “working-out” of what he saw, or the typical deliberations of Kuhn’s “normal science”.

Henri Poincaré carefully observed the operation of intuition in his own work as a mathematician. He noticed a pattern. He would begin applying himself to a mathematical problem, but often his initial efforts to solve it produced little or no result. Being brought to a standstill, he would take a rest. But he had evidently “set the unconscious machine in motion”. After some time a sudden inspiration would bring the solution. This could happen at any moment; in a case he narrates, it was while he was crossing the street. Or if it occurred after resuming work on the problem, the revelation appeared to be independent of the conscious work, which seemed to serve only as an “unlocking process”. This was not the end of it, however, for it was still necessary to verify and demonstrate the results. Poincaré summarised his experience in a formula that many mathematicians and scientists would endorse: “it is by logic that we prove, but by intuition that we discover.”²³

Psychologist David Myers mentions a survey of Nobel laureates in science and medicine in which seventy-two out of eighty-three attributed their success partly to intuition. A winner of the prize for medicine said: “We felt at times there was almost a hand guiding us. We would go from one step to the next, and somehow we would know which was the right way to go, and I really can’t tell how we knew that.”²⁴

Turning Eastward

So far we have kept within the framework of the European scientific, mathematical and philosophical tradition in looking at intuition as an agent in the process of discovery, taking mainly physics for the purpose of illustration. Erwin Schrödinger provides a bridge to the philosophy and spirituality of Asia. Not that Schrödinger was alone among the founders of quantum theory in being attracted to the East. Niels Bohr felt an affinity for Taoism, travelled to China and saw parallels between the yin-yang concept and the principle of complementarity which he introduced into physics. Werner Heisenberg visited India in the 1930s and acknowledged that his thinking on physics was stimulated by his discussions with Tagore.²⁵ The East “made a strong impression” on Wolfgang Pauli, who mentioned Vedanta, the I-Ching and Lao Tse as specific philosophical influences.²⁶

But none of these physicists adopted an Eastern philosophy in the whole-hearted way that Schrödinger committed himself to Vedanta from around the age of thirty, when he became “familiar with Schopenhauer and, through him, with the doctrine of unity taught by the Upanishads”. For a while he even considered dedicating himself to philosophy rather than science.²⁷ A few years later, starting from the work of de Broglie, he developed wave mechanics, publishing his findings in 1926 in a rapid series of ground-breaking papers. Unfortunately Schrödinger left no account of how he arrived at the discoveries that, along with the work of a few others – especially Heisenberg – revolutionised physics in the mid-1920s. But it seems unlikely that his Vedantic worldview played no part in his thought process. As his biographer observes, “the unity and continuity of Vedanta are reflected in the unity and continuity of wave mechanics”.²⁸

Science for Schrödinger was a game where “you strive against the imaginary boundary between yourself and the Godhead – a boundary that perhaps does not exist.”²⁹ He revealed few details about how he played this game of scientific discovery. With regard to his spiritual philosophy, however, he was somewhat more communicative. Commenting on his favourite phrase in the Upanishads – “the words so obscure to the understanding, so close to the intuition: *Tat twam asi*, That Thou Art” – he remarked:

It is so simple that it is impossible to explain it. It cannot be grasped by the intellect, but it may spring up in you on some occasion like a spark, and then it is there and will never really leave you. . . .³⁰

Some millennia ago, the unknown author of the Kena Upanishad described how this kind of intuitive knowledge can “spring up” in us:

This is what it is like: as the lightning flashes and one says “Aha!” or as one blinks and says “Aha!”³¹

Schrödinger elaborated in some of his writings on the view of things that had evidently come to him in such an “Aha!” moment and remained with him from then onwards. He stressed “the empirical fact that consciousness is never experienced in the plural, only in the singular”.³² For him, this simple fact clinched the truth of the Upanishadic *Tat twam asi*, the formula expressing the essence of mysticism as defined by Schopenhauer: “consciousness of the identity of one’s own inner being with that of all things”.³³ Schrödinger asked:

What is this Self of yours? What was the necessary condition for making the thing conceived this time into *you*, just *you*, and not someone else? . . . What justifies you in obstinately discovering this difference – the difference between you and someone else – when objectively what is there is *the same*?

Looking and thinking in that manner you may suddenly come to see, in a flash, the profound rightness of the basic conviction in Vedanta: it is not possible that this unity of knowledge, feeling, and choice which you call your own should have sprung into being from nothingness at a given moment not so long ago; rather this knowledge, feeling, and choice are essentially eternal and unchangeable and numerically *one* in all men, nay in all sensitive beings. . . .³⁴

This is far from the normal outlook of the Western mind. But the quantum-mechanical world picture itself is as remote as possible from common sense. Perhaps it is not surprising that those who forged this theory were rather unusual Europeans. Relatively unencumbered by the conventional notions of their own civilisation, they were open to radically different ways of seeing things.

The success of the scientific method in unlocking the secrets of the physical universe has given the typical modern mind, since the Enlightenment, an almost unprecedented confidence in the power of reason. This confidence remains largely intact despite the crisis into which civilisation has been plunged due to the very triumphs of science and its offshoot, technology. Moreover, the new faith in reason is found not only in the West, but everywhere in the world among a Westernised elite. For the spread of European rationalism, following in the wake of European power, coincided with the temporary eclipse of cultures where intuitive approaches to knowledge were more highly valued.

Ironically we have seen that the victories of science, for which the rational intellect usually takes credit, seem to depend on apparently unaccountable leaps of creative intuition as much as on the systematic efforts of analytic reason. The complementary functions of reason and intuition need to be recognised and the dynamics of their interaction explored without limiting the scope of the inquiry by Eurocentric preconceptions. If representatives of Asian traditions have something to contribute to our understanding of the workings of intuition, it would be foolish to exclude them from the conversation.

The antithesis between the rational, scientific West and the intuitive, mystical East is as much a false dichotomy as the supposed opposition between Platonism and Aristotelianism in Western culture itself. Europe's greatest achievements have resulted from the cooperation of these two tendencies. Nevertheless, it is true that the empirical, logical, Aristotelian side of the Western pursuit of knowledge has at times overshadowed the more idealistic though no less rational Platonic impulse toward transcendence. Sometimes reduced to an undercurrent, it is this Platonic aspect of the Western mind that has the most affinity with corresponding elements in Eastern civilisations.

Interestingly, some scholars believe that Plato himself was significantly influenced by ideas from India, carried perhaps by Jain missionaries and incorporated in the Orphic Mysteries. Supporting a speculation by Alain Daniélou, Thomas McEvilley has pointed out striking resemblances between specific Jain teachings and similar Orphic doctrines adopted by Plato.³⁵ Direct influence has not been proved, but it would be consistent with what is known in general about the transmission of ideas in the ancient world and may be the simplest explanation of these parallels.

In modern times, a major Western philosopher on whom Eastern thought made a strong and acknowledged impact was Arthur Schopenhauer. By his own account, his thinking was shaped mainly by Kant, Plato and the Upanishads. Despite his pessimistic view of the world, Schopenhauer believed in the possibility of a "better consciousness".³⁶ His writings reach heights of exaltation in passages where the inspiration of Indian mysticism is felt, as where he evokes the state achieved by the renunciation and extinction of the will that strives for egoistic ends:

Then, instead of the restless pressure and effort; instead of the constant transition from desire to apprehension and from joy to sorrow; instead of the never-satisfied and never-dying hope that constitutes the life-dream of the man who wills, we see that peace that is higher than all reason, that ocean-like calmness of the spirit, that deep tranquillity, that unshakable confidence and serenity, whose mere reflection in the countenance, as depicted by Raphael and Correggio, is a complete and certain gospel. Only knowledge remains; the will has vanished.³⁷

Though Schopenhauer uses the German equivalent of the word "intuition" in a restricted, Kantian sense, he describes a kind of perception in which we "let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation" of the object so that "the person who is involved in this perception is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; he is pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge."³⁸

Schopenhauer's writings were neglected until almost the end of his life, but became immensely popular in cultured circles in Europe during the half century or so after his death in 1860, influencing a range of thinkers and creators from Wagner and Nietzsche to Wittgenstein. Even then, however, few were as open as Schrödinger to the aspects of Schopenhauer's thought that were indebted to the Upanishads or converged with Buddhism. Marginalised for most of his career, Schopenhauer was acutely conscious of being out of place in the Europe of his time. He was sympathetic to the fate of Spinoza and Giordano Bruno, commenting wryly:

They do not belong either to their age or to their part of the globe, which rewarded the one with death, and the other with persecution and ignominy. Their miserable existence and death in this Western world are like that of a tropical plant in Europe. The banks of the Ganges were their spiritual home; there they would have led a peaceful and honoured life among men of like mind.³⁹

Epistemologies of Limitation and Epistemologies of Enlightenment

Is a "better consciousness" possible? The sages of the East have always said so. Plato, Spinoza, Schopenhauer and others in the West have agreed with them. Plato symbolises this possibility in Book VII of *The Republic* in his Allegory of the Cave. First we are asked to imagine people chained in a cave, who have never seen anything but shadows projected on the wall of their subterranean chamber. "They are strange prisoners," comments Glaucon. "Like ourselves," Socrates replies. This is the ordinary human condition, where shadows are mistaken for reality. Only when one of the captives is freed and emerges from the cave into the daylight does he realise the extent of his former delusion.

Science analyses the shadows of Plato's allegory. Sir Arthur Eddington observes: "We have learnt that the exploration of the external world by the methods of physical science leads not to a concrete reality but to a *shadow world of symbols*,

beneath which those methods are unadapted for penetrating.” He adds: “The frank realisation that physical science is concerned with a world of shadows is one of the most significant of recent advances.”⁴⁰ Sir James Jeans confirms and elaborates on this point, explicitly referring to Plato’s metaphor:

Many would hold that, from the broad philosophical standpoint, the outstanding achievement of twentieth-century physics is not the theory of relativity with its welding together of space and time, or the theory of quanta with its present apparent negation of the laws of causation, or the dissection of the atom with the resultant discovery that things are not what they seem; it is the general recognition that we are not yet in contact with ultimate reality. We are still imprisoned in our cave, with our backs to the light, and can only watch the shadows on the wall.⁴¹

Every theory of knowledge must ask whether we can know anything more than shadows. Is our knowledge inherently limited to phenomena, or is it possible to go beyond appearances to the reality that casts the shadow? Depending on their answers, theories of knowledge can be grouped in two categories. Richard King calls them epistemologies of limitation and epistemologies of enlightenment (using the word “enlightenment” not in the European but in the Asiatic sense).⁴² Kant and Sankara may be taken as representative examples from Europe and India. Kant’s conclusion was – to use Plato’s image – that escaping from the cave and perceiving “things in themselves” (noumena) was not an option. King points out how Sankara’s theory of knowledge has similarities to Kant’s, but diverges radically on the fundamental issue of the possibility of transcending our cognitive limitations:

Śankara’s theory of superimposition is reminiscent in some respects of Kant’s notion of the ‘transcendental imagination’ – in that we build a picture of reality based upon the manifold of impressions received through the sense-organs which are then structured according to certain concepts that we already possess. . . . For Kant, however, the a priori categories constitute the unbreachable conditions of possibility for human experience. These are incontrovertible and binding – as humans we must experience the world according to certain structuring categories such as space and time. Śankara, however, constructs his entire philosophical system based upon the principle that one can transcend the cognitive limitations of current modes of perception and attain the immediacy (*aparokshatva*) of a direct-cognition of brahman (*brahmānubhava*).⁴³

One who accepts an epistemology of enlightenment is likely to look at intuition very differently than one who is committed to an epistemology of limitation. Epistemologies of limitation restrict what we can know to what the intellect, working on the data supplied by the senses, thinks it can be sure of. The inescapable limits of our knowledge are due, in that case, to the absence of any faculty with access to things the intellect cannot really know – though it may speculate endlessly about them, as metaphysicians have always done, with the most contradictory results. Even from the standpoint of an epistemology of enlightenment, Kant was justified in defining the limits of reason. The question is whether these limits are the limits of all possible knowledge, or whether

there is some form of “direct-cognition” (Śankara’s *anubhava*) that can lead us out of the cave and its shadows into the sunlight of reality. This is where intuition is often invoked.

In Kantian theories of knowledge, intuition is reduced to being a necessary but inferior faculty associated with sense-perception. Post-Kantian philosophers and psychologists in the West have agreed, with a few notable exceptions, to relegate intuition to a secondary status as an adjunct to our rational consciousness whose reliability is generally suspect. Its subordination is hardly mitigated by the occasional recognition of its indispensable function and its sometimes remarkable manifestations – as in its role in scientific discovery – which, if admitted, have to be explained by some mechanism of unconscious processing.

Though the dissenters against the downgrading of intuition include such reputable figures as Henri Bergson, William James and Alfred North Whitehead, these individual advocates of a reconsideration of its status do not change the overall picture. Analytic philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition seem particularly fond of the pastime of intuition bashing.⁴⁴ Mainstream psychologists, even since the overthrow of behaviourism by the cognitive revolution, remain suspicious of introspection and, for related reasons, comparatively uninterested in intuition.⁴⁵ The efforts of the transpersonalists have had little effect on the general consensus. Of course, the situation in popular culture is very different. But not surprisingly, the wave of bestselling books on our intuitive powers only seems to have reinforced the academic aversion for the subject.

Academic anti-intuitivism should be seen from the point of view of its cross-cultural ramifications as well, since the epistemologies of limitation on which it is based are typically Western. Richard King notes with regard to the traditions of India:

The acceptance of the reality (indeed, for these Indian traditions the *centrality*) of an unmediated and unconstructed awareness constitutes a major point of disagreement between mainstream Western intellectual thought and classical Asian traditions of spirituality. . . . Western epistemologies of limitation reflect the socio-cultural and political changes that have occurred in the West since the Enlightenment and thus remain peculiarly Eurocentric in orientation.

Though hardly an uncritical scholar of Indian philosophy, King goes on to remark pointedly: “There are other ways of seeing the world than are dreamt of in post-Enlightenment Western philosophy and one should not seek to close one’s account on reality too prematurely. To accept modern Western epistemological theories without highlighting their cultural and social particularity is to remain within a long and well-established tradition of Western arrogance about the superiority of Western ways of understanding the world.”⁴⁶

Intuition and the Memory of Truth

Eastern philosophies and the disciplines associated with them generally challenge in one way or another the assumption that the reasoning intellect stands at the summit of human possibilities. Not that these philosophies are anti-rational. Their usual position

is that, as Swami Vivekananda put it, “The way to intuition is through reason.”⁴⁷ Vivekananda distinguishes “three grades of manifestation in living beings: (1) subconscious – mechanical, unerring; (2) conscious – knowing, erring; (3) superconscious – intuitional, unerring”.⁴⁸ The inclusion of the third level, connecting intuition with the superconscious, sharply differentiates this view from systems that accept only the first two levels.

A scheme similar to the one outlined by Vivekananda was developed by Sri Aurobindo. He recognises the same three levels, but brings out in another way the relation between the first and the third, both characterised by Vivekananda as “unerring”. He attributes intuition to both of them, defining it in a manner that accounts for their differences as well as their similarities:

The subconscious and the superconscious are two different formulations of the same All. . . . Intuitional knowledge is that which is common between them and the foundation of intuitional knowledge is conscious or effective identity between that which knows and that which is known. . . . But in the subconscious the intuition manifests itself in the action. . . . In the superconscious . . . the intuition manifests itself in its true nature as knowledge. . . . Between these two states reason and mind act as intermediaries which enable the being to liberate knowledge out of its imprisonment in the act. . . .⁴⁹

The recognition of both a subconscious and a superconscious intuition makes it possible to connect seemingly unrelated or contradictory uses of the word “intuition” associated with different theories of knowledge. On this basis we have a better chance of harmonising apparently conflicting scientific and spiritual approaches than if we insist on either the subconscious or the superconscious nature of intuition to the exclusion of the other.

As an intermediary between the subconscious and the superconscious, reason is the faculty that, if rightly used, can lead the prisoner to the opening of the cave. Emerging into the light, he or she will no longer stare at shadowy phenomena, but know things in themselves with a direct vision. A slight modification of the cave allegory is suggested, however, by Plato’s own theory of recollection (*anamnesis*). Instead of assuming that the prisoners have always been in the cave, we may suppose that they were once free. When they were taken captive, they were hit on the head and lost their memory of the world outside the cave. One of them who then recalls scenes of that other world might experience what Heisenberg so vividly evoked, “the amazed awe . . . with which the soul remembers, as it were, something it had unconsciously possessed all along.”

Concurring with Plato and with these mystically inclined physicists, Sri Aurobindo explained intuitive knowledge as “the disclosing of a knowledge that is secret but already existent in the being: it is not an acquisition, but something that was always there and revealable.”⁵⁰ He applied the Sanskrit word “*smṛiti*”, memory, to this aspect of intuition. “*Smṛiti*” is what occurs “when the truth is presented to the soul and its truth immediately and directly recognised by a movement resembling memory – a perception that this was always true and already known to the higher consciousness.”⁵¹

Though examples of this usage in Sanskrit texts are not easily found, there is a well-known instance at the end of the Bhagavad Gita where Arjuna says his delusion has been dispelled and he has regained memory (“*smṛiti*”). Here no ordinary meaning of “memory” would fit. Elucidating this verse, Sri Aurobindo comments that “the soul’s memory of its self and its truth concealed so long by the misleading shows and forms of our life has returned to it and become its normal consciousness”.⁵²

Though Sri Aurobindo adopted a Sanskrit word for the memory-like aspect of the process of intuition, he was also aware of the Greek antecedents of this idea. Once, using the Greek name for the goddess of memory, he glossed “*smṛiti*” as “divine mnemosyne” which “remembers at a second remove the knowledge secret in the being but lost by the mind in the oblivion of the ignorance”.⁵³ Elsewhere he speaks of memory in “that larger sense given to it in Greek thought”, where it is not merely “a paltry selection from the store gained by the individual in his present life, but rather the all-recording knowledge which secretly holds and constantly gives from itself everything that we now seem painfully to acquire but really in this sense remember”.⁵⁴

So far such ideas can hardly be said to have received serious attention in academic psychology, though they are not alien to Western culture as such. An exception is in transpersonal psychology. In *Awakening Intuition*, transpersonal psychologist Frances Vaughan writes:

At any given moment one is conscious of only a small portion of what one knows. Intuition allows one to draw on that vast storehouse of unconscious knowledge that includes not only everything that one has experienced or learned, either consciously or subliminally, but also the infinite reservoir of the collective or universal unconscious, in which individual separateness and ego boundaries are transcended.⁵⁵

The relatively scanty psychological literature on intuition is mostly sceptical of such assertions, if it even takes note of them. In *Educating Intuition*, Robin Hogarth remarks: “Psychologists working within the scientific tradition would not accept many of Vaughan’s statements about intuition.” Nevertheless, Hogarth approves of much of the advice that Vaughan offers, including “opening oneself to experience, increasing the ability to observe, and exploring, questioning, and possibly changing one’s assumptions about the world.” These recommendations are similar to some of his own and can, he feels, “also be advanced from a less mystical point of view.”⁵⁶

In *Intuition: Its Powers and Perils*, David Myers tries “to authenticate two huge ideas from contemporary psychological science – that, more than we’ve realised, our lives are guided by subterranean intuitive thinking and that our intuitions, though speedily efficient, often err in ways we need to understand. Ergo, intuition – our capacity for direct, immediate knowledge prior to rational analysis – has both surprising potency and surprising perils.”⁵⁷ The emphasis on these “perils” is not unjustified, whatever one’s scientific or spiritual standpoint. Though Vivekananda referred to the superconscious intuition as “unerring”, he acknowledged that “in the present state of the world they are few and far between who attain to that state”.⁵⁸ Sri Aurobindo recognised the limitations and pitfalls of intuition or pseudo-intuition and cautioned

that “at the worst, through our misuse of it or false imitations of it, it may lead us into perplexities and confusions which the less ambitious intellectual reason avoids by remaining satisfied with its own safe and plodding method”.⁵⁹

Yet the safe plodders do not make the breakthroughs that revolutionise science or any other field. Several of the physicists, philosophers and others whose thought processes we have glimpsed might have substantially agreed with Sri Aurobindo’s observations on the relation of intuition to the logical intellect:

A too formalised logical mind discourages, but a free use of the whole action of the logical intelligence may rather heighten a certain action of immediate insight, the mind’s nearest approach to the higher intuition. . . . The endeavour of the logical reason is always by a detached, disinterested and carefully founded method to get rid of error, of prejudgment, of the mind’s false confidence and arrive at reliable certitudes.

And if this elaborated method of the mind were really sufficient for truth, there would be no need of any higher step in the evolution of knowledge. . . . It is more and more perceived that the knowledge of phenomena increases, but the knowledge of reality escapes this laborious process. A time must come, is already coming when the mind perceives the necessity of calling to its aid and developing fully the intuition and all the great range of powers that lie concealed behind our vague use of the word and uncertain perception of its significance.⁶⁰

(Based on paper presented at a conference on “Consciousness and Knowledge: Scientific and Spiritual Perspectives”, organised by the International School for Jain Studies, 12 December, 2010, New Delhi)

Notes:

1. For a refutation of the view of historians of science who claim that no scientific tradition except that of the Greeks, passively transmitted by the Arabs, had a significant influence on the emergence of modern science, see Arun Bala, *The Dialogue of Civilisations in the Birth of Modern Science* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
2. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.3.
3. Attributed to the American writer Owen Wister (1860–1938).
4. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York : Ballantine Books, 1991), p. 68.
5. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, quoted in Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.
6. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), p. 39.
7. Ken Wilber, ed., *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World’s Great Physicists* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), p. 40.
8. Galileo, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, quoted in Stillman Drake, *Galileo : A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 22, 24.

9. Wilber, *Quantum Questions*, p. 41.
10. Ibid., p. 61.
11. Ibid., p. 63.
12. Ibid., p. 65.
13. Ibid., pp. 59–60.
14. Ibid., pp. 66–67.
15. Ibid., p. 68.
16. Ibid., p. 34.
17. Suzanne Gieser, *The Innermost Kernel: Depth Psychology and Quantum Physics. Wolfgang Pauli’s Dialogue with C. G. Jung* (Berlin : Springer, 2005), p. 28.
18. Rebecca Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza : The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity* (New York: Shocken Books, 2006), p. 186.
19. Wilber, *Quantum Questions*, p. 113.
20. Ibid., p. 121.
21. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 122–23.
22. Walter Moore, *Schrödinger: Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 42.
23. Henri Poincaré, *Science and Method*, tr. Francis Maitland (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1914), pp. 54–56, 129. Available at <http://www.forgottenbooks.org/info.php?a=9781440085932>.
24. David Myers, *Intuition: Its Powers and Perils* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 61.
25. J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 168.
26. Gieser, *The Innermost Kernel*, pp. 27–28.
27. Moore, *Schrödinger : Life and Thought*, pp. 109, 111.
28. Ibid., p. 173.
29. Ibid., pp. 348–49.
30. Ibid., pp. 252, 475.
31. *Kena Upanishad*, 4.4 (my translation).
32. Wilber, *Quantum Questions*, p. 87.
33. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, tr. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), p. 613.
34. Wilber, *Quantum Questions*, pp. 97–98.
35. Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), pp. 197–204. McEvilley writes: “The Jains recognised two classes of material particles or atoms: gross particles that make up physical bodies and very fine or small particles that make their way into the soul and stick or cling there. . . . The state of the soul veiled with karmic dirt is likened to that of a wanderer in the world, and the path of wandering is symbolised by a wheel. In Plato’s Orphic passages this distinction between two kinds of matter is found, along with the imagery of the dirt, the veil, the wanderer, and the wheel. The matter which makes up the physical body falls away when the body dies; but there is another kind of matter that sticks to the soul in the afterlife and causes it to be reborn.” (pp. 198–99)
36. Christopher Janaway, *Schopenhauer: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 6, 16–19.

37. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, tr. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), p. 411.
38. Ibid., pp. 178–79.
39. Ibid., p. 422, n. 2.
40. Wilber, *Quantum Questions*, pp. 6–7.
41. Ibid., p. 8.
42. Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 182–84.
43. Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (New Delhi: Maya Publishers, 2000), p. 155.
44. Michael DePaul and William Ramsey, eds., *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and Its Role in Philosophical Inquiry* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), p. 202.
45. Robin Hogarth, *Educating Intuition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 6.
46. King, *Orientalism and Religion*, p. 182.
47. Swami Vivekananda, “Addresses on Bhakti-Yoga: The Ishta”, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 4, p. 58.
48. Swami Vivekananda, “Lectures and Discourses: Discourses on Jnana-Yoga – V”, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 8, p. 17.
49. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2005), pp. 71–72. The distinction between “reason” and “mind” in the last sentence is the difference between the Sanskrit terms buddhi (“intellect”) and manas (“sense- mind”).
50. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1999), p. 814.
51. Sri Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001), p. 430.
52. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997), p. 561.
53. Sri Aurobindo, *Record of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001), p. 1136.
54. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 312.
55. Frances Vaughan, *Awakening Intuition* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), p. 4.
56. Hogarth, *Educating Intuition*, p. 281.
57. Myers, *Intuition : Its Powers and Perils*, pp. 128–29.
58. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 4, p. 59.
59. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 480.
60. Ibid., pp. 854–55.

The Need To Change The Political System

(Continued from the previous issue)

Kittu Reddy

As already pointed out in the previous article, Sri Aurobindo wrote extensively about politics and society not only when he was in active politics but also after withdrawing from it. These writings were written mainly from the psychological point of view and were illustrated by contemporary events and appeared in the two books *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*. In that context he wrote in great detail about the psychological roots of socialism and democracy as they have evolved in the modern age. These are extremely relevant even today; in fact in the previous chapter we have shown in some detail the psychological roots of democracy.

We are picking some more relevant extracts from his writings:

Most governments either have now or have passed through a democratic form, but nowhere yet has there been a real democracy; it has been everywhere the propertied and professional classes and the bourgeoisie who governed in the name of the people. (*The Human Cycle*, p.400 CWSA)

Inevitably there have been different forms of democracy in nations. And, in India democracy as it has evolved in the last five decades seems to be more like a disguised oligarchy which reposes its rule on the assent of the people expressed by election or otherwise; it would be more appropriate to call it a semi-passive democracy.

For that is what the modern democracy at present is in fact; the sole democratic elements are public opinion, periodical elections and the power of the people to refuse re-election to those who have displeased it. The government is really in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the professional and business men, the landholders, —where such a class still exists,—strengthened by a number of new arrivals from the working-class who very soon assimilate themselves to the political temperament and ideas of the governing classes (*The Human cycle*, p.471 CWSA)

Referring to India Sri Aurobindo wrote:

I have no doubt we shall have to go through our Parliamentary period in order to get rid of the notion of Western democracy by seeing in practice how helpless it is to make nations blessed.

It is the European idea that makes you think that the parliamentary form or constitution is the best. (*India's Rebirth*, July 13, 1911)

The parliamentary form would be hardly suitable for our people. Of course, it is not necessary that you should have today the same old forms [as in ancient India]. But you can take the line of evolution and follow the bent of the genius of the race. (*India's Rebirth*, Apr. 7, 1926)

In this article we shall try to show the relevance of these statements in the present context in India; we shall then see that democracy as it has been practised in India is hardly democratic. Later, we shall make suggestions to improve the system and make it more democratic in the true sense of the word.

We shall divide this series of articles into three parts

1. In the first we shall bring out the psychological basis of Indian democracy.
2. In the second part we shall take note of the actual working of the Parliamentary system.
3. In the third part we shall try to suggest ways and means for improving the system and make it more truly democratic. This will be taken up in some detail in the next article of the series.

The psychological basis of Indian Democracy:

1. As already seen in the previous article, the modern age is essentially an age of Reason. It follows that in a rational society every citizen must be given the liberty to develop himself and fulfil his life, satisfy his mental tendencies, emotional and vital needs and physical being according to his own desire **governed by his reason**; no other limit to this right and this liberty is to be admitted except the obligation to respect the same individual liberty and right in others. This was the principle applicable to the individual in his personal life.
2. In the collective life, however, society had to be governed by the collective Reason. The question was to find out this collective Reason. It was in answer to this seeking that the system of parliamentary democracy evolved. This was done by means of periodic elections where the citizens would elect their representatives.
3. Thus it was believed that Parliament with all the elected members becomes not only the representative but also the embodiment of the reason of the people; in other words, it is suggested as a logical follow-up that the citizen may consider his representative in Parliament as an extension of his own reason. Indeed, one sometimes even hears the argument put forward that the enlightened individual could well come to regard this collective reason and will as his own larger mind, will and conscience and find in a happy obedience to it a strong delivery from his own smaller and less rational self. **Thus emerged the belief that Parliament is supreme and it is Parliament alone that can make laws for the country and that is because it represents the enlightened reason and will of the people.**

The Parliamentary system in India

Let us now see the essential elements upon which the Parliamentary system in India actually functions. They are as follows:

1. Universal adult franchise with the eligible voters having the option to vote or not to vote since voting is not compulsory.
2. Periodic elections are held at different levels: Parliament, State, districts, taluqas right down to the Panchayats.
3. Single member constituencies with the first past- the- post winners.
4. The Government is formed by the party or the conglomerate of parties that gets a majority of seats in the legislature—the Lok Sabha.
5. The leader elected by the elected members of that party or conglomerate of parties is nominated as the Prime Minister.
6. The Prime Minister selects his ministers only from the legislature and only from his own party.

The system is justified on some of these counts:

1. It is said to be representative of the people and their will.
2. It is said that the Government formed in this manner will be broadbased, representative, stable, durable and effective.
3. It claims to ensure accountability – of each member to the Prime Minister, of each minister to his colleagues through the principle of collective responsibility and finally of the political Executive to the Parliament.

The established procedures of Parliament

Parliament is the body that makes the laws for the nation. We have already seen that the Executive is chosen only from members of Parliament. What are the established procedures of Parliament?

1. Bills are introduced by the executive;
2. They are scrutinised by standing committees;
3. The reports of standing committees are then studied by the executive and the necessary changes are made or proposed to Bills;
4. The legislature then debates the Bills clause-by-clause
5. Finally there is voting for or against them.

This procedure seems on the face of it very reasonable and sound; why then is there so much criticism and dissatisfaction against the functioning of Parliament as witnessed in the recent movements. This dissatisfaction has even in its extreme led to slogans denouncing parliamentary democracy and some of them were crudely blunt such as: '*Parliament is a pigsty*'.

While it's easy to snigger and criticise Parliament and its functioning, it would be more useful and to the point if we first identify the shortcomings in the system and contribute our mite to set the system right by cleansing it of its malcontents and even if necessary overhaul it and get a new system more suitable to the Indian temperament and genius.

Let us therefore see the areas of weakness in the present system and only after that can we make the needed suggestions and improve the system.

The issues that we shall take up are:

1. Does parliament really represent the will of the people?
2. Is it justified to say that Parliament is supreme?
3. Is parliament honestly applying their reason to make laws for the country?
4. Is the executive truly accountable and to whom are they accountable?
5. How are decisions taken?
6. What is the quality of the Parliamentarians?

Parliament represents the will of the people

Does parliament really represent the people?

In the book written by Arun Shourie who was twice a member of the Rajya Sabha *Parliamentary Democracy*, we are shown how in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, 59 MPs of Uttar Pradesh entered the Lok Sabha with just 10 to 20 per cent of the vote! While the then Basti MP won on just 11 per cent of the votes, the Robertsganj MP needed 11.4 per cent, Mohanlalgunj MP 11.6 per cent, Mirzapur MP 12.4, Bansgaon MP 12.5 per cent, and so on. It must further be noted that this 11% is of the votes cast and in most elections only 50% of the eligible voters cast their vote. Thus this 11% really comes down to around 5% to 6%. If we glance at the proportion of votes by obtaining which members got elected to the Lok Sabha in 2004, we get the following results. 99% of the members got into the Lok Sabha by getting less than half the electors to vote for them. Almost 60% got in with the endorsement of less than 30% of electors in their constituencies. It is evident that the governments are not truly representative of the people. In the State Assemblies it is still worse. **Yet it is claimed that Parliament represents the people of India.**

The supremacy of Parliament

It is being continuously argued by many members of Parliament and some political commentators that it is only Parliament that can make laws; no other individual or group has the right to make laws since it is the sole prerogative of Parliament. Here is what an editorial in the Hindu writes:

In appraising what has happened over the past fortnight, a red herring needs to be got out of the way — the idea of the ‘supremacy of Parliament’ versus everyone who comes up against it. Parliamentarians, who assert this, need to learn their Constitution. In India, unlike Britain, Parliament is not supreme; the Constitution is. Nor is law-making “the sole prerogative” of Parliament. The significant victory of the anti-corruption campaigners gives political India a rare opportunity to translate fine anti-corruption sentiments into a potent law that can be a game-changer. The challenge before the people of India is to ensure, by keeping up the pressure that in the tricky business of law making in committee and on the floor of the Houses of Parliament a potentially powerful instrument is not blunted.

For in India the situation is different from that prevailing in Britain. Britain does not have a written Constitution and quite naturally Parliament is supreme. It suits their natural genius and has been working for more than a century. But In India we have a written constitution which has been amended by Parliament many times. It is, therefore, argued that Parliament is supreme. But it must be remembered that even the Constitution is for the people.

It would be therefore more correct to say that **the people are supreme** and that both the Constitution and Parliament are meant to be the expression of the people and their will. Thus neither the Constitution nor Parliament can be considered as a sacred cow which one must not touch. What needs to be done is to make both the Constitution and Parliament more responsive and representative of the people of India. For after all, the Constitution has been made for the people of India and it must represent the genius and temperament of the history and aspirations of the Indian people. It follows that members of Parliament must be well versed with the history and deeper psychological aspiration of the people of India down the ages. Consequently the people must be consulted in major changes to the Constitution. All radical alterations must get the assent of the people of India and that can be done by a referendum. Only then will we be moving towards a more democratic democracy.

Here is a reference from Sri Aurobindo to show that in ancient India, the people were considered supreme. India

... always had the democratic idea, applied it in the village, in council and municipality, within the caste, was the first to assert a divinity in the people and could cry to the monarch at the height of his power, “O king, what art thou but the head servant of the demos?” (*The Renaissance in India*, p.11, CWSA)

The application of Reason by members of Parliament

As already seen in the previous article, Democracy is the exercise of the Reason in guiding the collective life. Hence members of Parliament are supposed to exercise their reason before passing a law. Unfortunately, very often bills are passed without any application of reason by the members. Here is one illustration taken from a remark by Justice Santosh Hegde:

Do you think your elected representatives discuss bills before they are passed? Are they even aware of what bills are being passed? In 2008, 17 bills were tabled and passed in Parliament in a span of 12 minutes. Where are the discussions? Where are the debates? And please do not harbour any illusions about them being insignificant bills. One of the bills (which was noticed and not passed) was an amendment to the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA). Can anyone in his right mind imagine that corruption has decreased from 1947 to 2008 that there is a need to amend the Act to make it easier for the accused? The present Government sought to amend three sections. Section 13(1) clearly states that if someone holding public office has accumulated unaccountable assets, the onus

is on the person to prove his innocence. The second, Section 19, states it cannot be argued by a person in public office that bribery and accumulation of wealth were activities that occurred during the discharge of duties. The last amendment is with reference to sanctions where you can prosecute retired government officials in a corruption case. Now tell me, does a Government that tries to pass a bill like this have the heart to fight corruption?

Another feature of almost all parties is the issue of a whip which demands that all members of the party have to follow the decision taken by the heads of the party. This means that even when a member of a party finds that the decision taken by the leaders is not reasonable he has no choice but to subvert his reason to that of the leaders. This leads to the question whether the party system is itself reasonable. We shall discuss this aspect later in the chapter.

The Decision Making process

How are decisions taken by the Government and Parliament?

One of the most important elements of governance is the decision-making process. In the Parliamentary system, it is the Prime Minister along with his Cabinet that takes all the decisions. Unfortunately in the present scenario, this system seems to have been undermined. The impression that seems to be making the rounds of the political circles is that there is a diarchy; the perception is that all important decisions are taken by the President of the ruling majority party and the Prime Minister follows suit. This impression has been further strengthened by the creation of the National Advisory Council. The President of the ruling majority party is the Chairman of the Council and has been given the rank of a cabinet minister; also all members of the Council are not members of Parliament. Thus the decision making process is taken out of the hands of Parliament. At least that is the impression in the country today. If this is true, it poses a serious danger to democracy itself. It is being felt and even aired by respected political commentators that Indian democracy is hardly a democracy; it is a veiled oligarchy and today not even veiled; it might be called a veiled autocracy. Writing about the present phase of Indian politics Mark Tully writes:

Yet, today I can say without the shadow of a doubt that when history will be written, the period, over which the present incumbent presided, both over the Congress and India, will be seen as an era of darkness, of immense corruption and of a democracy verging towards autocracy, if not disguised dictatorship.

As a matter of fact the problem is not so simple. It is much deeper. There seem to be two centres of power in the country. Effective power is with the President of the ruling majority party with no accountability, while authority with accountability rests with the Prime Minister but without any real power. The creation of the National Advisory Council responsible for all major decision making process, with the party President as its Chairman, confirms this fear. The present ruling majority party appears to have become a private limited company owned by a single family.

Quality of politicians

Sri Aurobindo writes about politicians in the world:

The ... politician in any part of the world ... does not represent the soul of a people or its aspirations. What he does usually represent is all the average pettiness, selfishness, egoism, self-deception that is about him and these he represents well enough as well as a great deal of mental incompetence and moral conventionality, timidity and pretence. Great issues often come to him for decision, but he does not deal with them greatly; high words and noble ideas are on his lips, but they become rapidly the claptrap of a party. The disease and falsehood of modern political life is patent in every country of the world and only the hypnotised acquiescence of all, even of the intellectual classes, in the great organised sham, cloaks and prolongs the malady, the acquiescence that men yield to everything that is habitual and makes the present atmosphere of their lives. Yet it is by such minds that the good of all has to be decided, to such hands that it has to be entrusted, to such an agency calling itself the State that the individual is being more and more called upon to give up the government of his activities. (*The Human Cycle*, pp. 296 -97 CWSA)

This seems to be particularly true in India.

Here is an illustration from an article written by Ajai Sahni who is a founding member and executive director of the Institute for Conflict Management, in New Delhi.

This entire system has been completely dismantled, due to sheer political cussedness and stupidity. No one in politics wants an autonomous and independent and effective police force. Why not? There are 162 members of India's Parliament with criminal cases against them, now why would they want an effective policing system? The politicians use the same hawala [an informal and difficult-to-trace money transfer method] system as the terrorists. Unless we end criminality in the mining sector, we can't shut down the explosives coming from the mining sector. And the Supreme Court on this issue has been ignored or subverted.

It is evident that the election process needs to be looked into so that we get the right people into Parliament and into the Government. A detailed note on the electoral process will be presented in the next part of the series of articles.

Accountability of the Executive

It is claimed that in the Parliamentary system that the Ministers are accountable to Parliament. This is a myth; for as we have shown earlier all decisions are taken by a small committee of the ruling party and every member of Parliament belonging to that party is bound by that decision. Therefore since the ministers are chosen from the ruling party which has a majority in the House, accountability is not to Parliament but to the heads of the Party that takes decisions. This is neither democracy nor accountability.

One can go on and on, for there are many other aspects that need to be looked into; however even without going into all those aspects, it is clear that the Party system and the consequent system of Parliamentary democracy as practised in India is hardly democratic and has failed to fulfil the aspirations of the people.

We are putting forward some relevant quotes from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo which will be the basis of the suggestions for a better political system.

In 1969, the Mother had given a message to the then Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi; we quote the message below:

Let India work for the future and set the example. Thus she will recover her true place in the world.

Since long it was the habit to govern through division and opposition.

The time has come to govern through union, mutual understanding and collaboration.

To choose a collaborator, the value of the man is more important than the party to which he belongs.

The greatness of a country does not depend on the victory of a party, but on the union of all parties". (*CWM*, Vol.13, p.377)

We are reproducing another extract from what the Mother said in 1970 regarding Indian politics. It seems so relevant now.

Politics is always limited by party, by ideas, by duties also—unless we prepare a government that has no party, a government that admits all ideas because it is above parties. Party is limitation; it is like a box: you go into the box (Mother laughs). Of course, if there were some people who had the courage to be in the government without a party—"We represent no party! We represent India"—that would be magnificent.

Pull the consciousness up, up, above party.

And then, naturally, certain people who couldn't come into political parties—that! that is truly working for tomorrow. Tomorrow it will be like that. All this turmoil is because the country must take the lead, must go above all these old political habits. Government without party. Oh! it would be magnificent! (Emphasis added)

(25 May 1970, *CWM*, Vol.15, p.428)

Here is an extract from Sri Aurobindo:

India is now trying to imitate the West. Parliamentary government is not suited to India. But we always take up what the West has thrown off....

(A disciple:) What is your idea of an ideal government for India?

My idea is like what Tagore once wrote. There may be one Rashtrapati at the top with considerable powers so as to secure a continuity of policy, and an

assembly representative of the nation. The provinces will combine into a federation united at the top, leaving ample scope to local bodies to make laws according to their local problems. (*India's Rebirth*, December 27th, 1938)

In the next article we shall suggest some solutions to the system. Some of the problems mentioned above will be addressed; we do not claim that the suggestions are the last word — that is not the intention — but to open a dialogue among all lovers and well-wishers of the nation and even if it so happens a national dialogue. For the matter is one of pressing importance.

(*To be continued*)

Sarasvati And Her Vedic Symbolism

Sampada Savardekar

INTRODUCTION

The most unfortunate thing, in the educational scenario, next only to the lack of education, is the fact that, the knowledge of Indian history present in the history books today is far from true. The upcoming younger generation is not well informed or rather, rightly informed about their culture and heritage and thus they can hardly be expected to grow into proud Indians. We are what our culture makes of us, and we are necessarily the result of the culture and heritage and its influence that flows in our genes. The only outer impact or influence that can change and alter our feelings and understanding is the influence of our education, and most significantly early education. The tragedy is that most people, intellectuals and educationists, are probably either not aware of the damage being caused by incorrect and inappropriate textbooks on formative minds; or they are inconveniently ignoring the fact for a range of reasons. The latter is more likely to be true. There are two sections in this paper:

Part 1- We shall look briefly into what was the reason behind the invention of the so-called invasion theory.

Part 2 - In the second, however, I would like to concentrate not so much on the historical, scientific and archaeological data which tears the invasion theory into bits; but rather glance at another interesting yet significant aspect of this whole matter: the Saraswati River herself and her Vedic symbolism.

1. THE EARLY VISITORS

We note with pride that the early travellers to India spoke very highly of India, her culture and her people. There are several records of their words showering praises on India. I would like to quote a few:

All Indians are free, and none of them is a slave. Indians neither invade other peoples, nor do other peoples invade India. They fare happily, because of their simplicity and their frugality since they esteem beauty; they practise everything that can beautify their appearance. Further, they respect alike virtue and truth. i

Others like Mountstuart Elphinstone, the first Governor of the Bombay Presidency in 1841, wrote in *History of India* : No set of people among the Hindus are so depraved as the dregs of our great town The Hindus are mild and gentle people ...

THE REAL INVADERS

The real invaders were, in fact, the British who came to plunder and colonise India. From the very beginning, the connection between India and Britain was based on greed and oppression. They were not interested in her heritage and culture; but did not fail to notice it. Their greed knew no bounds upon discovering the incredible wealth of India and a plan was created to rob her of her riches. They were quite aware that it was not easy to conquer India and her peoples without creating a division among its peoples. For, as long as India stood as one solid rock, one undivided entity to defend herself, it would not be possible for any alien power to penetrate her. Lord Macaulay quickly saw where the attack was needed, and he suggested that English education be implemented in India to help them dominate her. And this they did successfully. They devised a plan to rob her of her own self-esteem by penetrating deep into her system of education, corrupting it by the incorrect and baseless assumption of the so-called Aryan Invasion.

Unfortunately, this trick worked remarkably in their favour, as in a matter of a few years, many intellectuals and educationists also began to accept this. The British argument was simple. You Indians have been dominated by an alien (Aryan) culture for so many centuries. We are just another wave of ruling aliens and, in fact, have come for your upliftment. If you could absorb the Aryans, who were themselves barbaric, then why not us, who are so much more sophisticated and cultured than yourselves? An alarming example of this logic can be seen in the speech by Stanley Baldwin, in British House of Commons in 1929.

Ages and ages ago there sat, side by side, the ancestors of the English, Rajputs and Brahmins. Now, after ages, the two branches to the great Aryan ancestry have again been brought together by Providence. By establishing British rule in India, God said to the British, I have again brought you and the Indians together after a long separation, not in order that you should lord over them, or that you should exploit them, but in order that you should recognise your kinship with them. It is your duty to raise them to their own level as quickly as possible, and work together, brothers as you are, for the evolution of humanity. ii

A very convenient way indeed of terming colonisation as God's will!

ARYA / DRAVIDA CONFLICT

Arya and Dravida were initially words, which never had any racial connotation. Arya purely meant one of moral and inner quality. Dravida came on the purely geographical basis. It had no connection in the Veda with race. The invasion theory, basically, was successful in creating a gap of misunderstanding between the north and south Indians, who considered themselves Dravidians and thought they were being

polluted by the barbaric Aryans. Even today, we hear that the Dravidians (South Indians) being told to resist the domination of the so-called Indo-Aryans or (North Indians), who wish to pervert their culture. This is the result either of the scheming minds of politicians, or of the incorrect but effective history lessons that they have been taught since childhood. Many hymns were very conveniently accorded a racial twist by some recent scholars. They alluded to certain hymns, which described wars between the Arya and the Dasyus (dark aborigines) and here it was also noted that the Aryas were continuously storming their cities. But Sri Aurobindo clearly claimed that these conflicts were nothing but battles between the forces of light and darkness. These Vritras, Panis, Atris, Rakshasas, are not Dravidian kings and gods, as the modern mind with its exaggerated historic sense would like them to be; they represent a more antique idea better suited to the religious and ethical preoccupations of our forefathers. They represent the struggle between the powers of the higher Good and the lower desire, and this conception.iii

In recent days, a Canadian archaeologist, George Erdosy, repeats what Sri Aurobindo had said decades earlier. Even apparently clear indication of historical struggles between dark aborigines and Arya conquerors turn out to be misleading. It is a cosmic struggle which is described in detailed (Vedic) accounts that are consistent with one another.iv

WHO IS THE JUDGE?

We have seen the opinions of some of the Western scholars, and their claim upon the Aryan Invasion theory as true. But I ask each and every Indian who is fit to judge the history of India, her people, and her culture? Those who wished to loot and plunder her, or those great and illumined minds who guided her towards her destiny? On the one hand, we are faced with people like Mr. Richard Temple, Stanley Baldwin, and Lord Macaulay who would have us believe that India needed to civilise herself with their guidance; on the other hand we have great thinkers and philosophers in India like Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Sri Aurobindo. Here are some of their inspiring and potent words:

And what your European Pandits say about the Aryans swooping down from some foreign land snatching away the land of aborigines and settling in India by exterminating them, is all pure nonsense, foolish talk. Strange that our Indian scholars too say. Amen to them. And all these monstrous lies are being taught to our boys! v

A systematic refutation of the Aryan invasion was forwarded by Sri Aurobindo after his close study of the Vedas in the early 1900s. He calls it a modern legend and not ancient history. He categorically refuted the fact that there was any significant proof in the Vedas to justify an Aryan invasion, and this he did several decades before the scientific defence was found. Along with this refutation, he also cast new light upon the interpretation of the Vedic verses. His study of the Veda proved to reaffirm the subtle, yogic experiences he had already had during the period of his intense Sadhana. He says,

In India we have fallen during the last few centuries into a fixed habit of unquestioning deference to authority. We are ready to accept all European theories, the theory of an Aryan colonisation of a Dravidian India, the theory of Nature-worship of the Vedic Rishis as if these hazardous speculations were on a par in authority and certainty with the law of gravitation and the theory of evolution.vi

Interestingly, we must also add that when Dr. Ambedkar who himself fought for equal rights of the lower caste and untouchables, approached the Vedas for an independent study, also agreed that the whole concept of the Aryans coming from outside of India and ruling over the present Dravidians, was false and baseless.

The theory of invasion is an invention. ..The theory is based upon nothing but pleasing assumptions and inferences based on such assumptions. The theory is a perversion of scientific investigation. It is not allowed to evolve out of facts. On the contrary, the theory is preconceived and facts are selected to prove it. It falls on the ground at every point. vii

2.A NEW APPROACH

The entire basis of the falsification of the Aryan invasion theory is the fact of the discovery of the dry bed of the Sarasvati River, which flowed thousands of years ago. The satellite images and other scientific data have contributed to the solid justification of the fact that the so-called invaders (Aryans), lived on the banks of this mighty Sarasvati and this is where a wonderful and many-faceted culture developed. Yet, I would like to propose that we look upon the mighty Sarasvati with much more reverence than as a scientific location where a wonderful culture was born. I would like to present before you the symbolic connotation attributed to the River Sarasvati in the Vedas, in the light of the interpretation of the 20th century visionary, Sri Aurobindo. When handling this subject of the symbolism, we are immediately faced with the question: Do the Vedas have a symbolic or hidden meaning at all?

Now, this is a question that urgently needs to be answered in the affirmative. However, in order to assimilate this hidden meaning, and experience its truth, one must first realise that the poets of the Vedic times, the Rishis, had a completely different mentality than ours. An effort to understand their symbolism merely with a mental approach would be in vain. For, every field of activity has its own limitations, its laws, its Dharma. So also science. If a scientist were trying to prove to us the existence of various planets in the Milky Way, he would definitely ask us to view the sky through the telescope. It is only through the help of that instrument that he can prove his point to us. But if I refuse to look into it, and insist that he should prove it to me in another manner visible to my naked eye, it is simply impossible. Even the scientist has to work within the Dharma of his science. In the Gita, when Arjuna wished to see the Visvarupa of Sri Krishna, he humbly inquired whether it could be possible,

Manyase yadi tachhakyam mayâdrastumiti prabho.viii;

To which Lord Krishna clearly says,

*Na tu mām aīkyase draṣṭumanenaiva svacaṅkṣuṣā
Divyam dadāmi te caṅkṣuḥ . ix*

Just as the Divine Rūpa could not be seen by the human eye, but only with the *Divya Cakṣu*, so also, one cannot absorb or comprehend the subtle Truth behind the Vedic hymns without a psychological approach.

Who were these people who gave birth to our rich ancient heritage, who were they to whom we claim we owe our rich culture, tradition and spirituality? Could they really be nomadic tribes, or a semi-barbaric uncultured race, who could give birth to a culture as rich as the Vedic Culture? Even a thought like this is preposterous. They were Rishis, Munis, who had acquired great power and strength owing to their intense Tapasya. We refer to them as *°ṣayāh mantradr̥ṣṭārah*. They were seers. They saw the Truth. Based on this seeing, the Indian philosophy is referred to as darshana, which in itself is significant. Owing to the power of askesis, they saw very plainly what an ordinary person could not have seen or experienced. But the most important thing was to maintain and safeguard the sanctity of the Knowledge. It was for the purpose of maintaining this sanctity, that the knowledge was coded into a language, which could be understood only by one who was himself an *adhikārī*. Therefore is it said, *ninyā vacānsi nivacanā kavaye*.

This was a typical feature of the Vedic literature. The deeper truth of the words is revealed only to the seer, and for the rest, it appeared to be mere physical rituals. The sacred knowledge, once fallen into the hands of the wrong people could cause calamity and havoc, and even a regression for humanity, thus the precaution.

VEDIC SYMBOLISM

It is necessary to understand the Vedas for what they are, in their real meaning and depth, in their symbolic sense, and not as European scholars would have us understand them mentally. What they (European scholars) sought for in the Veda was the early history of India, its society, institutions, customs, a civilisation, a picture of the times. x This verily, was the error. The Vedas are a storehouse of knowledge and wisdom, they reflect the inner experiences of the Rishis, they are not meant to be the data collections describing material things and events. The right interpretation cannot be reached at with an incorrect approach. It is indeed very hard to escape the inevitable necessity to accept a symbolic meaning for the very common words in the Vedas, such as *agni*, *aṁṁ*, *go*, *ghṛta*, etc., because without doing so, the verses simply do not hold together. Usha or dawn has always been described as *gomati*, *aṁṁavati*. If we insist on the literal meaning only, one wonders why the dawn is referred to as having cows and horses. The words do not hold together to give out any comprehensive sense. It must be noted that the word *go* also means light in Sanskrit, and the word *aṁṁ* means energy. Other interpreters have accorded to words changeable meanings and do not stick to one particular meaning. But Sri Aurobindo says that if we were to consider the symbolic meaning each time, all verses hold together and reveal their hidden meaning. Thus,

Usha as *gomati* even physically would mean, bringing the rays of light and this is an image of the dawn of illumination in the human mind. And *aṁṁavati* comes from *aṁṁ* meaning energy. Light and energy are two companion ideas that always go together, signifying mental illumination and vital energy. Also, most often, the *ṛṣis* are shown as aspiring three things, namely, the sun, the cows and the waters. We wonder why the *ṛṣis* would pray to have more and more cows. The answer to this is the unfolding of a symbolic meaning of the words, which is:

The Sun -Truth Consciousness
The Cows - inner illumination
The Waters - divine consciousness

Thus, their prayer for acquiring *go* is not directed towards cows, but inner illumination, which is justifiably what the *ṛṣis* aspired for. Again we have another verse:

*Evā hyasya sūnṛtā, virapṣī gomati mahī ,
Pakvā aṁṁkhā na dāṁṁṣe...xi*

Thus Mahi for Indra full of rays, overflowing in her abundance, in her nature a happy truth, becomes as if a ripe branch for the giver of the sacrifice...

This means:

Here, a simile is presented. As trees like mangoes etc, with their flowers and fruits are beneficial, similarly the Vedas revealed by the God are givers of great knowledge. Only great scholars can reveal this truth to others. This significantly shows the revealing character of the Vedas. But the translation of *Gomati* as (giver of cows/ Indra) does not make sense in this context as has been earlier translated and interpreted by some. Sri Aurobindo presents many more similar illustrations in his book *The Secret of the Veda*. Sri Aurobindo did not whimsically accord random symbolism to words. He proceeded in a systematic manner by basing himself on the very language of the Veda, inquired into whether the words themselves indicated toward some psychological meaning beyond the material sense alone. He insisted on according to the terms an unwavering meaning, for they have come down as the diction of the seers, based firmly on philological justification to begin with, befitting the context, and later relating it to psychological functions of Gods. If this leads us to a clearer understanding of the verses, and all hold together as one great doctrine, then the method proves successful, and the undeniable sanctity and uniqueness of the Veda is unveiled.

Following the thread of his psychological theory, he says,

Thus there emerged in my mind, revealing itself as it were out of the ancient verses, a Veda which was throughout the Scripture of a great and antique religion already equipped with a profound psychological discipline, — a Scripture not confused in thought or primitive in its substance, not a medley of heterogeneous or barbarous elements, but one, complete and self-conscious in its purpose and in its purport, veiled indeed by the cover, sometimes thick, sometimes transparent, of another and material sense, but never losing sight even for a single moment of its high spiritual aim and tendency. xii

Most Western interpretations have erred by the fact of looking at only the ordinary meaning of the word, unaware of the roots of the word, not going to the depths of its nuances, thus yielding a most inefficient and insufficient interpretation. For example, there are numerous references to oceans and waters in the Vedas. Let us consider an example:

*Samudrâd ūrmirmadhumân udārad, upāmānâ sam amṛtatvam ânat;
Ghṛtasya nâma guhyam yad asti, jihvâ devânâm amṛtasya nâbhih...xiii*

A honeyed wave climbs up from the ocean and by means of this mounting wave which is the Soma (*amṣu*) one attains entirely to immortality; that wave or that Soma is the secret name of the clarity (*ghṛtasya*, the symbol of the clarified butter); it is the tongue of the gods; it is the nodus (*nâbhi*) of immortality.

[In this verse especially, it is clear that the sea, the honey, the Soma, the clarified butter are psychological symbols. They could not have been written in a purely physical sense of the terms. The seer could not possibly have meant that secret name for the clarified butter. The symbolism would probably point to the honeyed wave of Ananda (delight of existence), arising from the subconscious depth in us; and that we can arrive at immortality by this Ananda. It is this Ananda that is the secret reality behind outer actions of the mind in its shining clarities.]

The Vedas speak of two seas. Water for them is essentially a flood of consciousness, and the Ocean is seen in the image of infinite and eternal existence. To further justify this interpretation, we can refer to verse 4.58.5; wherein Rishi Vâmâdeva clearly refers to the sea as *hr̥dyât samudrât* out of which arise *ghṛtasya dhârâh*.

SARASVATI:

Now, we come to Sarasvati herself. Let us try to view another aspect of this Goddess in the light of Sri Aurobindo's symbolic interpretation. Sri Aurobindo categorically states 'The symbolism of the Veda betrays itself to the greatest clearness in the figure of the goddess Sarasvati. She is, plainly and clearly, the goddess of the Word, the goddess of a divine inspiration. The association of a river with poetical inspiration is also found in Greek mythology, in the form of the river Hippocrene, the fountain of the horse. This stream had sprung from the hoof of the divine horse, Pegasus. The stroke of the hoof on the rock releasing waters of inspiration is a psychological symbol. The symbolism of Sarasvati can be understood in a somewhat similar fashion'.

*Pâvakâ nah sarasvatî, vâjebhir vâjinivatî;
Yajñâm vaṣṭu dhiyâvasuh.
Codayitrî sunṛtânâm, cetantî sumatînâm;
Yajñâm dadhe sarasvatî.
Maho arṇah sarasvatî, pra cetayati ketunâ;
Dhiyo viāṁ vi râjatî." xiv*

Word to word symbolic meaning follows:

Pâvakâ - purifying
nah our
sarasvatî -sarasvati
vâjebhir - with all the plenitudes of her forms of plenty
vâjinivatî - rich in substance
Yajñâm - sacrifice
Vaṣṭu - may desire
Dhiyâvasuh - by the thought
Codayitrî - the impeller
sunṛtânâm - of happy truths
cetantî - the awakener in consciousness
sumatînâm - to right mentalisings
yajñâm - sacrifice
dadhe - upholds
sarasvatî - sarasvati
Maho arṇah - great flood (the vast movement of the ṛtam)
cetayati - awakens in consciousness
ketunâ - by the perception
Dhiyo - the thought
Viāṁ - all
virâjatî - illumines entirely

In the light of these word meanings, the complete translation would be thus in Sri Aurobindo's own words:

May purifying Sarasvati with all the plenitude of her forms of plenty, rich in substance by the thought, desire our sacrifice...
She, the impeller to happy truths, the awakener in consciousness to right mentalisings, Sarasvati, upholds the sacrifice...
Sarasvati by the perception awakens in consciousness the great flood (the vast movement of the ṛtam) and illumines entirely all the thoughts. xv

For these are the three riks devoted to Sarasvati, the divine Word, who represents the stream of inspiration that descends from the Truth-consciousness, and thus limpidly runs their sense:

Another interesting aspect would be to draw our attention to the initial naming of the rivers. A question arises: who has named the ancient rivers? The names have come down to us through scriptures and other literatures, so it is fair enough to suppose that it was the ṛṣis who addressed particular rivers and mountains by particular names. Why a particular name for a particular river? Can Gangâ be called Narmadâ, or Yamunâ be called Vipâçâ? Here, knowing the ṛṣis who have a unique faculty of inner perception, we

can expect that they would have appropriately named the rivers in the light of what they represent and their inner relevance. The word Sarasvati itself in Sanskrit, means, one of flowing movement. Considering that the waters symbolised floods of higher consciousness to the Vedic Aryan, this Sarasvati represented to them the flood of Truth-Consciousness (*ṛtam*), she was the embodiment of Divine Inspiration. It is again extremely significant to note that the Vedic Sanskriti, replete with culture and spirituality, developed on the banks of this very river, which was the Mother herself. She could very well have been their Inspiration for the Vedic compositions. They also regarded her as their Mother, which is very clear in

*Ambitame nadī tame devitame sarasvatī
Apraṇstā iva smasi praṇstimamba naskridhi...xvi*

Best of mothers, best of rivers, best of goddesses...

Sarasvati is also spoken of as the secret self of Indra in the Vedas. This would certainly not make sense if we were to suppose Sarasvati to be merely a physical river and nothing more. Indra himself is much more than simply the God of the sky. He represents the illumined Mind, and if we consider Sarasvati to be the inspiration flowing from the higher plane into the mind, the concept makes perfect sense. If this theory of the Aryan invasion were true, do we realise what it implies? It implies that the Vedas were composed by the nomadic tribes or semi-barbarians who came from the northern regions and settled in India. But it is clear to us that the Vedas have to be the compositions of people who belong to this soil. P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar affirms, 'A careful study of the Vedas reveals the fact that Vedic culture is so redolent of the Indian soil and of the Indian atmosphere that the idea of the non-Indian origin of that culture is absurd'. xvii

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is not to debate upon the validity of traditional commentaries. This symbolic interpretation presented by Sri Aurobindo has been proposed in this paper as an alternative viewpoint, which is certainly worth considering. In the light of this new interpretation, many more doors open up in front of us. His writing was always based on his own experiences in the course of his Sadhana.

Obviously, we are not refuting that Sarasvati was the name of a river, in the ancient times, which later was buried into the ground due to several reasons. What I would like to add to this is that, it is not only a name of this river by coincidence. The river herself has significance, a symbolism, which has been revealed in the Vedas. If we were to consider it, understand it and experience it, then, the regard we have for our heritage and for the *ṛsis* who built and maintained the heritage, would rise to much greater heights; and very justifiably so.

The *ṛsis* of yore had arranged the substance of their thought in a system of parallelism by which the same deities were at once internal and external Powers of universal Nature. They managed its expression through a system of double values by which the same

language served for their worship in both aspects. But the psychological sense predominates and is more pervading, close-knit and coherent than the physical sense. This is what we have to keep in mind.

Today, the scientific proof has changed the opinion of Westerners too. The belief in an Aryan race had become accepted by philologists who knew nothing of science, what these men have written on the subject has been cast by historians into the limbo of discarded and discredited theories, said Mr.Huxley in 1939. xviii

As proud Indians, we do not now need to rely upon Western scholarship to agree and give the green signal that the invasion is a myth. It is for us to defend our land, to stand up for our scriptures and argue our own case. The least we can do is to support the experts who are engaged in this research to unveil the hidden truths with the passage of time.

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LANGUAGE : A MEANS OF SPIRITUAL REALISATION

Ananda Reddy

“O Living power of the incarnate word,
All that the Spirit has dreamed thou canst create.”
— *Savitri*, Bk XI, Canto 1 (1984), p.693

Frankly, it was Jacques Derrida’s concept of “Deconstruction” of language that focused my attention on the study of linguistics.

Derrida (b. 1930), a French critic of western philosophy, literature and language, dismisses the ideal of clear presentation of meaning through the immediacy of spoken words as “logocentrism” and “phonocentrism” and offers instead a strategy of deconstruction. This strategic device aims at making explicit the metaphysical presuppositions that are at the centre of all human activity and which need to be mistrusted and resisted. In other words, Derrida shows that all western philosophy and even our common language assumes that conscious, integrated selves are at the bottom of human communication and action. And that conscious self is represented by our voice, that voice which assures us of our self-identity, our existence in the present, indeed of our “self-present-ness”. He calls this presence, the “metaphysical presence” and he is out to tease our concepts and expose the strands of the metaphysical web which surrounds our language and thought.

Derrida tried to do what D.H. Lawrence had set out to achieve in his poetry:

“The idea is to get rid of all over-expression, of language for the sake of language, of form for the sake of form, even of indulgence of poetic emotion for the sake of the emotion, because all that veils the thing in itself, dresses it up, prevents it from coming out in the seizing nudity of its truth, the power of its intrinsic appeal. There is a sort of mysticism here that wants to express the inexpressible, the concealed, the invisible. Reduce expression to its bareness and you get nearer the inexpressible; suppress as much of the form as may be as you get nearer that behind, which is invisible.”¹

In his attempt to go beyond the conflict to identity, the ‘metaphysical presence’ in language, Derrida seems to approach the basic concepts of the Hindu philosophers such as Bhartrihari and Shankaracharya and to an extent, even Sri Aurobindo.

In the west, the philosopher, Aristotle, conceived language to be both a representative of truth and a medium of finding the truth. It is perhaps in this sense that we should read the Biblical sayings. The Gospel says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.. All things were made by him and without Him was not anything made that was made “(St. John I). And again, St. John writes: “the Word which became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.”

‘Word’ is a translation from the Greek “Logos” which meant variously “voice”, “speech”, “law” and later reason. The Sanskrit for word is *vaabda* which also means sound. Knowing all these different etymological meanings it now becomes clear that the Word of the Bible is the power of God, it is one with God and it is God just as the power of burning and fire are one and the same. So, God made all things by his own power and, in the process, the power or the Word had to incarnate in ‘flesh’ — the innumerable prophets, messiahs, and the incarnations — in order to help humanity in its evolutionary movement.

Similarly, in the Vedas, it is stated that there are as many words as there are manifestations of the Brahman. That is to say, speech permeates all creation and is identified with the Divine. The Sankhya Aranyaka states that speech is Brahman. The Taittiriya Brahmana opines that speech is the support of all creation. In fact, Prajapati and speech are viewed as Male and Female copulating to create the world.

In the Upanishads, the divine origin of language is made more clear. The Mandukya Upanishad states that speech is the link between the unmanifest and the manifest, the unspeakable Absolute and the ‘speakable’ world. The symbol of this link-speech is AUM which incorporates the three levels of human consciousness, the waking, the dream and the deep sleep consciousness, and then goes beyond into the silence of the Transcendent. Seen this way, language can be a ladder in the ascent of our consciousness.

This view of linking language with the divine or the Scripture is upheld in the subsequent schools of Indian philosophy — the Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Vedanta and the grammarian school which is best represented by Bhartrihari. He holds that the Veda is a mirror to Brahman and therefore by chanting the Vedic mantras one could be released from the karmic ignorance.

“For Bhartrihari the one Brahman is the Sabdatattva or Word-Principle. Sabdatattva is not lesser Brahman, a mere *upayah*, but is identical with Brahman itself, the only Brahman there is. For Bhartrihari, Brahman, as the Word-Principle, is an intrinsically dynamic and expressive reality, and the Universe as a whole is to be understood as its manifestation under the form of temporal becoming.”²

The great philosopher Shankaracharya agrees with Bhartrihari to the extent of seeing Scripture as a necessary medium to realise the Brahman. But, he does not identify

language with Brahman for language belongs to the manifest world which ultimately, according to Shankaracharya, is an illusion.

Similarly, Nagarjuna, the Buddhist philosopher, rejects the identity between language and the divine. He considers language to be purely conventional and that there is nothing as scripture which can help in the spiritual realisation. He holds that even the word of the Buddha must be verified by one's own personal experience before being fully accepted.

This rational approach of Nagarjuna reflects the attitude of the Western philosophers toward language. One of the most influential linguists of the 19th century, Wilhelm von Humboldt (d.1835), divided language into two forms: the inner and the outer. "The outer form of language was the raw material form, was the pattern, or structure, of grammar and meaning that was imposed upon the raw material and differentiated one language from another!" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol.17). The idea of the "inner form" influenced many linguists among whom the best known are Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky. At present, it is Wittgenstein and John L. Austin who are holding the fort of the "inner form" of language.

It is the study of the "outer form" that has led linguists to come up with conclusions that have dangerously affected definitions of culture and the origin of races. In 1786, around the time when Sanskrit was discovered by the Western linguists, Sir William Jones put forward the hypothesis that Greek, Latin and Sanskrit "sprung from some common source which perhaps no longer exists". This analysis was based on the principle of comparing language with respect to their sound systems, grammatical structure and vocabulary and which could be shown to be genealogically related. It was stated that French, Latin, Portuguese, Rumanian and Spanish had evolved from "Latin and that their languages had evolved from some earlier language of Europe and Asia, called the Indo-European Language". This theory of a common parental language led to the dangerous conclusion that an early Aryan civilisation had split itself up in several groups and that they had spread into Greece, Persia and India.

In the light of Sri Aurobindo's analysis of the origins of human speech, such an ethnological conclusion is too presumptuous and uncalled for. The body of common words establishes only a plausible contact with other cultures. An in-depth analysis of the body of common, day-to-day used objects and human relationships. The word for 'mother' in Sanskrit is 'mata', in Greek it is *meter*, in Latin it is *mater*. Similar is the case with the word Father. But, when it comes to son the Sanskrit word is *putra*, the Greek is *huios* and Latin is *filius*. Beyond a small group of a common body of words, there isn't any greater similarity which could lead us to the conclusion of a single Aryan culture speeding itself into different parts of the Earth.

Unlike their Western counterparts the Indian linguists, until the time of Panini in the 5th century B.C., had the only aim of keeping the sacred Vedic texts and their commentaries pure and intact. They were not interested in any kind of comparative philology. It is this purity of purpose, the spiritual and not the mundane, that gave rise, in the subsequent centuries, to a lot of mystical philosophy regarding language and the word. This is the uniqueness of Indian character – all studies, be it either philosophical, psychological,

religious or linguistic, they are all at the service of Spirituality, bent to the purpose of uplifting man's consciousness.

Ābda or Vak is believed to be the gateway to the higher and deeper levels of human consciousness. Ābda, in its highest form, the mantric form or the Japa form, can remove the veils of ignorance and take us nearer to the inner divinity.

Ābda "is the essence of all reality and existence: this divine Word, this heavenly Harmony, this Celestial Music. It is the very being of the Ultimate Absolute... It permeates all creation, it pervades the whole cosmos. Only the transcendent soul can come into contact with it; only in a superconscious rapture to mystic transport can we touch it and know it; only in a divine ecstasy of spiritual flight do we embrace it."³

The mystic concept of ābda is found in almost all religions. The Adi Granth Sahib calls it Sar Shabad (the Real word) or Nam. Guru Nanak Sahib has a fine image:

"When clothes get dirty, they are washed with soap;
When the mind is polluted with sins, by Nam is it washed".

In the words of Kabir Sahib, Ābda's importance is unique:

"Close thou thine eyes, thine ears and thy mouth
And listen thou to the subtle Anhad Shabad."*

Guru Nanak Sahib has a similar verse:

"Shutting the three doors, O listen thou to the music of Anhād
In the trance of Sun, O Nanak, neither is it morning nor evening."

The high, intense spiritual experience of the Ābda is similarly voiced by Maulvi Rumi:

"O close thou thine eyes, thine ears, and thy lips;
Any if the secret of God thou dost not behold,
Then laugh thou at me."*

Ābda is called Kalam – I – ilahi or Nada – asmani (god's word or Heavenly Harmony) by the Sufis, and by the Hindus it is called the Nād of which OM is the phonetic and visual symbol. The highest and purest manifestation of ābda is the form of divine music heard in the OM, according to the Hindus or the Bani according to the Sikhs. Mystics have experienced and described variously the divine music — the Nāḍabindu Upanishad

"In the beginning of this practice,
Many loud sounds he hears;
Gradually they increase in the pitch
And are heard more and more subtly.
First he will hear the sound

Like those of the waves of ocean,
Clouds, kettle drums and cataracts,
At intervals he will hear the sound of Mardala,
Bell and conch.”*

Mystics practise the repetition of the name of God because they believe that God’s name is more powerful than God. Tulsidas writes:

“Greater than Ram and Brahma is Name
Giveth it gifts and bestoweth it boons.”*

It is told by the mystics, again, that it is the Name that creates the universe, Vedas speak of the Chaudah Bhavan, the fourteen parts, created by the Name, the Nad Brahman. Quoran says that Kalma, word of God, has created Chaudah Tabag, fourteen sections, of the universe. The Bible too says: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

With their experience of intense love and union with the Lord, with their trances of heavenly music and light, the mystics cut a direct path out of this ignorance and bondage. Songs of Mirabai, Shyama and countless other devotees are an ample proof of their practice, belief and achievement. The mystic’s philosophy is summarised by Guru Nanak Sahib in the following verse:

“All recitals, austerities, knowledge, meditation,
Discussions on Smritis,
An the six Schools of Hindu Philosophy
Yoga practice, ceremonies, rites and rituals,
Renouncing all and roaming in jungles,
Many efforts in various ways
Benevolent actions, charity,
Sacrifice of a lot of jewels,
Getting the body cut with proper ceremony,
Burning of incense,
Observing of fasts, and disciplining the mind
In different forms
Nothing equaleth the practice of God’s Nam
With the help of the Guru recite thou
His Nam once, O Nanak.” *

Howsoever ecstatic may to the pure Transcendental experience of the mystics be, it is a one-sided fulfilment, a lop-sided evolution of the human being. If one’s aim is to forget the world – its evils and its traps of enjoyments, then one could look into the eyes of the Lord and do so. But, if one’s aim is to become the instrument of God, then mysticism per se is not the solution. Integral Yoga is the chartered path for achieving such an aim.

Like all other activities, literature “can be made an instrumentation for the Divine life.” says Sri Aurobindo. “Literature, poetry, science and other studies can be a preparation of the consciousness for life. When one does Yoga they can become part of the sadhana only if done for the Divine or taken up by the divine Force, but then one should not want to be a poet for the sake of being a poet only, or for fame, applause etc.”⁴

Literature, spoken or the written word, is perhaps the best vehicle, compared to other studies, for increasing one’s consciousness, because its basis is word and “The Word has power — even the ordinary written word has a power. If it is an inspired word it has still more power. What kind of power or power for what depends on the nature of the inspiration and the theme and the part of the being it touches. If it is the Word itself, – as in certain utterances of the great Scriptures, Veda, Upanishads, Gita, it may well have a power to awaken a spiritual and uplifting impulse, even certain kinds of realisation.”⁵

“The Word has power – even the ordinary written word has a power”⁶ emphasises Sri Aurobindo. What is the source of this power? How can an ordinary word be pregnant with power and with what kind of power? It ‘depends on the nature of inspiration.’ That is to say, the Word comes from different levels beyond the mental – it is a descent into the mind. Sri Aurobindo emphasises again, the nature of power depends on which ‘part of the being it touches.’ That would presume a kind of conscious, prepared receptivity on the part the speaker or writer. And lastly, if it is the word, notes Sri Aurobindo, then it will awaken ‘a spiritual impulse’ and even a certain kind of realisation. What then is the nature of the word that is found in the ancient Scriptures? Has such word been caught in later poetry?

A study of these questions would perhaps lead us into the true meaning and purpose of language – both on the mundane and spiritual levels. We shall therefore analyse the questions in the order given by Sri Aurobindo.

Power of the Ordinary Word

In his essay on the ‘*The origins of Aryan Speech*’ Sri Aurobindo traces the historical and evolutionary growth of Sanskrit language. Sri Aurobindo’s theory of philology is based on two basic ideas: a) sound determines sense b) Language undergoes an evolutionary process similar to the one applicable to the growth of any human community or society.

“In their beginnings”, writes Sri Aurobindo, “language-sounds were not used to express what we should call ideas; they were rather the vocal equivalents of certain general sensations and emotion-values. It was the nerves and not the intellect which created speech...”⁷

“Mind has emerged out of vital and sensational activities; intellect in man has built itself upon a basis of sense-associations and sense-reactions. By a similar process the intellectual use of language has developed by a natural law out of the sensational and emotional. Words, which were originally vital ejections full of a vague sense-potentiality, have evolved into fixed symbols of precise intellectual significances.”⁸

Thus in the beginning, the words were not fixed to any specific idea, they had only a 'general character or quality' which had many possible significances, shades of meaning etc. These root-words developed into word-families, word-clans and word-nations or languages.

"The progression is from the general to the particular, from the vague to the precise, from the physical to the mental, from the concrete to the abstract, from the expression of an abundant variety of sensations about similar things to the expression of precise difference between similar things, feelings and actions."⁹

The growing demand of the intellect on the economy and precision resulted in a shrinking of the word into its outer concrete significance. This is the status of the modern precisely a fossil, but an organism proceeding towards fossilisation.

Therefore, the power of the ordinary word at present is only the power of the idea behind or the power of the emotion and consciousness injected into by the speaker/writer.

To recapture the fluid evocative power of the inner word is the only way to enliven the dying modern languages. The best example of the double significance of language is the Vedic language, according to Sri Aurobindo. The Vedic mantras are expressed in, at the same time, a concrete sense for the mass of ordinary worshippers. There is a simultaneous inner evocation as well as an outer concrete reference.

Can we ever break the shackles of language and restore it to its pristine freedom and multi-significance of roots? We seem to be caught up in sphinx-dilemma. On the one side, language, either spoken or written, has the positive function signifying and conveying meaning. And, on the other hand, once the word escapes the speaker's lips or the writer's pen, it closes off further signification. Language as such is already in a pharmakon situation ('position' and 'cure') as Derrida puts it, and restoring it to a 'double-entendre' would it not make matters worse? If not, in what sense is Sri Aurobindo speaking of a re-evolution, restoration or restructuring of language?

Nature of Inspiration

If it was the intervention of the intellect that caused language, its fossilisation, fixity and the loss of the spirit, then it is only by going beyond the intellect that new seed-sounds have to be discovered which can give birth to a new literary language which regains its sound of knowledge. In the ancient times and at all times, it has been the seer-poets who had made language 'a thing of power, creative, formative.' The original Vedic mantras are still vibrating in tune with what Sri Aurobindo calls "a corresponding originative vibration on the supramental at the very root of things."¹⁰

And what is there at the root of things? Brahman, says Sri Aurobindo. But words, even the words of the Vedas, are not Brahman, Sri Aurobindo sees Brahman as efficient but not the material cause of language and scripture. "Human speech is only a secondary expression of the transcendent Brahman. Even the vibrations of the Vedic mantras, though they serve they serve to reveal Brahman to us, are only a far-off resonance of the perfectly vibrant supreme truth."¹¹

In the future too, it is again the poet who has to salvage language and bring into it the sense of the mantras, the 'crossing over' through thought (root man to 'think', and or 'to cross over') from the transcendent to the human levels and voice-versa. Why is this burden on the poet alone and not the prophet and the philosopher? Sri Aurobindo answers thus:

"The poet-seer sees differently, thinks in another way, voices himself in quite another manner than the philosopher or the prophet. The prophet announces the Truth as the word of God or his command, he is the truth as the word of God or his command, he is the giver of the message; the poet shows us Truth in its power of beauty, in its symbol or image... The philosopher's business is to discriminate Truth and put its parts and aspects into intellectual relation with each other; the poet's is to seize and embody aspects of Truth in their living relations, ..."¹²

In seizing and embodying the various aspects of Truth, the poet has to depend on the different levels of inspiration. The ordinary speech is apparently mere physical sounds which arbitrarily represent certain objects and ideas and persuasions. On the deeper level, "...what constitutes speech and gives it its life and appeal and significance, is a subtle conscious force which informs and is the soul of the body of sound: it is a superconscious Nature-Force raising its material out of our subconscious, but growingly conscious in its operations in the human mind that develops itself in one fundamental way and yet variously in language. It is to this Force, this Shakti to which the old Vedic thinkers gave the name of Vak, the goddess of creative Speech."¹³ Basing themselves on this theory, the Tantricians believed that this Force or Shakti acts in us "through different subtle nerve centres on higher and higher levels of its force and that thus the word has a graduation of its expressive powers of truth and vision."¹⁴

The highest degree of power according to the gradation is the *Pashyanti Vak* followed by *Madhyama Vak* and *Vaikhari Vak*. The *Vaikhari Vak* is the ordinary speech characterised by fully sequenced utterances. In the ascending order, next is *Madhyama Vak*, the seeing speech which is annotative intuition in which sequencing is present only as a pregnant force.

Sri Aurobindo has his own classification of the sources of inspiration and poetic vision. He calls them the Illumined mind, the Intuitive mind, the Overmind and Supermind. Each level has its own characteristic poetic expression and vision.

Whatever be the different names of the levels of inspiration, what is crucial to receive them is a certain inner purification, a certain level of egolessness.

"The Being it touches"

Derrida speaks of the absence of poet's ego when he writes: "To be a poet is to know how to leave speech. To let it speak alone... To leave writing is to be there only in order to provide it passage way, to be the diaphanous element of its going fourth; everything and nothing. The poet's absence is an absence of ego, of ego determined language, that allows a fatal transparency to the word."¹⁵

What Derrida suggests here is that the writer while writing must be able to draw back, not from the family or the society, but from himself. He must be absent in his

writing. Poetic language can be emancipated only when it is left alone to find its own way. As Derrida puts it, “For the work, the writer is at once everything and nothing.”

This is what Sri Aurobindo too meant when he wrote to a disciple that literature can become a part of sadhana, but if this activity is bereft of any anxiety for praise or recognition etc, Derrida’s suggestion is, however, abstract without a positive direction. What does he mean by, “leaving behind not only community patterns but also the structures of his or her own ego the poet ‘dies’ to former linguistic experience of the desert”? What is the ‘inspiration of the absence’? The ‘death of the former linguistic experience’?

Sri Aurobindo has given a positive direction; he says that knowledge through language, the type of the Vedic language, can come to us with a purified cognition. And this purification, elevation, transformation is what is integral yoga that can be attained by self-effort and the divine grace. One of the means of the purification of yoga is to read language which reverberates with *pashyanti vak*, be it either the ancient scriptures like the four Vedas in Sanskrit or the modern fifth Veda *Savitri*. Like in the ancient Scriptures, we see once again in *Savitri* a complete transparency and absence of the individual ego. It is mantric poetry at its highest intensity; it is the vehicle of Sri Aurobindo’s own realisation and can become a vehicle of realisation for all of us.

As we go through line after line of *Savitri*, we seem to hear the mystic sounds, described by Nāḍabrahma Upanishad, which culminate in the reverberations of AUM. The Cosmic Scribe, Sri Aurobindo, disappears and waves of sound and images seem to stretch your being; you begin to lose the sense of Time and space. Image follows image, conveying not thought nor symbol, but the truth of seeing speech. Every page seems to be dotted lines of truth that forces us, though for a while, beyond ourselves, all the while we are seized with an oppressive feeling of:

Something unknown, unreached, inscrutable
Sent down the messages of its bodiless Light,
Cast lightning flashes of a thought not ours,
Crossing the immobile silence of her mind: ¹⁶

Thus, in Sri Aurobindo, we have both the end and the means.

It is enough to read his mantra poetry — we need not even understand it, for verily it is beyond all mental comprehension, and we can purify our consciousness. And as we go along the way, the consciousness, the impersonal cognition seizes upon us, gradually expanding our limited consciousness into the universal consciousness. This is the aim of Integral yoga, to spiritualise our consciousness, to go beyond the ego and to become a Yogi:

“A splendid centre of infinity’s whirl
Pushed to its zenith’s height, its last expanse,
Felt the divinity of its own self-bliss
Repeated in its numberless other selves.”¹⁷

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(* All translations of poems quoted in this article are from Lekhraj Puri)

Being Human And The Copernican Principle

Georges van Vrekhem

Science and Scientism

In the path of the Integral Yoga each person has his or her own way, for the simple reason that in each person the constitutional and incarnational difficulties to become aware of and master vary. Yet the integrality of the Aurobindian Yoga should never be overlooked, however limited and fractional our individual effort still may be. In the attempt at self-perfection based on the combined psychological faculties of the human being – knowledge, devotion or works – each of these faculties can only be neglected at the peril of gross reduction of the integrality, the condition of the intended divine transformation.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have often stressed the need for a clear mind and ever expanding knowledge. Sri Aurobindo writes e.g. in *The Life Divine*: “In any total advance or evolution of the Spirit, not only the intuition, insight, inner sense, the heart’s devotion, a deep and direct life-experience of the things of the Spirit have to be developed, but the intellect also must be enlightened and satisfied, our thinking and reflecting mind must be helped to understand, to form a reasoned and systematised idea of the goal, the method, the principle of this highest development and activity of our nature and the truth of all that lies behind it.”¹

Science is fundamentally a form of knowledge, it is the mind searching for the Truth behind the workings of Nature. Its importance, combined with the wonders of technology, is evident in the world in which we live. Unfortunately its unprejudiced search for Truth was turned into a dogmatised positivist or materialistic system, for historical reasons which we will see later. The result has been that academic science has divided the integrality of the human experience into two separate spheres: the sphere of the materially perceptible and the sphere of the non-material, at best treated agnostically but more often with supercilious disdain. Science metaphysically dogmatised became Scientism.

The hypothetical gap between science and religion or spirituality turned into a cause of serious tension, for instance during the late Renaissance when Galileo Galilei was put on trial by the Inquisition of the Catholic Church. “The Galileo Affair had a catastrophic effect on the Church, putting her in discredit for her inability to accept the development of the sciences. Her condemnation of Galileo remains the big mistake

which nothing can efface and makes the Church into an enemy of science for ever.” (Jacques Arsac²) The nineteenth century hardened the standpoint of Scientism while generally weakening religious faith. The polemical tension between both survives in the present, witness the quarrel between Scientism on the one hand and Creationism or Intelligent Design on the other.

Science is now thought by many to be the only source of true knowledge, which should be clear from the fact that it can prove its affirmations mathematically and experimentally, and that it has conquered the Earth. Yet the first affirmation is contradicted by the many discredited scientific theories left by the wayside, and by the recently gained awareness that scientific systems depend on the temporarily dominant paradigm. The second affirmation, that of science’s worldwide triumph, can also be questioned if one realises how much technology differs from theoretical science, which may lead to the conclusion that the triumph should not be claimed by the theoretical scientist but by the engineer. Although nowadays the two often overlap, science is about abstract knowing, technology about practical making.

Science is also the privileged domain of people with a knack for complicated mathematics and an extensive training in them. This has led to the image of the scientist, more specifically the physicist, as a sort of higher being with an intellect out of the ordinary, who indeed sometimes seeks “to understand the mind of God” (cf. Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking). The acceptance of such a view would put science and the crucial decisions made by scientists in our societies beyond the reach of the general public. It would also mean certain defeat for religion and spirituality in any comparison or confrontation with science, for science has the hard arguments at its disposal, while religion and spirituality seem to reason in the clouds or apparently have to resort to wondrous, improbable experiences.

It is, moreover, from their high perch and relying on their mathematical training that some scientists perorate about matters outside their formulas or laboratories, matters about which they know just as much or as little as anybody else. In other words, their scientific training does not substantiate their ideas about psychology, religion or spirituality. Thinking that they are putting down the “mysticism, superstitions and hallucinations” of religion and spirituality, they are in fact depreciating their own search for Truth which, if it exists, is One, approached in whatever way. The West, because of its centuries old Judeo-Christian tradition, is only familiar with religion as a matter of knowledge and prayer, and with a God outside his creation. The scientists, and science writers, who have any notion of a divine Presence within, and of a possible identification with this Presence, are still exceptions.

Sri Aurobindo’s appreciation of science:

“But, first, it is well that we should recognise the enormous, the indispensable utility of the very brief period of rationalistic Materialism through which humanity has been passing. For that vast field of evidence and experience which now begins to reopen its gates to us, can only be safely entered when the intellect has been severely trained to a clear austerity.”³

“The scientist is man the thinker mastering the forces of material Nature by knowing them. Life and Matter are after all our standing-ground, our lower basis, and to know their processes and their own proper possibilities and the opportunities they give to the human being is part of the knowledge necessary for transcending them.”⁴

“Three things will remain from the labour of the secularist centuries: truth of the physical world and its importance, the scientific method of knowledge – which is to induce Nature and Being to reveal their own way of being and proceeding ... – and last, though very far from least, the truth and importance of the earth life and the human endeavour, its evolutionary meaning.”⁵

La nuova scienza

As mentioned in passing above, an integral and usually overlooked factor in the thinking of modern science is its Judeo-Christian background. The science of the so-called Hellenistic period in Greece and Alexandria had reached a high level of development with figures of genius like Archimedes, Eratosthenes, Aristarchus of Samos, Hipparchus and Ptolemy. Marvin Minsky regrets the course history has taken, for he is of the opinion that science could now already have been much more advanced “if its progress had not succumbed to the spread of monotheistic religions. As early as 250 BC, Archimedes was well on the way toward modern physics and calculus. So, in an alternate version of history (in which the pursuits of science did not decline), just a few more centuries could have allowed the likes of Newton, Maxwell, Gauss, and Pasteur to anticipate our present state of knowledge about physics, mathematics, and biology.”⁶

Out of the originally quite diverse Christian movement grew a structured and authoritarian Catholic Church which became, from about 400 C.E., the official religion of the Roman Empire. This organisation, because of its hierarchical structure and its faith, survived the collapse of the Empire and became the dominant institution in the Middle Ages. Its holy book, the Bible, was supposed to be the Word of God and therefore indubitable truth, together with its interpretations by the Church Fathers. What remained of the former Greek and Roman culture was used as a source of reference, integrated to a certain degree into the belief system of the Church. Any culture has its myths, legends and explanations which support and give meaning to its life. The myths and legends of the Old and New Testament became the mental baggage and source of reference of Western thought, which is even today still heavily influenced by them.

However, for the Catholic Church too, as for all life and its manifestations on Earth, the time arrived that its hierarchical structure and authority began to falter. This period of questioning, roughly from the 14th to the 17th century, we call the Renaissance, synonymous with the urge of rediscovery and exploration in matters intellectual and artistic as well as physical. New continents on the globe were discovered, and so were new realms of the mind. What existed on Earth was so much more, and apparently equally worthy and humane, than the limited world which until then had been thought the only civilised one. A new spirit of astonishment, exaltation and daring led to the *nuova scienza*, a new science eagerly connecting with the forgotten or forbidden

knowledge of the ancients, but also with previously discarded occult practices and wisdom traditions.

The stuff of ancient Hebrew tribes and of the alleged reminiscences about Christ and primitive Christianity was now put to the test of reason and found for the most part to be invention, superstition, fabulation, and sometimes outright errors or lies. Intellectuals invested themselves with the right of scepticism and dared to exert it publicly and in their writings, even at the risk of their possessions, their career, or their lives. The Enlightenment was a period of heroism, fully aware that the negation of an old intellectual and religious paradigm and the construction of a new one would result in revolt as the precondition of a new world. Few people of the present day realise how much they owe to the activist thinkers of centuries not that long past.

It was against this 17th century background that the scientific revolution took place. The principles then formulated by Galileo, Kepler, Descartes, Newton, and a host of less well-known “natural philosophers,” are still the pillars supporting positivist or materialistic science today. All can be found, worded in various ways, in the works of Galileo, the Catholic scientist to whom they were the keys to decipher the book of Nature.

1. *Science must be about matter.* This tenet is nowadays so self-evident that one hardly finds it mentioned anymore in writings on science. Yet at the time it was a hard-won rule which created a split between things material and non-material. Then the prevalent view was still that of the Chain of Being, the hierarchical ladder of (in ascending order) matter, the life force, mental consciousness, and the spirit. The new, materialistic statement directly implicated the definition and interpretation of Reality, and therefore of God. It was one of the main causes in the attitude of the Church towards the “new science” of which Galileo was seen as the harbinger and figurehead. The sole validation of matter or, in other words, of that which could be perceived by the senses, would gradually lead to distrust and doubt of the non-material, of religion (more specifically Catholic authoritarianism), and ultimately of God. The principle of the sole validity of matter is still the cause of widespread dispute among philosophers, theologians, and people living the spiritual life.

2. Science has no grasp of wholes, but reduces all things to parts consisting of smaller parts consisting of still smaller parts. This is called *reductionism*. The reason of its central utility in science is, again, that science is an activity of the mind, and that the mind cannot handle wholes. Sri Aurobindo has explained this aspect of the mind quite clearly on many occasions. Its way of functioning is analytic or dividing (i.e. reductionist) because “it can only know by separation and distinction, and has at the most a vague and secondary apprehension of unity and infinity – for though it can synthesise its divisions, it cannot arrive at a true totality.”⁷ Nonetheless the biologist Richard Lewontin warns: “Whatever the faults of reductionism, we have accomplished a great deal by employing reductionism as a methodological strategy.” It is, after all, reductionist science that has made our modern world. Yet the increasing awareness that we need much more comprehensive [i.e. holistic] and much less reductionist understanding may be a sign of “a new sort of science that is being forged at the moment.”

3. *All changes in matter are brought about by external forces.* This excludes any kind of internal movement or life. The history of the formulation of the laws of motion is fascinating, if only because of the difficulties Galileo and his predecessors had to reckon with. The principle of the external forces is closely connected with the principle of the exclusivity of matter. Here again a drastic cut is made between matter and everything else. The reason seems to be the physiological restrictions of the evolutionary human being, who can only measure things perceived by the senses. The phenomena of life are obvious but for the most part indefinable, and this goes still more for the phenomena of the mind and the spirit. The result will be that living beings are studied as complex compounds of material elements, and that the mind will be declared a function of a material brain. Any time scientific materialists tackle matters of the spirit with the concepts and instruments of their science, they venture beyond their ken and produce for the most part nonsense.

4. Science can only work with the “*primary*” *qualities* of things: extension, motion, and mass. “*Secondary*” *qualities*, like colour, scent or taste, are effects of the primary qualities. This principle illustrates clearly how the scientific method – by which is mostly understood the method of physics – reduces the world to a kind of abstract rendition of its real appearance, a black-and-white version of the fantastic diversity it really shows. Here again a reduction is made to what is measurable and quantifiable, in other words usable in the composition of mathematical formulae.

5. *The language of science is mathematics, based on measurement.* According to this principle what cannot be measured cannot be known exactly. However, each measurement is the application of a theoretical mindset, as is the registration of each fact. Consequently, the way Reality is seen by scientific materialism is the outcome of a complex prejudice originated within the framework of a scientific theory – a temporarily accepted consensus now called “paradigm.” Where once (around the year 1900) the science of physics was assumed to be complete, without anything basically new to be expected, the growing awareness of the relative value of any theory of physics has changed that outlook completely, and led to the realisation that the science of tomorrow may be quite different from the science of today.

6. In science all guesses, hypotheses or theories have to be tested as to their truth and validity. This was the principle of the unconditional necessity of *the experiment* which has remained and will remain forever valid. The need of the experiment was the direct consequence of the doubt of any affirmations by any authority, until the Renaissance so docilely accepted in all places of learning and teaching. The “natural philosopher” (as Isaac Newton still called himself) became an experimenter who communicated the results of his findings to other experimenters; they, in their turn, could then examine and try to repeat them. The experiment is at the heart of the “scientific method.” It was the experiment, supported by novel scientific instruments, that opened a whole new world first in cosmology and physics, then in biology.

The intellectual adventure of the Renaissance evolving into the Enlightenment, also called “the Age of Reason,” is one of the great episodes in the history of a part of humanity, Western Europe, which would become of importance to the whole of it. It was

a struggle to bring life in phase with reality, more particularly material reality, this against a religious worldview which disdained life on Earth and supported its dogmatic affirmations with a literature from bygone times, outmoded despite being declared the eternal Word of God. It seems rather paradoxical that the Bible throughout the history of Christianity remained intertwined with the “heathen” literature and philosophy of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The Renaissance brought these classical treasures to the fore again, and the Enlightenment would rely on them as the basis for its humanistic outlook on life.

The radical materialism of some Enlightenment philosophers, added to the general attitude of pragmatism and scepticism – the right to question anything now declared to be the birthright of any human – led inevitably to the decline of the angry and vengeful God of the Hebrews, whom Christ’s Father of Love had not succeeded in replacing. Moreover, experts now investigated the text of the Bible with the same objectivity as they examined any other text, and found numerous surprisingly human features in the “Word of God.” This, and the increasing resistance against the very human and corrupt mammoth institution that was the Catholic Church, led in the 19th century to “*God’s funeral*,” the title of a book by A.N. Wilson in which he writes: “It seemed as if there were no good arguments left for religion. If, either for emotional reasons or because you believed in religion as a socially conservative cement, you wished to preserve the forms, you could only do so at the expense of the intellect.”⁸

In the present era of “postmodern” confusion, according to the Aurobindian view not the symptom of decadence but the sign of transition and rebirth, most of these problems and unresolved tensions between science, religion and spirituality remain not only alive, they also spread, carried by the necessity of scientific education or training, throughout our technological world. In this situation the words of George Tyrell are worth remembering: “One has to pass through atheism to faith; the old God must be pulverised and forgotten before the new can reveal himself to us.”⁹

“Knocking Man off his pedestal”

In 1543 Nicolaus Copernicus, in his *Revolutionibus de Orbium Coelestium* published when on his deathbed, showed mathematically that the Earth orbiting around the Sun was a more correct proposition than the Sun orbiting around the Earth. As at that time the general belief was that the Earth was the centre of the cosmos, a belief that was an article of faith, Copernicus’ demonstration came as a severe shock, for if it proved to be true Earth would lose its privileged position in God’s creation, of which the Human would no longer be the king.

Especially the Catholic Church, appointed custodian by Jesus Christ of everything true, reacted vehemently to defend verities contained in the books of the Ancient Testament. Did one not read there: “On that day when the Lord delivered the Amorites into the hands of Israel, Joshua spoke with the Lord, and he said in the presence of Israel: ‘Stand Still, O Sun, over Gideon, and Moon, you also, over the Valley of Aijalon.’ And the Sun stood still and the Moon halted, till the people had vengeance on their enemies.” Was this not sufficient proof for all believers that it was the Sun that was moving, not the Earth? And could not anybody see this on any day with his own eyes?

Nevertheless, the Aristotelian and Ptolemaic system had to make place for the Copernican, but only after much conflict and confrontation, the best-known episode of which is Galileo's trial and condemnation by the Inquisition. In the long run science triumphed over superstition, something Scientism vividly remembers and keeps reminding humanity of. For what it calls "the Copernican Principle" means that, as in nature there are no values, everything consists of the same elementary matter and nothing is more or less, higher or lower than anything else. For this reason the Copernican Principle is also called "the Principle of Mediocrity."

In a previous talk* we have already wondered about the strange pleasure some positivist scientists seem to find in denigrating all values and targeting especially humanity for degradation. To quote one example among innumerable ones: the biologist Lynn Margulis writes about "the tenacious illusion of special dispensation" which humanity imagines it possesses, but which "belies its true status as upright mammalian weeds." "Earth is going to die...the Sun is going to die...the Universe is going to die..." is in our contemporary science literature an often repeated litany of perdition. That this is going to happen in billions of years, while the very first life-forms on Earth are thought to have appeared 3.8 billion years ago, and *Homo sapiens* only 2 million years ago, is not taken into account. Such pronouncements do indeed substantiate the truth of the Mother's saying: "Materialism is the gospel of death." What is the fun a certain breed of scientists may find in divulging a conviction meant to belittle and to hurt, while they should be aware that Science is a matter of process which has no room for metaphysical conclusions?

The *New Scientist* of 20 December 2008 examined the question: "Who did most to knock man off his pedestal?" Was it the tandem Copernicus-Galileo who removed us from the centre of the universe? Or was it the tandem Linnaeus-Darwin who put an end to the illusion that humans are created in the image of God and placed them among the animals? But then there is also the question: what is a human being, and what kind of human being is Science talking about?

The Copernican theory

Copernicus' world and reasoning were much more complex and varied than generally assumed. He was after all a man of the Renaissance trying to make sense of the old and new cultural influences crisscrossing through his time. For the central position of the Sun, for instance, he argued in the following way: "In the middle of everything stands the Sun. For in this most beautiful temple who could place this lamp in any other better place than one from which it can illuminate all other things at the same time? This Sun some people call appropriately the light of the World, others its Soul or Ruler. [Hermes] Trismegistos calls it the Visible God, Sophocles' Electra calls it the All-Seeing. Thus the Sun, sitting on its Royal Throne, guides the revolving family of the stars."¹⁰ The mentality of Nicolaus Copernicus seems to have been rather different from the gross materialistic evaluation of nature which uses his name in the formulation of the Copernican Principle.

* See the talk 2012 and 1956: *Doomsday*

What is more, Copernicus, as often thought, did not reduce the Ptolemaic number of circles required to make the solar system go round, he *increased* it from forty to forty-eight, as painstakingly counted by Arthur Koestler in *Sleepwalkers*. And Copernicus stuck to the inviolability of the circle, since classical times the paragon of heavenly perfection and the reason why Copernicus still needed so many cycles and epicycles to make his model fit the data of observation. Therefore, "when we talk today about 'the Copernican system' we usually mean a system of the universe quite different from that described in Copernicus' *De revolutionibus* ... It should be more properly be called 'Keplerian' or at least 'Keplero-Copernican' ... It has been well said that the significance of Copernicus lay not so much in the system he propounded as in the fact that the system he did propound would ignite the great revolution in physics that we associate with the names of Galileo, Johannes Kepler, and Isaac Newton. The so-called Copernican revolution was really a later revolution of Galileo, Kepler, and Newton."¹¹ In fact, Galileo's "spyglass" or "optick tube" did more for the acceptance of the heliocentric system than Copernicus' famous book.

It may therefore be concluded that the Copernican Principle or the Principle of Mediocrity could never have been devised by Copernicus himself nor by one of his contemporaries. It is a weapon in the arsenal of Scientism forged during the decline of Western religion and the ascendance of positivist science. Bertrand Russell, formerly the mouthpiece of anti-religious rationalism, defined the Principle as follows: "The earth is one of the smaller planets of a not particularly important star, a very minor portion of the Milky Way which is one of a very large number of galaxies; and altogether the idea that we who crawl about on this little planet are really the centre of the universe is one which I don't think would occur to anybody except us."¹² Here Russell was speaking about a universe with a very large number of galaxies of which Copernicus could not have had an idea – and Russell himself would probably wonder at the cosmological marvels and riddles that have been discovered since he made his voice heard.

The picture of the cosmos has changed in amazing ways since Aristotle, then Ptolemy, then Copernicus, Galileo and Newton, then Einstein, and it is changing today with the powerful telescopes on and above Earth. Another question altogether is whether all this has taken the human being out of the centre of the universe. If the humans were only material things on planet Earth, one could say yes. But as they are mental and spiritual beings, they will always perceive "the world," including its picture as developed by Science, from the centre that they are themselves.

The naked ape

Was it Charles Darwin, more than Nicolaus Copernicus, who knocked man from his pedestal? In the public mind nowadays Charles Darwin is the giant who thought out the theory of evolution and thereby initiated a radical shift in the conception humans had of themselves. This, like so much else in popular science, is a misconception. It might be said that Darwin was the midwife who, in 1859, presented the theory of evolution to the world, or that he was the cause that all of a sudden the evolution theory became the

focus of attention and consternation. For how to admit that among our ancestors and those of Christ there had been a monkey?

In the first half of the 19th century theories of evolution were in the air. What was more, the great French biologist Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck had formulated one that was fully worked out and coherent, although not fully justified – which was not possible with the means at the disposal of biologists at the time (and even now). Secondly, Darwin's own theory was far from fully justified scientifically. He never touched on the origin of species, even though so proclaiming in the title of *On the Origin of Species*, could only sketch the formation of species by natural selection, and had not a clue about the inheritance of the natural characteristics in animals, now called genetics.

Darwin was also a recluse who did not undertake any long-distance travels after his adventurous five-year voyage on the *Beagle*. The ones who did campaign to spread his ideas were his friends and admirers, most of them ardent freethinkers with T.H. Huxley as their ringmaster. They enjoyed shocking the prim moralistic Victorian society of their time with the new message: that all living beings consisted of nothing but matter, should be studied in the way physics studied material things, and that in the course of the evolution everything had always developed from a previous material something, like the primates from the monkeys and consequently the humans from the primates. The human became nothing but an animal, an evolved “Naked ape” living in a society which was a “*Human zoo*” (titles of books by Desmond Morris).

The human media repeat day by day how animal-like humans are, and those animalised humans, on an average, seem to care little about it. If scientists say so, it must be true. Besides, who still cares about values, metaphysics, or – God forbid! – “mysticism”? The late Stephen Jay Gould, a Harvard biologist and science writer of world-fame, was one of the chief propagators of the idea that human beings were a fluke, not an inevitable outcome of increasing mammal intelligence. He wrote for instance that, if *Pikaia* had not survived, we would not have been here. *Pikaia*, an animal from the Cambrian era, was a soft-bodied darting swimmer, now thought to be the ultimate grandparent of all vertebrate animals. But if any other strategic link in the evolutionary chain had not been there before or after *Pikaia*, we would not have been here either!

Gould: “We are here because an odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures; because the earth never froze entirely during an ice age;* because a small and tenuous species [*Homo sapiens*], arising in Africa a quarter of a million years ago, has managed, so far, to survive by hook and by crook. We may yearn for a ‘higher’ answer – but none exists.” And Richard Dawkins, whose name is now often associated in importance with the name of Darwin, wrote in *The Selfish Gene*: “The argument of this book is that we, and all other animals, are machines created by our genes. ... We are all survival machines for the same kind of replicator – molecules called DNA.”

* At the time Gould wrote these words, it was not yet known that the Earth had frozen over (“snowball Earth”) at least two times, 2.5 billion and 800 to 600 million years ago.

It is now increasingly recognised that the past of the terrestrial evolution has been a concatenation of huge catastrophes and extinctions, but also that after each of those catastrophes life made a step forward, as if the ordeal had been a precondition for its growth. “The evolution of consciousness and knowledge cannot be accounted for unless there is already a concealed consciousness in things with its inherent and native powers emerging little by little,” wrote Sri Aurobindo already in *The Life Divine*. “Further, the facts of animal life and the operations of the emergent mind in life impose on us the conclusion that there is in this concealed consciousness an underlying Knowledge or power of knowledge which by the necessity of the life-contacts with the environment comes to the surface.”¹³ To be able to accept such a conclusion, however, one must have an open, plastic mind, not a mind brainwashed by authority, professional (de)formation or historical formulation of any kind, even scientific. For if the search for knowledge and truth is ineradicable from the human mind, its findings have without exception been proven to be partial or provisional.

The second law of thermodynamics

A third, less often noted argument in the negative view propagated by Scientism is the second law of thermodynamics, the study of the transformations of energy. The first law of thermodynamics is the law of conservation of energy. Its second law is the law of increase of entropy or molecular disorder, which states that, over time, closed systems tend toward greater states of disorder. This increase in entropy must, in the opinion of positivist science, inevitably lead to universal degradation.

“The secrets of evolution,” which are the secrets of life, “are time and death,” wrote Carl Sagan. (Once again we are reminded of the Mother's saying that materialism is the gospel of death.) The Earth, the Sun, our galaxy, the billions of galaxies of our universe: all that is not living but dying. “Indeed, life is about half over. Our estimates are that the first living organisms appeared on earth in the order of 3 to 4 billion years ago, and we know from stellar evolution that our Sun will expand and burn up the Earth in another 3 to 4 billion years, putting an end to everything,” writes Richard Lewontin. George Smoot is even more explicit: “*Coraggio, domani sarà peggio!* (Be courageous, tomorrow will be worse!) ... The long-term future is bleak: entropy will continue to increase ... Every physical process in the universe follows the second law of thermodynamics ... We face a continuous downward spiral of no return.” Entropy is unforgiving. “Many scientists look worried these days ... To become even a guarded optimist, you have to think hard.” (William Calvin)¹⁴

However, the consequences of the second law are valid and verifiable only in case of the evolution of a system that is energetically isolated, in other words: closed. Biological systems are not closed. And is the universe a closed system? ... “When the laws of thermodynamics are applied to living organisms there seems to be a problem,” writes Paul Davies. “One of the basic properties of life is its high degree of order, so when an organism develops or reproduces, the order increases. This is the opposite of the second law's bidding. The growth of an embryo, the formation of a DNA molecule, the appearance of a new species and the increasing elaboration of the biosphere as a

whole are all examples of an increase of order and a decrease of entropy.”¹⁵ “The famous law of increase of entropy describes the world as evolving from order to disorder; still, biological or social evolution shows us the complex emerging from the simple. How is this possible? How can structure arise from disorder? ... There is an obvious contradiction between the static view of dynamics and the evolutionary paradigm of thermodynamics.” (Ilya Prigogine¹⁶)

In one of his first though least known books, *Quantum Questions*, Ken Wilber examines the metaphysics of the 20th century physicists, quoting some of them extensively. His conclusion is clear and convincing. The physicists who worked out the two great revolutions of relativity and quantum mechanics – Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, Schrödinger, Eddington, and others – were also profound philosophers and even, Wilber writes, mystics. The reason was that they felt themselves confronted with the essence of things, with Reality as such and with everything Reality may stand for. For some three decades they were rethinking the foundations of existence, and although their vantage point was that of scientific materialism, they were capable of expanding their horizon sufficiently to encompass the big questions within it, even those beyond Judeo-Christianity.

The great theoretical physicists of the following generation – Dirac, Feynman, Weinberg, Hawking – were very differently focused (at least most of them). To them the big questions led to nothing but confrontational and useless verbiage; what counted was to solve the mathematical problems posed by the accepted paradigms. The rest one could speculate or joke about, but it could only be meaningfully approached after the bases of physics (fundamentally the Grand Unified Theory) would be found. As they saw it, everything had come about by the universal laws and constants, obeying Chance. The following are two examples of this mentality. Steven Weinberg: “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless. ... The effect to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce, and gives it some of the grace of tragedy.”¹⁷ Peter Atkins: “We are the children of chaos, and the deep structure of change is decay. At root there is only corruption and the unstemmable tide of chaos. Gone is purpose; all that is left is direction. This is the bleakness we have to accept as we peer deeply and dispassionately into the heart of the Universe.”¹⁸

The biologists, eager to insert the various branches of their science within the framework of physics, have adopted this view with a vengeance. “If the human accepts this message of science [actually of Scientism] in its full meaning, then he must wake up from his dream lasting thousands of years to discover his total solitude, his radical foreignness. He knows now that, like a Gypsy, his place is in the margin of the universe where he has to live – in a universe deaf to his music, indifferent to his hopes as it is to his sufferings and crimes.”¹⁹ This is a paragraph from Jacques Monod’s famous *Chance and Necessity*, called “a book of desperate metaphysics.”

The way scientists like Stephen Hawking have become superstars, whose slightest pronouncements are regurgitated by the media *ad nauseam*, is pathetic. About Hawking’s latest bestseller, *The Grand Design*, one finds in *Scientific American* of November 2010: “Physics, the book states, can now explain where the universe came from and why

the laws of nature are what they are. The universe arose ‘from nothing’ courtesy of the force of gravity, and the laws of nature are an accident of the particular slice of universe we happen to inhabit. ‘God may exist,’ Hawking told Larry King, adding, ‘but science can explain the universe without the need for a creator.’”

Paul Davies has put it all together: “There is a sizeable group of scientists who ... wish to diminish or even besmirch human significance, and with it the significance of human qualities such as intelligence and understanding. For these scientists any suggestion of a teleological trend or progressive evolution towards consciousness, or even towards greater complexity, is anathema. Their arguments, however, also carry barely concealed overtones of an ideological agenda [Scientism]. In this respect they are little different from those who have decided in advance on this or that religious interpretation of nature, and then shoehorn the scientific facts to fit their preconceived beliefs. Meanwhile, it has to be admitted, most scientists stick with something like position A [the absurd universe] and get on with their work, leaving the big questions to philosophers and priests.”²⁰

Two notes in the margin

In conclusion of this section, the following notes may throw a special light on its contents.

What was the real centre of the universe?

In his classic work *The Great Chain of Being*, Arthur Lovejoy has the following remark: “The geocentric cosmography served rather for man’s humiliation than for his exaltation, and Copernicanism was opposed partly on the ground that it assigned too dignified and lofty a position to his dwelling-place ... The centre of the world was not a place of honour; it was rather the place farthest removed from the Empyrean, the bottom of the creation, to which its dregs and baser elements sank. The actual centre, indeed, was Hell; in the spatial sense the medieval world was literally diabolocentric.” Though surprising, this is logical because hell, the abyss or bottomless pit, was always felt to be located below the earthly life. And Lovejoy quotes John Wilkins, who wrote in 1640 about “the vileness of our earth, because it consists of a more sordid and base matter than any other part of the world; and therefore must be situated in the centre, which is the worst place, and at the greatest distance from those purer incorruptible bodies, the heavens.”²¹

Galileo Galilei seems at one time to have been of the same opinion, if only for matters of expediency. “Galileo circulated *La Bilancetta* in manuscript form and it became a success. It established him as a mathematician to be reckoned with. The academic establishment welcomed him with open arms, and asked him to apply his mathematical ability to what was to them a far more important problem: the calculation of the exact location and dimensions of Hell, as described in Dante’s *Inferno*. Galileo took his assigned task seriously ... Over the course of two lectures to the Florentine Academy he used mathematical arguments to demonstrate that Hell must have a shape like a cone, with the point at the centre of the Earth and the circular boundary of the surface passing through Jerusalem. ... His argument convinced the aristocratic audience, and

he was rewarded with a lectureship in mathematics at the University of Pisa, where he soon realised that he had got the mathematics of Hell badly wrong.” (Len Fisher²²)

Earth special

As we have seen, it is the main tenet of the Copernican Principle that there is nothing special or privileged about our location in the universe. The spiritual view of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother says exactly the opposite. In the present context the following quotations must suffice.

The Mother: “In the immensity of the astronomical skies, earth is a thing absolutely without interest and without importance, but from the occult and spiritual point of view, earth is the concentrated symbol of the universe. ... For the convenience and necessity of the work, the whole universe has been concentrated and condensed symbolically in a grain of sand which is called the earth. And therefore it is the symbol of all: all that is to be changed, all that is to be transformed, all that is to be converted is here. This means that if one concentrates on this work and does it here, all the rest will follow automatically.”²³

Sri Aurobindo: “Earth is the foundation and all the worlds are on the earth and to imagine a clean-cut or irreconcilable difference between them is ignorance; here and not elsewhere, not by going to some other world, the divine realisation must come.” – “Evolution takes place on earth and therefore the earth is the proper field for progress.”²⁴ The Mother’s strong statement speaks volumes : *La terre, on ne la détruit pas!* – the Earth will not be destroyed!

What is a human being?

Scientific materialism reduced the human being to a complex chance agglomeration of material elements, emerging as forms in a coincidental evolution. The image it found pleasure in destroying in the Western mind was that of an original human being given form by a Creator in his own image from the dust of the Earth. This is one of the numerous mythical stories about the origin of man. In this case the image after which he was made must have been that of an anthropomorphic God, in other words a God himself made in the image of man!

Still there is a truth behind this myth.* When writing about the four *varnas* – *brahmins*, *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas*, and *shudras* – Sri Aurobindo mentioned the *Purushasukta* of the Vedas “where the four orders are described as having sprung from the body of the creative Deity, from his head, arms, thighs and feet.” To us, he comments, this is merely a poetical image, but to the seers among the ancient forefathers it was “a revelative symbol of the unrevealed ... To them this symbol of the Creator’s body was more than an image, it expressed a divine reality. Human society was for them an attempt to express in life the cosmic Purusha ... Man and the cosmos are both of them symbols and expression of the same hidden reality.”²⁵

What Sri Aurobindo calls here “the cosmic Purusha” was also known in various

* See the talk *Adam Kadmon and the Evolution*.

ancient occult traditions. Gnosticism knew an Anthropos, Protanthropos, Adam or Adamas. The Kabbalah knew Adam Kadmon, the Primal or Primordial Man, sometimes also called the High Man or the Heavenly Man. Whatever the names given, all could be considered to be the same divine archetype from whose supernatural body the manifestation, the macrocosm, continuously came forth, as well as the human being in his structural complexity, the microcosm. It is because of the existence of this archetype that life in the evolution has gradually taken on the shape which, for the time being, culminates in the human body. Far from being a gratuitous outgrowth somewhere in the universe, the evolution is a process of Consciousness and has an aim, directed or projected by the cosmic Purusha. This Sri Aurobindo called the Supramental Being. Everything in existence is supported by it, guided by it, and will ultimately be fulfilled by it.

According to Sri Aurobindo the human is “the mental being” who appeared on Earth at a certain moment in its evolution. In the popular mind man, as Darwin said, is still a descendant of the ape, but today paleo-anthropology could neither tell you which ape nor when the event took place. Sri Aurobindo had already written in the *Arya*: “With regard to man especially there is still an enormous uncertainty as to how he, so like and yet so different from the other sons of Nature, came into existence.”²⁶ One finds this now confirmed in some of the most recent publications by experts in this matter, e.g. Friedemann Schrenk in *Die Frühzeit des Menschen* [The early times of the human being], and Pascal Picq in *Les origines de l’homme* [The origins of the human being]. Schrenk writes: “The origin of the species *Homo* is one of the most controversial problems in Paleo-anthropology, despite or because of all the new [fossil] finds.” And Picq: “The human does not descend from the chimpanzee or the bonobo, nor the other way around. If we share that many common characteristics, it is because they have been transmitted to us by a common ancestor who lived in Africa some 7 million years ago.” That ancestor remains unknown.

Most important in this context is the Aurobindian view of what one might call “the double movement” in evolution. The manifestation is the result of a plunge by the Divine into his contrary, thereby creating the glorious scale of the worlds, from the highest expressions of the divine Consciousness to the lowest, those of the Inconscient. Thus was established “the Chain of Being”: in descending order spirit, mind, the life forces, and matter. In its urge to regain the divine Origin, the evolution is the slow re-conquest of the original and central Consciousness, ascending the existing scale step by step. The downward movement Sri Aurobindo has called “involution” and the upward movement “evolution.” To accede to a new, higher step in the evolution a double movement is needed: the inner urge on the existing level, obeying the evolutionary aim of re-conquest, and an answer from the corresponding higher step in the involution. What is here summarised in an abstract way means that, in order to realise the urge in Nature to exceed the level of the primates, a response from the worlds of the mind was needed, and not only an answer but a participation, an incarnation of the mental life in the life of the primates. The human is that being that has in him the mental characteristics

from the worlds of the mind incarnated in the material unfolding of the terrestrial evolution.

Human beings are the sons and daughters of Mother Earth. As such they carry in them the evolutionary gradations of their formation – matter, the life forces, mind. Because these evolutionary gradations correspond to the cosmic gradations, the human being is rightly called a “microcosm.” The gradations are concretely expressed in what in yogic experience has called the “chakras,” lined up in the subtle body along the backbone. Through the chakras, the human being is tuned to the universal forces, even though unaware of it. “All the time the universal forces are pouring into him without his knowing it. He is aware only of thoughts, feelings, etc., that rise to the surface and these he takes for his own. Really they come from outside in mind waves, vital waves, waves of feeling and sensation, etc., which take particular form in him and rise to the surface after they have got inside.” (Sri Aurobindo²⁷)

So what is a human being? Present-day scientific materialism assures us that “there is no reason to single out the human line [in the evolution] as special, except for our chauvinistic interest in it. ... There is no way in which we can claim to be ‘better’ than *Aegyptopithecus* [an early monkey] or the Miocene apes, only different. They were well adapted to the world in which they lived, and we are well suited to the world in which we live.” (Mary and John Gribbin²⁸)

The great Persian mystical poet, Rumi, saw the human otherwise – but that was still in what the West calls its “Dark Ages:”

First man appeared in the class of inorganic things,
Next he passed therefrom into that of plants.
For ages he lived as one of the plants,
Remembering naught of his inorganic state so different;
And when he passed from the vegetative to the animal state
He had no remembrance of his state as a plant ...
Again, the great Creator, as you know,
Drew man out of the animal into the human state.
Thus man passed from one order of nature to another,
Till he became wise and knowing and strong as he is now.
Of his first souls he has now no remembrance,
And he will be again changed from his present soul ...²⁹

In the Western “Age of Reason,” Alexander Pope wrote in his famous *Essay on Man* (1733):

He hangs between; in doubt to act or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast ...
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey of all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl’d;
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

In the spiritual view, now as well as in the past, the human being is an incarnated soul, in other words the Divine incarnated to fulfil His purposes on Earth. This has always been sensed and even concretely experienced by people in all climes called seers, great souls, yogis or mystics, even when their mentality was restricted by the knowledge and thought patterns proper to their ages. Now the times seem to have ripened and may bear fruit in the realisation by mature souls of their presence in this material world, transformed by a higher Consciousness. The “anthropocentric illusion” will then be changed into a divine Reality. Which is why Sri Aurobindo had Narad say to Savitri’s royal father:

Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls;
Earth is the heroic spirit’s battlefield ...
Thy servitudes on earth are greater, king,
Than all the glorious liberties of heaven.³⁰

“This alone [the realisation of the Divine] is man’s real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck of surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical universe.”³¹

(Based on a talk given earlier at Auroville)

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Inayat Khan And The Mystic *Nāda*

Nancy A. Barta-Norton

[We would like to preface this essay with a selection of extracts from the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on Music and the part it plays in the development of consciousness and sadhana in general. These have been taken from a compilation published by AIM long back. Most of the Mother's Works are translations of her conversations and writings in French. Writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother published here are copyright of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry-605002, and have been reproduced here by their kind permission]

Mother and Sri Aurobindo on Music

The role of music lies in helping the consciousness to uplift itself towards the spiritual heights. Music too is an essentially spiritual art and has always been associated with religious feeling and an inner life. But, here too, we have turned it into something independent and self-sufficient, a mushroom art, such as is operatic music. Most of the artistic productions we come across are of this kind and at best interesting from the point of view of technique. I do not say that even operatic music cannot be used as a medium of a higher art expression; for whatever the form, it can be made to serve a deeper purpose. All depends on the thing itself, on how it is used, on what is behind it.

.....

Music is a means of expressing certain thoughts, feelings, emotions, aspirations. There is even a region where all these movements exist and from there, as they are brought down, they take a musical form. One who is a very good composer, with some inspiration, will produce very beautiful music, for he is a good musician. A bad musician may also have a very high inspiration; he may receive something which is good, but as he possesses no musical capacity, what he produces is terribly commonplace, ordinary, uninteresting. But if you go beyond, if you reach just the place where there is this origin of music — of the idea and emotion and inspiration — if you reach there, you can taste these things without being in the least troubled by the forms; the commonplace musical form can be linked up again with that, because that was the inspiration of the writer of the music. Naturally, there are cases where there is no inspiration, where the origin is merely a kind of mechanical music. It is not always

interesting in every case. But what I mean is that there is an inner condition in which the external form is not the most important thing; it is the origin of the music, the inspiration from beyond, which is important; it is not purely the sounds, it is what the sounds express.

.....
 There are different levels. There is a whole category of music that comes from the higher vital, which is very catching, somewhat (not to put it exactly) vulgar, it is something that twists your nerves. This music is not necessarily unpleasant, but generally it seizes you there in the nervous centres. So there is one type of music which has a vital origin. There is music which has a psychic origin — it is altogether different. And then there is music which has a spiritual origin: it is very bright and it carries you away, captures you entirely. But if you want to execute this music correctly you must be able to make it come through the vital passage. Your music coming from above may become externally quite flat if you do not possess that intensity of vital vibration which gives it its splendour and strength. I knew people who had truly a very high inspiration and it became quite flat, because the vital did not stir. I must admit that by their spiritual practices they had put to sleep their vital completely — it was literally asleep, it did not act at all — and the music came straight into the physical, and if one were connected with the origin of that music, one could see that it was something wonderful, but externally it had no force, it was a little melody, very poor, very thin; there was none of the strength of harmony. When you can bring the vital into play, then all the strength of vibration is there. If you draw into it this higher origin, it becomes the music of a genius.

.....
 For music it is very special; it is difficult, it needs an intermediary. And it is like that for all other things, for literature also, for poetry, for painting, for everything one does. The true value of one's creation depends on the origin of one's inspiration, on the level, the height where one finds it. But the value of the execution depends on the vital strength which expresses it. To complete the genius both must be there. This is very rare. Generally it is the one or the other, more often the vital. And then there are those other kinds of music we have — the music of the café-concert, of the cinema — it has an extraordinary skill, and at the same time an exceptional platitude, an extraordinary vulgarity. But as it has an extraordinary skill, it seizes you in the solar plexus and it is this music that you remember; it grasps you at once and holds you and it is very difficult to free yourself from it, for it is well-made music, music very well made. It is made vitally with vital vibrations, but what is behind is frightful. But imagine this same vital power of expression, with the inspiration coming from far above — the highest inspiration possible, when all the heavens open before us — then that becomes wonderful. There are certain passages of Cesar Franck, certain passages of Beethoven, certain passages of Bach, there are pieces by others also which have this inspiration and power. Inspiration comes like a flash; sometimes it lasts sufficiently long, when the work is sustained; and when that is there, the same effect is produced, that is, if you are attentive and concentrated, suddenly that lifts

you up, lifts up all your energies, it is as though someone opened out your head and you were flung into the air to tremendous heights and magnificent lights. Music is not necessarily melody. It is a relation of sounds which is not necessarily melodic. Melody is a part of this relation of sounds.

This very high inspiration comes only rarely in European music; rare also is a psychic origin, very rare. Either it comes from high above or it is vital. The expression is almost always, except in a few rare cases, a vital expression— interesting, powerful. Most often, the origin is purely vital. Sometimes it comes from the very heights, then it is wonderful. Sometimes it is psychic, particularly in what has been religious music, but this is not very frequent. Indian music,... has almost always a psychic origin; for example, the ragas have a psychic origin, they come from the psychic. The inspiration does not often come from above. But Indian music is very rarely embodied in a strong vital. It has rather an inner and intimate origin. I have heard a great deal of Indian music, a great deal; I have rarely heard Indian music having vital strength, very rarely; perhaps not more than four or five times. But very often I have heard Indian music having a psychic origin; it translates itself almost directly into the physical. And truly one must then concentrate, and as it is— how to put it? — very tenuous, very subtle, as there are none of those intense vital vibrations, one can easily glide within it and climb back to the psychic origin of the music. It has that effect upon you, it is a kind of ecstatic trance, as from an intoxication. It makes you enter a little into trance. Then if you listen well and let yourself go, you move on and glide, glide into a psychic consciousness. But if you remain only in the external consciousness, the music is so tenuous that there is no response from the vital, it leaves you altogether flat. Sometimes, there was a vital force, then it became quite good. I myself like this music very much, this kind of theme developing into a play. The theme is essentially very musical: and then it is developed with variations, innumerable variations, and it is always the same theme which is developed in one way or another. In Europe there were musicians who were truly musicians and they too had the thing: Bach had it, he used to do the same sort of thing. Mozart had it, his music was purely musical, he had no intention of expressing any other thing, it was music for music's sake. But this manner of taking a certain number of notes in a certain relation (they are like almost infinite variations), personally I find it wonderful to put you in repose, and you enter deep within yourself. And then, if you are ready, it gives you the psychic consciousness: something that makes you withdraw from the external consciousness, which makes you enter elsewhere, enter within. Among the great modern musicians there have been several whose consciousness, when they created, came into touch with a higher consciousness. Cesar Franck played on the organ as one inspired; he had an opening into the psychic life and he was conscious of it and to a great extent expressed it. Beethoven, when he composed the Ninth Symphony, had the vision of an opening into a higher world and of the descent of a higher world into this earthly plane. Wagner had strong and powerful intimations of the occult world; he had the instinct of occultism and the sense of the occult and through it he received his greatest inspiration. But he worked mainly on the vital level and his mind came in

constantly to interfere and mechanised his inspiration. His work for the greater part is too mixed, too often obscure and heavy, although powerful. But when he could cross the vital and the mental levels and reach a higher world, some of the glimpses he had were of an exceptional beauty, as in Parsifal, in some parts of Tristan and Iseult and most in its last great Act.

There is a domain far above the mind which we could call the world of Harmony and, if you can reach there, you will find the root of all harmony that has been manifested in whatever form upon earth. For instance, there is a certain line of music, consisting of a few supreme notes, that was behind the productions of two artists who came one after another — one a concerto of Bach, another a concerto of Beethoven. The two are not alike on paper and differ to the outward ear, but in their essence they are the same. One and the same vibration of consciousness, one wave of significant harmony touched both these artists. Beethoven caught a larger part, but in him it was more mixed with the inventions and interpolations of his mind; Bach received less, but what he seized of it was purer. The vibration was that of the victorious emergence of consciousness, consciousness tearing itself out of the womb of unconsciousness in a triumphant uprising and birth.

... the best way of listening is ... to be like a still mirror and very concentrated, very silent.... And if one can stop thinking, then it is very good, then one profits fully.... It is one of the methods of inner opening and one of the most powerful.

My music resembles the inner movements of the Sadhana. Sometimes a trouble, a chaos, a problem, a wrong movement which seemed conquered returns with greater force. But then, as an answer or as an aid, the growth, the unveiling of the consciousness — and then the final enlightenment. This music is very difficult to understand — especially for the Western mind. To people from the West it often means nothing; nor do they easily feel in them the corresponding movements. Mostly those who can appreciate the Indian Ragas can like that music; for there is some resemblance with the Ragas. But here too from the point of view of form, all conventions of musical laws and notations are broken. ... there are regions harmonious and musical in which one hears something which is the origin of the music we have here ... When one has heard that, even the most perfect instrument is inadequate. All constructed instruments, among which the violin certainly has the purest sound, are very much inferior in their expression to the music of this world of harmonies. The human voice when absolutely pure is of all instruments the one which expresses it best; but it is still... it has a sound which seems so harsh, so gross compared with that. When one has been in that region, one truly knows what music is. And it has so perfect a clarity that at the same time as the sound one has the full understanding of what is said. That is, one has the principle of the idea, without words, simply with the sound and all the inflexions of the... one can't call it sensations, nor feelings... what seems to be closest would be some kind of soul-states or states of consciousness. All these inflexions are clearly perceptible through the nuances of the sound. And

certainly, those who were great musicians, geniuses from the point of view of music, must have been more or less consciously in contact with that. The physical world as we have it today is an absolutely gross world; it looks like a caricature.

Music, no doubt, goes nearest to the infinite and to the essence of things because it relies wholly on the ethereal vehicle, sabda, (architecture by the by can do something of the same kind at the other extreme even in its imprisonment in mass); but painting and sculpture have their revenge by liberating visible form into ecstasy, while poetry though it cannot do with sound what music does, yet can make a many-stringed harmony, a sound revelation winging the creation by the word and setting afloat vivid suggestions of form and colour, — that gives it in a very subtle kind the power of all the arts.

Between them music, art and poetry are a perfect education for the soul; they make and keep its movements purified, self-controlled, deep and harmonious.

An ear of mind withdrawn from the outward's rhymes
Discovered the seed-sounds of the eternal Word,
The rhythm and music heard that built the worlds,
And seized in things the bodiless Will to be....

*

The murmur and the whisper of the unheard sounds
Which crowd around our hearts but find no window
To enter, swelled into a canticle
Of all that suffers to be still unknown
And all that labours vainly to be born
And all the sweetness none will ever taste
And all the beauty that will never be.
Inaudible to our deaf mortal ears
The wide world-rhythms wore their stupendous chant
To which life strives to fit our rhyme-beats here,
Melting our limits in the illimitable,
Turning the finite to infinity.

“I gave up my music because I had received from it all that I had to receive. To serve God one must sacrifice what is dearest to one; and so I sacrificed my music. I had composed songs; I sang and played the *vīṇā*, and practising this music I arrived at a stage where I touched the Music of the Spheres. Then every soul became for me a musical note, and all life became music. Inspired by it, I spoke to the people, and those who were attracted by my words listened to them instead of listening to my songs. If there is anything in my philosophy, it is the law of harmony: that one must put oneself in harmony with oneself and with others. Now, if I do anything, it is to tune souls instead of instruments; to harmonise people instead of notes. I have found in every

word a certain musical value, a melody in every thought, harmony in every feeling; and I have tried to interpret the same thing, with clear and simple words, to those who used to listen to my music. I played, until my heart turned into this very instrument; then I offered this instrument to the Divine Musician, the only musician existing. Since then I have become His flute; and when He chooses He plays His music. The people give me credit for this music, which in reality is not due to me but to the Musician who plays on His own instrument.” –Inayat Khan¹

This quotation by Inayat Khan demonstrates the centrality of music, harmony, and sacred sound in every aspect of his life and teaching. In fact, it could be said that Inayat’s entire life was devoted to the exploration of sound or *nāda*, a concept which would be very familiar to students of Indian philosophy or music. Though there is no satisfactory equivalent of this Sanskrit term in English, *nāda* signifies “sound,” not only in the ordinary sense but also as the primordial vibration which has brought the entire cosmos and the creatures who inhabit it into being: *Nāda Brahma*, sacred sound, the Creator, the “sound-God.” The vital importance of this concept in Yogic philosophy is illustrated by a passage from the *Yogaśikha Upaniṣad* (2.20), where it is stated, “There is no mantra higher than the *nāda*; there is no god higher than one’s own *Ātman*; there is no worship higher than investigation of the *nāda* and there is no higher satisfaction.”²

Descended from a line of renowned musicians, Inayat Khan (1882-1927) was a professional music teacher, singer, and master of *vīṇā*; later, he would say he regarded music as “nothing less than the picture of our Beloved.”³ He took initiation into the Nizamiyya branch of the Chishti Sufi order, an order which is noted for its devotion to sacred sound in *sāma*, qawali, and the repetition of sacred words or phrases (*wazaif* and *zikr*) as a path to union with the Divine Being. As Inayat notes, this “science of sound . . . the most important science in every condition of life” was refined by the Sufis as *wazaif* and *zikr* and by the yogis as *mantra śāstra*.⁴ Later, Inayat followed the deathbed instruction of his Sufi teacher, Sayyed Muhammad Abu Hashim Madani, to “Fare forth into the world . . . and harmonise the East and the West with the harmony of thy music.”⁵ As he progressed along the mystic path, he came to perceive all of life as a phenomenon of vibration, proceeding from the “silent, motionless, and eternal life which is among the Sufis called *zāt*.” Explicating this further, he said, “Each atom of the universe confesses by its tone, ‘My sole origin is sound.’”⁶ Bringing oneself into resonance with that primordial sound can be seen as the purpose and goal of existence: “the music of the spheres is the music which is the source of creation, the music which is heard while travelling towards the goal of all creation. And it is heard and enjoyed by those who touch the very depths of their own lives.”⁷

Inayat was born in Baroda, India on July 5, 1882, into the household of the great singer, master of the *vīṇā*, and educator Maula Bakhsh (1833-1896), whom he later described in his Confessions as the “Beethoven of India.”⁸ Maula Bakhsh was the sole pupil of the Gujarat vocalist Ghasit Khan and also studied with the Brahman Shubramani Ayar; eventually, he created a system of Indian musical notation. Sponsored by the

Maharajah Sayaji Rao Gaekwar, he founded the Gayan Shala or Royal Academy of Music in Baroda. Inayat’s father, Rahmat Khan, learned singing and musical composition from the Sufi Saint Alias; his uncle, Allaodin Khan, studied Western music in London, earning a doctoral degree and later forming a Western-style orchestra at the Baroda academy.⁹ The studies and travels of his youth, accompanying his father and his uncle Murtaza Khan, exposed him to noted musicians from all over India and Nepal and undoubtedly exerted a powerful influence upon him. It is no wonder that music and the mystery of vibration held a deep fascination for Inayat, as for his brothers Maheboob and Musharaff and his second cousin, Ali Khan. Inayat was trained in both Hindustani and Carnatic music and also learned something of the music of the West from Allaodin. Mehta notes that “Prof. Inayat Khan Rahmat Khan Pathan” was responsible for several books on music, including his master work, the *Minqār-i-mūsiqār* (1912), four textbooks *Śrī Sayājī garbāvalī*, *Ināyat fiddle śikṣak*, *Ināyat hārmoniyam śikṣak*, and *Ināyat gīt ratnāvalī* (1903), and for the many beautiful lyrics and songs which he composed.¹⁰ In addition, he produced several recordings which are obtainable today in CD format.¹¹

Beyond his formal musical training, Inayat’s exploration of the *nāda* or inner sound was stimulated by his deep religious study. Though he was raised as a devout and observant Muslim, Inayat engaged in a close study of comparative religions, attentively and respectfully examining the works of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian sages, visiting with fakirs and mahatmas, reading scriptures from the Abrahamic traditions and encountering Muslim scholars and Sufi teachers,¹² as evinced by biographical and autobiographical materials; for him, this always represented an encounter with the distinctive music of these spiritual traditions. While more conservative associates criticised him for befriending people from all faiths, he was staunchly defended by his murshid, who perhaps realised that Inayat’s inclusive tendencies were a preparation for his life’s mission and purpose.¹³ Inayat himself described these meetings and studies as bringing him “the bliss of realisation of the one truth which all religions contain.”¹⁴ His early religious studies laid the foundation for a more fully-developed vision of the harmonic unity of religious ideals. In this period, Inayat felt himself transformed by a deepening absorption in the music he loved, combined with wide-ranging spiritual inquiry and his inner experiences in the presence of great beings.

During his sojourn in Nepal, Inayat had a series of unforgettable experiences with a muni living in a lofty Himalayan cave near Katmandu. Inayat sang and played his *vīṇā* music for him. He reported that the muni subsequently, “without seeming to notice,” gifted him with a revelation of “the mysticism of sound, and unveiled before my sight the inner mystery of music” through the power of his glance and attunement.¹⁵ This meeting revealed the secret of the *anāhad nāda*, the unstruck sound, to Inayat. Vilayat Khan, his eldest son, later described the incalculable significance of this encounter, this awakening to the *nāda*, which he says left an “indelible impression” on his father and actually “shaped his life.”¹⁶ This story clearly illustrates the importance of transmission or darshan; beyond any philosophy or verbal teaching, the wordless, heart-to-heart resonance between teacher and pupil has the power to harmonise and exalt the being of that pupil, catalysing inner transformation.

By his own account in his *Confessions*, at the age of eighteen, his musical abilities were his entrée in to the courts of many rajas and maharajas throughout India.¹⁷ At the apex of his musical career in India, Inayat performed for the Nizam of Hyderabad (Mir Maheboob Ali Khan). Deeply moved by Inayat's music, the Nizam asked to know its secret. Inayat's response, indicating his deep attunement to the *nāda*, explains why his music had the power to inspire the Nizam so profoundly. Inayat told him the key to his music was "*huzur*" or "presence." He went on to say, "As sound is the highest source of manifestation, it is mysterious in itself. And whosoever has the knowledge of sound, he indeed knows the secret of the universe. My music is my thought and my thought is my emotion. The deeper I dive into the ocean of feeling, the more beautiful are the pearls I bring forth in the form of melodies. Thus, my music creates feeling within me even before others feel it. My music is my religion; therefore, worldly success can never be a fit price for it, and my sole object in music is to achieve perfection." He also said, "What I have brought to you is not only music merely to entertain, but the appeal of harmony which unites souls in God." Subsequently, the Nizam bestowed upon him the high honours of his court, a bag of coins, a precious emerald ring, and the title "Tansen," after the legendary musician of Akbar's time.¹⁸

In a passage of his *Confessions*, Inayat describes his encounter with a band of dervishes in a cemetery. When the dervishes finished their meditations and prayers and began to sing, Inayat recounts:

I forgot all my science and technique while listening to their simple melodies as they sang, to the accompaniment of sitar and dholok, the deathless words of the Sufi masters such as Rumi, Jami, Hafiz, and Shams-e Tabrez. The rhapsody which their ecstasies conjured up seems to me so strong and vital that the very leaves of the trees seemed to hang spellbound and motionless . . . Although I did not enjoy the music as much as they, still it impressed me so deeply that I felt as if I were lost in a trance of harmony and happiness.¹⁹

In such encounters, Inayat was experiencing the power of the *nāda* emerging through even the simplest melodies when sung with great devotion.

Inayat's biography furnishes many similar vignettes, which show his deep respect for the spiritual music of all people. For example, he made the acquaintance of Sirdar Dastur Hoshang, the high priest of the Zoroastrians, and subsequently set some Parsi gathas or sacred texts into a *rāga* mode, much to the delight of the priest.²⁰ Throughout his collected lectures and writings, one can find evidence of Inayat's comparative study of the music of all religions and his sincere regard for each form of musical expression.

From the quotations and accounts given above, it is quite clear that Inayat's natural attraction to music and sound, his training in the classical discipline of *rāga*, and his encounter with the mystic science of vibration upon meeting great spiritual beings brought him a deep understanding of what the Hindus call *nāda* or sound. In a seminal lecture, "Abstract Sound," found in a collection called *The Mysticism of Sound* (1923),

Inayat speaks of the "abstract" or "unlimited" sound, which is the Vedic *Anāhad* or the Sufi's *Saut-e Sarmad*. Of this sound he says "the vibrations of this sound are too fine to be either audible or visible to the material ears or eyes." While the *Anāhad nāda* "is always going on within, around, and about man," it is generally imperceptible to people due to active lifestyles and identification with phenomena of the material world.²¹ This is the "unstruck sound," of which Inayat says:

It was the *Saut-e Sarmad*, the sound of the abstract plane, which Muhammad heard in the cave of Ghar-e Hira when he became lost in his divine ideal. The Qur'an refers to this sound in the words, 'Be! and all became.' Moses heard this very sound on Mount Sinai, when in communion with God; and the same word was audible to Christ when absorbed in his Heavenly Father in the wilderness. Shiva heard the same *Anāhad Nāda* during his Samadhi in the cave in the Himalayas . . . The flute of Krishna is symbolic of the same sound. This sound is the source of all revelation to the Masters, to whom it is revealed from within; it is because of this that they know and teach one and the same truth."²²

If one meditates on this inner sound, Inayat says, he will be "relieved from all worries, anxieties, sorrows, fears, and diseases; and the soul is freed from captivity in the senses and in the physical body" becoming "the all-pervading consciousness."²³ In the yogic tradition, it might be said that these meditations would ultimately "find their last resting place in the *nāda* of the *pranava*, wherein is manifest the Brahman, which is no other than the innermost *ātman*."²⁴ A soul that listens often to the *Saut-e Sarmad* becomes peaceful and absorbed in a state of ecstasy, which the Sufis call *wajud*, becoming open to inspiration and the unending revelation around him.²⁵

Inayat also gives some guidelines on how one might gradually over time learn to perceive the *nāda*:

Some train themselves to hear the *Saut-e Sarmad* in the solitude on the sea shore, on the river bank, and in the hills and dales; others attain it while sitting in the caves of the mountains, or when wandering constantly through forests and deserts, keeping themselves in the wilderness apart from the haunts of men. Yogis and ascetics blow sing (a horn) or *śaṅkha* (a shell), which awakens in them this inner tone. Dervishes play *nai* or *algosa* (a double flute) for the same purpose. The bells and gongs in the churches and temples are meant to suggest to the thinker the same sacred sound, and thus lead him towards the inner life.²⁶

Inayat delineates ten different aspects to the sound manifesting through "ten different tubes of the body": "It sounds like thunder, the roaring of the sea, the jingling of bells, running water, the buzzing of bees, the twittering of sparrows, the *vīṇā*, the whistle, or the sound of *śaṅkha*, until it finally becomes *Hu*, the most sacred of all sounds."²⁷

Similarly, in the *Haṃsa Upaniṣad*, these ten manifestations of *nāda* are described as follows:

That *nāda* is produced in ten different ways (in the right ear of the seeker). The first is of the character of the ‘*cini*’ sound. The second is of the character of the ‘*cini-cini*’ sound. The third is like the sound of a bell [*ghaṇṭā*]; the fourth is distinctly like the blast of a conch [*śaṅkha*]. The fifth is like the note produced by the wire of a harp [*vīṇā-tantrī*]. The sixth is that sound of cymbals made of bell metal, *tāla*. The seventh is like the sweet note of the flute [*veṇu*]. The eighth is like the sound of a kettle-drum [*bherī*]. The ninth is like the sound of a tabor [*mṛdanga* or drum]. The tenth is the sound of a thunder-cloud [*megha*].²⁸

Alternately, in the *Nāḍabindu Upaniṣad*, a progression of eleven inner sounds is described:

This sound [i.e. *nāda*], when constantly practised, will drown every sound from outside . . . By persisting . . . the sound will be heard subtler and subtler. At first, it will be like what is produced by the ocean [*jaladhī*], the cloud [*jīmūta*], the kettle-drum [*bherī*], and the waterfall [*nirjharā*]. A little later it will be like the sound produced by a tabor [*mardala* or small drum], a big bell [*ghaṇṭā*], and a military drum [*kāhala*]; and finally like the sound of the tinkling bell [*kiṅkiṇī*], the bamboo flute [*vaṁśa*], the harp [*vīṇā*], and the bee [*bhramara*].²⁹

Just as the *Amṛitabindu Upaniṣad* distinguishes between the Om that one can hear (*svara*) and the one that is not audible (*asvara*), Inayat has represented these two aspects of sound in his teachings. The sound that is “struck” is called *āhata nāda* in Sanskrit, while the sound that is “unstruck” is *anāhata nāda*. In *The Mysticism of Sound*, Inayat states that all physical manifestation is based on vibration, which in Sanskrit could be called *Parā-Nāda* or *Parā Vāk*, which Swami Lakshman Jee has described as the “All- Transcending Word . . . God’s unspoken thought.”³⁰ Inayat recognises that “All creation has come from vibrations, which the Hindus have called *Nāda*; and in the Bible we can find it as the Word . . . On this point, all the different religions unite”;³¹ his son and spiritual successor, Vilayat Khan, later described earthly creatures as sound “crystallised” or “petrified” in matter, yet continuing to “resound.”³² As science attests, on the atomic and molecular levels, even those manifestations which appear “solid” and motionless are in a constant state of agitation at different speeds or frequencies. Inayat explains further that vibration perceived by the hearing is sound and vibration perceived by the vision is light or colour: “the first aspect that makes Intelligence conscious of manifestations is sound; the next aspect is light (colour). The proof of this can be found in the Bible, as well as in the Vedānta.”³³ He explains this concept from both the Hindu and the Sufi perspectives:

. . . all that is audible and all that is visible is one and the same. It is this which is called in Sanskrit Puruṣa and Prakṛiti, and in the terms of the Sufis, *Zāt* and *Sifat*. The manifested aspect is called *Sifat*, the outer appearance. It is in the manifestation as *Sifat* that one sees the distinction or the difference between what is visible and what is audible. In their real aspect of being they are one and the same. According to Sufi mystics the plane of existence where they are one and the same is called *Zāt*, that knowledge of the inner existence in which one sees the source and goal of all things.³⁴

He mentions that each of the elements of which all things are comprised — earth, water, fire, air, and ether — has a very particular quality of sound, and he notes that the commingling of elements also produces a certain “effect” on those who hear it³⁵; there is also a correspondence between the five elements and specific colours and sounds with the *rāga* of five notes.³⁶ Moreover, a network of vibrations forms the fabric of our universe in which all creatures “are connected with each other, visibly and invisibly, and through vibrations a communication is established between them on all the planes of existence.”³⁷ With regard to the “signature note” of the individual, Inayat also asserts that “each person has his particular pitch and each person has his special note on which he speaks, and that particular note is expressive of his life’s evolution, expressive of his soul, of the condition of his feelings and of his thoughts.”³⁸

It is clear that Inayat regards all of nature as an expression of *nāda*, a cosmic symphony, which ordinary people can at least vaguely discern but which creates an ecstatic resonance in the being of the mystic:

When we pay attention to nature’s music, we find that everything on the earth contributes to its harmony. The trees joyously wave their branches in rhythm with the wind; the sound of the sea, the murmuring of the breeze, the whistling of the wind through rocks, hills, and mountains; the flash of the lightning, and the crash of the thunder, the harmony of the sun and the moon, the movements of the stars and planets, the blooming of the flower, the fading of the leaf, the regular alternation of morning, evening, noon, and night, all reveal to the seer the music of nature. The insects have their concerts and ballets, and the choirs of birds chant in unison their hymns of praise. Dogs and cats have their orgies, foxes and wolves have their soirées musicales in the forest, while tigers and lions hold their operas in the wilderness. Music is the only means of understanding among birds and beasts.³⁹

This passage is very much in consonance with the earliest Vedic conceptions of *Vāk*, which was conceived as “an underlying ‘language’ of nature in which the sounds of cows, animals, birds, frogs, drums, and even inanimate objects participated.”⁴⁰ In fact, it is widely known that the notes of the scale in Indian music are named for the sounds of different animals and birds, being derived from *nāda* as expressed in the natural world.⁴¹

This music of nature is found in many of the beautiful verses, prayers, and aphorisms contained in Inayat's *Gayan, Vadan, Nirtan* and in his *Nature Meditations*. Perceiving *nada* is an experience vouchsafed to those who conduct their lives in a natural and pure state: "Those who live naturally, who open the doors of their heart, whose soul is in contact with nature, find nature singing, dancing, communicating."⁴²

In the *Upaniṣads*, there is extensive discussion of the sacred word AUM, which is described in the *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* as "the Supreme Reality" and as "a symbol for what was, what is, and what shall be."⁴³ It is also seen as encompassing the waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and the superconscious (turiya) states in the letters A, U, M, and the *bindu*.⁴⁴ In the *Shvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, it is said:

Let your body be the lower firestick
Let the mantram be the upper. Rub them
Against each other in meditation
And realise the Lord.⁴⁵

Practice of the sacred word is seen as allowing the spark of Self, the Supreme Reality, to blaze forth from its hidden place within.

Following the Sufi tradition, Inayat describes the sacred word *Hu* similar in a similar fashion to the yogic AUM, and equates this with the Vedantists' *Nāda Brahma*:

The Supreme Being has been called by various names in different languages, but the mystics have known him as *Hu*, the natural name, not man-made, the only name of the Nameless, which all nature constantly proclaims. The sound *Hu* is most sacred; the mystics called it *Ism-i Azam*, the name of the Most High, for it is the origin and end of every sound as well as the background of each word. The word *Hu* is the spirit of all sounds and of all words, and is hidden within them all, as the spirit in the body. It does not belong to any language, but no language can help belonging to it . . . This word is not only uttered by human beings, but is repeated by animals and birds, All things and beings proclaim this name of the Lord, for every activity of life expresses distinctly or indistinctly this very sound.⁴⁶

Elsewhere, he refers to this *Ism-e Azam* as the "word of power" and as the "word which belongs to no language . . . because it is a word of nature" which unveils the "mystery of all religion."⁴⁷ He explains the various ways in which the sound *Hu* can be limited or modulated by adding other sounds as prefixes and suffixes to it; he says, "*Hu* is the origin of sound, but when the sound first takes shape on the external plane, it becomes 'A'".⁴⁸ This "u" vibration dwells at the centre of the sacred word AUM. In this, Inayat's thinking seems to be in consonance with the teachings found in the *Upaniṣads*. For instance, in the *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad*, we are told that the "u" is "an excellence, and contains the qualities of 'A' and 'M.' He who comprehends this/Glorifies the flow of philosophy/And rests in equilibrium."⁴⁹

Just as the term *Nāda Brahma* reflects an understanding of God as sound, for the Sufis *Hu* signifies the mystery of Divine Presence, the all-pervading vibration which is sound, light, and life.⁵⁰ In the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, it is said:

Affix to the *Upaniṣad*, the bow incomprehensible, the sharp arrow of devotional worship; then, with mind absorbed in love, draw the arrow and hit the mark, the Imperishable Brahman. Om is the bow, the arrow is the individual being, and Brahman is the target. With a tranquil heart, take aim. Lose thyself in him, even as the arrow is lost in the target. In him are woven heaven, earth, and sky, together with the mind and all the senses. Know him, the Self alone . . . Within the lotus of the heart he dwells, where, like the spokes of a wheel, the nerves meet. Meditate on Him as Om.⁵¹

The unity of existence expressed in 'Advaita Vedānta – in which the arrow (individual), the bow (the expression, Om) and the target (Brahman) are one — is also expressed in Sufi metaphysics as the principle of *wahdat al-wujud*, or the oneness of being; Inayat stresses that in practices such as the Sufi Qawali "is revealed the secret of love, lover, and beloved, the three in one."⁵² Of this philosophy, Inayat says, "the greatest principle of the Vedānta, from which all different beliefs of Hindus are derived, is 'Advaita,' that means 'no duality,' in other words, 'unity.'"⁵³

The topic of music has generated much controversy in Islam over the centuries; however, Inayat declares that "to the extent that a simple Muslim like myself can understand the holy Qur'an, I have found nothing against music there."⁵⁴ The importance of sacred sound, *nāda*, in the devotional life of Sufis in some orders is beyond question. Inayat explains that certain groups of Sufis greatly value music: "The Chishtis, a particular school of Sufis, take a special interest in music. They call it *Ghiza-i-ruh*, the food of the soul, and they listen to the Qawali, the special songs sung at their Suma, the contemplative musical assembly."⁵⁵ As Ernst and Lawrence explain in their excellent study of the Chishtis, Sufi Martyrs of Love, while some Sufi orders prohibited the use of music or vocalised *zikr*, Chishti masters viewed music as a "penultimate stage" on the path of unity or even as "the ultimate mystical experience";⁵⁶ in fact, *sāma* ("listening," audition) is the "integrating modus operandi of the Chishti Order"⁵⁷ Inayat says that Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, the great Sufi saint, "actually lived on music,"⁵⁸ and he refers to *sāma* as "nourishment for the soul."⁵⁹ Other orders, notably the Mevlevi, are renowned for their samas with beautiful chanted recitations or *qir'at* from the Qur'an, Ottoman melodies, and whirling prayer. In his book *The Treatise on Holiness*, a Persian Sufi, Ruzbihan Baqli, connects music with the Covenant of Alast (Qur'an 7:172). Ernst expands upon this as follows:

Several extant books of the Sufis comment on the spiritual benefits of listening to music. 'Am I not your Lord?' was the question addressed by God to the unborn souls of humanity in the pre-eternal time before the world was created. When those human souls answered 'Yes,' they sealed the primordial covenant with God for all time. According to the standard Sufi interpretation, the love of

music is based upon the faint recollection of hearing the beautiful voice of God saying, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ Listening to music therefore becomes a way of transporting oneself back to that moment of harmony with God in pre-eternity.

In connection with this quotation from Ernst, it should be noted that the Sufis place great importance upon listening to the beautiful voice, *al-sawt al-hasan*, which is a tangible manifestation of sacred sound, and which Inayat tells us is indicative of a person’s vibrational level, his feelings, thoughts, character, and evolution, and is “an expression of his spirit”; Sufis associate the beautiful and sonorous voice not only with the pre-eternal address by God but also with the Prophet David.⁶⁰

Inayat’s familiarity with this tradition is illustrated by this poem from his musical treatise, *Minqār-i-mūsīqār*:

The noble Sufis are the swimmers in the ocean of Truth. The sound “*Kun*” still echoes in their ears. They thrash their arms and legs in deep waters, plunge into annihilation (*fanā*) and safety wash up on the shore of immortality (*baqā*).

Marvellous is the state of one intoxicated By the sound of pre-eternity
His milieu is neither land nor sea.

The devotee of *sur* [sound] has been, since the day of pre-eternity,
Fallen at the foot of the Beloved,
By practising godliness, it manifests in the soul,
Whether I find myself in an idol’s temple
Or in the Ka’ba’s precincts,
Inayat has sacrificed his whole being to sound
Prostrate since pre-eternity at the Beloved’s door. . . .⁶¹

Sufi writings on *sāma* describe the manners or *ādāb* to be observed when listening to sacred music, performing music, or acknowledging the performer. The importance of time and place, preliminaries, deportment of the listeners and of the musicians themselves, and other such issues are also addressed.⁶² One such treatise, *The Melodies of Listening to Music*, enumerates many spiritual benefits of listening, including removal of “constriction of the heart,” illumination or unveiling, providing a straight and easy way to the “unfolding of spiritual stations,” and an ecstatic awareness of the Divine Presence.⁶³ In a paper called “*Suma, the Music of the Sufis*,” Inayat himself describes spiritual assemblies in which the participants may join in repeating sacred words or phrases, reciting scriptural passages, playing music, or expressing their ecstasy by means of movement, whirling, or other manifestations (*hāl* or *wajad*), their individual experience governed by their state of spiritual evolution.⁶⁴

Very much in keeping with the regard for *sāma* in the Chishti tradition, Inayat values music not only for its outer aspect but also for the psychological and mystical aspects, believing that “there is nothing in this world which can help one spiritually more than

music. Meditation prepares, but music is the highest for touching perfection.” Inayat notes that those who have “taken music as a source of their meditation . . . derive much more benefit from it than those who meditate without the help of music.”⁶⁵ In fact, he goes so far as to say that “for those who follow the path of the inner cult, music is essential for their spiritual development.”⁶⁶ The reason that Inayat has stated this so strongly is that perhaps more so than any of the arts, music “helps man to concentrate or meditate independently of thought,” acts as “the bridge over the gulf between form and the formless,” and “creates a resonance which vibrates through the whole being, lifting the thought above the denseness of matter” . . . “touching our innermost being.”⁶⁷ He mentions Qawali music, — in which mystical or devotional poems are sung accompanied by instruments and hand-clapping — as a method by which the Sufi “produces his ideal vision in his imagination.”⁶⁸ In other passages, he speaks of the power of music played in “congenial surroundings,” as “nature helps to complete the music, and both work together, for they are one.”⁶⁹ He outlines a more meditative way of being present with music. While the sensitivity or spiritual station of the performer and the quality of the music are certainly relevant, he states that one could even apply this technique when listening to lower “grades” of music. He says one should attempt to “tune oneself to the music.”⁷⁰

In fact, this same technique was frequently used by his son and spiritual successor, Vilayat Khan, who often led chanting from each of the world’s sacred traditions, selected beautiful compositions for his students to listen to in a meditative state, and even conducted choirs singing sacred music. His use of music in this fashion could raise the attunement of students to a very refined state or produce a sense of profound joy or ecstasy. In his talks, Vilayat often referred to the overtones created in vocalising a sacred word as a kind of “Jacob’s ladder” which the chanter could climb, ascending into higher and progressively more refined realms of attunement.⁷¹ Similarly, in his essay on the *sāma*, Inayat describes how Sufis may be moved to the depths of their beings, according to their stations or capacities, by hearing such music: “. . . sometimes his feeling finds vent in tears, sometimes his whole being, filled with music and joy, expresses itself in motion, which in Sufi terms is called *Raqs*.”⁷² The capacity for subtle hearing of the sacred sound varies from individual to individual depending on his station at the moment and his evolution. This practice is not unlike the Hindu bhajan or kirtan sessions.

Inayat explains that “some people are like instruments; when good music is presented before them, they respond, they become attuned to it, they are all music. They take a share in the music . . . and this phenomenon can reach even the highest ideal that is to be expected of music, which is the realisation of the soul’s freedom; what is called Nirvana or Mukti in the East, and Salvation in the Christian world.”⁷³ In Sufi parlance, this would be called *fanā* “‘going through’ or ‘passing through’ . . . to pass through the false conception, which is a necessity first, and to arrive at the true realisation.”⁷⁴

As one of the “struck” forms of *nāda*, music is one with the deity. In speaking of music, Swami Vivekananda once said, “Music is the highest form of art and for those who understand, is the highest form of worship.”⁷⁵ As a Western student of dhrupad, Guy Beck recounts a common saying of musicians in India, “Through *svara* [musical notes] Īśvara [God] is realised”; in his words, “if the music is both understood as

Nāda-Brahma and performed properly in the spirit of Bhakti, then the musician and the listener are said to gain momentum for eventual release and the association of God in both this life and the next.”⁷⁶ Inayat went so far as to maintain that “music excels religion,”⁷⁷ explaining that the religion of a great being is music, is harmony, in which “every action, every word he speaks, every feeling he has, every sentiment he expresses is harmonious; they are all virtues, they are all religion. It is not following a religion, it is living a religion, making one’s life a religion, which is necessary.”⁷⁸ Elsewhere, he maintains that since music “is all, music takes in all,” containing within itself all dimensions and all experiences, that it is “even greater than heaven.”⁷⁹

Inayat mentions the three classical aspects of *sangīta* or music: language, playing, and movement.⁸⁰ Because of his mastery of Indian music forms, Inayat has a great deal of wisdom to share on how *nāda* manifests in the *rāga* form. He recognises that as far back as Vedic times, sages had discovered mystic principles of science and astrology which they subsequently reflected in the *rāga* scales. Referring to classical Indian music, he states that this music has the effect of awakening the intuition and the ability to appreciate beauty. He notes that it trains both mind and soul, as it “attracts the soul, keeping the mind concentrated,”⁸¹ as is also the case with mantra and *zikr* practice.

Inayat also articulates the relationship between music and language: “Language may be called the simplification of music; music is hidden within it as the soul is hidden in the body.”⁸² The *nāda* manifests in the earliest articulations of ancient humans, in the intonations, inflections, and cadences of all languages, which are derived from the music of nature itself.

Nāda can also be perceived in the science of mantra yoga, which employs sacred words, such as the word Om, to effect a transformation in the adept through vibration. Inayat states:

... the Yogis regulated the rhythm of the circulation, of the heart, and of every action of the breath, by the help of the vibration of music, of both tone and rhythm. This brought them from the audible vibrations to the inward vibrations, that is to say, from sound to breath; and for these the Hindus have one and the same word : *Sura*, a name for both sound and breath. It is the breath of an object which may be called sound; and it is the audibility of the breath which may be called voice.”⁸³

The practice of remembrance which Yogis call mantra yoga, the Sufis refer to as *zikr*, which Inayat defines not as “one particular phrase,” but rather, as “a science of words;”⁸⁴ both are vehicles for awareness of Divinity. Inayat Khan points out the numerous similarities between Hindu and Sufi practices utilising sound: “They [the seekers after truth] made these physical atoms, which had gradually become deadened, live again by the help of sound. As Zeb-un-Nissa says, ‘Say continually that sacred name which will make thee sacred’ ... It is the power of the word which works upon each atom of the body, making it sonorous, making it a medium of communication between the external life and the inner life.”⁸⁵ Because there is a vibrational correspondence between the

sacred word and a living reality, the act of repetition serves to awaken and enliven that quality, attribute, or aspect invoked. Hindus may choose to engage in japa practice, repeating sacred names with a japa mala, while Sufis may repeat sacred words or phrases using a rosary or *tasbeih*. One sees that Inayat recognised the power of sound to rejuvenate and heal. Concentrated work with *nāda*, whether following the practices of the Yogis or of the Sufis, has the potential to regulate the workings of one’s body and mind, to bring about healing and deep restoration, to “set the heart in rhythm, which makes even the circulation of the blood regular, [so that] the pulsation and the whole mechanism of the body become rhythmic. When the mind is also set in rhythm by its awakened response to tone, the Sufi’s whole being becomes musical. This is why the Sufi can harmonise with each and all.”⁸⁶ Bodily movements may, in some circumstances, serve to enhance the rhythmic effect of such practices.

A major theme in Inayat’s teaching can be termed the “art of personality.” Developing refinement, sensitivity, and delicacy of manner, called *ādāb* by the Sufis, is not adhering to an artificial or arbitrary set of social customs and conventions. Rather it is the natural outgrowth of a sincere and engaged spiritual practice, arising spontaneously from within, a sweetening of the disposition which occurs when one is attuned to the Divine Presence. Vilayat Khan notes that upon reaching a certain level of emotional attunement, one finds that one “cannot brook vulgar and gross emotions.”⁸⁷ Inayat and Vilayat describe this cultivation of the personality in the language of music, as yet another manifestation of *nāda*:

The art of personality is like the art of music: it wants ear-training and voice-culture. . . . When one looks at every soul as a note of music and learns to recognise what note it is, flat or sharp, or high or low, and what pitch it belongs to, then he becomes the knower of souls and he just knows how to deal with everybody. In his own actions, in his own speech, he shows the art. He harmonises with the rhythm of the atmosphere, with the tone of the person, with the theme of the moment. To become refined is to become musical: it is the musical in the soul who is artistic in his personality.⁸⁸

In another instance, Inayat says “every soul is destined to dance at the court of Indra. The art of personality is, in reality, learning to dance perfectly at the court of Indra.”⁸⁹ When humans touch upon the *nāda*, they will find the natural exaltation and abundant life which Inayat finds throughout nature, from the swaying of the trees to the dance of the peacock to the charming movements of the infant’s limbs. The dance of the soul finds its expression in all inspired works of art, literature, and music. It finds expression in an outlook on life which is open, accepting, and “friendly,” “not only friendly to persons, but also to objects and conditions.”⁹⁰ In his writing, Inayat describes how this natural ecstasy is sublimated and made sacred in the God-intoxicated ones, in whom the divine music or *nāda* finds expression in *Akhlak Allah*, the beautiful personality and manner of those living in the Divine Presence.

Throughout his writings, Inayat consistently describes human relationships in terms of a symphony in which each has a part to play in relation to other the other performers and in relation to the composition as a whole. He emphasises that art of personality, while cultivated in a manner similar to the study of music, is a longer and more delicate process. Striking the appropriate note is a very intuitive process, answering the demand of the moment, an approach quite akin to the improvisational nature of the *rāga* form: “To the ear of the Sufi, every word spoken is like a note which is true when harmonious and false when inharmonious. He makes the scale of his speech either [sic] major, minor, or chromatic, as the occasion demands; and his words, either [sic] sharp, flat, or natural, are in accord with the law of harmony.”⁹¹ Inayat says that in the interests of finding harmony, the Sufi “even modulates his speech from one key to another,” looking at an issue “from the speaker’s point of view rather than his own.”⁹² On a larger scale, Inayat sees the attitude of brotherhood as arising naturally “from a heart that is tuned to the proper pitch.”⁹³

In speaking of the prophetic origins of the world religions, Inayat asserts that “in ancient times, the greatest of the prophets were great musicians,” citing the examples of Narada, Shiva, Krishna, Sarasvati, Orpheus, and David.⁹⁴ By this, he also means that they resonated with and derived their inspiration from *nāda*, the primal vibration. This concept becomes very clear in his story of the Prophet Musa (Moses):

Some say that music was named after Haýrat Mūsā (Moses) – peace be upon him. Once while in the wilderness, he was passing by a stream whose gentle flow was washing over the pebbles and producing various sounds. He received the revelation ‘*Ya Mūsā qe!*’ that is, ‘*Oh Mūsā, wait!*’ The word, *taharnā*, ‘wait,’ means to concentrate, think, or understand. So under the guidance of this heavenly or divine communication, Haýrat Mūsā drew forth music (*rāgā*) from these sounds. If this is indeed true, then by the grace of God this science is divine. How wonderful that it is the very spirit of the soul (*rūh kī jān*).⁹⁵

This story recalls the *nadī*, the “rushing” or “sounding” rivers which are also described as the channels and tubes through which *nāda* is experienced. Mūsā’s audition is accompanied by a flow of inspiration which opens him to the harmonies of the universe which finds their analog in musical expression (*rāgā*). We are reminded that the “language” or music of nature was perceived in a similar fashion by the *ṛṣis* and sages of ancient times.

In speaking of the unity of religious ideals, Inayat continues to develop the analogy of the musical composition: “Every religion strikes a note, a note which answers the demand of humanity in a certain epoch . . . All the different religions are the different notes, and when they are arranged together they make music.”⁹⁶ He refers to “the religion” as the harmonious composition which results when, in rising above narrow distinctions and differences, each religion is able to sound its unique and distinctive note in unison with the whole.⁹⁷ From Inayat’s perspective, unity does not signify uniformity, but rather something complex, dimensional, and beautifully-textured, a grand

and magnificent polyphony, which is not diminished, but rather, augmented by its many different voices. This outlook is tangibly reflected in Inayat’s inspired prayer, *Salat*, and in the Universal Worship service celebrated by the Inayati orders, in which every religion is represented on one altar with candles, sacred scriptures, and which often includes the music or chanting of each tradition.

In accordance with the science of vibration which the Hindus called *nāda*, Inayat recognised that our source, our purpose, and our very substance is the Divine Music. He tells an ancient Eastern story in which God made a clay statue in his own form and requested that the soul inhabit it. The soul strenuously resisted this constraint of its freedom until the angels danced and played their celestial music, and the soul, lost in a state of ecstasy, entered the body in order to apprehend the sublime music more clearly. In commenting on this story, Inayat says “the only reason why the soul has entered the body of clay or matter is to experience the music of life and to make this music clear to itself”⁹⁸; he quotes the words of the great Sufi poet, Hafiz, who stated, “People say that the soul, on hearing that song, entered the body, but in reality, the soul itself was a song.”⁹⁹

Inayat Khan has said, “What makes us feel drawn to music is that our whole being is music; our mind and our body, the nature in which we live, the nature which has made us, all that is beneath and around us, it is all music; and we are close to all this music, and live and move and have our being in music.”¹⁰⁰ By whatever name one calls it – *nāda*, *Saut-e Sarmad*, the music of the spheres – the sacred mystery of vibration is a leitmotif in the work of Inayat Khan, who regarded music as the divine art, the wine of ecstasy, a perfect miniature of the universal order, and the most swift and sure way to realisation.

Notes

1. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*. Vol. II. p. 7.
2. Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology*, p. 92.
3. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II., p. 73.
4. Ibid., p. 108.
5. Biography of Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, p. 111.
6. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II., pp. 13-14.
7. Ibid., p. 88.
8. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. XII, p. 129.
9. Vilayat Inayat Khan, *Message*, pp. 25-29, 40-41.
10. R.C. Mehta, “*Music in the Life of Hazrat Inayat Khan*,” in Zia Inayat-Khan, ed., *A Pearl in Wine*, p. 167-168.
11. Ibid., pp. 169-70.
12. Vilayat Inayat Khan *Message*, pp. 43-44; Biography, p. 72.
13. Biography, pp. 77-78. One instance of Abu Hashim Madani’s defence of Inayat is recounted as follows: “Once an orthodox friend of Inayat was visiting his Murshid and told him how very unorthodox Inayat was. He said to the Murshid that he should teach him the ways of the faithful and also their customs and manner of life, for he seemed to know nothing of

these things. He said: 'The clothes he wears are not such as we wear and he scarcely goes to the Mosque. Among his friends are people of other religions, Hindus, Parsis and Christians and Jews, and with them he feels at home. I should have thought that by coming in contact with your Holiness he would have altered, but he seems to be just the same.' Inayat's Murshid said to him: 'While you see the outward person of Inayat, I see his inner being, I cannot very well tell you what Inayat is and what he is to me, except that he is my beloved mureed and I am proud of him.' This answer made the man silent."

14. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. XII, pp. 132-133.
15. Ibid., p. 139.
16. Vilayat Inayat Khan, *Message*, pp. 43-44.
17. Vilayat Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. XII, p. 13.
18. Biography, pp. 70-71.
19. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. XII, p. 142.
20. Biography, p. 72.
21. Inayat Khan *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, pp. 62-63. In Prince Muhammad Dārā Shikūh, *Majma' ul Bahrain* or *The Mingling of the Two Oceans*, ed. and trans. by M. Mahfuz Ul-Haq. Kolkata: Asiatic Society, 1929, p. 47, Shikūh speaks of the unstruck sound, *Anāhat*, as follows: "First, *Anāhat*, which has been in Eternity Past, is so at Present, and will be so in [the] Future. The Sufis name this sound *Āwāz-i-Mutlak* (or the sound of the Absolute) or *Sultān-ul-Adhkār* (i.e., the Sultan of all devotional exercises)." Inayat says
22. Ibid., p. 62.
23. Ibid., p. 63. In the same discussion, Inayat says "*sarmad*" suggests "intoxication," a word "used to signify upliftment, the freedom of the soul from its earthly bondage" (p. 63). See Bruce B. Lawrence, "*The Early Chishti Approach to Sama*," in Joyce Irwin, ed. *Sacred Sound : Music in Religious Thought at Practice*. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983, p. 98. Lawrence quotes from Hamid ad-din Suwall's *Risalah-e sama* : "Every ecstasy (*wajd*) that is derived from sama' / Is a taste which relieves the soul of anxiety."
24. Beck, *Sonic Theology*, pp. 93-94.
25. Inayat Khan *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 67.
26. Ibid., p. 63.
27. Ibid., p. 64.
28. Beck, *Sonic Theology*, p. 94.
29. Beck, *Sonic Theology*, p. 93.
30. Beck, *Sonic Theology*, p. 162. Sufi Dārā Shikūh (*Majma'*, p. 48) explains the struck sound, *Āhat*, as "the sound which originates from the striking of one thing against another, without its (i.e., sound's) combination into words."
31. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 97.
32. Berendt, Joachim-Ernst, *Nāda Brahma*, p. 34.
33. Khan, Inayat, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p.123.
34. Ibid., p.130.
35. Ibid., pp. 15-16.
36. Ibid., p.124.
37. Ibid., p. 19.
38. Ibid., p. 129.
39. Ibid., p. 50.
40. Beck, *Sonic Theology*, p. 25.
41. Beck, ed., *Sacred Sound*, p. 122.
42. Inayat Khan *Sufi Message*, Vol. VIII, p. 281.43.
43. *The Upanishads*, trans. Eknath Easwaran, p. 203
44. Ibid., pp. 203-205.
45. Ibid., p. 162. Coward and Goa's Mantra quotes Hidayat Inayat Khan, one of Inayat's sons (p. 75): "During our daily occupations or while resting, that universal sound resounds at unexpected occasions, as a result of which we become lost in the eternal *Hu*. The sound of all the planets, the sound of the universe, in fact the only sound there is. The sound of the Divine Presence. If the word 'sacred' ever had a definition, it would be just this: to forget that we wanted to forget ourselves, our egos. And all of a sudden we are confronted with the Divine Presence. Without any want, without any desire . . . and that is why, 'not to be is to be.' Because when one has no more desire, no more want, one is at-one with the Divine "the sound which emanates together with its formation into words. Sabd possesses an affinity with Sarasatī (Sarasvatī) and its Presence."
46. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 64. Sufi Dārā Shikūh (*Majma'*, p. 48) speaks of the aspect of *nāda* called *Sabd*, or (further) the source of Ism-i-A'Zam (or the Great name) of the Musalmāns and the Bīdmukh, or Om, of the Hindu Divines."
47. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. XII, p. 118.
48. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 66.
49. Jacobs, *Upanishads*, p. 120.
50. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 123.
51. Puligandla, R., p. 20.
52. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. 1, p. 43.
53. Biography, p. 84.
54. Zia Inayat-Khan, *Pearl*, p.190. In fact, Inayat poses the question, "Why does music appeal so much to man?" answering that "the whole of manifestation has its origin in vibration, in sound; and this sound, which is called *Nāda* in the Vedānta, was the first manifestation of the universe" (Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, X, p. 222).
55. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. 1, p. 41.
56. Ernst and Lawrence, p. 34.
57. Ibid, p. 36. The authors mention several medieval Sufi books on *sama*. *Usul as-sama* (*Principles of Listening to Music*) which was composed by a mureed of Nizam ad-Din Awliya, and *Risala i-sama* (*Treatise on Listening to Music*) by Hamid ad-Din Nagauri were solely devoted to the practice of *sama*. Ahmad Ghazali's *Bawariq al-ilma* (*Gleams of Illumination*) also treats the subject (Ernst and Lawrence, p. 36). In *Teachings of Sufism*, Ernst has included translations of two texts: Chapter seven of Ruzbihan Baqli's *A Treatise on Holiness* (Ernst, p. 95-105) and a Pakistani guidebook for qawwalis published in 1972, *The Melodies of Listening to Music* (Ernst, 105-117). Ernst and Lawrence identify three types of works on *sama*: essays on *sama*, chapters on *sama* in lives of the saints or theological texts, and mention of *sama* in *malfuzat* or discourses of saints (Ernst and Lawrence, p 36). Elsewhere, Inayat mentions that what is apprehended through the hearing touches us most deeply.
58. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 60.
59. Allyn Miner, "*The Mīnqār-i-mūsiqār* and Inayat Khan's *Early Career in Music*," in Zia Inayat-Khan, ed. *A Pearl in Wine*, p. 188.
60. Ernst, *Teachings*, p. 96; Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. 2, pp. 115, 117, 129; Lawrence, "*Early Chishti*," in *Sacred Music*, p. 97.
61. Zia Inayat-Khan, *Pearl*, p.189.

62. Ernst, pp. 95-117.
63. Ibid., pp. 109-110.
64. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. I., pp. 41-44. Lawrence, in his “*The Early Chishti Approach to Sama*,” quotes Hamid al-din Suwall as saying *sama* and *wajd* are “wings of the spirit by which it takes flight till it reaches the Divine Presence” (Irwin, p. 98). *Tawajud*, *wajd*, and *wujud*, stages of ecstatic behavior or rapture stimulated by “audition,” are all connected with *sama*. Inayat gives a detailed explanation of the varieties of *wajd* or ecstasy a Sufi may experience according to his nature: “There are five aspects of *Wajd*: *Wajd* of dervishes, which produces a rhythmic motion of the body; *Wajd* of idealists, expressed by a thrilling sensation of the body, tears and sighs; *Wajd* of devotees, which creates an exalted state in the physical and mental body; *Wajd* of saints, which creates perfect calm and peace; and *Wajd* of prophets, the realisation of the highest consciousness called *Sidrat ul-Muntaha*. One who by the favour of the murshid arrives at the state of *Wajd* is undoubtedly the most blessed soul and deserves all adoration.” Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. V, p. 32.
65. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 77.
66. Ibid., p. 75.
67. Ibid., pp. 151-152.
68. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. I., p. 43.
69. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 139.
70. Ibid., p. 137.
71. Berendt, p. 34.
72. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. I., p. 43. In *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, Ernst and Lawrence tell of Delhi Chishti Mas’ud Bakk’s *Mir’at al arfin*, where he explains *hizza*, which signifies “both the physical shaking or agitation of the body and the spiritual state of ecstasy.” He says; “Whoever has not agitation (*hizza*) in *sama* will never have the pleasure (*lazza*) of seeing the face of God.” (p. 41). This physical motion is another sign of what Inayat would call the dance of the soul. In his writings, Inayat also details the degrees of “audition” one might experience based on one’s spiritual advancement.
73. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 139.
74. Ibid., p. 250.
75. Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, Vol. V, p. 125.
76. Beck, *Sacred*, p. 126.
77. Inayat Khan *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 75.
78. Ibid., p.149.
79. Ibid., p.143.
80. Ibid., p. 92.
81. Ibid., p. 102.
82. Ibid., p. 52.
83. Ibid., pp. 92-93.
84. Ibid., p.108.
85. Ibid., p.133.
86. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. I., p. 42.
87. Vilayat Inayat Khan, *That Which Transpires*, p. 146.
88. Inayat Khan, *Creating*, p. 10. Elsewhere, Inayat Khan speaks of tuning the personality in the manner that the musician tunes his instrument: “As a mechanism wants winding every day, or a musical instrument wants tuning, so every person, whatever be his life and occupation, wants tuning every day. And what is this tuning? This tuning is the harmonising

of every action of the mechanism of the body, the harmonising of the pulsation, of the beating of the head and heart, of the circulation of the blood; and this can be done by the proper method of repose. When once this is done, then the next step is to harmonise the condition of the mind. The mind which is constantly wandering, which is not under the control of the will, which cannot be made to respond in a moment, which is a restless, this mind should be harmonised; it can be harmonised first with the will. When there is harmony between the will and the mind, then the body and mind, thus controlled and harmonised, become one harmonious mechanism working automatically. Merely bringing the mind and body into order allows one’s every faculty to show itself in its fullness, to manifest. A person begins to observe life more keenly, to comprehend life more fully; and so perception becomes keener and the faculty of knowing develops. (Khan, Inayat, *Sufi Message*, Vol. IV, p. 44).

89. Inayat Khan *Sufi Message*, Vol. III, p. 215; see also Inayat Khan, *Awakening*, pp. 201-06.
90. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 83.
91. Inayat Khan, *Personality*, p. 36.
92. Ibid., p. 36.
93. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. X, p. 266.
94. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. 11, p. 75.
95. Zia Inayat-Khan, Zia, ed., Pearl, p. 189.
96. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. X, p. 255.
97. Ibid., p. 255.
98. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 79.
99. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol. II, p. 79; Vol. III, p. 70; Vol. VII, p.180.
100. Inayat Khan, *Sufi Message*, Vol II., p. 80.

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