

Śraddhā श्रद्धा



21 February, 2012

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Courtesy : Nirmal Sethia Charitable Trust



To see her was a summons to adore,
To be near her drew a high communion's force.

Savitri, 1993 4th rev.ed., Bk.IV, Canto II, pp.363-64

Śraddhā

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

Vol.3 No. 3

21 February, 2012



Sri Aurobindo Bhavan
8 Shakespeare Sarani • Kolkata 700 071

Publication Details

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

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

Annual Subscription for soft copy of the journal : Rs.150.00

For overseas readers : Annual subscription :US\$ 45 inclusive of postal and bank charges for hard copy;

US\$ 20 for soft copy

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

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Published by

Sri Aurobindo Centre for Research in Social Sciences

Sri Aurobindo Bhavan

8 Shakespeare Sarani

Kolkata 700071

Phone : 2282 3057, 2282 2162, 2282 1819

Printed by

Basab Chattopadhyaya

Shilalipi

16 A Tamer Lane

Kolkata 700 009

Phone 22414580

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श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Editorial

Winter has receded bringing in its wake the sweet smell of spring. The soft glow of the sunlight, the aroma of white jasmines, the cuckoo's warm love-note all tend to cast a spell of charm and joy and rapture on our lives and send a thrill through our senses. It is as if 'all Nature is at beauty's festival'. And amidst all this, there is a general hushed expectancy of something greater happening, as if earth is nursing a 'transcendent birth's dumb glorious seed'. And slowly at such

a high signal moment of the gods
Answering earth's yearning and her cry of bliss
.....
A spirit of its celestial source aware
Translating heaven into a human shape
Descended into earth's imperfect mould

Thus took place on this imperfect and suffering earth of ours, the sacred birth of Savitri, the Supreme Divine Mother, our Douce Mère. With her 'fathomless heart' and deep compassion for her children, she 'bore anew the load of mortal breath', 'accepting sorrow and unconsciousness'. Her call to our soul was to forever make new attempts, defy death or fate, and found a mightier race. It is now for us to respond to her call and ask no more, uplift ourselves to those sublimer heights and walk heroically with tireless step towards the splendour of a greater light that she has revealed to us. But even as we do so, we must not, in our frailty, look upon her, as we so often do, as our human mother only. As Nolinida has so simply and beautifully put it 'She is the mother indeed, but the Divine Mother. She wishes us to come to her in the divine way and not in the human way. ... A human way ties us down to the littlenesses and smallnesses of the human feeling'. But '.. in the divine way.. we rise to our highest and deepest stature and receive her fully and integrally, enjoy the plenitude of the delight in her Grace... The Divine Mother even in being transcendent leans down to our human dimensions, becomes one of us, is within us as our own self and with us as comrade and guide. She takes us by the hand, and if we only allow it, teaches us how to transcend the little humanity we are made of and grow into own nature and substance through the miracle of her love...'. for '.. to feel

love and oneness is to live'. We must remember that we owe a debt to the Supreme Divine.

'A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:
His nature we must put on as he put ours;
We are sons of God and must be even as he:
His human portion, we must grow divine'.

Due to unavoidable reasons, we could not publish the sequel to Kittu Reddy's series of articles on 'Indian Democracy'. However, we hope to feature it in the April issue.

Huta, 'a very special child' of the Mother, as so aptly referred to by Shraddhavan, passed away in the Ashram Nursing Home on 17 November, 2011. We are grateful to Shraddhavan for permitting us to reprint in this number the very moving tribute to her. We specially thank Ms Anjali Jaipuria, Managing Trustee, Mother's Institute of Research, New Delhi for her kind permission to include in this issue the selected extract from Dr. Kireet Joshi's book '*Indian Identity and Cultural Continuity*', published by the Institute in 2011. We once again thank Samata in the Studio for helping us to choose the right painting for the cover of our journal and to our ever obliging friend, Chaitanya, in the Archives for providing its high resolution image. We are grateful to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, for allowing us to publish the following :

the first few pages of the mss. of the book on *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo taken from the Ashram e-library resources
the photograph of the Mother from the Ashram catalogue of photos
the painting *Divine Presence* by Usha R Patel to be used for the cover of the journal

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgements and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

The Mother

Sri Aurobindo

There are two forces that alone can effect in their conjunction the great and difficult thing which is the aim of our endeavour, an ^{entire} and unifying aspiration, from below and a supreme force from above that moves.

But the supreme force will act only in the conditions of the Light and the Truth; it will not act in the conditions ^{laid upon it by} of the falsehood and the Ignorance. For if it were to yield to the demands of the falsehood, it would defeat its own purpose.

There are the conditions of the Light and Truth, the sole condition under which the highest Force will descend, and it is only the very highest supermental Force descending from above and opening from below that can victoriously handle the physical Nature and annihilate its difficulties ... There must be a total and sincere surrender;

there must be an exclusive self-opening to the divine Power; there must be a constant and integral choice of the Truth that is descending, a constant and integral rejection of the falsehood of the mental, vital and physical Powers and Appearances that still rule the earthly Nature.

The surrender must be total and seize all the parts of the being. It is not enough that the psychic should respond and the higher mental accept or even that the inner vital submit and the inner physical consciousness feel the influence. ^{There must be in} no part of the being, even the most external, anything that makes a reserve, anything that hides behind ^{doubts} confusion and subterfuges, anything that revolts or refuses.

If part of the being surrenders, but another part reserves itself, follows its own way or makes its own conditions, then each

place of the true aspiration ~~add~~ ^{add} mix them with it and try to impose
them on the Divine Shakti, then it is idle to invoke the divine Grace
to save you

If you open yourself on one side or in one part to the Truth and on another side are constantly opening the gates to hostile forces, it is vain to expect that the divine Grace will abide with you. You must keep the temple clean if you ~~wish~~^{want} to dwell there the living Presence.

If each time the Power witnesses and brings in the Truth, you turn your back on it and call ^{on} again. The falsehood ~~is~~ that has been expelled, it is ~~not~~ the divine force that you must blame for failing you, but the falsity of your own will and the imperfection of your own surrender.

If you call for the truth and yet something in you chooses what is false, ignorant and undivine or even simply is unwilling to report it altogether, then always you will be open to attack and the Grace will recede from you.

Detect first what is false ^{or false} in you and persistently reject it, then alone can you rightly call for the divine Power to transform you.

Do not imagine that truth and falsehood, darkness light and darkness,
and cowardice and selfishness can be allowed to dwell together in ~~good~~
the house consecrated to the Divine. The transformation must be integral,
and integral therefore the rejection of all that withstands it.

Reject the false notion that the Divine Power will do and is bound to be everything for you at your demand, ^{and} when though you do not satisfy the conditions laid down by the Supreme. Make your demands true and complete, then only will all else be done for you.

Regret too the false and idolatrous expectation that the divine Power will do even the surrender for you. The Supreme demands your surrender to her, but does not impose it; you are free at every moment to tell the unchangeable transformation to forget, or recall your self-giving; if you are willing to suffer the spiritual consequence. The surrender must be self-made and free; the surrender of a living being, not of an inert automaton or mechanical tool.

An inert passivity is instantly confused with the real renunciation of an inert passivity nothing true and powerful can come. It is the inert passivity of physical Nature that leaves it at the mercy of every obscure or undivine influence. A glad and strong ^{and helpful} submission to the working of the Divine Force, the obedience of the illumined disciple of the Truth, of the inner Warrior who fights against obscurity and phallos, of the faithful servant of the Divine

This is the true attitude and only those who can take ^{good} keep it, preserve a faith ^{and} ~~and~~ by disappointments and difficulties and ^{then} ~~there~~ through the ordeal to the extreme victory and the great transmutation.

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

In Yoga also it is the Divine who is the sadhaka, and the sadhana; it is his Shakti with her light, power, knowledge, consciousness, Ananda acting upon the adhara only, when it is

opened to her, pouring into it with these divine forces that makes the Sadhana possible. But so long as the lower nature is active the personal effort of the sadhaka remains necessary.

The personal effort required is (1) aspiration vigilant, constant, increasing - the mind's will, the heart's seeking, the ascent of the vital being and nature, the ^{only to} ~~nothing~~ open and make plastic of the physical consciousness and nature;

(2) rejection of the movements of the lower nature, —
rejection of the mind's ideas, passions, preferences, habits, constructions, so
that the true knowledge may grow free from all about
mind, — the vital nature's desires, cravings, sensations, passions, selfishness,
pride, arrogance, lust, greed, jealousy, envy, demands, etc. so that
the true power and joy may grow from above into a calm, large,
strong and consecrated vital being, — the physical nature's stupidity, doubt,
obstinacy, obstinacy, foolishness, ignorance, unwillingness to change, tenacity,
that the true stability may establish itself in a body growing always more
lively.

31) remainder of oneself and all one is and has ^{and} every part
of the consciousness and every movement to the Divine and the Shakti.

In proportion as the surrender and self-consecration progresses the sadhaka becomes conscious of the Divine Shakti doing the sadhana, pouring into him more and more of herself, founding within the freedom and perfection of the Divine Nature. The more this conscious process replaces his own effort, the more rapid and true becomes his progress. But it cannot completely replace the necessity of personal effort until the surrender and consecration are pure and complete from top to bottom. Note that a transient surrender refusing to fulfil the conditions and calling on God to do ^{and save me all the trouble and struggle} everything is a self-deception and does not lead to freedom and perfection.

To walk through life armoured against all fear, peril and disaster only two things are needed, two that go always together, the grace of the Divine Mother and on your side an inner state made up of faith, sincerity and surrender.

Let your faith be pure, candid and perfect. An egoistic faith in the mental and vital being tainted by ambition, pride, vanity, mental arrogances, vital self-will, personal demand, desire for the petty satisfactions of the lower nature is a low and soiled obscured flame that cannot burn upwards to heaven. Regard your life as given ^{only} for the divine work and to help in the divine manifestation. Desire nothing but the purity, force, light, wisdom, calm, Ananda of the divine consciousness and its insistence to transform and perfect your mind, life and body. Ask for nothing but the divine spiritual and supramental Truth, its realisation on earth and in you and in all who are called and chosen and the conditions needed for its creation and its victory over all opposing forces.

Let your sincerity and surrender be genuine and ^{entire} complete. When you give yourself, give completely, without demand, without condition, without reservation, so that all in you shall belong to the Divine Mother and nothing be left to the ego or given to any other.

The more complete your faith, sincerity and surrender, the more will grace and protection be with you. And when the grace and protection of the Divine Mother are with you, what is there that can touch you or whom need you fear? A little of it even will carry you through all difficulties, obstacles and dangers, surrounded by its full presence you can go securely on your way because it is her,

careless of all menace, unaffected by any hostility however powerful whether from this world or from worlds invisible. Its touch can turn difficulties into opportunities, failure into success and weakness into unfaltering strength. For the grace of the Divine Mother is the sanction of the Supreme and now or tomorrow its effect is sure, a thing decreed, inevitable and irrevocable.

Sri Aurobindo

August 1., 1927.

VANDE MATARAM

Srimat Anirvan

Sri Aurobindo has bequeathed to us the Mantra of Mother worship.

“Om Anandamayee, Chaitanyamayee, Satyamayee Parame”

Thou art Omkara, thou art manifested Bliss, manifested Consciousness and manifested Existence –Truth art thou, Oh Supreme Mother.

In this Mantra, the Mother has clearly been addressed as Brahmayee or Manifested Brahman. Brahman is the absolute Purusha and the Brahmayee Mother is the Absolute Prakriti. The conception of Brahman is identified with the concept Sat, Chit and Ananda. And the Mother is perceived as the Anandamayee, Chaitanyamayee and Satyamayee. There is no difference in the *essence* of the two ideas; the difference lies only in the sequence. Additionally, in the Mother’s Mantra, there is the reference of ‘mayee’, an implied suggestion of Manifested or ‘maya’. Brahman is essential Sacchidananda and the Mother is the manifested Sacchinanada. Brahman is the Supreme Purusha and the Mother, as the manifestation of Brahman, is His intrinsic Shakti — His Para Prakriti. Brahman is Shaktiman and the Mother is His Shakti. Essentially, there is no difference between Shakti and the Lord of Shakti — the distinction is only in the specific and relative expressions of the Cosmic Oneness.

That Sri Aurobindo has introduced the Mother, the embodiment of Brahma Shakti, by arranging the Brahmic aspects in a reverse order, is to be noted. This gives us a hint of a double aspect. First, Brahman and His Shakti are not only identical but are interwoven with each other. This has been made transparent in the hexagonal symbol consisting of an intertwined upward and a downward triangle, which Sri Aurobindo has used to represent his vision of the Truth Revealed.

Secondly, in this Mantra, as is apparent, we find the sequence in the reverse order. The Mother is addressed first as the Embodiment of Bliss, then of Consciousness and lastly of Truth. A little introspection would reveal that following this reverse concept is very conducive to our Sadhana.

In our day-to-day life, our mother, first and foremost, is the embodiment of Ananda — of ecstasy — the source of love and beauty. It is the mother, who brings us near to our father. Mother is Bliss, Father is Consciousness or Knowledge and their inseparable union is the Truth of our existence.

Moreover, there are two aspects of the Blissful nature of Mother. In one, she is verily the Universal Mother, in the other, she is the Beloved of the Supreme Purusha. Both together constitute her aspect of Maheswari or Parameswari. In one form, she is Durga as well as Radha. In this connexion, we can bring to our mind the *Durga Stotra* of Sri Aurobindo and *Radha’s Prayer* by Sree Ma. Together they form the twin petals of the same lotus of Ajna Chakra.

The Mother, in one Universal Form, represents the multitudinous creation. She has descended for the accomplishment of Divine Work in different families and different countries from age to age. India has worshipped the Divine Mother from time immemorial. Worship of the Mother is a special trait of the country, especially in Bengal. We see mother not only as one who gave us Life, and brought us up but also in the extensive vastness of the country that nourished and cherished our Soul and beyond that we even see her as the Universal mother of All. Everywhere it is the one and only Mother. We worship her with the Mantra of Fire — VANDE MATARAM; we utter the Mantra of worship of the Divine Mother;

“Om Anandamayee, Chaitanyamayee. Satyamayee Parame!”

The Purpose Of The Mother's Embodiment Upon Earth

Kalpana Bidwaikar

At the head she stands of birth and toil and fate,
In their slow round the cycles turn to her call;

.....

She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.
The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,
A power of silence in the depths of God;
She is the Force, the inevitable Word,
The magnet of our difficult ascent,
The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,
The Light that leans from the unrealised Vasts,
The joy that beckons from the impossible,
The Might of all that never yet came down.

(Savitri, 4th rev ed, 1994, Bk 3,Canto 2, p.314)

Sri Aurobindo has given us a glimpse of the Mother in the lines quoted above. The description of the Divine Mother is precisely the description of the one whom we adore as the Mother. Sri Aurobindo perceives her as the "Force", the "golden bridge", the "wonderful fire", "The Sun", the "Light", the "Might" and anything and everything that we as human beings can suppose or realise. In his book *The Mother* Sri Aurobindo describes Her as "the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence, one and yet so many-sided that to follow her movement is impossible even for the quickest mind and for the freest and most vast intelligence." (SABCI, vol.25, p.19) The question before us is if the Mother is herself the Divine why did she take birth on earth? What was the need for her to take birth on earth at this hour?

The Mother herself explains the importance of her birth to one of her disciples "Sri Aurobindo has arranged everything so that my work becomes easy. Sri Aurobindo has the key to open this region of the Inconscience. He turns the key to open the door and illumines my way, and very gently I enter to infuse

the Force, the Light and the Divine Ananda into the body of this inert and obscure matter. When it is touched by this transforming light, the atoms that constitute this matter awake to a New Consciousness. Like this the work continues and spreads or multiplies... Sri Aurobindo is the Soul of Matter, the aspiration of the whole humanity. He is the Light in Matter or the Spirit incarnated in Matter. Sri Aurobindo has separated himself from the Supreme and has plunged in this matter, in a body, with this load of inconscience and ignorance upon himself — to awaken them to the divine life. For this He has invoked the Supreme, the Grace, to descend here below on this earth to help in His work. That is why, having heard His call, I have come down here into matter in a physical body into this world of pain, suffering and death... It is because of Him that I have descended. It is this intense aspiration of matter from below that He has sent up and the Grace has responded by a descent." (The Supreme: p. 68)

From the above explanation given by the Mother regarding her birth it is clear that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo worked for the earth in collaboration. They have separated themselves from the Supreme to establish a New Consciousness here on earth. It is this New Consciousness that is significantly related to the Mother's birth in Paris, her stay in Japan and her migration to India. The Mother, as we know, was born on 21st February 1878 in Paris. Significantly, her parents moved to Paris from Egypt just a year before her birth. In one of his writings, Nolini Kanta Gupta highlights the importance of the Mother's birth in France and her subsequent stay in Japan and then in India. (CWNKG Vol 6:pp.3-8) France, during those days was the focus of the intelligentsia. The level of the mind was expressed at its best and highest. The Mother spent most of the time with the best of poets, philosophers, scientists and thinkers while she was in her youth. The Mother's interaction with such elevated minds helped to infuse the New Consciousness at the level of the Mind. As the mind was at its highest, it had reached its acme and was thus receptive towards the New Consciousness. It was important to start with the Mind because any new idea first seizes the mind and is then transferred to and accepted by the other members of one's personality. Mind follows and understands the new idea and becomes capable of commanding the vital and physical parts to accept it. It is with this aim that the Mother took birth in the midst of the representatives of the highest Mind, and her force of the New Consciousness operated at the level of the Mind.

In the next phase of her earthly life, the Mother moved to Japan. But why did the Mother choose to go to Japan? The answer to this question is given by Nolini Kanta Gupta as according to him Japan was at the peak of its vitality at that time. The Japanese always strove towards perfection in art, aesthetics and

focused on the perfection in life. Zen system of meditation was quite popular in Japan which was different from other meditation systems. In this Zen system one has to contact the inner consciousness; thus in Japan, too, the Mother found the ground ready to act upon the vital and bring in the New Consciousness. The Mother was able to penetrate into the vital world in Japan as she was able to create a new vital world. As the Mother is the force in action, her presence alone was a decisive action from the Supreme wherever she went.

Having worked at the level of the mind and the vital the next work was to be done at the level of the physical. A solid *âdhâr* or base is required for the working of the mind and vital and now it was the turn of the physical to receive the Mother's force. Therefore, the Mother finally arrived in India. Here she established an ashram where she laid great emphasis on the physical education. To hold the force of the New Consciousness a strong *âdhâr* was needed as a weak *âdhâr* would get shattered under the mighty force. However, it was not enough for the force and the light of the Mother to penetrate. One had to identify with it and this identification could take place only when the psychic was open. With the psychic command the mind, the vital and the physical could accept and identify with the New Consciousness. Thus the psychic plays an important role towards acquiring a higher consciousness. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo describes the Mother as the "magnet of our difficult ascent" and it is the psychic that feels this magnetic force and helps us to ascend towards our future goal. Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga aims at the divine life upon earth and He and the Mother worked towards the fulfilment of this yoga. The Mother's words throw light regarding the purpose of her embodiment upon earth as "...in the terrestrial evolution, man, who is emerging out of the inconscience and ignorance, is guided by the Supreme. And the Supreme, in order to manifest His reign upon earth, labours to uplift the human consciousness so as to establish the Divine Consciousness; and for this He does not delegate someone but He Himself manifests physically, even in the Ignorance to accomplish His work. And it is I who have been appointed to raise up man and the creation out of this Inconscience." (The Supreme: p. 5)

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Spiritual Principles Of Management

Ananda Reddy

I am not a management expert, but I grew up under an expert of management; she was the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry. She had not studied in any management school or attended seminars on management principles, but for almost 47 years she managed a growing institution, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and in later years also Auroville, giving to each inmate not only an opportunity to grow in his/her innate capacities but also to express his/her inner and outer nature, to develop his/her integral consciousness, his/her inner being, his/her soul. I lived in the Ashram from 1958 till 1973, that is, for about 15 years, during the Mother's ministry. If I think of management by consciousness and that too, a spiritual consciousness, then the Mother provided, for me, the perfect example of spiritual management. There is, for me, no other person who could have been a better example. This experience has given me both the courage and the clarity to attempt to explore—through some in-search and research — what could probably be considered as the new principles of management by consciousness, in the light of the Mother's ministry.

The quadruple principles of her management of the most diverse conglomeration of human beings both at the Ashram and Auroville could perhaps be summarised as wisdom, power, harmony and perfection. These principles were all wrapped in divine love and not in a shroud of fear, the fear of the board of management or the boss. I guess these principles could be considered, seen from a particular angle, as the foundation for management by consciousness. What follows here is mostly based on personal experience, observation, and reflection. The task of interpreting and connecting this reflective account of essential principles of management by consciousness as applied during the Mother's ministry in the Ashram with the contexts prevailing in organisations and institutions elsewhere is left to a management expert!

Wisdom

The central guiding principle of action of such a management by consciousness was: "All can be done if the God-touch is there" (Sri Aurobindo,

Savitri). When we were in the Ashram in our childhood, we always felt confident of ourselves in work, in play, in life because we had the immense faith in this spiritual dictum given by Sri Aurobindo. In a different manner, the same principle forms one of the central guidelines of the Bhagavad Gita itself :

*Yatrayogeshwarah Krishna, yatrparthodhanurdharah,
Tatrashreervijayobhutirdhruva, nithirmathirmama
(Bhagavad Gita, chapter xviii, 78)*

("Wherever there is Sri Krishna, the master of Yoga, and Arjuna, the wielder of the bow, there shall be found wealth, victory, general welfare and unwavering justice and ethical sense.")

When the human effort, here represented by that of Arjuna, is supported or sustained by the wisdom of the total vision and a spiritual consciousness, of the highest order, here represented by Sri Krishna, then there is not only the well-being of the individual but also of the welfare of the community and the nation. But, unfortunately, modern man has alienated himself from this ancient truth of Nara-Narayana, of the combined action of man and God to manifest and to fulfil God in life.

Modern culture, as we understand it, grew out of the 18th century Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. It gained universal approbation in the late 19th century through the movement of French Revolution and came to its own in the Industrial Revolution and the Industrial Socialism of the 20th century. It promised to "emancipate humanity from natural and religious limits" (Griffin, p. 43). But instead of liberating humanity, modern culture seems to have brought humanity to the edge of self-destruction.

"We now face the slow threat of the ecological poisoning and a rapid threat of nuclear holocaust. In the meantime, great energies of human exploitation, oppression, and alienation are unleashed across the 'three worlds'.

"The modern dream has turned a full circle. Seeking to free itself, modern scientific progress has become precariously uprooted — from the earth, from the human community and its tradition, and above all from the religious mystery" (Ibid, p. 44).

But luckily for us, the children who grew up at the Ashram, we were outside this scope of modernity's self-destruction. We were at all times wrapped in a Divine Mystery. The Mother showed us constantly that it is the Divine who is behind all expressions of life — be they political, cultural, religious, economic or social. In fact, as we grew up life itself was slowly unravelling the hidden secrets of Divine Presence. And to that Presence we learnt to surrender

progressively. We were ready at all times to give in to her will and wisdom in matters small and big.

To give you an example of how we were taught to surrender when we were children. Whenever I had to go to Chennai or any other place, I used to write to the Mother seeking her permission and also telling her the details of the purpose of my going. She would graciously give me the permission, writing on the letter 'blessings'. That was perhaps an insignificant thing. But even in more important matters, which changed the destiny of my life, I learnt to surrender to her guidance. Here is an example. After completing my education in the Ashram, I was planning to go to the USA for my higher education. So I wrote to the Mother on 17.1.1969 seeking her decision regarding my desire to go to the US. I had even communicated to the authorities at Monmouth College, Illinois, USA, through my father who was there at that time, that I would be joining from the winter semester. Still, after posting the official admission forms to the University, I wrote to the Mother: "I await your decision, your choice, your advice, your will and your blessings" indicating that the final decision would be hers. She replied on the same day :

"I can tell you immediately that all depends on what you expect from life. If it is to live an ordinary or even successful life according to the usual old type, go to America and try your best.

"If, on the contrary, you aspire at getting ready for the future and the new creation it prepares, remain here and prepare yourself for what is to come.

"You will answer on your birthday. Blessings." (Unpublished letter)

For modern youngsters it may sound funny and they could ask me: "Couldn't you decide for yourself? We are free to decide our own destiny, is it not?" But that was not the attitude we had in our younger days; we were learning the spiritual lesson of the process of surrendering to the higher consciousness represented by the Mother. After all, yoga begins with surrender and ends with surrender to the Divine. So for us it was not a teaching, it was more a living process of a spiritual growth.

In this example we see that one of the Mother's foundations of working with human beings was self-offering and conscious surrender to the Divine consciousness. Surrender to the Divine was the only security of our life and in her guidance we had found the meaning of all our action. And most often, her guidance, her replies to our queries would come as a happy surprise (as seen in the letter quoted above), perhaps instructing our minds that it cannot plan and execute as it wants; that there is a higher consciousness which, when

surrendered to, guides us cutting across all logic and reasoning of the human mind.

On one side we felt her immense grace and on the other we felt sweetness. She was indeed the central authority of the Ashram's management but she did not act as a CEO, blind with the power of professional egoism. Her authority was centred in her having a far superior spiritual consciousness than the human, which could regard all devotees and non-devotees with equality and equanimity. She kept in view the totality of work and the needs of managing the Ashram and Auroville on different levels such as the physical, the psychological and the spiritual. She was at all times generous, sweet, loving, understanding and forgiving, but at times also strict where there was hypocrisy, insincerity or falsehood.

As an organisational leader, she set high examples of aesthetic sense, work discipline, inter-personal relations, positive attitude, and a high aspiration for change and transformation of the lower nature.

Apart from her dealings with the human beings, the other fundamental lesson that we learnt from her wisdom was the equation between spirit and matter. We came to understand that matter is the body and form of the Spirit. Because of this profound equation, which became a living truth of our life, we knew that our own body is verily the temple of God. Going further, if that were the truth on the individual level, then it should be so on the collective level too; human society is also an embodiment of the collective or the group-soul. Further, Nature and the whole earth itself is an embodiment of the Spirit, a physical extension of the Divine. All is a single whole, one Divine Consciousness.

Power

This changed worldview, a recovery of the Vedic vision, definitely determined our way of thinking, feeling and acting. In the earlier centuries, religion had made the power of God more powerful than that of Divine Love. This belief in an omnipotent and intolerant God was reflected in the ruthless attitudes of the human managers who dealt inhumanly with their workers and employees. The tendency to believe that God is only transcendental and not immanent ultimately led to the stage of thinking that there is no God. And atheism seemed to be the best solution, for the atheist would be more humane and rational and less despotic. But, unfortunately, it was not to be so. Bereft of belief in the Divine, man succumbed more to his demoniac ego, became immoral and violent and his relations with his colleagues and subordinates in the work area suffered more disastrous consequences.

But having been given more of a unitarian vision of existence, we learnt to be non-coercive and more collaborative in our relationships with others. In fact, even those who were in charge of some of the Ashram departments were discouraged from dominating or imposing their views upon their co-workers. All tried to carry out with the utmost sincerity the work that was given to him/her by the Mother.

Each tried to follow her dictum without ever doubting her decision's wisdom or questioning her attitude. Each tried his/her best way to follow what the Mother would want in a particular situation. Nothing else mattered; no other principles of management were applicable. Personal feelings, differences of opinion were all drowned in the wave of harmony that originated from her consciousness. Those who were not receptive to the command of the higher consciousness or those who resisted or opposed her wish and will often did revolt, but surely suffered disharmony, despair and depression in their own inner being.

The Mother was slowly establishing an ideal institution with exemplary management principles while the world in general languished in dualistic and materialistic worldviews. Convinced by dualism which proposed that human beings by virtue of their superiority in creation were totally different from all other creatures of the world, men, in general, got a sense of superiority which, in its turn, brought in the unholy right to exploit Nature and to utilise her for men's fancies and comforts and pleasures. This anthropocentric and its consequent materialistic view resulted in "an increased tendency to treat other human beings, especially women and 'primitives' as mere objects...." (Griffin, p.147).

This notion of regarding others and especially women as mere 'objects' did not even enter our ken of understanding! The Divine is equally in all and thereby all were to be treated equally. It is said in the Upanishads, "One does not love the wife for the sake of the wife... but for one's self's sake one loves the wife" (SABCL, vol. 23, p. 759). We were trained to view all as forms and figures of the one Divine consciousness. In fact, women have greater openness to spirituality, we were told by the Mother. This attitude of equality between the sexes was also reflected in the co-education system at the Ashram, and even in our physical education activities no discrimination was made between girls and boys. I suppose the Mother established this gender equality long before the western world woke up to the women's liberation movement!

Harmony

To achieve harmony and beauty not only between human beings but also between man and materials — used or produced — was the daily dose of

consciousness that was given to us by the Mother. Not only was harmony being established between the in-charges and workers of the several Ashram departments, between men and women, but Mother also pioneered what has come to be known today as the ecological view of existence. She had experienced, even as a child, a close communication between herself and Nature. Birds and animals endeared themselves to her and she could even communicate with them. That is how she established the inner contact with the flowers and named thousands of flowers after their inner vibration and aspiration. Such a communion with the flowers and fauna gave us a consciousness of interdependence of each species and each individual in the world. The deep ancient vision of *Vasudhaiva kutumbhakam* — whole humanity is one family — had become the reality of a daily existence for us. Such a living steeped in a sense of oneness with our surroundings saved us from the ecological crisis which is, these days, one of the main themes of management studies.

That is why some of us are surprised when we read today something like the following: "Postmodern thought is ecological through and through, and it provides the philosophical and the logical grounding for the lasting insights popularised by the ecology movement. If it, in fact, becomes the basis of new paradigm of our culture, future generations of citizens will grow up with an ecological consciousness in which the value of all things is respected and the interconnectedness of all things is recognised. The awareness that we must walk gently through the world using only what we need, preserving the ecological balance for our neighbours and future generations, will be 'common sense'" (Griffin, p.152). Long before the postmodernist thought became popular, at the Ashram we had grown up with an ecological consciousness, thanks to the Mother's example.

To feel the divine consciousnesses permeate each animate and inanimate object, to experience the Divine sweetness in the sap of life is the very essence of spirituality. The Mother awakened in us this deep sense of oneness, this touch of divine harmony, sweetness and beauty into our daily life, because for her management was a spontaneous expression of her consciousness and not something of a science or an art to be learnt or adopted from books of management theories. She took the Ashram sadhaks not as workers or ordinary inmates, but as living souls to whom she could impart this deeper oneness of Nature and god and man. By all means and methods she communicated this consciousness of unity and continuously guided the inner growth of our consciousness towards such heights.

For the Mother, it was the growth of consciousness of an individual that superseded all other considerations such as profit and loss. Once when a sadhak asked the Mother: "Mother, why is it that here, in work, some people venture to satisfy their fancies and thus much money is wasted?" she replied :

"Energy, Consciousness is infinitely, a thousand times more wasted than money. Should there be no wastage... my word, I believe the Ashram couldn't be here! There is not a second when there isn't any wastage — sometimes it is worse than that. There is this habit — hardly conscious, I hope — of absorbing as much Energy, as much Consciousness as one can and using it for one's personal satisfactions. That indeed is something which is happening every minute. If all the Energy, all the Consciousness which is constantly poured out upon you all, were used for the true purpose, that is, for the divine work and the preparation for the divine work, we should be already very far on the road, much farther than we are. But everybody, more or less consciously, and in any case instinctively, absorbs as much Consciousness and Energy as he can and as soon as he feels this Energy in himself, he uses it for his personal ends, his own satisfaction.

"Who thinks that all this Force that is here, that is infinitely greater, infinitely more precious than all money-forces, this Force which is here and is given consciously, constantly, with an endless perseverance and patience, only for *one sole purpose*, that of realising the divine work — who thinks of not wasting it? Who realises that it is a sacred duty to make progress, to prepare oneself to understand better and live better? For people live by the divine Energy, they live by the divine Consciousness, and use them for their personal, selfish ends.

"You are shocked when a few thousand rupees are wasted but not shocked when there are... when streams of Consciousness and Energy are diverted from their true purpose!

"If one wants to do a divine work upon earth, one must come with tons of patience and endurance. One must know how to live in eternity and wait for the consciousness to awaken in everyone — the consciousness of what true integrity is."

(*Collected Works of the Mother* (CWM), vol. 6, pp.155-56).

Of course, money and financial management have their own important place in the affairs of running the Ashram or Auroville. For her, the idea "that money must make money is a falsehood and a perversion. Money is meant to increase the wealth, prosperity and the productiveness of a group, a country or, better, of the whole earth. Money is a means, a force, a power, and not an end in itself. And like all forces and powers, it is by movement and circulation that it grows

and increases its power, not by accumulation and stagnation. What we are attempting here is to prove to the world, by giving it a concrete example, that by inner psychological realisation and outer organisation a world can be created where most of the causes of human misery will be abolished" (CWM, vol.13, p.154). Money is a power that is at present controlled by the anti-divine forces, she said, and that by impersonal and desireless use of it, it could be brought back to the Divine's work upon the earth. She explained further the deeper truth of possessing money and how to utilise it in a spiritual way :

"The conflict about money is what might be called a 'conflict of ownership', but the truth is that money belongs to no one. This idea of possessing money has warped everything. Money should not be a 'possession': like power it is a means of action which is given to you, but you must use it according to... what we can call the 'will of the Giver', that is, in an impersonal and enlightened way. If you are a good instrument for diffusing and utilising money, then it comes to you, and it comes to you in proportion to your capacity to use it as it is meant to be used. That is the true mechanism.

"The true attitude is this: money is a force intended for the work on earth, the work required to prepare the earth to receive and manifest the divine forces, and it — that is, the power of utilising it — must come into the hands of those who have the clearest, most comprehensive and truest vision.

"To start with, the first thing (but this is elementary) is not to have the sense of possession — what does it mean, 'it is mine'?...Now, I don't quite understand. Why do people want it to belong to them? — so that they can use it as they like and do what they want with it and handle it according to their own conceptions? That's how it is. On the other hand, yes, there are people who like to store it up somewhere... but that is a disease. To be sure of always having some, they hoard it.

"But if people understood that one should be like a receiving and transmitting station and that the wider the range (just the opposite of personal), the more impersonal, comprehensive and wide it is, the more force it can hold ('force' that is translated materially: notes and coins). This power to hold is proportional to the capacity to use the money in the best way — 'best' in terms of the general progress: the widest vision, the greatest understanding and the most enlightened, exact and true usage, not according to the warped needs of the ego but according to the general need of the earth for its evolution and development. That is to say, the widest vision will have the largest capacity.

"Behind all wrong movements, there is a true movement; there is a joy in being able to direct, utilise, organise in such a way that there is a minimum of waste and the maximum of result. It is a very interesting vision to have. And this must be the true side in people who want to accumulate money: it is the capacity to use it on a very large scale. Then, there are those who very much like to have it and spend it; that is something else — they are generous natures, neither regulated nor organised. But the joy of being able to satisfy all true needs, all necessities, is good. It is like the joy of changing a sickness into health, a falsehood into truth, a suffering into joy; it is the same thing: to change an artificial and foolish need — which does not correspond to anything natural — into a possibility which becomes something quite natural. So much money is needed to do this or that or the other, so much is needed to arrange this, to repair that, to build this, to organise that — that is good. And I understand that people like to be the channels through which the money goes exactly where it is needed. That must be the true movement in people who like to...translated into foolish egoism, who need to appropriate.

"When the need to accumulate and the need to spend (which are both blind and ignorant) are combined, they can lead to a clear vision and a most efficient utilisation. That is good.

"Then there comes, slowly and slowly, the possibility of putting it into practice.

"But, naturally, the need is for very clear heads and for intermediaries of high integrity (!) to be able to be everywhere at the same time and do all at the same time. Then this famous question of money would be solved.

"Money does not belong to anybody. Money is a collective possession which should be used only by those who have an integral, comprehensive and universal vision. I would add something to that: not only integral and comprehensive, but essentially true as well; a vision which can tell the difference between a use which is in accord with the universal progress, and a use which could be termed fanciful. But these are details, for even the mistakes, even, from a certain standpoint, the waste, help the general progress: these are lessons learned the hard way" (CWM, vol.13, pp. 275-77).

So, the Mother dealt with money with a divine attitude. Once there was someone who wanted a loan from the Ashram, but the Mother said: "The money is not mine, the money belongs to the Ashram and the Ashram does not lend

money" (ibid, p.155). In spite of her being the head of the Ashram, and being the centre of inspiration for all the donations to the Ashram, she considered that the money coming to the Ashram did not belong to her! A wonderful example of divine detachment indeed!

Perfection

The Mother kept high standards of care and maintenance of the material things, Ashram buildings, cars, furniture, etc. because matter itself is to be respected and cared for. Material objects have a sensitivity of their own and they respond to touch of our love and care. Here we could give as an example the furniture at Golconde guest house. Instructions written in the guest rooms tell us that one should not drag or change the position of the furniture; except for the chair no other change is acceptable. All this furniture is there for the last 59 or more years and they have been kept more or less in their original positions. We can almost feel as if the furniture itself were speaking to us and thanking us for treating them with respect! This is the respectful care and attention we should have for all material things. One can see the Ashramites maintaining their cycles and vehicles in such a perfect order, not that people do not do that elsewhere, but at the Ashram it is done more with the consciousness that it is the Mother's vehicle, that they are only custodians of her property! For us everything that belonged to the Mother had to be taken care of. This is, in a way, applied spirituality: we are not talking about the higher ranges of spirituality but this is an all-inclusive spirituality which teaches us how to interact with the Mother's consciousness through matter and material things.

The material things were not supposed to be just used and thrown away just as the employed workers in a company are often just hired and fired. The ancient Indian tradition of the ayudha puja was a daily attitude with her. In India, on this ayudha puja day, we clean every little object that we use in our daily life: a carpenter would clean all his tools, a driver would wipe and oil all the mechanical tools, etc. It is not simply the cleaning that we may do throughout the year, but on this particular day all the material objects are worshipped in an elaborate way. This day reminds us of a sense of reverence and respect we should have towards material objects. Such an attitude has been emphasised in Indian culture since ages. Each object, even the pen, the pencil, the eraser, the computer, the table, the chair... has its specific value, its own proper place in a perfect harmonious order. Beauty is in fact perfect harmony, a harmony when everything finds its proper place and respect!

The Mother instilled in us the true feelings for objects, especially those which we use in our daily life. We had to be careful not only in using any object, but also to avoid any wastage. Today, one of the reasons why the world economy is melting is because we have utterly disrespected and wasted much matter. In a way it reflects our utter egoistic stand over matter. It is gross commercialism that has given us false values of matter: we use it promiscuously.

Behind all these attitudes towards matter and money and management principles, there was one central motive, that of the perfection of man! All circumstances of life, all material comforts and discomforts, all events — sad or joyous — are there for the growth of human consciousness. If only one could be conscious of these ups and downs in life, as in sadhana, then the progress towards one's perfection would be faster and smoother.

It is true that perfect perfection is obtained only on the supramental level, where matter is fully conscious and transformed, but one could always attempt for a progressive perfection here and now. Perfection is a state of harmony: it increases in dimension and depth as our consciousness enlarges.

Behind this attempt to bring in perfection in our inner and outer nature through our works, devotion and meditation, there is one principle that was emphasised by the Mother: it was the freedom to choose. This is something I myself learnt when I was a student. She always gave us the choice: the letter that I earlier referred to is a very good example of this. She didn't say "don't go to the US," but she gave me two alternatives: One was: "If it is to live an ordinary or even successful life according to the usual old type, go to America and try your best." And the other was: "If, on the contrary, you aspire at getting ready for the future and the new creation it prepares, remain here and prepare yourself for what is to come." The choice was given to me; it was not imposed upon me. That is the principle of her education also, she said that we should always give the child the different possibilities and let the child choose. At the same time, it is the duty of the teachers and parents to tell the child what the result and consequences of his or her action and decision could be. She always said you have the right to choose, but once chosen you have no right to be undisciplined. This principle too could be used in management of co-workers and labour.

This was a fundamental thing in life: you have all the choices but, once you have made a particular choice, then you will have to follow that path — that is sadhana. Your freedom is there to grow spiritually, that's the true freedom;

to express one's own vital desires and fancies is not freedom — that is only license. To grow spiritually you have to have true inner freedom.

Freedom of choice and consecration or self-offering — these are two principles which could be applied to a spiritual life or to any management situation. What does surrender to the Divine actually mean? Some might question, especially the youngsters of today: "Why should I surrender? After all I am an independent individual, I have my capabilities, I have my possibilities, etc." The Mother tells us that surrender is the only means to grow spiritually. But we wrongly think that surrendering in itself is self-abnegation; it is not abnegation, it is, on the contrary, a means to grow out of our weaknesses, to increase our own potential, to increase our own capacity. If that is the essence of surrender why shouldn't I do it? After all, I study, take courses, do all my other works etc. only to increase my capacity, only to increase my self-expression. If the Mother says 'I am here to help you, you just raise your hand and I will hold it', what could be more wonderful? It is like the island seeking to rejoin the continent. Who is it that gains in such a situation? The Mother is the continent of spirituality and we are the islands of ego. So, she is not there to take away our freedom, but she will give us the true freedom, the inner freedom.

She asked us to surrender our weaknesses as well as our strengths! Sometimes when we went to see the Mother on our birthdays or on a specific day, we were asked to wait in the room on the first floor or on the terrace on the second floor. In the beginning we had great enthusiasm and aspiration. But for some persons, as the time passed slowly, most of the enthusiasm and aspiration seemed to wither away like the flower bouquets in their hands! When Champaklal-ji suddenly called out the name, some people, who went to her, tried to show their best faces, never their weaknesses. We humans have a tendency to suppress our lower nature when going to a sacred place or when we go to see a spiritual person. But it could not be so in her presence: even if we tried to suppress it she saw it and she asked us to offer it to her willingly and consciously instead of her having to pull it out. She says in this regard :

"People come for blessings in the morning,...when they come to receive a flower, I have only to look at them. There is something around their heads, and at times it is as clear as though they said, 'This indeed is something I shall never tell.' They tell me this 'Never will I tell you this and this and that'; you understand, they tell me this by telling me that they will not say it. By telling me, 'I shall not tell you this,' they tell me" (CWM, vol. 6, p. 164).

In fact, in one of her conversations she explained beautifully this phenomenon of the personal darshan: "When I see people and am busy with them,...I want

to see in them their psychic being, their ideal, what they want to do, what they want to be, in order to keep it, pull it out to the surface; all my work consists of this: what I see I pull out always" (Ibid, p. 165).

About this experience of what the Mother says, "I want to see in them their psychic being," I can elaborate by giving my own example. The most marvellous thing I remember is that when I sat in front of her, during the personal darshan, she used to grip my eyes with her look. When she looked into my eyes, it seemed that I ceased to exist for a while; the world did not exist, as it were. She pierced through my eyes and seemed to ask my soul what it wanted. Mentally and vitally I may want a lot of things from the Mother, but have I ever seen or heard what my soul wants? We are hardly ever conscious of our soul's demands! But when she would finish communicating with my soul she would pull back her piercing look and burst with a smile giving a gentle nod. Then I did my pranam at her soft feet and again time was arrested; a sense of timelessness prevailed. Then she would touch me on my head and when I rose she would give me some selected flower/s. And when I would leave her room she would always follow me with her eyes till the door.

I don't know for how many lives we can benefit from her touch and her grace on our soul. I am sure that it is not just for this life...once you become her child, we are blessed for lives together... I don't know...I will come back in a new body, in a new place, but this thing is for sure that the contact with her will continue for lives together.

This is how she helped in our inner growth, helped us come out with our true spiritual needs. This was, I suppose, the result of surrender. This was her way of guiding our inner aspirations and putting in front of us our own highest ideal.

In this process of self-offering and surrender, there was another message by Sri Aurobindo which helped me much in managing my own life: "Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you, ... because she is, indeed, always present" (ibid, pp. 163-4). This has helped me to guide myself in many circumstances. Once you are convinced that the Mother is omnipresent you tend to act as if you were acting in her very physical presence. But if you believe that the Mother is only in Pondicherry, she is only a physical being, it would be wholly false. She is not a physical form alone; she is a Divine consciousness, ever present, omnipresent. The Mother once commented on this aspect of hers :

"From this point of view Sri Aurobindo wrote a little rule which for some time we had put up everywhere. But, I believe, it must have disappeared now or else people are so used to it that they no longer even look at it. It said : 'Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you,' and Sri Aurobindo added, 'because she is, indeed, always present....' Still these physical eyes... 'No, no, no, she is not there', and so the first instinct is to hide things. Not

only does one do everything that one wouldn't do before me, but as one doesn't at all believe the last part of Sri Aurobindo's sentence, that even though I am not there physically, perhaps still I know how things are, so the first instinct is to hide things, and the moment one enters that path, it is like stepping into quicksand. One goes down, down, down; it seizes you, swallows you up, it draws you down in such a way that it is very difficult to come out of it. Of all things this is the worst: "Ah, provided that Mother does not know!" And so it begins like that and that's the end. Well, I hope not many among you tell lies, but still, usually the end of the curve is that! And so, you understand, this is one of those stupidities without equal; for — I am going to tell you something — and I can tell you this with impunity: even if you don't want that to happen, it will happen all the same!" (CWM, vol. 6, p.164).

She is an omnipresent consciousness and her photographs kept in different places in our houses, centres or offices etc. are more of a reminder of her omnipresence. However, it is not like the religious belief that God is overlooking on you at all times in order to punish you or reward you. It is not the punitive attitude of the ancient God with which the Mother's consciousness is looking at you. Nor is it of the company boss looking over your shoulder. It is more a consciousness which guides us through life, taking us nearer to our souls with each step in life. And this is best done by a sense of intimacy with the Divine, for it is in the intimacy with the Divine that we grow fastest in spirituality. In the usual management system why is it that we are not able to open up inwardly? That is because of the fear of the superiors, fear of the targets to reach, fear of losing the job etc. But here, in spiritual management, we have the principle of love and intimacy. And those who have read the Bhagavad Gita would have noted that Sri Krishna and Arjuna were more like friends, they were intimate like two good friends although one was an incarnation of God and the other a human disciple. When we look at God as some kind of a 'Superior Boss' then intimacy does not take place, for fear of God obstructs it. With the Mother it was different: we looked up to her not as a disciple looks up to his Master, but more as her children. Apart from friendship, the other intimate relationship with the Divine is that of the mother and the child. If we want to be an instrument for the Divine's work, it is better to be the children of the Divine Mother and be guided and cared for by her.

After 1961 we could not see the Mother on a daily basis, but till then we saw her every day at the balcony darshan, or when she used to come to the Ashram's sports ground or the playground etc. I have seen the Mother expressing the Divine consciousness in every little act of hers. In all her acts and responses, she exuded this divine intimacy and sweetness in great abundance, and we

profited by it to the extent we were open to her in our inner being. If the psychic is open within then we can get all the guidance needed both in the inner and the outer journey of life. In fact, we are told by sadhaks who had come to the Ashram as children that the Mother used to tell them constantly that the only value in life is to realise one's own psychic being, one's inner being. She would reiterate this in so many circumstances that today in those who have grown up under her this advice seems to be the ringing message in their ears.

Conclusion :

It is with her loving ministry of the Ashram and Auroville that the Mother established integral principles of management on a small scale as well as a big one. If the most important element of management is man, the Mother gave us a new vision of man — his weaknesses and capabilities and his awaited destiny.

At the same time, the Mother brought back the synthetic view of Matter and Spirit, emphasising the truth that matter too can respond and reveal the spirit if we delve deeper into it with love and respect. She established in a living manner, and not didactically, the quadruple principles of Wisdom, Power, Harmony and Perfection, which, in fact, are the principles of a spiritual self-management both on the individual and collective levels.

With this living inspiration and guidance of the Mother's ministry, if I can manage my own life and manage to go a little deeper towards my own inner being, then I would consider that I have lived my life meaningfully. That, I suppose, is the goal of management by consciousness — to make each person manage his or her own life in the light of his or her highest consciousness.

It is said that a drop of practice is better than an ocean of theories; so all these theories of management would be meaningless and all the seminars on the principles of management redundant if we do not take a plunge into our soul and let it govern and manage all the parts of our being, for the soul within each one of us is the true manager, the true governor of our life.

Let me end with a quote from Sri Aurobindo which summarises the main idea of self-management: "For man intellectually developed, mighty in scientific knowledge and the mastery of gross and subtle nature, using the elements as his servants and the world as his footstool, but undeveloped in heart and spirit, becomes only an inferior kind of *asura* using the powers of a demigod to satisfy the nature of an animal" (SABCL, vol. 17, p.237). So let us recognise and install the Divine Manager within us and then there would be no need of any outer principles of management. It would be a spontaneous harmonising between the inner and the outer, between each being and each object in the world and that, I suppose, would be the acme of all ideals of management by consciousness.

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Sri Aurobindo's Perspective On The Four Major Powers Of The *Devi* In Integral Yoga And East-West Psychology

Hilary Anderson

Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872 - 1950) was an Indian sage, scholar, poet and patriot who is usually ranked with Gandhi, Tagore and Vivekananda as one of the great shapers of the Indian Renaissance. He had a unique vision of man and society which reflected not only his profound mystical insights but a balance of his European education and deep understanding of his own Indian spiritual heritage. His grand synthesis was an intellectual and spiritual exposition on the nature of life and its expanding possibility for the future.

He articulated his *Integral Philosophy* from an elevated perspective that included a personal, global and cosmic view of the purposeful evolutionary nature of the universe, as well as man's role as a participant with the Supreme Being in creating the life divine. Sri Aurobindo envisioned a new race of beings who would live a divine life in a divine body. He actually mapped the stages the individual goes through during this ultimate metamorphosis. He referred to this process as "the embodiment of the supramental truth consciousness" which descends into human beings (through their physical, emotional-vital, mental, and spiritual dimensions) as they ascend to it.

The practical application of this all-encompassing philosophy was called Integral Yoga. It combined inspiration from the Vedas, Upanishads, and the *Bhagavad Gita* and synthesised *Vedanta* and *Tantra* philosophies with a variety of spiritual disciplines. In so doing, he captured the essence of the major yoga traditions of *Jnana*, *Bhakti*, *Karma* and *Tantra* demonstrating how the head, heart and hand respectively are harmonised through a total surrender to the dynamic energy (and will of the *Devi* as *Adya Sakti*) emphasised in the Tantric transformational model of consciousness.

For Sri Aurobindo, the most important key to activating this supplemental potential is to awaken the spark of the Divine, the individual soul's consciousness

or "psychic being" (*Caitya Purusha*) which resides in a little known lotus (*Anandakanda Padma*) within the heart centre (*Anahata Cakra*). The awakening of this Presence allows one's unique divine potential to realise itself in the mental, emotional-vital and physical bodies as an evolutionary expression of the Divine. Illuminating this journey of the psychic being from its profound awakening through its ultimate liberation (*Moksha*) as reflected in its supramental manifestation on earth is, I believe, Sri Aurobindo's greatest contribution to the East and the West.

Drawn from his in-depth research of the Vedas and his personal revelatory process, Sri Aurobindo used the profound image of *Agni*, the Vedic god of sacrificial fire, to represent the role of the psychic being and its inter-relationship with its outer personality expression. As the presiding deity (*Adhithata Devata*) of the innermost aspect of our being, *Agni* embodies the force of action, the light of knowledge, and the heart of truth as the lustrous flame that purifies the instrument in its total surrender to and embodiment by the Divine — the vast truth-consciousness (*Satyam Ritam Brihat*). Also in the unique vision of Sri Aurobindo, we have a modern interpretation of the doctrine of *Shakti* in a discipline that combines the action of the fiery *Agni* of the Vedic heritage with the dynamic movement of the Divine Mother, *Devi*, or *Kundalini* of the Tantric tradition.

It appears that Sri Aurobindo may have gotten his scriptural warrant that interlinks fire symbolism in the two traditions from some of the following scriptural references. Whether he did or did not base his position on such scripture, these references show that the co-appearance of the *Devi* and *Agni* does have a minor scriptural heritage and can remain a clear support for such interlink for other Tantric researchers. The *Mundaka Upanishad* 1.2A, for instance, refers to *Kali* appearing as one of *Agni*'s seven quivering tongues. In the *Mahanirvana Tantra*, the devotee (being instructed in liberation) is advised after adoration of Fire (*Agni*) to give Fire the name of his own chosen deity (*Ista-Devata*) and specifically to declare: *Agni tvam Adya Kalika-namasi*= *Agni*, thy name is *Adya Kalika*¹) In the *Sri Sukta* (an appendix to the *Rig Veda*), Goddesses *Sri* and *Laksmi* are intertwined with the figure of *Agni*. And, in another reference, *Agni* becomes known as the *Durga Savitri* showing that there is a certain homology between *Devi* and *Agni* in the conceptualisation of the divine as "the flaming one."²) Finally, in a one-verse hymn to *Agni*, He is praised for leading us through difficulties (*durgati*), then it declares: "In the goddess *Durga* do I take refuge; O one of great speed, (well) do you navigate. Hail (to you)!"³

In Integral Yoga, the Devi is the great protectress from worldly adversity (*Durgati*) while simultaneously the embodiment of the purificatory fire that is the pathway she navigates. So, in actual practice of the discipline, the devotee (*Sadhaka*) is advised to take refuge in the Divine Mother while surrendering to the will and movement of Her transformative process (as imaged in the mystical physiology of the unfoldment of consciousness in the Tantric Cakra model).

Given in both traditions and their synthesis, Integral Yoga, there is the essential practice of surrendering to the internal fire of transformation, it is crucial to recognise the importance of this sacrificial purificatory evolutionary process to fully understand human personality, inter-personal actions and the human condition; for this is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the very nature of what is happening in us and to us individually and collectively.

Sri Aurobindo sees the inner being of the individual profoundly moved by four cosmic powers (*shakti*) as personified by four major aspects of the Universal Mother, *mahashakti*. He references these four aspects through an acknowledgement of the essential significance of the four social orders (*Varnas*) or types of persons outlined in the *Bhagavad Gita*. However, he sees these orders in the present time cycle as relating to principles that apply to psycho-spiritual self-development within the individual — the four cosmic principles of Wisdom, Power, Harmony and Work. He outlines these four as sides of the spiritual nature to be balanced within the individual as follows :

a soul of knowledge, a soul of strength and power, a soul of mutuality and interchange, a soul of works and service, but one side or other predominates in the action and expressive spirit and tinges the dealings of the soul with its embodied nature; it leads and gives its stamp to the other powers and uses them for the principle strain of action, tendency, experience.⁴

The four major aspects of the Universal Mother, then, include *Mahesvari*, Goddess of Supreme Knowledge, calm expansiveness, and comprehending wisdom; *Mahakali*, Goddess of splendid strength and highest aims, the mighty warrior of spiritual force, severest austerity and swiftness; *Mahalakshmi*, Goddess of supreme love, blissful grace and beauty, divine harmony and prosperity; and *Mahasaraswati*, Goddess of divine work, perfection and order, persistent effort and all-accomplishing fulfilment.⁵ It is by these four powers that the inner being is moved to express its own temperament, disposition, and character dramatised through the various dimensions of personality.

The purpose of this essay is to explore these four major personalities of the Universal Mother in order to bring out the richness of their contrasting ways as they express themselves through the individual. Each one of these four

personalities is further shown to be included within the *Dasha-Mahavidya Tradition*, or the Ten Wisdom Forms of the Goddess. These Wisdom Forms serve to symbolise and elaborate the inner workings of the universe and the individual psyche. As ten great cosmic powers, they serve to describe the whole cycle of existence; each is a particular cosmic function and each leads to a special realisation of the One Reality. We will conclude with a psychological reflection developed from an East-West perspective which recognises the dynamic workings within each one of the four great personalities, and shows that the dynamic working has a recognisable strategy for self-integration.

Mahesvari is the aspect of the Divine Mother who connects with *Durga*, the Cosmic Queen. *Mahesvari* is the imperial deity, universal wisdom embodying supreme knowledge and inexhaustible compassion. She is sovereign with profound majesty. She is seated in the wideness above the thinking mind and will, and sublimates them into the wisdom opening out into the cosmic vastness. She comprehends all things and beings and their nature and what moves them, she has a strength in her that meets and masters everything so that none, in the end, can prevail against her vast, intangible wisdom as well as her calm, tranquil power.

Most importantly for our understanding, she is *Maya-Shakti* of the supreme reality lodged in the heart of all beings. As creatrix of the universal drama, she is not bound by the drama or anything else in the universe. Therefore, it is *Mahesvari* that creates the sense of "I" by which the inner self feels itself different from other selves, and this activity gives rise to all manifest forms. When we perceive these limited forms as reality, we forget the medium or unitary space in which they appear and thus we experience the illusion of separation (*Maya*). It is in the secret heart centre (*Anandakanda*), "the centre of all happiness and bliss"⁶ that the Goddess abides as "auspicious, victorious, gracious; she who conquers and is unconquered; she who pleases and is known to dwell in this place as the woman-lioness"⁷

Mahesvari is known as *Bhuvanesvari* within the *Mahavidya* tradition. In this identity, she is the Queen or Ruler (feminine, *Ishvari*) of the universe or realm of being (*Bhuvana*). As the primal substance, she is called *Prakriti*, or universal nature. In the Veda, she corresponds to *Aditi*, the infinite or indivisible Mother of the Gods. Of the three great names of *Satyam Ritam Brihat*, the Vast Truth-Consciousness, given for the Supreme by the Vedic seers, she is *brhat*, the vast self-awareness, the infinite consciousness or vehicle by which *satyam*, the essential truth of being, becomes *ritam*, the right formulation for a law of action within the universal scheme of things. She is space that gives form to the formless. While she has herself limited light as *Akasa*, nobody can impair her

light. As *Aditi*, she is also the force of perception. In this way, she is the extent of space that is covered in a particular perception.⁸ As the great origin and cosmic womb, she is space itself. As genesis and origin, all light is born out of her. She, therefore, creates space in order to give birth to all things. At the individual level, she creates space within our own consciousness. And as microcosm, our own bodies contain the entire universe in the small space that dwells within the heart.

Psychologically speaking then, *Mahesvari* leads us to consider the very nature of life, our relationship to ourselves and others, and what we love. *Mahesvari* is the part of us that opens to the immensity of possibility. She creates new space for our "heart's desire" to be expressed and fulfilled. As we identify with her, our sense of "I" is transformed into a universal consciousness that realises true love has no form, yet is all form, dissolving attachment and suffering, in profound freedom. With the realisation of *Mahesvari*, a major shift is made from egocentric identification to include the vast potential of being one with all beings. At the same time, one begins to perceive all beings in their own uniqueness while expressing unconditional love and compassion for them. She allows us to have total acceptance for all forms as they are, and yet provide space for their change and transformation within the particular order and circumstance required by that form.

Out of the above realisation, she promotes cosmic vision by freeing us from the narrowness of opinion and belief, and showing the way beyond all identifications with creed, class, race, sex, nation and religion, to a universal understanding.

Mahakali, is the form of the Divine Mother that shares the meaning of time with the masculine *Kala*, "in the fullness of time" implying that time "brings all things to an end". Height, force and strength are her powers which bring overwhelming intensity, often a divine violence that rushes to shatter every limit and obstacle. She is, as Sri Aurobindo says, the "warrior of the worlds who never shrinks from battle"⁹ With her mighty sword, she is swift, direct. Intolerant of imperfection, her love as wrath is immediate and severe against falsehood, treachery and any form of ill-will against falsehood, treachery and any form of ill-will. Her interventions against obstacles and enemies are a constant gift to the seeker.

Mahakali's origins can be traced to non-Aryan and Vedic sources. *Aditi*, goddess of the Vedas, is known as a precursor, and perhaps the Vedic goddess *Ratri* later became transformed into *Kali*.¹⁰ As referenced above, *Kali* is shown to be one of Agni's seven tongues of fire, which could be an early intuition of the Seven Divine Mothers (*Sapta Matrika*) dating back to the *Rig Veda*. *Kali*

and fire eventually come to participate in the common matrix of *Kali* as agent of the world's incineration/destruction. The image of *Kali* is generally represented as black. Just as all colours disappear in black, so all names and forms are said to disappear in Her. She is free from all covering of illusion in her absolute, primordial nakedness. She is nature (*Prakriti*) stripped of "clothes". Most importantly for our understanding, she gives birth to the cosmos parthenogenetically, as she contains the male principle within herself. She is changeless, limitless primordial power, acting in the great cosmic drama and is often imaged awakening the unmanifest *Shiva* beneath her feet. As *Bhadra-Kali* she operates as *Rudra's* consort in the *Manipura Cakra* and as *Siddha Kali* she reigns as *Paramashiva's* consort in the *Ajna Cakra*.¹¹ She is in the *Anahata Cakra* as the element air and in the physical heart as the pulsing action as well as the circulating blood force throughout the circulatory system.¹²

Mahakali is the first in the *Mahavidya* tradition and presides over yogic transformation, the means by which we cross over the terrible forces of death. She is the great power of time, the Night-of-Eternity (*Maha-Ratri*). Time, as we all are forced to understand, is the foremost of the powers which governs the universe. In its essential nature, time is eternity itself, perpetual changeless duration. Everything changes but change itself. Everything moves but the movement itself does not stop. The secret of the message of time is being itself, the unborn, the uncreated, the undying, absolute reality. Therefore, time is the great force of change that drives all things to grow and develop, it is the working out of cosmic intelligence. *Kali* and *Bhuvaneshvari* are time and space respectively. *Bhuvaneshvari* is *Akasa*, ether and sets the stage while *Kali* is its *tanmatra*, sound, vibration, the puranic force that performs the cosmic dance. Time is our mother and origin, as well as our final abode. Time in her terrible aspect eats her children, but in doing so, returns them to her wholeness and abode of the transcendent-power-of-time (*Mahakal*). The state of deep sleep is the image for us of the total peace that follows the dissolution of the universe.

Psychologically, within and without, rebelliousness, impurities and defective qualities are met with victorious force, transformed by the grace of her fire, passion and speed. *Mahakali* as time is the instrument of death and transformation. She is the part of us that moves through limitation, heightens awareness far beyond our normal capacity and creates opportunities to accomplish tasks in the shortest duration of time. Since she carries the male energy within, when she strikes, sexual /gender sensitivities are lost in favour of action of great force. Old forms disintegrate; chaos is created, awaiting a new order.

With the realisation of *Mahakali*, two aspects of her work need to be further delineated in the psychological strategy of breaking down old forms of behaviours of consciousness. The first is *Dakshina Kali* in which there is a profound discernment, a right action born out of an intuitional discrimination. Her destruction of the form is done with the purpose of preparing the ground for creation of a truth (*bhadram*). The second is *Bhadra Kali*, the radiant, auspicious one, who destroys in order to create with the eternal energy of evolution as time the transformer. From this perspective, successive deaths are initiations on the highway of life.

Mahalakshmi is the divinity of destiny or transcendent fortune which embodies the characters of all the gods. However, she is best understood by recognising that she originally contained two major goddess energies that merged to become *Sri Lakshmi*. *Sri* refers to benefit, advantage, riches, prosperity, well-being, ruling, material power, glory, pre-eminence, and splendour. *Sri* also refers to *Prana* or life force, and is associated with a complete lifetime, offspring, honour and dignity. Her non-Aryan origin connects her as a *Yakshini* or "guardian of wealth", the shape-shifter hidden in the roots of trees as well as the earliest divinity to be represented with the lotus (*Padmapitha*).¹⁴ She is the acting power of wealth and fertility, connected to the essence of the water of life and mysterious potency of the earth. In this respect, the gods freely take from her spheres of food, power, kingship, prosperity and auspiciousness.

Lakshmi originally meant an omen or sign of good luck or fortune. *Lakshmi* is matter and represents the miraculous transformation of the formless waters into organic life necessary to the ongoing created order. She is beautiful, radiant as gold, glorious, and richly ornamented *Sri Lakshmi* is most auspicious. She has a profound identity all her own, yet for the sake of creativity, she does undergo the coupling of herself with the masculine gender as consort of *Kubera* or *Vishnu*.

Mahalakshmi brings the miracle of beauty, the secret of divine harmonies, irresistible universal charm, attracting and drawing things and forces, as well as bringing being together of sublime unity. She gives forth an intoxicating sweetness and bliss, so that all that is ugly, mean, base, poor, sordid, squalid, brutal and coarse repels her advent.¹⁵ In supplication, she's asked to banish her sister, *Alakshmi*, or misfortune, appearing in such inauspicious forms as need, poverty, hunger and thirst.¹⁶ In her play of consciousness, even the simplest and commonest things are made wonderful by her intuition of unity and the breath of her spirit. She is found in the *Svadhithana Cakra* along with *Sarasvati* as co-consort of *Vishnu* where the cosmic principle of the element water resides. She is also its purity that imparts divine love.

Mahalakshmi is represented in the *Mahavidya* as *Kamala*, the Lotus Goddess of Delight. *Sri Lakshmi*, as the fortune that we seek in life, naturally leads to *Kamala*, or the total unfoldment of powers of inner perception in order to see the extraordinary beauty in the simple presence of nature and the earth. *Kamala* is the form of *Sri Lakshmi* relating specifically to the practice of yoga, and as the tenth and last of the *Mahavidya* wisdom forms, she shows the full unfoldment of the goddess into the material sphere. Because *Kamala* is located in the heart, or *Anahata Cakra*, she carries the image of the heart's delight and wish for perfect beauty and happiness.¹⁸ She shares *Maha-Ratri* with *Kali*, but with her it is interpreted as the Night-of-Splendour.¹⁹

Psychologically, *Mahalakshmi* is the considering of where fertile energies can take hold in one's life and the mystery of where renewal can begin. She is the part of us that brings new life into our lives, bestowing prosperity, advantage, well-being and honour. Working through the miracle of beauty, transforming the formless into form, she creates harmony in all spheres. By embodying the force of attraction, love and appreciation, she represents our ability to draw all things into magnificent unity and exquisite manifestation. Sweetness, charm and loveliness are her ways of holding beings together, so that new forms have the opportunity to grow and development in Spirit.

Mahasarasvati represents the "pool of knowledge". *Saras* refers to anything that flows, and as such applies to speech and thought as well as to water. She has come to be known as the transcendent-power-of-knowledge, the "flowing one" who is the divinity of knowledge, representing the union of power and intelligence from which organised creation arises.²⁰ She is therefore the source of the word as creation, the Goddess of Eloquence, of Learning, revealing language and writing to humanity. She is known as the "mother of poetry" and the patroness of the arts and music.

She is intimately connected to *Vak*, the Divinity of Speech in the Vedic tradition, who enters into seers and gives power and intelligence to those she loves. It is said the *Vak* unites and enables people through speech to establish themselves as a community of friends. As the youngest of the four personalities of the Divine Mother, *Sarasvati* presides over all details of organisation, execution, the relation of parts and their effective combination of forces with unfailing exactitude of result and fulfilment. Science and craft (technique) are her provinces, therefore nothing is too small, apparently trivial for her precise attention. She is the tireless, careful, efficient builder, administrator and classifier of the spheres. Her eyes are open to all needs at once. Her profound intuition

knows what is to be chosen or rejected, what is the right instrument, timing, conditions and process that is appropriate. She abhors carelessness, negligence, indolence, clumsiness, false adaptations, things half-accomplished. Nothing short of perfection satisfies her. She is the most long-suffering with humanity, bringing things to completion and assuring the material foundation for total transformation.

Sarasvati along with *Savitri* is found in the *Muladhara Cakra* as co-consort of *Brahma*. She is also co-consort of *Vishnu* with *Lakshmi* in the *Svadhithana Cakra*.²² She is represented as *Matangi*, in the *Mahavidya* tradition, and in this respect is known as the elephant power, the power of domination and the Night-of-Delusion (*Moha-Ratri*). After demonic powers are defeated in the cycle of events within the heritage, *Matangi* establishes the rule of peace, calm and prosperity. *Matangi* is a form of *Sarasvati* directed towards inner knowledge. As such, she resides in the *Visuddha Cakra*, the centre of speech, and through a special channel the *Ajna Cakra* is connected with the tip of the tongue in the physical body wherein speech is articulated and we are able to taste the essence of things. She is behind the screen of words, giving us the power to use them the right way and to go beyond them. She is Divine Word as ecstasy and profound bliss.²³

Matangi is *Sarasvati*'s dark, mystic, ecstatic or wild form. *Sarasvati* is often known as the Goddess of Conventional Learning, Art and Culture. However, *Matangi* rules over the extraordinary, representing the artist who goes against the norms of society and is often allied with the transforming energy of *Kali*. *Matangi* is related to Lord *Ganesha*, and as an elephant form, she is his consort. Like him, she can be propitiated to remove obstacles, give accomplishments and grant knowledge.

Psychologically, *Mahasarasvati* is the union of power and intelligence. She is discernment and intuitive knowing in the orchestration of detail, of creation itself through artistic, verbal and technological expression, as well as the ability to "flow" in alignment with universal laws. She is our commitment to the refinement of our work. She represents our ability to recognise and clarify the arenas of consciousness that need transforming, and the ability to express into creation forms in which Spirit dwells with perfection.

To conclude then, the grouping of the four major personalities of the Divine Mother (manifesting in varying degrees within each individual) are acknowledged by Sri Aurobindo as the dynamic movement in Integral Yoga. They can be seen as a masterful communication of energies in the self by which a strategy for change and transformation can be intentionally developed. By following the above order, *Maheshvari* is engaged to open to a much wider conscious awareness

than the egocentric identity that normally occupies the ordinary life process of the individual. Through *Maheshvari*, we attain the profound heart connection that ushers in an awareness of the great sovereignty of self and intimate connection with others. For in the sacrificial fire of the psychic being lodged in the sacred secret heart centre (*Anandakanda*), old limitations and impurities of unconsciousness are consumed in the fire of the Divine Mother's love. As a result of surrender, the power of the Divine Mother's protection descends into the being as the Presence of ever-expanding peace and a willingness to continue the work of transformation.

Next, *Mahakali* rushes in to cut through all obstacles with a divine vengeance. She heightens awareness, way beyond our present capacity, discerning and creating opportunities to accomplish tasks and purify aspects of personality in the shortest period of time. With time as her instrument of death and transformation, she moves through old behavioural patterns, disregarding sexual/gender and cultural sensitivities as she destroys with great force all that is outdated and no longer aligns with the new sovereign identity that is emerging. Total chaos destroys all that is known or identified with, that a divine new order may be born.

Mahalakshmi then comes to the fore to invite the consideration of what is next or is ultimately possible. For as a dream within emerges, the mystery of renewal can begin. She gives birth to the seeds of new life through internal behavioural change and external creations, expressing harmony and beauty, bestowing prosperity, advantage, well-being and honour. Opening to her sublime Grace, the force of attraction and love draws all things aligned into a magnificent unity, a whole new world held together in sweetness, comfort and loveliness. Refined expressions of Spirit are supported and brought into form.

Finally, *Mahasarasvati* appears as the ecstatic self expressing the flow of knowledge, wisdom and learning, manifesting a new order of life energies so that the creation can sustain over time in divine order. Through the power of the "creative word", articulated intention manifests through eloquence in spoken, written, visual and musical arts. She manifests in us an unwavering commitment that utilises a variety of skills bringing a highly tuned refinement and precision to our life and organisation to our work. Inter and intra-personally, her astute analysis allows us to focus on areas that need further transforming. Ultimately our new structures express universal values that can be shared. In this way, Spirit, as a microcosm of the Divine Mother in form, dwells uniquely in and through each of us as ourselves.

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Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata In Sri Aurobindo's Savitri

Prema Nandakumar

11.Yama, Death Supreme

While downloading Vyasa's Sanskrit upakhyana into his English epic version, Sri Aurobindo made several changes that did not affect the traditional view of the characters. Aswapati is a raja-rishi; Savitri is a firm adherent of tapasya and strengthens herself through tri-ratra vrata. Satyavan is the ideal young man, majestic and sattvic at the same time. Rishi Narad acts out the mythological character in the same way as we have seen whenever he has appeared in the legends. It is in Yama that Sri Aurobindo has made a big change, and in the course of this transformation, has altered the story line which deals with his meeting Savitri.

Yama is a familiar personality in ancient Indian writings. His impeccable presence in the **Katha Upanishad** has been brought to us by Sri Aurobindo through his translation. Given to Yama by his father (*mrityave thvaa dadaami*), Nachiketas goes to his regions and waits for three days since Yama is out of station. As elsewhere in these ancient writings, here also we do not have any fearsome image of Yama. On the contrary, he is the very picture of courtesy in the **Katha Upanishad**. As soon as he returns and sees Nachiketas, he says:

"Because for three nights thou hast dwelt in my house, O Brahmin, a guest worthy of reverence, — salutation to thee, O Brahmin, on me let there be the weal, — therefore three boons do thou choose, for each night a boon."ⁱⁱ

He gives the boons asked for, the third being the meaning of death. Why do we say a person 'is not' or 'he is' when he has passed away? Poor Yama! He gently requests Nachiketas to choose another boon, but the boy will not. Who cares for all the good of the world including progeny and riches, if there is no permanence about any of these things? Yama is pleased and now proceeds to explain patiently the nature of the Supreme. The truth is nobody can describe him for it is near impossible to know him. "He is subtler than subtlety and that which logic cannot reach." The truth is this: the Divine is residing within us

and we can come face to face with him by "adhyatma yoga". The sacred syllable OM will help us gain this desire. As for death, there is no such thing! The Supreme does not slay. Again, the Supreme cannot be attained by teaching, intelligence or scholarship. The Supreme has to choose us! And remember, Death itself is food for the Supreme!

And so on goes Yama's soft voice, using images and similes that have become part of India's philosophical discourse to explain to Nachiketas the all-pervading divine.

"The Purusha, the Spirit within, who is no larger than the finger of a man is seated for ever in the heart of creatures; one must separate Him with patience from one's own body as one separates from a blade of grass its main fibre. Thou shalt know Him for the Bright Immortal, yea, for the Bright Immortal."

The great teacher of **Katha Upanishad** becomes, as it were, the disciple of Savitri in the **Mahabharata**. Savitri is also in the same quandary as Nachiketas though it is her husband's life that is now being given to Death. Like Nachiketas, Satyavan goes to (or taken by) Yama's abode. He is followed by Savitri who has empowered herself spiritually by performing the tri-ratra vrata. She does not question Yama like Nachiketas, but simply follows Satyavan who is being taken by Yama. It is Yama who is distressed and asks her to go away. She does not. Instead she speaks words which are dharma-conscious. Yama is not surprised though for he has noted that she is a *pativrata* and one who practises *tapasya* (*tapovrita*).

Savitri makes five statements which we may call *dharma-vachanas*. Yama listens to her humbly and happily. This little bride, this housewife from a forest hermitage, speaks so steadily when caught in this terrible situation! Here is an excerpt from the first statement :

"Those who are not self-possessed, even though they may stay in a forest, they cannot practise dharma; or go by the preceptors; or undertake difficult austerities. The wise, who know discrimination, hold happiness to lie in the dharma alone; therefore do the sages give to dharma such pre-eminence... Company with the virtuous, even though for a short while, is a highly cherished occasion; being in their friendship is said to be greater still; association with holy persons is never fruitless. Therefore, one should always be close to the truthful and virtuous."ⁱⁱⁱ

Even as Savitri utters these noble sentiments and follows Yama (and Satyavan) with determination, Yama is not irritated at all. He admires her spirit and grants her boons which she accepts but keeps walking behind him, while praising him softly now and then for being fair to all creatures ("For that reason you are,

O Lord, also known as Dharmaraj.") Thus we come to the fifth statement which is slightly longer than the earlier ones. Essentially it is about the value of *satsanga* though the concluding verse is a gentle challenge. Will Yama rise to the stature of a person established in Truth?

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

One can easily recognise the trend of Savitri's words. Surely Yama is established in Truth and his *aseervad* will be guarding her. Surely he is not going to stand upon any false sense of dignity if he concedes her prayer for Satyavan's life. People like him are the true protectors of the world as they are firmly poised in Dharma. Does Yama see through her words and has a glimpse of her anguish-laden, prayerful heart? He says that he is increasingly moved by her words as he keeps listening to her. He is very happy and says that she must now ask for a unique boon, *varam vruneeshva apratimam pativrate*. She asks for Satyavan's life and he is pleased to grant her wish. Indeed, Vyasa's Yama blesses Savitri and Satyavan for a long and happy future of togetherness :

"He shall have a life of four hundred years to live with you; also, by performing the holy Yajnas of fire-sacrifice and by the conduct of the dharma, he shall be renowned in the world."

It may be pointed out that this is the Yama we see in the ancient scriptures. He is no asura, he has no malice, he is ever stationed in Dharma. We see him only as a brilliant godhead, though associated with the death of living creatures, one is naturally frightened by the very mention of his name. He is described as "a bright person in red attire, with a tiara on his head; handsome and brilliant he looked, as though the Sun-God himself has appeared there." In fact Savitri salutes him and says, "I take you to be some noble god" (*daivatam thvaabhijaanaami*).

As one who was deeply interested in the **Mahabharata**, Sri Aurobindo was aware of other contexts in which Yama appears. The 'Ruru Pramadvura' legend is but one of many on the occurrence of death followed by resurrection. But Vyasa does not hold out any false hopes. Death is a reality man has to face. Acceptance is all. The story of Gautami occurs at the very opening of the Anushasana Parva. Gautami's child dies of snake-bite. A hunter catches the snake and brings it to Gautami. In what manner should he kill it? She asks him not to kill it and incur sin. The death of the snake would not bring back her child to life! The hunter argues that the snake might harm other people so it needs

to be killed. The snake says that it should not be blamed for it was directed by Death. Even as they argue, Death comes on the scene. He is not described as a frightening god, but very much a friendly voice that seeks to get at the truth about the child's death. After all, it is Time that is the destroyer, not he :

"O Serpent, I was directed by Kala (Time) to end this boy's life and so asked you to do the deed. Neither you nor me has caused the death of this child. Like the wind that scatters the clouds hither and thither, I am controlled by Time. The Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic gunas are all controlled by Time and move lives accordingly."^{iv}

It is Time that controls everything! *Sarvaa Kaalapracodita!* So Time appears. He makes it clear that none of them is the guilty one. It is the past karma of the boy that put an end to his earthly existence. Gautami agrees with this and addresses the friendly hunter: "O hunter! Obviously I have also performed such action that has resulted in my losing my son. Now Time and Death can withdraw to their respective places. And you may release this snake." As the serpent, Time and Death went their ways, the hunter and Gautami found release from their sorrow.

So many conceptions of Yama! Isn't he then all-powerful? If karma is the cause of sorrow (or joy), then only the Supreme can take charge and do the needful to destroy karma. With this in mind, Sri Aurobindo writes of the Divine Mother :

"At the head she stands of birth and toil and fate,
In their slow round the cycles turn to her call;
Alone her hands can change Time's dragon base.
Hers is the mystery the Night conceals;
The spirit's alchemist energy is hers;
She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.
The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,
A power of silence in the depths of God;
She is the Force, the inevitable Word,
The magnet of our difficult ascent ..."^v

Indian mythology speaks of Yama and Yami as the twin children of Surya. We also know him as the father of Yudhistira by Kunti. Vidura, the half-brother of Dhritrashtra is said to be an incarnation of Yama. Yama is also called Kala (Time) and Andhaka. Not only Yama, but his country is also described as beautiful by Vyasa. Shiva tells Uma :

"Yamaraja's land is in the southern direction. It is colourful, attractive and has many facets. Ancestors, dead persons and Yama's minions are found there."

Yama holds his royal hearings in a grand space, attended by a thousand courtiers. With his 'Maya' he gives punishment but strictly according to the karmic deeds of the person. In fact, there does not seem to be any precedence for Sri Aurobindo's characterisation of Death. Even when dealing with the birth of Death in the Drona Parva of the **Mahabharata**, we seem to have no clue to seeing him as the Annihilator-Ignorance.

Brahma seems to have been angry that he could go on creating, but found no end to it, as space was getting cramped by such production. As advised by Sthanu-Rupa (Shiva), he divided his creation in terms of Time as the Past, the Present and the Future. His anger that went back into him appeared now as a lady with a body that was red and black. Brahma asked Mrityu (for she was Death) to destroy people selectively.

"O Mrityu (Death)! Destroy the living beings of this world. You are born out of my anger, and hence keep destroying all people who are idiots and scholars. You have to do this because of my command. You will receive gains from this act."

Mrityu began to weep. Oh, how can a woman kill? A woman is incarnate mother. She would rather go away to the Denukasrama and spend her life in tapasya. But Brahma would not allow her. Death has a function in creation. So the Lady Death performed deep tapasya for sixteen padma years for the good of living beings. Another sixteen padma years were spent in tapasya, standing on one foot. Her tapasya went on thus almost endlessly. Brahma was pleased. He assured her that the Ancient Way (Sanatana Dharma) will keep her pure despite her terrible work. She will be helped in her work by Yama and all types of sicknesses. "You would be the Dharma of living beings and the Goddess of that Dharma." This is the Death that kills without lust or anger. Mrityu just follows what is right.

Yama the godhead, Mrityu which is Death, Kala which is Time have each a unique personality and yet they seem to be interchangeable concepts. Sri Aurobindo has chosen to give his own interpretation of Death's personality. It is 'mrityu' that literally means 'death', and in Sri Aurobindo's epic we see this Death but this is neither the Lady Death of Drona Parva nor the Death in Anushasana Parva arguing with Yama and Kala.

It is obvious Sri Aurobindo did not choose to use his Death as a lady for how can a sublime poet deny the maternal heart? The lawyer-like Death of the Gauthami legend seems closer to his conception as also the Yama in the Ruru-Pramadvura legend who is referred to as Dharmaraja. Death is inevitable but one can come to an understanding. If someone could make up for Pramadvura's life by giving up their own ...^{vi}

Death in Savitri is, of course, quite, quite different from the personalities we have seen so far. The Death we see in the epic is no intellectually thought-out creation as if Sri Aurobindo was engaged in research on Vyasa's conception of Yama. The epic gives us a visible person 'seen' by Sri Aurobindo in his yogic meditations. Not imagined, but 'seen'. Death is a person with a function as the Lady Mrithyu in the Drona Parva. This function is necessary if mankind is to evolve. According to him Death is to be considered "as a process of life". As he says in *The Life Divine* :

"Death is necessary because eternal change of form is the sole immortality to which the finite living substance can aspire and eternal change of experience the sole infinity to which the finite mind involved in living body can attain."^{vii}

Death is then a procedure for man aspiring to become a higher, greater human being. This procedure has to be understood as an experienced reality. Since the experienced reality of Death does not score marks as a happy experience, can it not be chased away from man's experience? In any case, how long should this repetitive birth-death-birth cycle go on in this human form? If Death is a procedure, must it not be given short shrift by getting in its place a more creative practice?

This is how we slip with ease into Sri Aurobindo's portrait of Death in *Savitri*. Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* can be taken as a blueprint for annihilating the Death experience. Her tapasya has strengthened Savitri and she is now prepared to face any eventuality. She is not worried about failure for such thoughts themselves weaken man. An example of positive thinking, Savitri does not need any visible image to recognise the presence of Death. As she kisses Satyavan as a kind of physical attempt to breathe life into him, she recognises that she is no more alone with Satyavan. In that forest full of living creatures, this was a new presence :

"Something had come there conscious, vast and dire.
Near her she felt a silent shade immense
Chilling the noon with darkness for its back.
An awful hush had fallen upon the place:
There was no cry of birds, no voice of beasts.
A terror and an anguish filled the world,
As if annihilation's mystery
Had taken a sensible form..."^{viii}

Has then life no meaning? Was it all no more than an illusion? For that is the view of Adi Sankara. If true knowledge has to be gained by man, he has to reject ignorance which is according to him nothing more than an *Adhyasa* (superimposition). Once this Ignorance is removed and the world is seen merely

as a superimposition on the Brahman, the dawn of knowledge regarding Brahman would be an automatic result. For, it is nothing but Ignorance on our part to think of you and me, yours and mine. So too with life and death! But how can Savitri reject her happy life with Satyavan as a superimposed experience? And now this Death that is confronting her. Is it also a superimposition? All that was seen by her, touched and enjoyed but a mere illusion? No! The reality was very real. The heart always recognises the truth about life and death and she recognises the truth about this Death as the "Shadow of a remote uncaring god" :

"She knew that visible Death was standing there
And Satyavan had passed from her embrace."

The Savitri-Death confrontation comes to us as a long walk together. It is so in Vyasa and Sri Aurobindo has followed the same scene. Unlike Vyasa's Yama who possesses a wonderful generosity of understanding, Death here is the Shearer and no more. The two aspects of Yama as *Mrityu* and *Dharma* are kept separate by Sri Aurobindo. Here Death has a job to do, and so he is no more than an Executor. This is why Sri Aurobindo avoids using the term Yama to Death. Nor is his Savitri in need of the kindly words of Vyasa's Yama. Here she is the full-blown *Tapasvini* and Sri Aurobindo makes it clear :

"The veil is torn, the thinker is no more:
Only the spirit sees and all is known.
Then a calm Power seated above our brows
Is seen, unshaken by our thoughts and deeds,
Its stillness bears the voices of the world:
Immobile, it moves Nature, looks on life.
It shapes immutably its far-seen ends...
A Force descended trailing endless lights;
Linking Time's seconds to infinity,
Illimitably it girt the earth and her:
It sank into her soul and she was changed."^{ix}

A nameless terror grips our heart as we watch Savitri moving effortlessly towards the Black Void, after gently placing the inert body of Satyavan on the green sward. The atmosphere tries to prevent her going. O withdraw back into life and forget it all! She should not make this day her last on earth. But the young girl is firm and even as Death leans down and draws away Satyavan's life, she follows the dire god. As they are about to cross the life-plane, we get to know the character of this Death, irritable, inimical and bound to the task

on his hand. How dare this chit of a girl attempt to cross over to his territory?
His words come out sharp :

"O mortal, turn back to thy transient kind;
Aspire not to accompany Death to his home,
As if thy breath could live where Time must die."

But who can stop Savitri? "A columned shaft of fire and light she rose", says Sri Aurobindo as we continue this terrible walk in what seems to be an eternal night. If Savitri is one-pointed in her aim, Death is somewhat confused as this is his first experience of a pulsating life defying the lifeless cold of the human body. He warns Savitri and perhaps somewhere at the back of his mind there is a little mix of pity, affection and admiration for this young lady. Perhaps she could be diverted by some gifts so that he can get along with his job of taking Satyavan's life to the nether worlds? He is taken aback when she rejects his gifts, calls him a "black lie" and as far as she is concerned there is nothing final about death.

Sri Aurobindo's Death is an admirable sophist. His lectures are drawn from Sri Aurobindo's meditations for they have no precedence in the Mahabharata. The profound statement of Krishna in the Gita, Kalosmi, I am Time, becomes a Vain Oration in the epic. Death is the creator, Death is the destroyer :

"I, Death, created them out of my void;
All things I have built in them and I destroy.
I made the worlds my net, each joy a mesh.
A Hunger amorous of its suffering prey,
Life that devours, my image see in things."

And so on and on flows the reason-based arguments of Death which are demolished by Savitri's simple statement : "I am, I love, I see, I act, I will."
How can reason have anything to do with these activities, especially love?

"Love in me knows the truth all changings mask.
I know that knowledge is a vast embrace:
I know that every being is myself,
In every heart is hidden the myriad One.
I know the calm Transcendent bears the world,
The veiled Inhabitant, the silent Lord:
I feel his secret act, his intimate fire;
I hear the murmur of the cosmic Voice.
I know my coming was a wave from God."

Educating a god is not easy. Death continues with his harangues. After all he is the static god of ignorance in the epic. He is the god of illusion and

destruction. But Savitri is a human being that has evolved into an image of the transcendent divine. As we come to the end-spaces of the pitch darkness of Eternal Night, neither has gained an upper hand. Death has not let go of Satyavan; but he has not been successful in preventing Savitri from following him either.

Night gives way to streaks of glow. Death, Satyavan's luminous form and Savitri now reach the land of the twilight of the gods. The three are seen in the background of an ethereal atmosphere. Death could think of it as a welcome change for nothing, not even total darkness, confounds the human being as the isthmus of darkness and light.

"There is a morning twilight of the gods;
Miraculous from sleep their forms arise
And God's long nights are justified by dawn.
There breaks a passion and splendour of new birth
And hue-winged visions stray across the lids,
Heaven's chanting heralds waken dim-eyed Space.
The dreaming deities look beyond the seen
And fashion in their thoughts the ideal worlds
Sprung from a limitless moment of desire
That once had lodged in some abysmal heart."^{xi}

But this twilight is welcome for Savitri who had had no clue about pathways in the darkness as she did not want to lose her luminous Satyavan. Sri Aurobindo's Death is an altogether new personality for human experience. Suddenly he changes his tone and now speaks insinuatingly of the twilight zone as a perfect image of the human condition. You live in a dream world!

"The ideal dwells not in heaven, nor on the earth,
A bright delirium of man's ardour of hope
Drunk with the wine of its own fantasy.
It is a brilliant shadow's dreamy trail."^{xii}

He is not prepared to buy the abracadabra of holiness, incarnations and eternity. All is but a dream, an adhyasa!

"This heightened joy, this ecstasy in the veins,
This strange illumination of the sense!
If Satyavan had lived, love would have died;
But Satyavan is dead and love shall live
A little while in thy sad breast, until
His face and body fade on memory's wall
Where other bodies, other faces come."

So insulting to be told that Savitri's love is no more than a physical hunger for the physical presence of Satyavan. To us who are controlled by Time the Destroyer, Death's words appear so realistic and logical :

"By a divine adventure of heavenly powers
Two strive, constant associates without joy,
Two egos straining in a single leash,
Two minds divided by their jarring thoughts,
Two spirits disjoined, for ever separate.
Thus is the ideal falsified in man's world;
Trivial or sombre, disillusion comes,
Life's harsh reality stares at the soul:
Heaven's hour adjourned flees into bodiless Time.
Death saves thee from this and saves Satyavan:
He now is safe, delivered from himself;
He travels to silence and felicity."

Any other heroine may have withdrawn, quite abashed. But Savitri cannot be victimised by such flawed logic. She assures Death that ideal love is very much possible on earth. The gopis of Brindavan! A marvellous description of Krishna comes from her, so apt, logical and emotionally perfect. For Krishna is not a one-time avatar. He is the Eternal Present!

"One who came love and lover and beloved
Eternal, built himself a wondrous field
And wove the measures of a marvellous dance.
There in its circles and its magic turns
Attracted he arrives, repelled he flees.
In the wild devious promptings of his mind
He tastes the honey of tears and puts off joy
Repenting, and has laughter and has wrath,
And both are a broken music of the soul
Which seeks out reconciled its heavenly rhyme.
Ever he comes to us across the years
Bearing a new sweet face that is the old."

Savitri assures Death that Krishna had come to her again, now wearing the face of Satyavan. Now Savitri proceeds to educate Death itself as to how creation was moving towards perfection. Ananda was the basis of this creation, this evolution. Ananda clasps the heart with its flame of immortality and no Death can remove this Delight of Existence from man. What Death considers to be

flaws are actually the signs of further growth. This creation is no illusion as its reality can be noticed us in clear, logical terms :

"If in the meaningless Void creation rose,
If from a bodiless Force Matter was born,
If Life could climb in the unconscious tree,
Its green delight break into emerald leaves
And its laughter of beauty blossom in the flower,
If sense could wake in tissue, nerve and cell,
And Thought seize the grey matter of the brain,
And soul peep from its secrecy through the flesh,
How shall the nameless Light not leap on men,
And unknown powers emerge from Nature's sleep?"^{xiii}

Death argues some more. In portraying Death, Sri Aurobindo seems to have felt that his duty is such a soulless task that the softer hues of the soul's beauty cannot move him. This Death understands only the chastising rod just as Krishna realised that the Kurus needed to be put down. Up with your Gandiva, he had commanded Arjuna to destroy the evil enemies, *jahi satrum duraasadam*! That is exactly what happens now. The time for action having come, Savitri blazes forth as a cosmic form, the Avatar :

"In a flaming moment of apocalypse
The Incarnation thrust aside its veil.
A little figure in infinity
Yet stood and seemed the Eternal's very house,
As if the world's centre was her very soul
And all wide space was but its outer robe.
A curve of the calm hauteur of far heaven
Descending into earth's humility,
Her forehead's span vaulted the Omniscient's gaze,
Her eyes were two stars that watched the universe."^{xiv}

Defeated by Savitri, Death flees vanishing into the Void. "And Satyavan and Savitri were alone."

We must remember that Death is not merely Mrityu in Vyasa. He is also Yama, Dharma and all that is glorious in our culture as we noted in the **Katha Upanishad**. We get to know of the 'other' facet of Death in Eternal Day.

References

- i. Of Yama Sri Aurobindo's note says: "Yama, lord of death, is also the master of the Law in the world, and he is therefore the child of the sun, luminous Master of Truth from which the Law is born."
- ii. Translations from **Katha Upanishad** used in this essay are by Sri Aurobindo.
- iii. All translations from Vyasa quoted in this essay are by R.Y. Deshpande
- iv. Translated by Prema Nandakumar
- v. *Savitri*, Book III, canto ii
- vi. For a detailed study of Death as handled in *Love and Death*, see **Sraddha**, 21 February, 2010.
- vii. Book One, chapter xx.
- viii. Book VIII, 'Death in the Forest'
- ix. Book IX, canto i.
- x. Book IX, canto ii
- xi. Book X, canto i
- xii. Book X, canto ii
- xiii. Book X, canto iv
- xiv. Book X, canto iv

The Human Aspiration

Debashish Banerji

Involution and evolution, ascent and descent, aspiration and grace, these form a central theme in the teaching of Sri Aurobindo, in his life and in the epic *Savitri*. One could say that this double movement runs through the entire epic *Savitri* and gives the central power to its dynamism. This double movement in *Savitri* is foregrounded by the two major actions that take place within it and which are related to the two major characters in it. In the first of these Aswapati the king, the father of Savitri, embodies a great aspiration to achieve that which is a promise in the human consciousness. He sees the possibility for an existence without suffering, unconsciousness, death and evil and aspires to overcome these difficulties and obstacles which face the human being so as to achieve the fulfilment of his possibilities. In response to his aspiration there comes from above a Grace, the Grace of the Divine Mother in the incarnated form of Savitri. This initiates the second movement. Savitri becomes the protagonist of the epic, the person who will bring through the power that she contains within herself the fulfilment which Aswapati sought for the human race. She achieves this in a symbolic form in her own life but in actuality, opens thereby the doors of this possibility for all humanity.

This double movement is also the central image in Sri Aurobindo's teaching in his packed mantric text *The Mother* which carries the quintessence of his practical teaching. He begins with the absolute necessity for the action of these two powers. They are the necessary and sufficient powers in the yoga of Sri Aurobindo. He says in the first paragraph of *The Mother* :

There are two powers that alone can effect in their conjunction the great and difficult thing which is the aim of our endeavour, a fixed and unflinching aspiration that calls from below and a supreme Grace from above that answers.

Sri Aurobindo portrays these two powers in a dramatic form through the narrative of his epic *Savitri*. In his other writings as well, Sri Aurobindo gave the greatest importance to aspiration as the central power available to human beings to achieve a difficult transformation of his nature and consciousness. He

begins his magnum opus of philosophy *The Life Divine* with a chapter called 'The Human Aspiration'. Here he writes :

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation, — for it survives the longest period of scepticism and returns after every banishment, — is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last, — God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.

In this paragraph, Sri Aurobindo sets up what he considers the essence of the human aspiration. The aspiration for the godheads of perfection, of ideal existence, of perfect consciousness is presented here. He continues :

These persistent ideals of the race are at once the contradiction of its normal experience and the affirmation of higher and deeper experiences which are abnormal to humanity and only to be attained, in their organised entirety, by a revolutionary individual effort or an evolutionary general progression. To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert out twilight or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation, — this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in Matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution. To the ordinary material intellect which takes its present organisation of consciousness for the limit of its possibilities, the direct contradiction of the unrealised ideals with the realised fact is a final argument against their validity. But if we take a more deliberate view of the world's workings, that direct opposition appears rather as part of Nature's profoundest method and the seal of her completest sanction.

Here we find these aspirations of the human race, these deepest and most 'primeval longings' as Sri Aurobindo calls them, to be constantly contradicted by his normal experience. Yet he draws our attention to the fact that these

aspirations persist in us, because they seek, against the grain of our experience, for their fulfilment. And he seems to indicate that they are planted in us by Nature, to whom they belong. It is not merely something hyper-individual, eccentric or a freak of human existence, but something universal in terrestrial existence, and as he says, something which, "if we take a deliberate view of the world's workings," we will find to be natural to the human consciousness.

On this basis, he develops his theory of evolution. This idea of an aspiration in the human being is an individualised conscious instance of a general stress for evolution in Nature. The idea of evolution in modern times comes to us through the work of Charles Darwin. But Darwinian evolution or the evolution of physical forms as theorised in Biology only recognises a growth of adaptation in forms and functions on the material plane. There is also along with this an evolution of consciousness, consciousness which embodies itself in these forms and functions, the organs developed through evolution. But Darwinian evolution, which assumes a material and accidental basis, ignores this evolution of consciousness. To account for this evolution of consciousness, one cannot merely see an accidental movement but one has to contend with the possibility of an Intelligent Power at work, because as Sri Aurobindo points out, these higher forms of consciousness emerging from the Inconscience of Matter couldn't appear without their prior presence within it. This may bring to mind the old debate between the Creationists and Evolutionists, today reconfigured in terms of Evolution vs. Intelligent Design. But Sri Aurobindo's position is not a simple either/or in this debate. It is a complex formulation which includes aspects of both arguments. He says :

We speak of the evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of Mind in Matter; but evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form, unless we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. And then there seems to be little objection to a farther step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond Mind. In that case, the unconquerable impulse of man towards God, Light, Bliss, Freedom, Immortality presents itself in its right place in the chain as simply the imperative impulse by which Nature is seeking to evolve beyond Mind, and appears to be as natural, true and just as the impulse towards Life which she has planted in certain forms of Matter or the impulse towards Mind which she has planted in certain forms of Life. (*The Life Divine*, SABCL, vol.18, p.3)

In other words, the evolution of consciousness which accompanies the evolution of forms in nature is backgrounded or preceded by an involution of consciousness. He posits that the explanation, philosophically speaking, to the appearance of higher forms of consciousness in matter, is an involution of these states of consciousness in Matter, resulting in a latency or sleep of these principles of consciousness. In the Vedantic view, and in the way in which Sri Aurobindo presents it, Reality is seen as a fully extended infinite Self-consciousness. Vedanta gives to this the name Sachchidananda, which means the triune reality of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. In our evolutionary universe, this Original Subject appears to itself as the purity of an objectified reality, the Inconscient Substance of Matter with consciousness latent in it. It is as if it views itself through an act of consciousness to be only a shell of its own being, its own inconscient possibility.

Thus, the totality of infinite self-consciousness is latent or hidden in this Inconscience, which becomes the figure or façade of an involved Spirit. This material façade is given an exclusive right of existence so that the involved Spirit within it seems to have no reality and must struggle against its dead weight of Inconscience to express itself. This accomplishes itself through a process which seems to be part necessity and part chance, evolving thereby an ascending series of consciousness. However, Sri Aurobindo posits a double movement for the process of this evolution, that is, the locked powers of consciousness in Matter do not merely emerge in it through an automatic evolution of that which became involved in its origin, but a continuous double process of involution and evolution gives the basis to the structure of time in such an evolutionary universe.

One may ask why there is any need to posit an ascent or a descent. If there is an original involution, it should necessarily evolve over time. But to conceive from within our sense of reality of the possibility of an involution which is evolving, we must realise that this is merely a way of speaking. For us as beings within time, temporal beings, this experience of the evolution of consciousness seems to be a process in time. But if we try to conceive of this from the viewpoint of an Absolute Being which is infinite and eternal, then time itself and its finite processes can only be paradoxes. It is to account for paradoxical time in an absolute reality marked by eternity, that Friedrich Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer, spoke of Time as the eternal recurrence of the Same. Schopenhauer himself developed this idea based on Indian Vedantic thought. An eternal recurrence of the Same implies that infinite and absolute Reality quantises itself through an act of consciousness, appearing and disappearing but necessarily re-appearing ad infinitum. Thus infinity or eternity is here re-figured as perpetuity. In each such temporal instance the totality of infinite Being recurs.

But within this recurrence, according to Sri Aurobindo, there also recurs the double movement of involution and evolution, ascent and descent, aspiration and spiritual response, manifesting evolution. Here we see that if we posit an involution and evolution, this cannot but be an appearance of time, and this structure of time can maintain itself only in terms of eternity if it is a perpetual recurrence. Therefore, we can conceive of this double movement of involution and evolution as a dynamic pattern, not merely a static structure, fixed once and for all as an ongoing expansion in time but a recurrence or a repetition of arduous aspiration and response of consciousness at every "instant."

We can see that it takes an act of consciousness to view Spirit, Sachchidananda as an Inconscience. But this is also an operation of Intelligence, of Knowledge, because what we have is not merely powers of consciousness emerging from an appearance of Inconscience in which they have involved themselves, but significantly, a graded and phased emergence of such powers. This is what gives to the evolution its sense of an ascending series of exploration. This Intelligence that seems to be implicit within the Inconscience can be thought of as the Mind of God. Sri Aurobindo posits such a Divine Mind which is at work in the evolution and it is because, as human beings, we possess a mental faculty, that we can intuit the presence of such a Mind, the power of a reasoned or a more properly, supra-rational exploration of consciousness. We would be justified in calling this supra-rational because we intuit it as a totality consciousness, too integral, too whole, infinite and all-containing, and marshalling of its infinite contents in an order at the same time. Therefore, our mind which can deal only with finite understandings can intuit it but finds itself unable to grasp this infinite mind of God. Sri Aurobindo gives it the name Supermind.

In the emergence of consciousness from Matter through Life to Mind, we have noted that these forms of consciousness have followed an evolutionary progression. In Sri Aurobindo's view of evolution, that progressive emergence involves the natural aspiration of these forms of consciousness within Matter to liberate themselves from their entrapment within its Inconscience. Such a stirring of consciousness within Matter results in the evolution of material forms which approximate conditions for the emergence of these new principles of consciousness. This evolution "from below," partaking of the properties of Matter, can appear to demonstrate a statistical randomness, as in Darwinian processes. However, the aspiration for emergence is accompanied by and calls down "from above" a response from the independent plane of consciousness proper to this principle, causing the forms proper to it to manifest in Matter, thus unlocking its own involved potency.

If we can think of the principles of consciousness which are latent in Matter, we find that their properties are subordinated to the properties of Matter, they are always already compromised by Matter. If, for example, the Life-consciousness in Matter were to aspire to release itself, it would only attain to a very partial manifestation, because constrained by the alien principle of Matter and its lack of recognition of the forms proper to the latent principle. But if it were to push Matter to aspire so as to cause approximations of its own existence to emerge, this aspiration would evoke a response from a Presence above belonging to the independent plane of Life. The principle of Life that is "outside" of materialised terrestrial existence would respond to that aspiration and in this response would arrive a full-fledged manifestation of the forms of Life in Matter. Now this manifestation will naturally be modified and compromised by the laws of Matter just as it will itself modify the laws of Matter. So, too, other and higher principles would follow a similar process of ascent and descent.

When we come to the human being, we find not merely the universal or the cosmic principle of Mind operating here but this principle operating in an individualised or personalised form. In each individual human being, that property of nature which calls this double movement into action becomes individually operative. A conscious individual urge towards self-transcendence marks the human being, however veiled this may be in reality in specific cases. This secret of human existence at its core is what Sri Aurobindo captures in the epigram in his work on yoga, *The Synthesis of Yoga*. There he says "All life is yoga." By this he means that this secret double process of the aspiration "that calls from below" and the "unfailing" Grace "from above" which answers it is at the heart of all Nature as a generalised process, and that this is the secret meaning of yoga. "All Life" expresses this secret process but it begins to emerge from its secrecy and becomes individualised as a conscious process in human beings. If we become aware of this urge within us as the secret process of "all life" and learn to identify individually with the process of that yoga of nature, then that yoga which is the very meaning of existence in our universe will enter a new phase of self-consciousness in us.

We can see formulations of this esoteric symbol developed by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*. For example, the first Canto of *Savitri*, 'The Symbol Dawn,' has a line related to the manifestation of dawn which says, 'The brief perpetual sign recurred above.' This 'brief perpetual sign' appears at first sight to be a reference to the sun, because as he develops 'the symbol dawn', he shows us that the sun returns each day, and is thus a recurrence. It is a beginning that begins ever anew, a beginning which emerges from an end but an end which only is the mouth or the womb, the birth-place of a new beginning. This again is the notion of

the recurrence of the eternal as perpetuity in time. However, this recurrence is not just a closed circle, it is an evolution. Greater and greater powers of solar consciousness emerge with each dawn and this symbol of recurrence is better captured not just as a repeating succession of births and deaths or dawns and nights, but as an involution and an evolution that ever repeat manifesting greater and greater powers of Spirit and Knowledge. Indeed, the "symbol dawn" at the initiation of Savitri is not "just another" dawn but a dawn which will make possible a new cycle of manifestation, offering a new principle of consciousness which Sri Aurobindo calls the supramental.

This process is also captured in Sri Aurobindo's own symbol. Sri Aurobindo's symbol is a double triangle, two intersecting triangles which can be thought of as ascending and descending, and where they meet, they form a square. The "ascending" triangle represents the aspiration of Nature in the principles of consciousness manifest so far in it, which are Matter, Life and Mind. These principles are represented by the three lines of the "ascending" triangle. In response to this aspiration, there descends from above, from the fully awakened and self-conscious realms above, the three primary modes of the Supreme Conscious Being Sachchidananda, or Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. These three powers, Existence, Consciousness and Bliss are thus represented by the lines of the "descending" triangle. Where the two meet, we have the square of perfect manifestation and inside that square, which one may see as a symbol of the Intelligence of God, Vijnana or Supermind, there is born a new manifestation, represented by seven waves of the seven realms of consciousness, with the lotus of the Supreme Being blossoming in it. Sri Aurobindo enumerates these seven realms of consciousness as Matter, Life, Mind, Supermind, Bliss, Consciousness and Existence. He also refers to the lotus at the centre of this symbol as the Avatar, the embodied Divine Consciousness.

We may say that the symbol of Sri Aurobindo is also the central image that runs through *Savitri* like an ideogram. The central message of *Savitri* and the motif continuously operative through its text is the idea of the primordial aspiration of Nature for the overcoming of its limitations of pain, death and falsehood and the response of the Supreme Grace leading to the birth of the embodied Divine Consciousness, the avatar in the form of Savitri, and the fulfilment of a divine life upon earth through this intervention.

To illustrate this, one could look at two small passages from *Savitri* where Aswapati, the protagonist, is presented to us. I believe one may confidently say that Sri Aurobindo writes himself into Aswapati, in that the latter carries in himself the aspiration that Sri Aurobindo himself carried. Thus, from this point

of view the life of Aswapati is the spiritual biography of Sri Aurobindo just as Savitri could be said to represent the internal biography of Sri Aurobindo's collaborator, The Mother. In this sense the inner life of the Mother may be read as the act of Grace, of the intervention of a Power that brings the light of Truth to usher a divine manifestation. Of course, it is necessary not to be too literal about such identifications, but one may clearly detect overlaps which make this identification symbolically credible.

Sri Aurobindo introduces Aswapati to us in Book I, Canto 3 of *Savitri*, 'The Yoga of the King'. From the outset of this introduction we find that what Aswapati represents is the primordial aspiration of Nature that calls for the Supreme Grace. Aswapati is described in terms of the approaching divine Event as a culmination of this dialectic, the double process of ascent and descent. He writes :

A world's desire compelled her mortal birth.

This 'world's desire,' individualised in Aswapati, refers to the primordial aspiration of Nature fuelling the evolution of consciousness and ever-expectant for the godheads that can manifest a divine life. More specifically, the "her" here refers to Savitri, the Shakti avatar or embodiment of the supramental consciousness whose intervention "from above" is sought for the manifestation of the new principle.

One in the front of the immemorial quest,
 Protagonist of the mysterious play
 In which the Unknown pursues himself through forms
 And limits his eternity by the hours
 And the blind Void struggles to live and see,
 A thinker and toiler in the ideal's air,
 Brought down to earth's dumb need her radiant power.

(*Savitri*, 4th rev ed, 1993, p.22)

From this outset, we see the dialectic of ascent and descent at work. Aswapati is described as "one in the front of the immemorial quest", in other words, one who embodies in individualised conscious form Nature's own aspiration, he is as if the spearhead of Nature. He is then referred to as the 'Protagonist of the mysterious play'. This "mysterious play" is the secret process of Nature, the hidden yoga within it seeking for the manifestation of the Divine Consciousness. This secret process of Nature finds a protagonist in Aswapati, one who embodies its goals and pursues them as a conscious individual. We have here the sense of a plot being worked out and Aswapati is an individual chosen by dint of his

aspiration, as the protagonist, the hero of this play which has cosmic dimensions. The next lines of the passage specify "the play" as one in which

The Unknown pursues himself through forms
 And limits his eternity by the hours
 And the blind Void struggles to live and see,

These lines bring to mind the Intelligence at the heart of evolving forms in Nature, struggling from "bottom up" through what appear to be random steps to arrive at the archetypes or godheads which lie locked in the Inconscient. This is the universal condition which aspires for an Intervention "from above," the descent of Divine Grace.

Brought down to earth's dumb need her radiant power.

Of course, what is interesting here is that both the Aspiration and the Grace are given individualised and embodied forms, and exist not merely as impersonal principles but as incarnations. This aspect of the double movement relates to Sri Aurobindo's theory of the avatar, something he does not develop in *The Life Divine*. He touches on it in his *Essays on the Gita*, but there too it is not related in its fullness to his evolutionary theory. We will have occasion to consider this aspect later when we take up avatarhood in *Savitri*.

In another passage from the same canto, he brings to focus the same reality as seen from the other side — i.e. the aspiration not rising "from below" but missioned or attracted "from above" by this Divine Intelligence, Supermind, the Shakti whose action will result in her descending and occupying the house of Matter. Sri Aurobindo presents this in the form of a process :

This sculptor of the forms of the Infinite,
 This screened unrecognised Inhabitant,
 Initiate of his own veiled mysteries,
 Hides in a small dumb seed his cosmic thought.
 In the mute strength of the occult Idea
 Determining predestined shape and act,
 Passenger from life to life, from scale to scale,
 Changing his imaged self from form to form,
 He regards the icon growing by his gaze
 And in the worm foresees the coming god.
 At last the traveller in the paths of Time
 Arrives on the frontiers of eternity.
 In the transient symbols of humanity draped,
 He feels his substance of undying self
 And loses his kinship to mortality.

A beam of the Eternal smites his heart,
 His thought stretches into infinitude;
 All in him turns to spirit vastnesses.
 His soul breaks out to join the Oversoul,
 His life is oceaned by that superlife.
 He has drunk from the breasts of the Mother of the worlds;
 A topless Supernature fills his frame:
 She adopts his spirit's everlasting ground
 As the security of her changing world
 And shapes the figure of her unborn might.
 Immortally she conceives herself in him,
 In the creature the unveiled Creatrix works:
 Her face is seen through his face, her eyes through his eyes;
 Her being is his through a vast identity.

.....
 A static Oneness and dynamic Power
 Descend in him, the integral Godhead's seals;
 His soul and body take that splendid stamp. (Savitri, ibid)

In this passage Sri Aurobindo outlines the evolutionary process in the individual human consciousness as something which is being prepared by the Divine "from above" descending into a seed-form in the manifestation and guiding its own evolution "from below." Arriving at the human stage, the form and its consciousness are ripe for the intervention of the Divine Mother who, descending, in response to its individualised aspiration, will occupy his nature and build it into the perfection of her godhead. This is the culmination of the dual process of Aspiration and Grace and is, from a certain vantage, the inner message of *Savitri*.

On a height he stood that looked towards greater heights.
 Our early approaches to the Infinite
 Are sunrise splendours on a marvellous verge
 While lingers yet unseen the glorious sun.
 What now we see is a shadow of what must come.
 The earth's uplook to a remote unknown
 Is a preface only of the epic climb
 Of human soul from its flat earthly state
 To the discovery of a greater self
 And the far gleam of an eternal Light.
 This world is a beginning and a base

Where Life and Mind erect their structured dreams;
 An unborn Power must build reality.
 A deathbound littleness is not all we are:
 Immortal our forgotten vastnesses
 Await discovery in our summit selves;
 Unmeasured breadths and depths of being are ours.
 Akin to the ineffable Secrecy,
 Mystic, eternal in unrealised Time,
 Neighbours of Heaven are Nature's altitudes.
 To these high-peaked dominions sealed to our search
 Too far from surface Nature's postal routes,
 Too lofty for our mortal lives to breathe,
 Deep in us a forgotten kinship points
 And a faint voice of ecstasy and prayer
 Calls to those lucent lost immensities.
 Even when we fail to look into our souls
 Or lie embedded in earthly consciousness,
 Still have we parts that grow towards the Light,
 Yet are there luminous tracts and heavens serene
 And Eldorados of splendour and ecstasy
 And temples to the Godhead none can see.
 A shapeless memory lingers in us still
 And sometimes, when our sight is turned within,
 Earth's ignorant veil is lifted from our eyes;
 There is a short miraculous escape.
 This narrow fringe of clamped experience
 We leave behind meted to us as life,
 Our little walks, our insufficient reach.
 Our souls can visit in great lonely hours
 Still regions of imperishable Light,
 All-seeing eagle-peaks of silent Power
 And moon-flame oceans of swift fathomless Bliss
 And calm immensities of spirit Space.
 In the unfolding process of the Self
 Sometimes the inexpressible Mystery
 Elects a human vessel of descent.
 A breath comes down from a supernal air,
 A Presence is born, a guiding Light awakes,
 A stillness falls upon the instruments :

Fixed sometimes like a marble monument,
 Stone-calm, the body is a pedestal
 Supporting a figure of eternal Peace.
 Or a revealing Force sweeps blazing in;
 Out of some vast superior continent
 Knowledge breaks through trailing its radiant seas,
 And Nature trembles with the power, the flame.
 A greater Personality sometimes
 Possesses us which yet we know is ours:
 Or we adore the Master of our souls.
 Then the small bodily ego thins and falls;
 No more insisting on its separate self,
 Losing the punctilio of its separate birth,
 It leaves us one with Nature and with God.
 In moments when the inner lamps are lit,
 And the life's cherished guests are left outside,
 Our spirit sits alone and speaks to its gulfs.
 A wider consciousness opens then its doors;
 Invading from spiritual silences
 A ray of the timeless Glory stoops awhile
 To commune with our seized illumined clay
 And leaves its huge white stamp upon our lives.
 In the oblivious field of mortal mind,
 Revealed to the closed prophet eyes of trance
 Or in some deep internal solitude
 Witnessed by a strange immaterial sense,
 The signals of eternity appear.
 The truth mind could not know unveils its face,
 We hear what mortal ears have never heard,
 We feel what earthly sense has never felt,
 We love what common hearts repel and dread;
 Our minds hush to a bright Omniscient;
 A Voice calls from the chambers of the soul;
 We meet the ecstasy of the Godhead's touch
 In golden privacies of immortal fire.
 These signs are native to a larger self
 That lives within us by ourselves unseen;
 Only sometimes a holier influence comes,
 A tide of mightier surgings bears our lives

And a diviner Presence moves the soul.
 Or through the earthly coverings something breaks,
 A grace and beauty of spiritual light,
 The murmuring tongue of a celestial fire.
 Ourself and a high stranger whom we feel,
 It is and acts unseen as if it were not;
 It follows the line of sempiternal birth,
 Yet seems to perish with its mortal frame.
 Assured of the Apocalypse to be,
 It reckons not the moments and the hours;
 Great, patient, calm it sees the centuries pass,
 Awaiting the slow miracle of our change
 In the sure deliberate process of world-force
 And the long march of all-revealing Time.
 It is the origin and the master-due,
 A silence overhead, an inner Voice,
 A living image seated in the heart,
 An unwall'd wideness and a fathomless point,
 The truth of all these cryptic shows in Space,
 The Real towards which our strivings move,
 The secret grandiose meaning of our lives.
 A treasure of honey in the combs of God,
 A Splendour burning in a tenebrous cloak,
 It is our glory of the flame of God,
 Our golden fountain of the world's delight,
 An immortality cowed in the cape of death,
 The shape of our unborn divinity.
 It guards for us our fate in depths within
 Where sleeps the eternal seed of transient things.
 Always we bear in us a magic key
 Concealed in life's hermetic envelope.
 A burning Witness in the sanctuary
 Regards through Time and the blind walls of Form;
 A timeless Light is in his hidden eyes;
 He sees the secret things no words can speak
 And knows the goal of the unconscious world
 And the heart of the mystery of the journeying years.
 But all is screened, subliminal, mystical;
 It needs the intuitive heart, the inward turn,

It needs the power of a spiritual gaze.
 Else to our waking mind's small moment look
 A goalless voyage seems our dubious course
 Some Chance has settled or hazarded some Will,
 Or a Necessity without aim or cause
 Unwillingly compelled to emerge and be.
 In this dense field where nothing is plain or sure,
 Our very being seems to us questionable,
 Our life a vague experiment, the soul
 A flickering light in a strange ignorant world,
 The earth a brute mechanic accident,
 A net of death in which by chance we live.
 All we have learned appears a doubtful guess,
 The achievement done a passage or a phase
 Whose farther end is hidden from our sight,
 A chance happening or a fortuitous fate.
 Out of the unknown we move to the unknown.
 Ever surround our brief existence here
 Grey shadows of unanswered questionings;
 The dark Inconscient's signless mysteries
 Stand up unsolved behind Fate's starting-line;
 An aspiration in the Night's profound,
 Seed of a perishing body and half-lit mind,
 Uplifts its lonely tongue of conscious fire
 Towards an undying Light for ever lost;
 Only it hears, sole echo of its call,
 The dim reply in man's unknowing heart
 And meets, not understanding why it came
 Or for what reason is the suffering here,
 God's sanction to the paradox of life
 And the riddle of the Immortal's birth in Time.
 Along a path of aeons serpentine
 In the coiled blackness of her nescient course
 The Earth-Goddess toils across the sands of Time.
 A Being is in her whom she hopes to know,
 A Word speaks to her heart she cannot hear,
 A Fate compels whose form she cannot see.
 In her unconscious orbit through the Void
 Out of her mindless depths she strives to rise,

A perilous life her gain, a struggling joy;
 A Thought that can conceive but hardly knows
 Arises slowly in her and creates
 The idea, the speech that labels more than it lights;
 A trembling gladness that is less than bliss
 Invades from all this beauty that must die.
 Alarmed by the sorrow dragging at her feet
 And conscious of the high things not yet won,
 Ever she nurses in her sleepless breast
 An inward urge that takes from her rest and peace
 Ignorant and weary and invincible;
 She seeks through the soul's war and quivering pain
 The pure perfection her marred nature needs,
 A breath of Godhead on her stone and mire.
 A faith she craves that can survive defeat,
 The sweetness of a love that knows not death,
 The radiance of a truth for ever sure.
 A light grows in her, she assumes a voice,
 Her state she learns to read and the act she has done,
 But the one needed truth eludes her grasp,
 Herself and all of which she is the sign.
 An inarticulate whisper drives her steps
 Of which she feels the force but not the sense;
 A few rare intimations come as guides,
 Immense divining flashes cleave her brain,
 And sometimes in her hours of dream and muse
 The truth that she has missed looks out on her
 As if far off and yet within her soul.
 A change comes near that flees from her surmise
 And, ever postponed, compels attempt and hope,
 Yet seems too great for mortal hope to dare.
 A vision meets her of supernal Powers
 That draw her as if mighty kinsmen lost
 Approaching with estranged great luminous gaze.
 Then is she moved to all that she is not
 And stretches arms to what was never hers.
 Outstretching arms to the unconscious Void,
 Passionate she prays to invisible forms of Gods
 Soliciting from dumb Fate and toiling Time

What most she needs, what most exceeds her scope,
 A Mind unvisited by illusion's gleams,
 A Will expressive of soul's deity,
 A Strength not forced to stumble by its speed,
 A Joy that drags not sorrow as its shade.
 For these she yearns and feels them destined hers:
 Heaven's privilege she claims as her own right.
 Just is her claim the all-witnessing Gods approve,
 Clear in a greater light than reason owns:
 Our intuitions are its title-deeds;
 Our souls accept what our blind thoughts refuse.
 Earth's winged chimaeras are Truth's steeds in Heaven,
 The impossible God's sign of things to be.
 But few can look beyond the present state
 Or overleap this matted hedge of sense.
 All that transpires on earth and all beyond
 Are parts of an illimitable plan
 The One keeps in his heart and knows alone.
 Our outward happenings have their seed within,
 And even this random Fate that imitates Chance,
 This mass of unintelligible results,
 Are the dumb graph of truths that work unseen:
 The laws of the Unknown create the known.
 The events that shape the appearance of our lives
 Are a cipher of subliminal quiverings
 Which rarely we surprise or vaguely feel,
 Are an outcome of suppressed realities
 That hardly rise into material day:
 They are born from the spirit's sun of hidden powers
 Digging a tunnel through emergency.
 But who shall pierce into the cryptic gulf
 And learn what deep necessity of the soul
 Determined casual deed and consequence?
 Absorbed in a routine of daily acts,
 Our eyes are fixed on an external scene;
 We hear the crash of the wheels of Circumstance
 And wonder at the hidden cause of things.
 Yet a foreseeing Knowledge might be ours,
 If we could take our spirit's stand within,

If we could hear the muffled daemon voice.
 Too seldom is the shadow of what must come
 Cast in an instant on the secret sense
 Which feels the shock of the invisible,
 And seldom in the few who answer give
 The mighty process of the cosmic Will
 Communicates its image to our sight,
 Identifying the world's mind with ours.
 Our range is fixed within the crowded arc
 Of what we observe and touch and thought can guess
 And rarely dawns the light of the Unknown
 Waking in us the prophet and the seer.
 The outward and the immediate are our field,
 The dead past is our background and support;
 Mind keeps the soul prisoner, we are slaves to our acts;
 We cannot free our gaze to reach wisdom's sun.
 Inheritor of the brief animal mind,
 Man, still a child in Nature's mighty hands,
 In the succession of the moments lives;
 To a changing present is his narrow right;
 His memory stares back at a phantom past,
 The future flees before him as he moves;
 He sees imagined garments, not a face.
 Armed with a limited precarious strength,
 He saves his fruits of work from adverse chance.
 A struggling ignorance is his wisdom's mate.
 He waits to see the consequence of his acts,
 He waits to weigh the certitude of his thoughts,
 He knows not what he shall achieve or when;
 He knows not whether at last he shall survive,
 Or end like the mastodon and the sloth
 And perish from the earth where he was king.
 He is ignorant of the meaning of his life,
 He is ignorant of his high and splendid fate.
 Only the Immortals on their deathless heights
 Dwelling beyond the walls of Time and Space,
 Masters of living, free from the bonds of Thought,
 Who are overseers of Fate and Chance and Will
 And experts of the theorem of world-need,

Can see the Idea, the Might that change Time's course,
 Come maned with light from undiscovered worlds,
 Hear, while the world toils on with its deep blind heart,
 The galloping hooves of the unforeseen event,
 Bearing the superhuman rider, near
 And, impassive to earth's din and startled cry,
 Return to the silence of the hills of God;
 As lightning leaps, as thunder sweeps, they pass
 And leave their mark on the trampled breast of Life.
 Above the world the world-creators stand,
 In the phenomenon see its mystic source.
 These heed not the deceiving outward play,
 They turn not to the moment's busy tramp,
 But listen with the still patience of the Unborn
 For the slow footsteps of far Destiny
 Approaching through huge distances of Time,
 Unmarked by the eye that sees effect and cause,
 Unheard mid the clamour of the human plane.
 Attentive to an unseen Truth they seize
 A sound as of invisible augur wings,
 Voices of an unplumbed significance,
 Mutterings that brood in the core of Matter's sleep.
 In the heart's profound audition they can catch
 The murmurs lost by life's uncaring ear,
 A prophet-speech in thought's omniscient trance.
 Above the illusion of the hopes that pass,
 Behind the appearance and the overt act,
 Behind this clock-work Chance and vague surmise,
 Amid the wrestle of force, the trampling feet,
 Across the triumph, fighting and despair,
 They watch the Bliss for which earth's heart has cried,
 On the long road which cannot see its end
 Winding undetected through the sceptic days
 And to meet it guide the unheedful moving world.
 Thus will the masked Transcendent mount his throne.
 When darkness deepens strangling the earth's breast
 And man's corporeal mind is the only lamp,
 As a thief's in the night shall be the covert tread
 Of one who steps unseen into his house.
 A Voice ill-heard shall speak, the soul obey,

A Power into mind's inner chamber steal,
 A charm and sweetness open life's closed doors
 And beauty conquer the resisting world,
 The Truth-Light capture Nature by surprise,
 A stealth of God compel the heart to bliss
 And earth grow unexpectedly divine.
 In Matter shall be lit the spirit's glow,
 In body and body kindled the sacred birth;
 Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,
 The days become a happy pilgrim march,
 Our will a force of the Eternal's power,
 And thought the rays of a spiritual sun.
 A few shall see what none yet understands;
 God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;
 For man shall not know the coming till its hour
 And belief shall be not till the work is done.

This passage is from Book 1, Canto 4 of *Savitri*, 'The Secret Knowledge'. Sri Aurobindo begins this passage by pointing to the fact that there is a mystery to life which eludes us, our knowledge of the hidden and secret processes at work in our life and in nature is scanty at best. As human beings, we thirst for meaning, but no depth of meaning is available to our surface consciousness, we grope as it were to find some meaning to life which eludes us. We have an intimation of meaning and yet we do not know what it is. Yet through all this limitation and incertitude, something in us is conscious of an aspiration at work, an aspiration that does not find its fulfilment but always keeps its flame alive. So he starts this passage by talking about the condition of ignorance in which we find ourselves.

But all is screened, subliminal, mystical;
 It needs the intuitive heart, the inward turn,
 It needs the power of a spiritual gaze.

Thus he confronts us with the fact that there is a knowledge to be had, but it needs a change of consciousness, a movement into another knowledge-status which is not common or available readily to us, it is not in our present condition :

Else to our waking mind's small moment look
 A goalless voyage seems our dubious course
 Some Chance has settled or hazarded some Will,
 Or a Necessity without aim or cause
 Unwillingly compelled to emerge and be.

To the transient measure of human experience, it feels as if this universe is a complete accident or some very ambiguous Intelligence is at work, which, if anything, seems to be hostile, cruel and which, for reasons that we can never imagine, has forced on the universe an unhappy condition we find ourselves haplessly and helplessly experiencing.

In this dense field where nothing is plain or sure,
Our very being seems to us questionable,
Our life a vague experiment, the soul
A flickering light in a strange ignorant world,
The earth a brute mechanic accident,
A net of death in which by chance we live.

This is how the universal condition looks to us given our mental incertitude, which intuitively some meaning but can be sure of nothing. The world feels like something which is completely unknown, where each step is a step in the dark and as he says 'A flickering light in a strange ignorant world.', The earth seems to be something which is completely bereft of consciousness like a machine, 'a brute mechanic accident', and 'a net of death'. Within this unconscious trap we find ourselves cursed with consciousness. We find ourselves in this trap purely through random chance — 'in which by chance we live'. In these lines, Sri Aurobindo gives voice to the existential angst of the human condition. He continues about the kind of darkness and inconscience which are at the base of our experience.

The dark Inconscient's signless mysteries
Stand up unsolved behind Fate's starting-line.

We are pulled as if into some plot through fate and experience paradoxes to which we find no solution. Sri Aurobindo gives the most eloquent and feeling voice to this condition but then refers to it as a kind of a goad for the birth of an aspiration within this condition of Ignorance. He says

An aspiration in the Night's profound,
Seed of a perishing body and half-lit mind,
Uplifts its lonely tongue of conscious fire
Towards an undying Light for ever lost;

This aspiration is described in impersonal and cosmic terms, though it is shown to be a product of an emerging consciousness marked by mortality and ignorance. Consciousness which lives only for a fleeting while, quenched easily by death and unable to make sense of its world due to its "half-lit mind" calls out for knowledge, power and immortality. This is the founding act of aspiration

with the appearance of consciousness on earth. In this act, there seems to be a dim remembrance of a lost "undying Light" somewhere within the depths of the Inconscience and that remembrance stirs within the darkness like a flame, uplifting 'its lonely tongue of conscious fire'. It arises from its sense of imprisonment, because it feels cramped and compromised in a condition in which it is alone. It is a stifled and smothered consciousness in an alien world. It calls to its own origin. In other words, the aspiration intuitively and calls to its own native condition, the "home" from which it has arrived here. This is the "undying Light for ever lost'. It seems completely absent here and the aspiration calls to it as if it is calling to something lost.

Only it hears, sole echo of its call,
The dim reply in man's unknowing heart

This aspiration has its roots in a cosmic power. It is a cosmic aspiration but it does not meet the reply of the cosmic power above, what it meets is an echo 'in man's unknowing heart'. In other words, it finds resonance in the individual consciousness. Something in the individual vibrates to that cosmic aspiration and it intensifies it in himself even if he knows nothing about its meaning or whether it will succeed or fail. This is how the human being becomes a conscious protagonist of Nature's aspiration.

And meets, not understanding why it came
Or for what reason is the suffering here,
God's sanction to the paradox of life
And the riddle of the Immortal's birth in Time.

The human aspiration, though it finds life so ambiguous that it cannot understand its message, realises nevertheless that in some sense, this paradoxical and ambiguous manifestation, has been sanctioned by a Higher Power, by God, presented to us as a riddle and a challenge in which the fulfilment of our highest ideal of Godhead needs to manifest, with aspiration as its necessary agent.

Along a path of aeons serpentine
In the coiled blackness of her nescient course
The Earth-Goddess toils across the sands of time.

Sri Aurobindo moves the focus once more to the cosmic scale to draw out attention to the slow "aeonic" process of nature which becomes conscious and individualised in the human. We are presented with a vision of the 'Earth-Goddess' as a kind of a serpent power. We see the earth-goddess labouring and we view time as a spiral, the serpent's coils like the spiral movement of history which ever repeats but repeats each coil at a higher rung with an expanded

circumference, a greater manifested consciousness. So this is how history repeats its lessons but also progresses by gathering experience and growing into a greater consciousness. This is the long or aeonic travail or labour of the Ignorance, 'The Earth-Goddess' moving towards Knowledge and Power. In this image, Sri Aurobindo also captures the ancient or archaic wisdom which sees an evolutionary force at the base of the creation. This is seen in its individualised form as the kundalini shakti, the coiled serpent power at the base of the spine. This also has its cosmic manifestation as locked Inconscient power, a cosmic Serpent or Dragon in some traditions, which is at the origin of this evolution.

A Being is in her whom she hopes to know,

The coiled evolutionary force is the involved Power of Nature (Prakriti) in Matter, but it houses in itself a conscious spark, the Divine Inhabitant (Purusha), the Being who also moves from form to form with the evolution of nature, becoming more awake and able to express itself through nature's evolving instruments. This is the Being she hopes to know and her evolution is an attempt to provide that being with an adequate form so that it may manifest its divinity here.

A Word speaks to her heart she cannot hear,
A Fate compels whose form she cannot see.
In her unconscious orbit through the Void
Out of her mindless depths she strives to rise,
A perilous life her gain, a struggling joy;

Sri Aurobindo here elaborates the dimensions of aspiration arising from the insufficiencies of ignorant Nature. We find here ignorance seeking for knowledge, impotence struggling for power, sorrow trying to claim little portions of delight. These are the opposites which are the conditions of the ignorance from which the fullness of superconscious life has to emerge and that is the condition for which we aspire.

A Thought that can conceive but hardly knows
Arises slowly in her and creates
The idea, the speech that labels more than it lights;

As the powers of consciousness emerge, eventually there appears the consciousness of mind. A 'Thought' awakens and in this thought there is self-consciousness, and a stress of looking behind the specific forms of things to arrive at generalisations, laws, truths, but all this hardly give us the truth of things. They cannot arrive at light, they can only arrive at labels, they can only name and classify but they cannot arrive at the domain of meaning, a true grasp of

things. This constitutes the progress of ignorance towards light. Similarly, in the progress of delight there is a groping for pleasure, a seeking for delight in things but there is no plenitude of possession in it, there is only a groping and an insatiable thirst.

A trembling gladness that is less than bliss
Invades from all this beauty that must die.

In mortal beauty there is a fugitive quality, a sense that unless we grab it, it will disappear and there is in that sense an ephemerality to our experience of joy.

Alarmed by the sorrow dragging at her feet

Because that ephemerality of joy is not the stable delight of the Infinite, it coexists with its opposite, pain or sorrow, and gives a certain fugitive, feverish experience to our pleasures.

And conscious of the high things not yet won,
Ever she nurses in her sleepless breast
An inward urge that takes from her rest and peace.

Once again we return to the aspiration. All these experiences of struggle, of strife, of unfulfilment, ignorance, sorrow, death, take us back to this power of aspiration which we nurse within like an obsession.

An inward urge that takes from her rest and peace.
The problem of life refuses us rest, this is the divine discontent at the heart of things.

Ignorant and weary and invincible
She seeks through the soul's war and quivering pain
The pure perfection her marred nature needs,
A breath of Godhead on her stone and mire.
A faith she craves that can survive defeat,
The sweetness of a love that knows not death,
The radiance of a truth for ever sure.

Sri Aurobindo brings us back to the contemplation of the Godheads which he familiarised us with in the first chapter of *The Life Divine*. They are seen here as the aspiration of Life for a faith that can survive defeat, a love that can survive death, a truth that can survive every falsehood. Next, the passage introduces the response to this aspiration. This response is at first sporadic, it comes intermittently. Higher powers dawn on the ignorance and every such

experience builds the faith and causes a renewed intensification of the aspiration, a greater call, because it realises that there is an answer possible.

A vision meets her of supernal Powers
That draw her as if mighty kinsmen lost
Approaching with estranged great luminous gaze.

The aspiration is not mistaken in believing that its origin exists, that it has its glorious kinspeople, this is the family of the powers of truth, which come to visit in visions and inner experiences.

Then is she moved to all that she is not
And stretches arms to what was never hers.

Every answer, even if a glimmer, brings an intensified aspiration for these Godheads which it feels to be native and natural to it, as if the reality of the human consciousness, the truth of the manifestation, the birthright of creation.

For these she yearns and feels them destined hers:
Heaven's privilege she claims as her own right.
Just is her claim the all-witnessing Gods approve,

This expectation is not a mistake. Now Sri Aurobindo reverses the view and brings us into contact with the domain of truth answering the ignorance because it wishes to manifest here. That claim on the higher knowledge, the higher light is something that is upheld by the higher powers, who approve the arduous aspiration of the hero-soul.

Just is her claim the all-witnessing Gods approve,

These affirmations of the powers of Godhead in our life are sanctioned by the Divine. Sri Aurobindo continues

A struggling ignorance is his wisdom's mate:
He waits to see the consequence of his acts,

But if experience bolsters our faith, uncertainty strikes often and repeatedly. We fall back into the dubiousness of the ignorance.

He waits to weigh the certitude of his thoughts,
He knows not what he shall achieve or when;
He knows not whether at last he shall survive,
Or end like the mastodon and the sloth
And perish from the earth where he was king.

In other words, does evolution has a goal for us or are we doomed to extinction? Are all this glorious aspiration and all the visions and experiences

of the great, wise seers are just chimeras, epiphenomena of an accidental consciousness that has been born from the brute processes of a random, mechanical world? We are constantly plagued by this doubt.

He is ignorant of the meaning of his life,
He is ignorant of his high and splendid fate.
Only the Immortals on their deathless heights
Dwelling beyond the walls of Time and Space,
Masters of living, free from the bonds of Thought,
Who are Overseers of Fate and Chance and Will
And experts of the theorem of world-need,
Can see the Idea, the Might that change Time's course,
Come maned with light from undiscovered worlds,
Hear, while the world toils on with its deep blind heart,
The galloping hooves of the unforeseen event,
Bearing the superhuman Rider, near
And, impassive to earth's din and startled cry,
Return to the silence of the hills of God;

But to the reverse end of the human condition, is the knowledge of the gods, waiting their hour to manifest here. There are wise presences, there are powers aware of the destiny of this process that know the inevitability of the descent of Grace, that wait for the Hour of God, an unforeseen event which will visit the earth in response to all the travail and aspiration arising like sacred incense from the burning heavenward call of nature.

In the heart's profound audition they can catch
The murmurs lost by Life's uncaring ear,
A prophet-speech in Thought's omniscient trance.
Above the illusion of the hopes that pass,
Behind the appearance and the overt act,
Behind this clock-work Chance and vague surmise,
Amid the wrestle of force, the trampling feet,
Across the cries of anguish and of joy,
Across the triumph, fighting and despair,
They watch the Bliss for which earth's heart has cried
On the long road which cannot see its end
Winding undetected through the sceptic days
And to meet it guide the unheedful moving world.

These divine powers are not only aware of the response of Grace but lend a helping hand to the Ignorance. They give a slight shift to circumstances whenever necessary, so that this, the aspiration, may find favourable conditions

under which it can be intensified and express itself so that the Divine Powers from above can descend.

Having presented this view of the divine helpers and guides, Sri Aurobindo launches into the prophetic voice of the seer and announces a vision of the Grace that will descend. He writes :

Thus will the masked Transcendent mount his throne.
When darkness deepens strangling the earth's breast
And man's corporeal mind is the only lamp,
As a thief's in the night shall be the covert tread
Of one who steps unseen into his house.

Though doubt clouds human minds and we have lost hope, the response from above will come unseen, hidden in an occult way first into the occult, mystic cave of Nature and of the human heart and it will take its place as a king, ruler of the faculties and instruments of our being.

A Voice ill-heard shall speak, the soul obey,
A Power into mind's inner chamber steal,
A charm and sweetness open life's closed doors
And beauty conquer the resisting world,
The Truth-Light capture Nature by surprise,
A stealth of God compel the heart to bliss
And earth grow unexpectedly divine.

Invisible to us, our aspiration has power and though we hardly expect it, the power of aspiration will inevitably bring its response, in a divine possession of the earth nature, making 'earth grow unexpectedly divine'.

In Matter shall be lit the spirit's glow,
In body and body kindled the sacred birth;
Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,
The days become a happy pilgrim march,
Our will a force of the Eternal's power,
And thought the rays of a spiritual sun.
A few shall see what none yet understands;
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;
For man shall not know the coming till its hour
And belief shall be not till the work is done.

With these words, Sri Aurobindo prophesies the future coming of the culmination of which the epic *Savitri* is a presentation and a presage.

(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, **Sraddha** at **98032 58723**)

Sri Aurobindo's Metaphysics Of The Supermind : On How To Make Sense Of The Transcendence Of Mind

R C Pradhan

Sri Aurobindo's metaphysics of the supermind is one of the most revolutionary ideas in the twentieth century philosophy of mind. The idea of the supermind which Sri Aurobindo has outlined in his *The Life Divine*¹ has brought about a revolution not only in psychology, but also in philosophy of mind. There has been a long struggle in the history of philosophy, both in India and in the West, to understand the nature of mind and consciousness. The mystery of mind, however, has remained an enigma, for most of the philosophers for most of the time in the history of human thought. Even now the philosophers in the West are still grappling with this mystery². However, it is Sri Aurobindo who has given the idea of the supermind which provides an effective key to the solution of the mystery of the mind. The supermind as it is conceived by him not only solves the problem of mind but also shows the way to transcend mind and ascend to a higher realm of supramental consciousness.

In this essay I will be concerned mainly with the nature of the supermind and its relation with the mind as we understand it today. I will show that the supermind is a legitimate metaphysical category that we can make sense of even while we are mostly confined to the mind. The supermind can be understood as a new metaphysical principle that breaks down the boundaries of mind and ushers in a new way of unfolding the secrets of the higher levels of consciousness.

I. THE BOUNDARIES OF THE MIND AND THE NECESSITY OF TRANSCENDENCE

One of the central problems of Sri Aurobindo's metaphysics is: how can the human mind be transcended and transmuted in the process of evolution of human consciousness? That is, how can man be transformed into a superman in the process of spiritual transformation of the human mind? This problem occupied

Sri Aurobindo not only in his practical yogic practices, but also in his metaphysical reflections on the nature of mind and consciousness. The following are the metaphysical presuppositions in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of mind:

1. That the mind of man at the present stage of evolution is limited and is contingent on the material conditions of the universe.
2. That mind evolves from matter and is thus conditioned by the latter.
3. That mind stands for a new level of reality over matter and therefore is bound by its own laws over and above the laws of matter.
4. That mind shows the tendency of transcending matter and its own nature because of the inner dynamics of the spirit pervading the universe.
5. That the supermind is the higher level of reality beyond mind of which the mind itself is a fragmented appearance.

These metaphysical presuppositions constitute the broad framework within which Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of mind is shaped. This framework is free from the dualism of the Cartesian metaphysics which is the basis of the Western philosophy of mind³ and opts for an integral model of philosophising about mind which unifies all the faculties of mind under a unifying principle. Not only that, it also shows how a higher form of mind is possible beyond the normal mind.

Sri Aurobindo is not primarily a philosopher of mind, but of the supermind because he is aware that the mind that we deal with in the science of psychology is only a fragment of a higher mind called the supermind. It is the latter which is the subject matter of Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical psychology. Sri Aurobindo is particularly interested in the overcoming of the normal mind with which we are familiar, because he thinks that this mind is bound up with the material universe so much so that like all material nature mind is severely limited in its functions. He writes :

...Mind perceives only the particular and not the universal, or conceives only the particular in an unpossessed universal and no longer both particular and universal as phenomena of the Infinite. Thus we have the limited mind which views every phenomenon as a thing-in-itself, separate part of a whole which again exists separately in a greater whole and so on, enlarging always its aggregates without getting back to the sense of a true infinity.⁴

Thus the limited mind can see only the fragmented reality and not the reality as a whole which is infinite and unlimited. Human mind as it has evolved so far is constrained by its own evolutionary trajectory which has run through matter and life as the stages of evolution.

Another important feature of the normal mind is its ignorance which is enormous in comparison with what it can know. The mind at this stage of its evolution is pervaded by ignorance because of its cognitive limitations. The cognitively limited mind is such that it cannot comprehend the true nature of reality including its own nature. It is separated from reality by a veil of ignorance. As Sri Aurobindo says :

The fundamental error of the Mind is, then, this fall from self-knowledge by which the individual soul conceives of its individuality as a separate fact instead of as a form of Oneness and makes itself the centre of its own universe instead of knowing itself as one concentration of the universal. From that original error all its particular ignorances and limitations are contingent results.⁵

This goes to show that the mind's ignorance is the origin of all its defects and abnormalities. Man's blundering mind is the cause of all that we see as evil in the world surrounding the human race.

"Hence there is an element of error in all human knowledge. Similarly our will, ignorant of the rest of the all-will, must fall into error of working and a greater or less degree of incapacity and impotence;...Self-ignorance is therefore the root of all the perversity in our existence, and that perversity stands fortified in the self-limitation, the egoism which is the form taken by that self-ignorance".⁶

Given the above limitations of the mind, it is imperative to search for the remedies of the situation. Sri Aurobindo is truly concerned with the removal of the limitations of the mind by showing that what is known as the perversity of the mind is really due to our limited understanding of the mind by the mind itself. Therefore the effective remedy for this situation is to rise beyond the boundaries of the mind to a higher mind which can see reality more comprehensively and harmoniously. Mind in its severe limitations cannot see beyond what is presented to it under the veil of ignorance, Therefore, says Sri Aurobindo, if the mind "gets back to the truth from which it fell, it becomes again the final action of the Truth-Consciousness in its apprehensive operation, and the relation it helps to create in that light and power will be relations of the Truth and not of perversity".⁷ This calls for the transcendence of the mind to a higher level of mental reality that overcomes the earthly limitations of the mind.

II. THE ASCENT TO THE SUPERMIND: THE EVOLUTIONARY GRAPH

The most important question before Sri Aurobindo is: how to ascend to the supermind when the mind through which this ascension is possible is itself limited? For the normal mind which is self-closed and self-constrained, the possibility of the ascent to the supermind looks well nigh impossible. That is why the materialist science of mind is unable to accept any such ascent beyond the mind⁸. But Sri Aurobindo is optimistic about this ascent when he writes :

The psychic transformation and the first stages of the spiritual transformation are well within our conception; their perfection would be the perfection, wholeness, consummated unity of a knowledge and experience which is already part of things realised, though only by a small number of human beings.⁹

This transformation of the mind is well within the sight of the mind because the normal mind has got the glimpses of the higher regions of the supermind though in rare vision attained by a few individuals. As Sri Aurobindo puts it :

“The highest of these peaks or elevated plateaus of consciousness, the supramental, lies far beyond the possibility of any satisfying mental scheme or map of it or any grasp of mental seeing and description”¹⁰. It is to these peaks that the mind must ascend to, even if those levels of consciousness are far beyond our conceptual grasp.

What is most decisive in Sri Aurobindo's argument for the necessary ascent to the supermind is that the normal mind itself is aware of the superior heights of consciousness and has got the necessary aspiration to reach the peak. If such awareness and aspiration were not already in the human mind, there would have been no idea of the supermind at all. The proof of such glimpses of the supermind in the earthly consciousness is already available in the human experiences as profusely expressed in the Vedas¹¹. What is of importance is the fact that the human mind is aware of the high reaches of consciousness. Therefore, even if "the mind cannot enter into the nature of the Supermind, it can look towards it through these high and luminous approaches and catch some reflected impression of the Truth, the Right, the Vast which is the native kingdom of the Spirit".¹² Such being the assurance available, it is not difficult to imagine that getting into the reaches of the supermind is already inscribed into the inner dynamics of the mind.

Sri Aurobindo does not leave the ascent to the supermind to chance and sheer accidents in the domain of human consciousness. According to him, it is not an accident that the human mind has glimpses of the reality of the supermind; it is in fact according to an evolutionary law that man has proceeded towards

the supermind. There is already an evolutionary movement ingrained in the universe which has given rise to the mind and it is therefore inevitable that the next step in this evolution is overmind and supermind. According to Sri Aurobindo, the "logic of the process of evolutionary Nature continues, greatly modified in some of the rules of its working but essentially the same, in the ascension of the highest heights as in the lower beginnings; thus we can discover and follow to a certain extent the lines of her supreme procedure".¹³ This evolutionary graph is the design of the Nature itself which is designed to progress towards the Supernature. "The transition to Supermind through Overmind is a passage from Nature as we know it into Supernature. It is by that very fact impossible for any effort of the mere Mind to achieve; our unaided personal aspiration and endeavour cannot reach it".¹⁴

III. EVOLUTION AND INVOLUTION : THE IDEA OF DESCENT

The idea of evolution which Sri Aurobindo presupposes goes parallel with the idea of involution in which the Spirit or the highest reality itself is involved already in Nature such that it becomes inevitable that the Nature evolves into the Supernature. If Nature would have been bereft of the nascent consciousness of the Supernature, it would have been mere chance that there could be any evolution at all in Nature towards the Supernature. As Sri Aurobindo puts it :

Overmind and Supermind are also involved and occult in earth-Nature, but they have no formations on the accessible levels of our subliminal inner consciousness... In order that the involved principles of Overmind and Supermind should emerge from their veiled secrecy, the being and powers of the Superconscience must descend into us and uplift us and formulate themselves in our being and powers; this descent is a *sine qua non* of the transition and transformation¹⁵.

The secretly held inner powers of the Supreme Being within Nature itself provides the ground for the emergence of the higher mind culminating in the Supermind. This proves that the emergence of the Supermind is part of the blueprint of the Universe which keeps the Spirit in its bosom concealed and involved.

The idea of descent of the higher powers into our consciousness is uniquely Sri Aurobindo's, because he introduces this idea in order to explain why and how the evolution proceeds in Nature. He does not leave everything to Nature which conceals within itself the Spirit in a subliminal state, but invites the intervention of the Spirit in the process of evolution, because "this process would inevitably be a long and toilsome endeavour of Nature. There is a possibility, too, that what would be achieved might only be an imperfect superior

mentalisation...".¹⁶ So it is necessary that there is divine intervention in Nature such that "the transformation can take place by a comparatively swift conscious change".¹⁷ The accelerated pace of the evolution can transform the whole of consciousness into a divine supramental consciousness.

Of course, Sri Aurobindo does not suggest that the transformation of consciousness is sudden and miraculous. A process of steady progress is envisioned in which the human effort is equally important like the divine descent. This shows that the spiritual transformation of man is gradual, though inevitable. The free play of the human will has a role in the entire divine drama because man's participation is a part of the whole process of transformation. Thus individual freedom and divine necessity work together to achieve the supramentalisation of the universe and the human race. Sri Aurobindo writes :

The will of the individual, even when completely free, could not act in an isolated independence, because the individual being and nature are included in the universal Being and Nature and dependent on the all-overruling Transcendence.¹⁸

Thus both the individual and the Supreme Spirit must work in harmony to make the divinisation of the universe possible; that is, the individual must surrender himself or herself to the ultimate will of the Spirit. Sri Aurobindo says:

Thus the individuality would become more and more powerful and effective in proportion as it realised itself as a centre and formation of the universal and transcendent Being and Nature...his natural existence would be the instrumentation of a superior Power, an overmental and supramental Consciousness-Force, the power of the original Divine Shakti.¹⁹

IV. THE INDIVIDUAL WILL AND THE DIVINE WILL: FREEDOM VS. DIVINE NECESSITY

In Sri Aurobindo's framework, the Divine Will and the will of the individual have equal importance, though metaphysically it is the Divine Will which is primary. There has been a metaphysical debate in philosophy whether a predominantly Divine-centric world-view like Sri Aurobindo's can accommodate human freedom. The apprehension on the part of the champions of the free will is that human freedom is reduced to a nominal freedom in such a world-view where the Divine Being and its Will is supreme. For such philosophers, free will of man is illusory because of the supremacy of the Divine Will. Sri Aurobindo does not accept this theory because he is emphatic about the reality of the human will in the process of evolution. According to him, without the individual freely

willing to surrender to the Divine Being, the process of supramentalisation of the human consciousness cannot be completed. The individual is the torch-bearer of the evolutionary process. Such being the case, "the individual soul would be its conscious, open and free field and instrument, a participant in its action, aware of its purpose and process, aware too of its own greater Self, the universal and the transcendental Reality..."²⁰ and thus would realise the Divine Will in its own will.

Sri Aurobindo, of course, does not accept that the individual acts in isolation and that he or she can aspire to ascend to the Supremind without the divine help and grace. This idea of the individual ego clashing with the Universal Being does not arise at all because the individual will itself is a limited centre of the Divine Will. The individual and the Supreme Being are essentially one because the former is only a fragment of the latter and is therefore only an instrument in the hands of the Divine Being. For the purpose of the supramentalisation of the individual being, "all the parts of our being must assent and surrender to the law of the spiritual Truth; all has to learn to obey the government of the conscious Divine Power in the members".²¹ This act of surrender presupposes the individual freedom rather than deny it. Thus human freedom and divine necessity go together and work harmoniously in Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical framework.

What makes Sri Aurobindo different from other so-called theological determinists is that he does not reduce the individual will to a mere handmaid of the Divine Will which rides roughshod over the wills of the individual beings. For him, the individual soul is the face of the Divine Being on earth and therefore he or she is the torch-bearer of the Divine Being's own manifestation in the universe. The individual is not a mere Maya as declared by the Advaita Vedanta, but is a real personality embodying the supreme consciousness in its own nature, though in a rudimentary form. No doubt the individual soul is shrouded in ignorance (Avidya), but that does not prevent it from pursuing the path of realisation of the Supreme Being in himself or herself. The law of ignorance must be overcome by the individual soul to rise higher in the transformation of consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo puts it :

And yet the law of participation and the law of surrender are imperative; at each step of the transition the assent of the Purusha is needed and there must be too the consent of each part of the nature to the action of the higher power for its change. There must be then a conscious self-direction of the mental being in us towards this change, this substitution of Supernature for the old nature, this transcendence.²²

Since the individual is at the centre of this spiritual transformation, he or she must willingly surrender to the forces of the Supreme Being so that the latter take over the process of transformation.

V. THE LOGIC OF TRANSFORMATION

Sri Aurobindo introduces the idea of transformation in order to show that the material conditioning of our mental being is snapped and that it is freed from the bondage to its earthly bondage. The soul as embodied in its physical body is bound up with the bodily desires and instincts which cloud the mental functioning of the individual soul. This bodily existence has to be transcended in order to effect the mental change to absorb the light descending from the higher sources. "The totality of this abandonment can only come if the psychic change has been complete or the spiritual transformation has reached a very high state of achievement. For it implies a giving up by the mind of all its habits of intellectual observation and judgment to be replaced first by an intuitive and then an overmind or supramental functioning which inaugurates the action of a direct Truth-Consciousness, Truth-insight, Truth-discernment, a new consciousness which is in all its ways quite foreign to our mind's present nature".²³

The change envisaged here is very radical because it totally transforms the mental being of man which is at a lower stage in the ascending orders of Being. Sri Aurobindo envisages what is called a complete "reversal of consciousness"²⁴ which makes a radical departure from the normal consciousness which all of us are familiar with. The normal consciousness stands for the limited capacity of the mental being for apprehending Reality and also the limited form of its emotional and volitional capacities. Thus there must be transformation not only at the physical but also at the psychic and the spiritual level such that the whole being of man is transformed. "The admission of a such a change can only be brought about by a full emergence of the soul and inner being, the dominance of the psychic and the spiritual will and a long working of their light and power on the parts of the being, a psychic and spiritual remoulding of the whole nature".²⁵ This transformation is also transmutation because what is obviously of the level of matter, life and mind must be changed into the overmental and supramental level. This requires a kind of level-change and so it involves a radical change of all that man is.

From the present stage of our mental existence, it may appear impossible to think that such a radical reversal of consciousness is possible. It is true at the present stage of man's existence that there is a complete separation between the mind and the supermind and the higher region of Truth-Consciousness is out of the reach of the mind. "It would be chimerical to hope that the supreme

Truth-Consciousness can establish itself in the narrow formulation of our surface mind and heart and life, however turned towards spiritually"²⁶, as the surface mind refuses to receive the higher consciousness and establish it in its own bosom. Therefore the human mind has to be prepared for this change by subjecting it to spiritual training such that the individual must have progressed on the path of spiritual realisation to a great extent. "Moreover the individual must have sufficiently universalised himself, he must have recast his individual mind in the boundlessness of a cosmic mentality, enlarged and vivified his individual life into the immediate sense and direct experience of the dynamic motion of the universal life...".²⁷ Such an enlarged mentality alone can grasp the descent of the spiritual light into his or her own consciousness — the light of Power, Knowledge and Ananda — which penetrates into his or inner consciousness bursting forth the veil of ignorance in man. But as Sri Aurobindo points out, the transformation of consciousness is not sudden or arbitrary but methodical. He says :

The spiritual evolution obeys the logic of a successive unfolding; it can take a new decisive main step only when the previous main step has been sufficiently conquered: even if certain minor stages can be swallowed up or leaped over by a rapid and brusque ascension, the consciousness has to turn back to assure itself that the ground passed over is securely annexed to the new condition.²⁸

In this sense, one can understand that the path of transformation is not only arduous but also gradual and methodical. This is due to the fact that the Divine Reality guides this transformation at every stage; "a secret all-wisdom governs everything in her, even the steps and processes that seem to be most unaccountable".²⁹

VI. THE UNFOLDING OF THE SUPERMIND: THE UNBOUNDED TRUTH-CONSCIOUSNESS

Sri Aurobindo provides a metaphysical key to the supermind in his concept of Truth-Consciousness which is the supreme function of the supermind. In Truth-Consciousness is unfolded the supramental consciousness in its creative as well as stabilising functions. The Truth-Consciousness is one and indivisible unlike our ordinary mentality which is incessantly divided and disharmonious. It is seized of the ultimate Truth and therefore is eternally conscious of the Supreme Being. Sri Aurobindo writes :

But it (the Supermind) is not a mental Intelligence that informs and governs all things; it is a self-aware Truth of being in which self-knowledge is

inseparable from self-existence: it is this Truth-Consciousness which has not to think out things but works them out with knowledge according to the impeccable self-vision and the inevitable force of a sole and self-fulfilling Existence³⁰.

The supermind thus transcends our mental intelligence and far exceeds the limits of the mental horizon such that it is endowed with a "cosmic vision which is all-comprehensive, all-pervading, all-inhabiting."³¹

For Sri Aurobindo, the supermind is an ontological principle which explains the nature of all existence because it pervades all as the inner principle. It is a creative Force in that it creates all forms of existence by virtue of its creative power. "This Supermind in its conscious vision not only contains all the forms of itself which its conscious force creates, but it pervades them as an indwelling Presence and a self-revealing Light".³² Thus the supermind not only knows all but creates all out of its creative power such that it is the indwelling Presence in all. Our present mind is only a fraction of this Divine Mind that harmonises everything into one all-existence. Sri Aurobindo writes :

We have to regard therefore this all-containing, all-originating, all-consummating Supermind as the nature of the Divine Being, not indeed in its absolute self-existence, but in its action as the Lord and Creator of its own worlds.³³

The ontological status of the supermind can be seen only within the whole scheme of Reality which is Sachchidananda, or the Supreme Reality. The supermind is the creative power of the Supreme Divine Reality.

The most metaphysically intriguing aspect of the supermind is its relation with the Supreme Reality, the Sachchidananda, because it is the latter that is the central Reality on which the supermind is dependent. In a sense, for Sri Aurobindo, the supermind is the creative power of the Sachchidananda because with its help the Reality brings forth the universe into existence. Sri Aurobindo writes :

This, then is, is the nature of the Divine Consciousness which creates in itself all things by a movement of its conscious-force and governs their development through a self-evolution by inherent knowledge-will of the truth of existence or real-idea which has formed them.³⁴

This creative aspect of the Sachchidananda is the supermind because it is this power which is not only Consciousness but also the Will that makes the entire

existence real out of its own infinite nature. "We find that in the principle of Supermind itself it has three such general poises or sessions of its world-founding consciousness. The first founds the inalienable unity of things, the second modifies that unity so as to support the manifestation of the Many in One and One in Many; the third further modifies it so as to support the evolution of a diversified individuality which, by the action of Ignorance, becomes in us at a lower level the illusion of the separate ego."³⁵ Thus the triple status of the supermind is at the root of the world-creation which is a manifestation of the One Reality into Many in the form of the world.

VII. WHERE THE MIND AND THE SUPERMIND MEET: THE CHALLENGE TO THE MENTAL WORLD

The very idea of a supermind, apart from its metaphysical grandeur, serves a practical purpose in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. It is the one that shows that the mental reality in which the present humanity is poised is rather limited and transitional. Sri Aurobindo attempts to show that all that is called mind in our language is only a fraction of a higher and larger reality which is the domain of an infinite consciousness. That infinite and unlimited consciousness is the supermind that acts as the Consciousness-Force in order to make the Supreme Reality manifest in the diversity of the world-phenomena. The mental world itself is a manifestation of the supramental consciousness. Thus there is a meeting point of the mind and the supermind in the human world itself.

If the supermind would have been completely out of the reach of the human mind, then the whole idea of the evolution of the mind to the supermind would have been vacuous. Therefore Sri Aurobindo takes care to link the mind to the supermind by virtue of the fact that the mind is only a fragment of the latter. The human mind is not sealed within its functions as it is generally assumed by the philosophers of the mind of the West³⁶, but is plastic enough to expand further in its functions which are not just computational as it is believed by some thinkers. Sri Aurobindo does not accept that the human mind is a mechanical computer-like device³⁷, but is the creative and self-transcending principle. "Mind, life and body must then be capable of divinity; their form and working in that short period out of possibly only one cycle of the terrestrial evolution which Science reveals to us, need not represent all the potential workings of these three principles in the living body".³⁸ That is to say, mind is capable of rising higher than its present states and can be so converted to a higher mind that it progresses into the Truth-Consciousness.

Both mind and supermind are organically connected such that the higher the mind rises, the lower the supermind descends to meet the mind. The supermind is the ideal towards which the mind moves, but at the same time, the supermind comes downwards to meet the mind in order to elevate it to a higher level.

To conclude: Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of supermind brings to us the message of the new mind that is struggling to emerge out of the darkness into which the human mind has fallen. The chains of the present mind need to be broken so that the new mind rises on the horizon to make room for the possibility of a supramentalised human race.

Notes and References

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1973).
2. See David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1996), Part I..
3. See John R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1992), Chapter 1.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p.166.
5. Ibid., p. 171.
6. Ibid., pp. 171-72.
7. Ibid., p. 172.
8. Cf. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, Part II and II. See also Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Little, Brown and Company, 1991; Penguin Books, New York 1993)), Parts II and III on the naturalistic explanation of consciousness. Like Chalmers, Dennett denies that there could be any higher mind other than the biologically determined mind.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 919.
10. Ibid., p. 919.
11. Ibid., p. 919.
12. Ibid., p. 920.
13. Ibid., p. 920.
14. Ibid., p. 921.
15. Ibid., p. 921.
16. Ibid., p. 922.
17. Ibid., p. 922.
18. Ibid., p. 926.
19. Ibid., p. 927.
20. Ibid., p. 927.
21. Ibid., p. 928.
22. Ibid., p. 929.
23. Ibid., pp. 929-30.
24. See A. S. Dalal, "Reversal of Consciousness: Thoughts on the Psychology of the New Birth" in *Consciousness and Its Transformation*, ed. M. Cornelissen (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2001), pp. 17-28.
25. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 930.
26. Ibid., p. 930.
27. Ibid., p. 931.

28. Ibid., pp. 931-32.
29. Ibid., p. 932.
30. Ibid., p. 136.
31. Ibid., p. 136.
32. Ibid., p. 135.
33. Ibid., p. 132.
34. Ibid., p. 144.
35. Ibid., pp. 145-46.
36. Cf. Chalmers, op.cit; Searle, op.cit. on the closed nature of the mind in the sense that mind cannot rise above itself to bring about any transformation within itself.
37. See Jerry Fodor, *The Language of Thought* (Thomas Y. Crowell, New York, 1975) on the computational nature of the mind and the mental representations. For him, mind functions like a computer such that all the mental representations are computational phenomena.
38. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 161.

A Primer Of Gita

Daniel Grings

Introduction

This primer is an attempt to present all the information that I think are needed for an understanding of the Bhagavad Gita in a clear and succinct way. While the practice of Yoga is touched upon, the primary focus is the clarification of its metaphysics. A planned follow-up series is intended to look at the practice of its Yoga from the perspective of the specific goals mentioned (based on the characteristics the Gita gives of a person who is "in Yoga"). My interpretation of the Gita has been most strongly influenced by Sri Aurobindo's *"Essays on the Gita"* (and Sri Aurobindo's writings in general). I also owe several ideas to Christopher Langan's *"Cognitive-Theoretical Model of the Universe (CTMU)"*, especially as far as the last section, titled "Additional Metaphysics", is concerned. That section contains nothing that is mentioned directly in the Gita; rather, it is an attempt to answer several questions regarding its general metaphysics that might arise during its study.

- I. Narrative Context
- II. Philosophical Context
- III. Metaphysical Context
- IV. The Goal
- V. The Method
- VI. Additional Metaphysics

I. Narrative Context

The Bhagavad Gita is part of the Mahabharata, the great Indian epic that tells the story of five brothers, the Pandavas, and their struggle against their evil cousins, the Kauravas. Having lost their kingdom to the Kauravas in a rigged game of dice, the Pandavas enter into negotiations to get it back, but it soon becomes apparent that the Kauravas will not yield. A battle becomes inevitable. Arjuna, one of the Pandavas, and Duryodhana of the Kauravas go to Krishna, king of Dvaraka and their mutual relative, to ask for aid. Krishna is also believed by many to be an Avatar, an incarnation of God. He has already helped in the

negotiations, but this time it is military support that is requested. He explains that he is bound by honour and duty to help both sides of the conflict and so makes the following offer: One of them will receive the help of his entire army while Krishna will serve the other as charioteer while not himself interfering in the battle. Since Arjuna arrived slightly earlier the choice should be his. Duryodhana is furious, expecting the Pandavas to receive the help of Krishna's army, but Arjuna says, "If these are my options, I choose you as my charioteer." This choice leads to the dialogue of the Gita and also offers a simple and beautiful symbolic answer to its central question: How should we act in the world? By making God our charioteer.

The Gita begins on the day of battle with Dhritarashtra, king of the Kauravas, asking his adviser Sanjaya to describe the situation on the battlefield Kurukshetra to him^[1]. Sanjaya describes both armies and its heroes^[2] and then focuses on Arjuna who asks Krishna to steer his chariot between both armies to get a better look^[3]. It is then that Arjuna for the first time fully comprehends what a conflict within one family will mean for him: He sees not just his cousins whom he despises, but also his former teachers Bhishma and Drona, the men he admires most, on the battlefield arrayed against him^[4]. He is overcome with a sense of the futility of this conflict and says he would rather become a renunciate or even be killed than kill these great teachers^[5]. Krishna responds first by reminding him of his duty as a kshatriya, a warrior^[6], and then by expounding Hindu metaphysics in its simplest form: It is only the body that dies, the soul is immortal, life in the world is to be confronted and endured, not abandoned^[7]. He then speaks of Sankhya and Yoga and calls on Arjuna to become "stable in intelligence", to fix his mind on his true identity as the Self^[8]. Not satisfied with the first two justifications and wanting to learn more about the third, in the beginning of the third chapter, Arjuna asks, "If you ask me to practise meditation, why do you also ask me to go and kill my relatives?"^[9] This leads to the conversation that forms the rest of the Gita, in which Krishna reconciles renunciation and action through a spiritual practice and outlook that allow Arjuna to unite with his higher Self and yet ever perform the work that he has to do.

II. Philosophical Context

The conversation between Arjuna and Krishna happens in the context of a wider conversation in Indian culture, one that continues to this day. The most important question in Hindu philosophy, it seems, is how to reconcile our true nature as infinite and perfect Brahman with existence and action in a limited and imperfect world. Should we act at all, and if yes, how do we know when and how to act? More precisely, should we focus our attention and effort on

the Infinite or should we try to improve ourselves and the world in the world? The Gita devotes most of its time to formulating, explaining and emphasising its answer: Both approaches are needed, but, if done correctly, these are not in conflict, but in perfect harmony.

The Gita refers to these approaches by various names. In the beginning, it calls the first Sankhya and the second Yoga^[10]. Then, the first is referred to as the Yoga of Knowledge and the other as the Yoga of Works^[11].

The central thought of Sankhya, one of the oldest Indian systems of philosophy, is that every being is really a free and perfect Person (Purusha) that has entangled itself with Nature (Prakriti) and, by identifying with it, lost the awareness of its true nature. While the duality of Purusha and Prakriti has informed almost every philosophy that came after it, including that of the Gita, the Gita differs from Sankhya most importantly in that it affirms the existence of God, Ishvara ("lord"). Therefore, when the Gita speaks of Sankhya it speaks of the effort of the Purusha to remember that it is really the Ishvara, the Lord and not the subject (anishvara, "not lord") of what it experiences, Prakriti.

After briefly mentioning Sankhya in chapter two^[12], the Gita makes a rather abrupt and sharp reference to a "creed of the Veda"^[13]. The creed criticised is perhaps best referred to as the ritualistic interpretation of the Vedic sacrifice (Yajna). Those who subscribe to it believe that the universe is set up in such a way that pouring clarified butter into a fire under the right incantations will strengthen certain supernatural beings (the gods) who in return will reward the sacrificer with gold, cattle and offspring. The Gita calls this materialistic and asserts that one's goal should rather be self-realisation^[14]. Having dismissed the ritualistic interpretation, it then proceeds to give a larger meaning to the term Yajna^[15]. While it later states that the outer ritual can and should continue^[16], what really counts is the psychological process, the inner sacrifice. This is an important characteristic of the message of the Gita: Outer activity need not be abandoned, but it is always the inner activity that matters.

The Vedic sacrifice, as the Gita describes it, is an act of inner transformation. Agni, the fire of inner aspiration, is lit, and all our thoughts, feelings and actions are poured into it to be purified and to fuel and to become part of this divine fire within us. The gods are at once representations of the Purushottama and expressions of our own higher nature. The more we give up the pettiness of our current state, the more we can be filled with their power. We give them room for their manifestation and they manifest in us that to which we aspire. Eventually, we learn to always offer everything first to this process and enjoy only the result of our inner growth^[17].

III. Metaphysical Background

There is one absolute consciousness (Brahman) that transcends all existence and that has an infinite potential for self-expression. Everything that exists is an expression of it.

Because it transcends all limitation, it cannot be said to be merely either personal or impersonal or to have certain qualities or to not have them. However, as it expresses itself, it can be described as doing so in three general terms: Sat (existence, reality, substance, truth), Chit (consciousness; including Tapas or Shakti, force or energy of consciousness) and Ananda (delight in itself, beauty when taken form, love when directed towards form).

As a consciousness it has three states: First, it is latent potential, in which all possible ideas are present in principle but unexpressed (Akshara, the Immutable). Second, it is the contemplation of its potential in coherent thoughts (Kshara, the Moving)^[18]. Third, it is the thinker, coordinating its activity, choosing what and how to think (Purushottama, the Highest Person)^[19]. These exist simultaneously, with the Purushottama serving as the bridge between Akshara and Kshara. All three states are Brahman, but the Purushottama is the "true person" who is never limited by his acts of imagination and creation. A thought cannot be separated from its thinker or from the mind in which it exists, and yet neither any particular thought nor the mind as a whole (as the potential for thought) can be said to be all of the thinker. It is the thinker who forms the thoughts in his mind, without being limited or defined by them.

In the Akshara, consciousness and energy are one and there is no distinction between subject and object. The Kshara on the other hand depends on several distinctions and limitations. These are expressions of two abilities: The ability of diversification (Jiva-Shakti) and the ability of concentration (Maya-Shakti).

Brahman is able to look at itself from several points of perspective at once, each such point being referred to as a soul (Jiva, literally "living being")^[20]. The experience of each soul is created by separating thinker from thought and thereby creating a distinction between subject and object, and then defining, through a process of limitation, what the soul experiences. This creation is called Maya^[21].

To understand the Maya-Shakti, we have first to understand that the process is not constructive (starting with nothing and then building up something upwards), but filtrative (starting with everything, then limiting it downwards). This is why creation is referred to as a limitation (Maya, from ma "to measure"). As an analogy, picture a white board as a space that in potential contains all possible geometrical forms superimposed on each other. If I wish to draw a square on this white board, I have to do so by delineating a portion of it by drawing

four lines. These can be thought of as a "fence" separating this portion (the square) from everything else. In this context limitation, delineation, definition and creation all refer to the same process. I have also limited this shape in other ways: I have defined its location and its size, as well as its type (it cannot be a circle while remaining a square).

If we imagine Brahman creating in this manner, questions about the nature of omnipotence arise. Is the unlimited, creating by self-limitation, limited in the ways it can create? The answer is as self-referential as the question: Brahman is limited in the ways it chooses to be. Or rather: Brahman is limited by the conceptual constraints it sets for itself.

If we take the example above, we could ask : Can Brahman create a square that is simultaneously a circle? The answer is, "In any way it can imagine it." We can imagine ways in which a square/circle could be modelled. We could draw half a square and half a circle or create a computer animation of a square constantly morphing into a circle and back. But all of these would remain models of something that cannot actually exist and cannot be created, because the very definition of a square implies that it is not a circle.

Let's look at another challenge to the idea of omnipotence: Can God create a rock that is so heavy that he himself cannot lift it? Yes. By diversifying his experience into a "demiurge" creating a rock and a being whose physical strength is sufficiently small, the Purushottama can enjoy this experience.

More difficult are questions such as, can God relinquish his omnipotence or, can God commit suicide? Again, he can have those experiences by assuming a lesser form. Perhaps the only question that would have to be answered in the negative is can the Purushottama himself entirely and permanently cease to be the Purushottama? He cannot, but this is hardly a limitation, since it is unlikely that he would want to.

We might wonder why an infinite being, in complete control of itself and its experience, would accept any kind of limitation at all. Why does it not simply remain in its state of unbounded potential? It can and does remain in this state, but also, simultaneously, contemplates this potential in coherent forms. The true sign of omnipotence, one might say, is consistently having one's cake and eating it. Form, however, as explained above, is limitation.

Brahman (as the Purushottama) is aware of all of itself and it creates by thought; that is, Brahman conceiving of something and it happening are the same thing. But omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, too, have their "limitations" as in their pure form they don't allow for process. As soon as Brahman conceives of a world, it already exists, fully formed. This is an inevitable consequence of its omnipotence. Of course, being omnipotent,

Brahman must have a way to contemplate change and movement. To get from A to B, so to speak, Brahman must imagine a form of itself that is not omnipresent, that has a form fixed in space and time. That form is the Jiva. As soon as any Jiva attains ("remembers") its full state of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, it "dissolves" back into the Purushottama, as its separation, its difference and its individuality depend on not being everything at once.

The limitation of the Jiva is exclusively one of consciousness, i.e. the Jiva is Brahman conceiving of itself as something less than it is in its true absolute state. On the extent and character of what it conceives itself to be depends its power. A Jiva cannot create merely by thought the way the Purushottama does, or rather, the Jiva imagines itself creating in a more indirect way, using instruments to affect objects in space and as a process over time.

The Jiva is pure consciousness that neither has a body nor needs one, but that can pay attention to one to the exclusion of other experiences, up to the point of complete identification. This process of identification is referred to as "birth". Every experience we have with the sense of being "in" the body, rather than merely being aware of it, can be called a birth, as our awareness loses its original freedom and accepts matter — one form of consciousness — as primary, rather than consciousness itself. With this state of mind, as we move from moment to moment we move from birth to birth and, since these experiences are transient, from death to death.

That is why the Gita, while insisting on the continuation of action in the world^[22], simultaneously calls for the cessation of birth^[23].

Note that this liberation from the body implies only this shift of awareness; everything else, i.e. changes in perception or movement, would imply changes to the body or using a different kind of body, rather than liberation from it.

But what happens at the time of physical death? Consciousness is indestructible and so there are two options: reabsorption in the absolute Brahman or a continuation of limited experience, i.e. reincarnation. Since the Jiva represents one way in which Brahman chooses to perceive and express itself, distributed over a period of time and mirroring the gradual evolution of the world, reincarnation seems like the obvious choice. Otherwise, we would have to account for the vast disparity between life spans, experiences, opportunities and abilities and the immense difficulty associated with remembering one's true self in a single lifetime. A person "in their last birth" is somebody ready to renounce this limiting identification with their body; and "immortality", rather than referring to the continuation of consciousness which is already inevitable, refers to paying attention to a body while conscious of one's true nature as infinite, timeless consciousness.

Brahman as a subject, the thinker or observer, is called Purusha ("person"), while the object, the thought or observed, is called Prakriti (nature, literally "created" or "sent forth")^[24]. In its state of the Purushottama (the highest Purusha), thinker, thinking and thought are one and everything plays out infallibly and without effort within pure consciousness. When Brahman limits itself as Jiva, it separates these two, and the Purusha can identify with conceptions of effort, struggle, failure and loss by imagining itself as a being subject to such experiences.

However, Prakriti has never ceased to be merely the thought of the Purushottama, and so any distinction between a "lower" and a "higher" Prakriti is simply a matter of perspective. Ultimately there is only the nature of the Purushottama, the Daivi Prakriti ("divine nature")^[25], assuming seemingly higher and lesser forms. From our perspective, however, we appear to be involved in a struggle out of suffering and imperfection towards perfection and bliss.

The "lower" Prakriti can be described as an immense machinery that works infallibly the will of the highest thinker^[26]. This immense process is often simplified and divided into three major states, Gunas ("qualities"), ultimately psychological principles that can be said to inform, infuse or permeate all phenomena in various forms of interaction and intermixture.

Tamas is the principle of darkness, ignorance and inertia; Rajas the principle of restless and violent activity; while Sattva is the principle of harmony, wisdom and equilibrium^[27]. It is important to note that, although Sattva is recognised as the highest of the three, all three must be transcended, as they all belong to the lower nature^[28]. Sattva serves as a portal to the higher nature, and raising all of one's activity to a Sattvic state prepares one for being first above the gunas (traigunyatita)^[29], i.e. aware of them without being affected, and finally without the gunas (nistraigunya)^[30], i.e. absorbed in the higher nature to a degree where the gunas simply no longer apply.

How does this idea of Brahman so far described map onto our experience and the world we perceive around us? Each of us is a Jiva, a form taken by Brahman to express and enjoy one facet of itself. We identify with a body that is fixed in space and time, allowing us to experience change and movement and to create not merely by thought but by manipulating objects with our hands. The One can meet himself in the Many in a wide variety of situations and relations and can enjoy an almost infinite number of experiences. Matter serves as the "common ground", the aspect of reality we are most likely to agree on without it merely being a product of our consensus, while the laws of nature are the rules Brahman has set to ensure its consistency.

The description so far would fit many possible worlds, but if we look at the kind of world we actually live in, we feel that there is a jarring dissonance between the idea of an infinite being blissfully and infallibly exploring its potential and the suffering and frustration that seem to define our existence. In fact, the existence of suffering remains the most powerful argument against any idea of an omnipotent and benevolent god. If God can imagine and create any kind of world, why this one, if each of us can imagine a better one?

First, we have to remember that Brahman is not an extracosmic monotheistic god inflicting suffering on beings different from himself, but a monistic (or "holotheistic") god, freely choosing to experience suffering. If this is the case, we can perhaps accuse it of masochism, but no longer of sadism.

But even then we have to ask, Is the case against suffering one of degree or of principle? Just how much should God be permitted to suffer? The reason we recoil from the idea of suffering is the same principle that turns an experience into suffering in the first place: It seems to transcend our power of assimilation. We, seeing ourselves as limited beings who can "only take so much", cannot identify with an infinite being free to contemplate any kind of experience. However, even among different human beings, the relative nature of suffering is obvious: What triggers anguish in one person might cause boredom in another.

As real and as terrifying suffering is to us, it remains entirely a matter of perspective as how and how much we suffer is determined by our ability to process the experiences we have.

But this does not yet address the more general charge that God has clearly failed to create the best possible of all worlds. If Brahman can assume any form it likes, why not stride a celestial paradise as mighty gods, the days filled with ecstasy and splendour?

The short answer is that this is an unsatisfying way of trying to get away from the boredom of omnipotence; but to really answer this question we have to look at what suffering accomplishes. The first aspect is the most difficult to accept, that suffering is an experience worth having in itself. Everybody who has ever wallowed extensively in their own misery knows that there is a part of us that enjoys the pathetic and melodramatic. The second part is that it opens up more possibilities. Courage in the absence of danger is certainly possible; a courageous person does not surrender their courage whenever they are safe. However, courage is only ever truly expressed in the face of danger and the greater and more real the danger seems, the greater the courage. Danger, however, is really the threat of suffering. In a sense, every virtue depends on some opposite or negation of perfection: Compassion depends on suffering, generosity on scarcity, self-control on temptation etc. Does God then set fires only to put them

out? The better analogy would be that of a theatre play. God is telling a story. How many good stories do you know that begin with "And they lived happily ever after"?

Self-expression over time is self-discovery. The reason we are not automatically aware of our true nature is the same why we are not powerful gods: to allow for a more extensive and detailed development of our experience. We are a reflection of the world discovering itself.

The world is a story and a work in progress. It is the unfolding of the essential characteristics of Brahman, out of nothingness and nescience through confusion and suffering, towards truth, consciousness and bliss. While it is true that we all have dreams of better worlds, they are really our hope and motivation to transform our own. And even if this is not the best of all possible worlds after all, I challenge you to imagine one that is more interesting.

IV. The Goal

What is the goal that the Gita puts before us? What, according to it, is the one thing most worth striving for? Union (yoga) is said to be both the process and the goal^[31]. Who are we to unite with and what should be the form of that union? And what is really meant by "union"?

Each Jiva is the infinite Brahman contemplating one specific aspect of its potential. Each Jiva is therefore a Purusha bound to one form of Prakriti. A Purusha uniting with a form of Prakriti by identifying with it is what the Gita refers to as Yoga in its widest sense^[32]. We now identify with a form of Prakriti in the Kshara, the mutable world. We observe a body and its activities, a mind and its thoughts, a heart and its emotions and say, This is who I am. The first step is to disengage the Purusha, our awareness, from Prakriti to make a different kind of existence even conceivable. The second is to direct our awareness towards a higher form of Prakriti to merge with it. This could be a higher form of the Kshara, a better body, a better mind, better emotions, more power, knowledge and enjoyment. This is generally frowned upon as merely seeking a more pleasant form of bondage, gilding one's chains, so to speak. The Akshara is considered a far worthier goal. In fact, virtually all Hindu philosophies that lack the concept of the Purushottama declare it to be the only goal worth pursuing: Our true nature is to be infinite and free from limitation. The Gita, however, says that this is to misrepresent the nature of Brahman^[33]. Brahman is always free and infinite, even when it creates, contemplates and even when it identifies with limited forms. We have never stopped being the Purushottama. The goal the Gita sets before us is to become aware of this identity and make our life the conscious expression of it. This means evolving one's nature to a point where it no longer obscures one's identity as the Purushottama, while also becoming a more and more fitting expression of it and a better channel for the Purushottama's will^[34].

V. The Method

The Gita describes three approaches to the practice of Yoga in great detail, called Jnana Yoga (the Yoga of Knowledge), Karma Yoga (the Yoga of Works) and Bhakti Yoga (the Yoga of Devotion), but it is clear that its method is not limited to any of these. It speaks of its method simply as "this Dharma" (this rule of action or spiritual practice)^[35] and culminates in the injunction to "abandon all Dharmas"^[36]. To practise the Yoga of the Gita is to embark on a journey where old methods are continuously refined and new ways are discovered, where one follows most one's own law of nature (svadharma)^[37] that can never be confined to any one system. Furthermore, the Gita does not describe even the three well-known systems as clear-cut and distinct from each other, but rather in a way where each, when seen and practised in the widest sense, really contains the others^[38]. A complete synthesis of Jnana, Karma and Bhakti Yoga has been achieved. When every time one's attention turns to the Purushottama it achieves identification (Jnana), sacrifice (Karma) and adoration (Bhakti).

There exists an obstacle common to all approaches of Yoga — really the sum of all of our inner obstacles — and that is the "ego"^[39]. Not only is the conception of ourselves as Jiva foreign to us, it is contradicted by how we perceive ourselves and ourselves in the world around us. In a sense, the ego is the "old Yoga", the result of the Purushottama identifying with an aspect of its potential with an overemphasis and an exclusive concentration, and the practice of Yoga is the attempt to "overwrite" this former identification. This is, from a metaphysical perspective, why the process is so difficult. It is a struggle between two forms of self-conception, and both are "sanctioned" by the Divine. However, ultimately there is one will, that of the Purushottama, that works out its objective infallibly, and the increasing identification with the Purushottama allows us to more and more transcend the dualistic perspective. Until then, the ego is really the only personification of "evil" we need. Thinking in terms of good and evil is itself an expression of dualism, the main problem. Therefore, to externalise one's problems is really to strengthen the ego, whereas to perceive the problems of the world as problems of one's own consciousness is a step towards transcending the ego.

Throughout this text, when the Jiva is mentioned it usually applies to Brahman freely creating its experience from one of its perspectives. Much of what applies to the Jiva in this sense does not apply to the ego, which is really the "persona" or "mask" that the Jiva wears. The Jiva is writing the play, and the ego is playing the character. While it is true, for instance, that the Jiva determines its experience (including the "wearing" of an ego), part of what the ego is designed to

accomplish is to create a separation of what one desires and what one experiences, i.e. to create struggle, failure and frustration — as mentioned earlier.

Jnana Yoga

The first emphasis is on "intelligence"^[40]. It is important to note that words that are usually translated to mean knowledge or intelligence (like Jnana, Vidya or Buddhi) often refer not so much to mental activity but to a more basic and/or a higher level of awareness.

The first and primary necessity is to realise who we really are. Our personality and our actions are shaped by who we believe ourselves to be. The Gita calls this Sraddha, usually translated as faith, but again the English word does not express the meaning of the Sanskrit term. The Gita does not talk about propositions to be regarded as true irrespective of evidence, nor does it necessarily mean optimism ("having faith in oneself"). The best translation might be "self-conception". We are made of Sraddha, says the Gita, whatever our Sraddha, that is who we are^[41].

Well, how do we define ourselves? Usually in terms of a body and its activity, family background and social relationships, nationality, occupation, religious beliefs, financial situation and many others. Yet, if we examine each of these, we see that none are essential. Even the claim, "I am my body" breaks down once we realise that our bodies are in a state of constant flux and that there is literally not one cell in them that is irreplaceable or essentially "us". We are not a thing, but a process. Perhaps the best claim is to say, "I am what my brain does", but here we are really speaking about awareness. We are awareness, and how we use it defines who we become.

The Gita calls this essential awareness Purusha. This Purusha, the subject, is united (in Yoga) with a form of Prakriti, its object. This Prakriti is also its Sraddha: By identifying with it, Purusha conceives of itself as nothing other than it. But Purusha can be absorbed in itself as well as identify with a higher form of Prakriti. The first movement in Jnana Yoga is away from our present identification with the lower Prakriti of limited and suffering nature towards pure awareness and the second is towards the higher Prakriti of the Purushottama (the Daivi Prakriti, divine nature; or Para Shakti, highest force), a self-conception that is more true and more essentially us.

What is normally referred to as meditation is simply an attempt to facilitate this way of using our awareness. All attempts at being more aware of our inner processes, of returning to our most essential way of being aware and of being aware of awareness itself are meditation. Certain postures and breathing exercises and similar provisions seek merely to make this process less difficult^[42]. We find ourselves in a paradoxical situation: We know we are conscious, but cannot

precisely pinpoint our awareness, because it is entangled with its objects. We are consciousness looking for itself.

Jnana Yoga is merely the attempt to peel back these layers enveloping our awareness. In many ways it is the most "mysterious" form of Yoga; it is also the essence of mysticism. But it need not seem daunting. All that is required is to never stop asking oneself, "Who am I?", and — in a sense — to live the answer.

Karma Yoga

A change in who we conceive ourselves to be must necessarily result in a change in how we act, both in terms of which actions we take and the spirit in which we take them. All the activity in the world is the Purushottama conceiving of itself in multitudinous forms and processes. The actions we take should therefore more and more be in harmony with that greater movement, while our attitude should reflect a growing sense of detachment leading to what the Gita calls "supreme perfection of inactivity" (para naiskarmyasiddhi)^[43]. This does not refer to outer inactivity, which is dismissed early on as impossible — being alive itself is an activity^[44] — nor to cessation of thoughts and emotions, but rather to the perception that everything that happens does so because the Purushottama conceives of it. We are part of the greater action of Nature, all activity is interconnected, our ego is an illusion and yet, even after all this has become clear to us, there is the last step of realising that everything that exists and everything that happens is the effortless "non-activity" of a pure intelligence, i.e. activity that is purely conceptual in nature^[45].

To effect the growing detachment needed, the Gita repeatedly insists on renouncing the "fruit" of one's actions^[46] and recommends this as one of its most potent methods^[47]. To do so means to immediately and forcefully shift one's awareness and one's priorities from one's apparent immediate situation towards the larger context of the divine action. It is taking one's eyes off the clogs and wheels and looking at the larger machinery, the "big picture". It is also to renounce individual existence as exclusive from universal and transcendent existence and so is a natural part of remembering one's true self. It does not involve any loss in effectivity or motivation, however; if it does, it is a "tamasic" renunciation and the egoistic perspective has not been transcended^[48].

Karma Yoga is Yajna, "sacrifice". It is to act with an awareness of the Purushottama and as an expression of its will^[49].

Bhakti Yoga

There exists one force that like no other has the power to change who one is, to effect a higher union of Purusha and Prakriti: the power of love^[50]. Love

is Ananda (bliss), the most essential characteristic of Brahman, turned towards a person or a state of being. Bhakti Yoga is based on this single simple premise: that one tends to become what one adores. Therefore, whenever one turns one's attention towards one's higher Self, the Purushottama, whether in meditation to effect an identification or in action offering one's work as a sacrifice, if this triggers a sensation of devotion, adoration and love, the power of Bhakti is at work. This is also the reason that the Gita portrays Bhakti, like Yoga, as simultaneously a means and an end, as well as an effort to be made and a reward to be received. Bhakti is as much a consequence as a prerequisite, and the highest Bhakti (Para Bhakti) is attained when one has become the Brahman^[51]. This also means that Bhakti need never cease. Bhakti is an "internal" process like everything else: Everything that exists is Brahman interacting with itself in various ways, and all Bhakti is felt by Brahman for Brahman.

How shall we conceive of the Purushottama? And why doesn't the Purushottama simply reveal itself in an obvious, unambiguous way? The Purushottama does reveal itself as the world and everything in it. Everything that exists is a representation of some aspect or perspective of the Infinite, but no limited form can capture or express all of it. It is therefore a far better approach to seek the Purushottama as a continuous experience within one's heart than in outer forms. You are the Purushottama; the world is merely your mirror. This realisation comes in sudden flashes: For a brief moment the Infinite is perceived as shining through its limitations, but we cannot hold onto it, cannot perpetually imprison it in a single form, for what we are holding on to is merely the "window", the symbol. We can merely remember the experience and seek to repeat it or rather remain open to another sudden revelation. Eventually the time interval between these experiences becomes so short that we can be said to be "established in the Brahman"^[52], in which case we have not seen the definite form of the Infinite — for there is none — but rather understood and seen the Infinite itself and how it perpetually casts itself into forms. The Gita calls the revelation of the Infinite in its forms Vibhuti (which can be translated as "heightened existence" or "special becoming")^[53]. This concept can be summarised as "all things are divine, but some more obviously so". What is or isn't a Vibhuti is relative to the individual, time and situation, and in principle the experience is always as significant as we choose to make it, regardless of outer form^[54]. It is important not to become attached to the container, but rather focus on the content; to keep the fruit and throw away the peel and not the other way around.

Despite the limitations of forms, we are encouraged to conceive of the revelations of the Infinite in certain patterns and of the Purushottama as having certain characteristics and character traits. The world — and therefore the self-expression of the Infinite — is not merely a chaos of random forces, but works in meaningful patterns that we can identify and attach varying levels of importance to. Seek those patterns and characteristics in the universal becoming that you find most powerfully suggestive of the Divine Person — that is the principle of the Ishta Devata ("chosen deity"). When choosing one's Ishta Devata (or being chosen by it, as the experience might be) only two principles matter: First, we must be able to conceive of entering into an emotionally empowered relationship (a Bhakti Yoga) with the Person we envision. All relationships between human beings are relationships of Brahman with itself. However, we can also enter into a relationship with the Purushottama more directly. All that is required is that we seek the Infinite behind its forms; any relationship into which love enters can provide effective patterns for this effort.

Second, our conception must always remain open to improvement as the patterns we envision map more and more accurately onto reality. Our Ishta Devata must be an enabling framework for a series of Vibhuti experiences, not our insistence that the Infinite limit itself in its revelation to whatever form we desire. Therefore, some conceptions of the Divine really are "objectively" better for our inner progress than others — if they represent more accurate patterns — even if this difference depends mainly or entirely on the characteristics and needs of our subjective nature.

Our Ishta Devata may be an abstract (like Love, Truth, Knowledge, Justice, Peace etc.), but if it is not personified, much of the emotional force (the Bhakti) may be lost. The Ishta Devata cannot be the Absolute itself as it is by definition merely a representation of it. To attempt to focus on the Absolute directly, too, is possible, but much more difficult^[55]. Although it seeks to guard against the error of unduly mentally limiting oneself in one's conception of the Infinite, it almost inevitably results in an undue limitation of one's conception of the Infinite in form, in distancing oneself innerly from the will and the action of the Purushottama in the world. The Formless reveals itself to us through forms, and we are encouraged to cherish it both with and without form, in its essential freedom and in its free becoming.

VI. Additional Metaphysics

As the Jiva, Brahman never renounces its essential characteristics. It merely contemplates a given set of characteristics in the context of its own infinity, eternity and immutability. Even other Jivas perceived are really an expression and a reflection of its own nature. The Jiva can therefore be considered a "holon" — a part that is simultaneously the whole.

Each Jiva is not merely a portion of the Brahman but all of the Brahman and each formulation of Prakriti it engulfs itself in is really a world (Jagat, literally "perpetually moving"). Although all of these worlds are connected within a wider world, viz. the perception of the Purushottama, each is a self-contained and self-defined experience. Everything required for its experience and expression is included in it, so the Jiva need never search for anything "outside" its consciousness, because there is no outside.

When we ask, "What is real?" we might be tempted to say that the vision of the Purushottama alone is real and every other vision is an approximation or a distorted copy. But this is to unduly diminish the identity of Jiva and Purushottama. Therefore, the better answer is to say that what is real to each Jiva is what is relevant to its experience. Each Jiva creates its own world and defines its own truth, and the Purushottama is that which creates the total experience through all and sets the Truth that coordinates the various truths.

The experience of Brahman as each Jiva is self-determined. Each Jiva is a stance of the Omnipotent and as such has total free will. The interaction among Jivas is coordinated by the Purushottama, however, and so the Jiva concentrated on its individuality to the exclusion of the awareness of its identity with the Purushottama and the other Jivas, really has only an illusion of free will. Such a Jiva is a slave to Prakriti, the perfect unfolding of the will of its own Higher Self. And yet, even this Jiva retains the perfect freedom to make choices and to direct its awareness according to its power and its limitations — which it has chosen as well in its original self-conception. The total of the choices made by all Jivas in any context constitutes the choice made by the Purushottama in that context.

That everything is freely and perfectly chosen does not mean that everything is "pre-determined". Rather, it is determined outside of space and time and unfolds through them. The Jiva outside of time determines the options it will have at any given moment and makes its choices "in real time".

Time is simply the contemplation of sequence. The Eternal cannot undergo change, but it can contemplate change and movement (from its fixed position). Each sequence of events (or "timeline") is simultaneously a single unchanging thought that is held in eternity (in the realm outside of time) and, when contemplated step-by-step, the unfolding of time. Each of these "steps", however, still takes place in eternity, and each can be itself another sub-sequence. Brahman can be aware of all its potential simultaneously in the Eternity of the Akshara, and it can, while never leaving this eternal status, contemplate "snapshots" of sequences and sub- and super-sequences that create the "illusion" of change and movement in an eternal moment. The Purushottama creates a single world with a single super-timeline that it surveys as the author of a novel might survey its

plot — with beginning, middle and end coexisting — while the Jiva contemplates a series of sub-sequences from past to future; the way the reader would when reading the novel. Perhaps an even better analogy is that of watching the novel's movie adaptation: The movie consists literally only of a sequence of static snapshots (frames), the rapid observation ("contemplation") of which creates the experience of movement.

There is an eternal moment that can be divided into two parts which we could call "eons" (in the sense of an indefinite period of time). In the first eon, Brahman as the Jiva contemplates a sequence of events and thereby uses or "creates" time. In the second, Brahman as the Jiva resumes contemplation of the Akshara (infinity and eternity) and therefore returns to timeless experience, while also resetting this cycle. With this movement of perception, like the opening and closing of one's eyes, the Jiva can contemplate "frame" after "frame", while never actually leaving eternity.

Each of these eons is indefinitely long simply because there is nothing to measure them by^[56]. Each is the duration of a subjective moment of awareness, and any attempt to "measure" time is simply the contemplation of the subjective proportion of two movements. And these eons don't themselves form a sequence in the sense of time, because as the Jiva returns to the contemplation of eternity, by definition all contemplation of sequence (i.e. time) is abandoned.

(Why is the concept of these two eons necessary? Otherwise Brahman would be "stuck" either contemplating one particular experience that it could never change or contemplating its infinite unexpressed potential without ever being able to form one thought using space and time.)

(Whether or not we should consider the second eon following the first a sequence in the sense of time is a question of semantics. We could refer to these two eons as "real time" and the sequence contemplated during the first eon "virtual time", but I think that this would merely add to the confusion.)

Space is the contemplation of (static) proportion and relation. Just as time, as the contemplation of sequence, creates a sense of change and movement, space creates the possibility for a sense of interaction and defines what may affect what under which circumstances. It creates context and "room for expression", so to speak. Like with time, there is no absolute standard by which to measure space and proportion; space is merely the relationship of two or more objects.

Tapas (literally "heat") is force of consciousness. In its pure form (or on the highest level) consciousness is one with its force or, one could say, has no force. It merely conceives and there is nothing other than its conception. And yet, consciousness has at least this power: to create ideas, concepts, worlds, and it has the power to express itself, to find itself through them as well as lose itself in them. Consciousness need never do this; it could rest content in its inactivity.

The reason it does express itself is that consciousness — or really the Thinker, the Purushottama — contains the urge (Iccha, "desire" or "will") to do so. This urge expresses itself throughout the manifestations of any particular idea; it is this that drives the movement forward and guides it inevitably towards its conclusion.

Tapasya is Tapas on the human level^[57]. It is the human being becoming aware of himself as consciousness that possesses and is driven by the inner urge towards his own perfection. Tapasya is to stop to suppress or to work against this tendency, and rather to concentrate on it and allow its open expression. It is one's attempt to pierce through one's surface consciousness of thoughts and emotions and to get to the deeper experience and expression of the Jiva one truly is.

The meaning of the word "Samadhi"^[58] is very similar to that of "Yoga", but refers specifically and more exclusively to the self-forgetfulness of the Purusha. One could say that there are three stages of Samadhi, or perhaps three ways in which it can be expressed and experienced. The first is either a tamasic inconscience or oblivion, where one simply loses oneself in an apparent temporary annihilation of the Purusha in Prakriti (and which is not usually referred to or thought of as Samadhi) or a blissful absorption of the Purusha in immediate thoughts or activities. The second is an experience in the context of the practice of Yoga, where the Purusha surrenders its experience of Prakriti in order to experience itself, i.e. to "lose itself in itself". The third is the complete identity of consciousness and force as experienced by the Purushottama, where force is simply an expression of the Self; it is therefore not a "forgetfulness of the Purusha" at all, but rather the "forgetfulness" of any distinction between Purusha and Prakriti.

Since existence is consciousness conceptualising itself in coherent thoughts, everything that is is language (Vak or Shabda). All forms are words, attempts to express an aspect of the Ineffable. There are things that can never be expressed; whatever is expressed is never expressed perfectly. All form is limitation and all language is an approximation. The Ineffable is infinitely succinct; the manifestation is somewhat obtuse. And yet, the Purushottama should not be accused of ineloquence; like a masterful poet, it draws on an infinite reservoir of ideas and experiences and uses forms as symbols to suggest, to move and to inspire.

Notes and References:

- [1] Bhagavad Gita I,1
- [2] I,3-19
- [3] I,20-23
- [4] I,26-27
- [5] I,27-47; II,4-6
- [6] II,1-3,30-37
- [7] II,11-29
- [8] II,39-41,47-72
- [9] III,1
- [10] II,39
- [11] III,3
- [12] II,39
- [13] II,42-45
- [14] II,45
- [15] III,9-11,14+15. The term Yajna, like the term Yoga, is also used in a more universal sense. It is the process Brahman uses to facilitate the exchange between different levels of its existence (hence, "with sacrifice the Lord created the creatures" in III,10).
- [16] XVIII,5
- [17] III,12+13
- [18] XV,16. In VIII,20+21 the Gita clarifies that the Immutable is not merely the absence, suspension or end of becoming, but rather the supreme "abode" of Brahman.
- [19] XV,17+18
- [20] VII,5; XV,7
- [21] IV,6 (This particular verse might be considered to apply exclusively to the avatar, however.)
- [22] III,8,19+20,25,30; XVIII,5
- [23] II,51; IV,9; VIII,15+16,24; XIV,2,20
- [24] Purusha and Prakriti are explained in chapter XIII. For a mention of "highest form of awareness" see III,42 (where the Purusha is simply referred to as "he").
- [25] It is important to distinguish between three related concepts: The "Para Prakriti" (supreme nature), mentioned in VII,5 and explained in VII,6-14, refers to the supreme creative force. Terms like "Madbhava" (my nature of being) in IV,10 and XIII,19, and "Para Bhava" (supreme nature of being) in VII,24, refer to the identity of the Purushottama. Finally, "Sampadam Daivim Abhijatasya" (the endowments of him born with the divine nature) in XVI,1-3 refers to divine qualities expressed in a human personality. When Krishna speaks of "mama sadharmyam agatah" (those who have become of like nature (or law of being) with me) in XIV,2, he means those with a sufficiently divine personality taking on the identity of the Purushottama. The term "Daivi Prakriti" is used in a similar sense in IX,13.
- [26] XVIII,61
- [27] The gunas are described in Chapter XIV. The sattvic, rajasic and tamasic forms of food, sacrifice, askesis and giving are described in chapter XVII, the forms of renunciation, knowledge, work, doer, understanding, persistence and pleasure in chapter XVIII.
- [28] XIV,5. The necessity to transcend Sattva specifically is made clear in XIV,6 by stating that Sattva brings attachment to happiness and attachment to knowledge.

- [29] XIV,20
 [30] II,45
 [31] II,50+51
 [32] When Krishna speaks of "My Yoga" (X,7), "My Yoga-Maya" (VII,25), "My Divine Yoga" (IX,5) or "My Self-Yoga" (XI,51), he speaks of the interaction of the True Person with his Consciousness- Force in a creative cosmic sense. Arjuna, too, says (in X,18), "Tell me of Your Yoga."
 [33] VII,24; IX,11
 [34] XVIII,56
 [35] II,40
 [36] XVIII,66
 [37] II,31; III,35; XVIII,47
 [38] V,4+5; VII,17+18
 [39] The word "ego" (Ahankara - "that which creates the sense of I") and the necessity of transcending it are mentioned in several passages, the first being II,71.
 [40] II,39+41 ("Buddhi" is the word used, which Monier Williams translates as "the power of forming and retaining conceptions and general notions, intelligence, reason, intellect, mind, discernment, judgment". "Dhi", "jna" and "prajna" are also used together with "stitha" or "tishthati" for "stable (in) intelligence" from II,54 onwards).
 [41] XVII,3
 [42] The Gita gives some practical guidelines in VI,10-14.
 [43] XVIII,49
 [44] III,5; also XVIII,11
 [45] V,14; XVIII,16
 [46] II,47 and V,12, among others
 [47] XII,12
 [48] XVIII,7
 [49] IX,34; XI,55; XII,20; XVIII,65
 [50] VI,47
 [51] XVIII,54
 [52] II/72; V/12,19,20
 [53] Chapter X is devoted to this topic.
 [54] X,19,39-42
 [55] XII,3-5
 [56] The Gita speaks of the "day and night of Brahma", each "a thousand ages" long, the coming into being of the world at the beginning of day and its dissolution at the coming of night (VIII,17+18). This is usually interpreted to mean that the world lasts "one day" in its entirety ("from big bang to big crunch"), and that "one night" comes between its dissolution and the creation of a new, rather than the world being experienced in a succession of many "days and nights of Brahma".
 [57] The Gita uses the terms "Tapoyajna" (sacrifice or offering of Tapas) in IV,16 and the verb "tapasyati" (to perform Tapasya) in IX,27.
 [58] In II,53+54 the term "Samadhi" is used both in the sense of "union" (i.e. Yoga) and "stable intelligence" (see Note [40]).

Ancient Indian Wisdom And Contemporary Challenges

Kireet Joshi

What are the critical problems of today? And what could be the relevance of ancient Indian wisdom in resolving our predicaments when the modern knowledge appears to have been so advanced? Since the last two centuries, humanity has taken a serious turn, and in its worst manifestation, two devastating wars have stormed the entire earth, and in its best manifestation, global aspiration to unite the peoples of the world has taken a concrete form. On its worst side, the survival of humanity on the earth has come under severest attack; on its best side, it has come to be realised that a new consciousness must seize humanity and change human nature so radically that the spirit of oneness and unity not only reigns as an idea and an aspiration but becomes embodied in human life like its living breath.

A significant fact is that the age of the Reason, which began and flourished in the West since the Renaissance and which has spread all over the world in varying degrees of preponderance, is now going to close. The questions which it had raised but failed to answer are now looming large before humanity with imperative pressure. What is truth and whether comprehensive truth can be known and known with certainty were the questions with which the Age of Reason began, and they have now come to be answered only in terms of probability and scepticism. The hope built up by the Reason that humanity can be so rationally governed that liberty, equality and fraternity can be actualised in the life of humanity has now been demonstrably proved to be unrealisable, since rationality is unable to provide equality, even at the minimum level, without strangulating freedom, and fraternity does not find even an elbow room when Reason goes on constructing, mechanising and dehumanising edifices. And yet it is not possible to remain reconciled with the failures of the powers of Reason and to forget the dreams of freedom, unity and brotherhood. The soul of humanity cries out to look for the means by which the ideals of progress can be actualised as urgently as possible.

At the root of all this, it is becoming clearer that we are not only at the turning point of a century or a millennium but at the turning point of a mutation of the human species. Man is a product of evolution, — so has modern science declared; and having reached the acme of experimentation with the highest faculty of Reason, which distinguishes the human species from all other species, will not man press forward to a new step of evolution? Self-exceeding is the very nature of man, — so has modern science concluded; will then man give up his distinctiveness and succumb to the limitations of gospels that counsel contentment within our imprisoning deficiencies? Great philosophers of evolution that have flourished during the last two centuries have declared that the *élan vital* will not cease to produce new varieties of human and superhuman species or the urge inherent in Space and Time in preparing the birth of Deity or God in the making or drive of ingression of higher powers of consciousness will continue to liberate corresponding powers imprisoned in man. Flying on the wings of speculation of leading philosophers like Bergson, Alexander and Whitehead, we also see scientists releasing tremendous packets of energies from the atom and grappling with the biological cell to release from it secrets of immortality; and we begin to wonder whether while striving to put our foot on the Moon and to fly to Jupiter, we are not being called upon to return to ourselves, — to something within our inmost being to find answers to the questions, which must be answered. The quest to find these answers has no more remained a pastime or a luxury of an idealist; asphyxiated by the narrow grooves in which we are required to be imprisoned, our call is a call of an imperative necessity.

There appear to be three alternatives before humanity today. The first possibility is to gravitate downwards towards the organisation of life that would keep humanity stagnant within the narrow circle of the satisfaction of animal wants, vital, desires and mental fashions supported by powerful means of communication and transmission and structures or super-structures built and sustained by ever-increasing processes of mechanisation. This possibility seems to be asserting itself more and more powerfully, since instruments like those of television and arts of music and cinema are producing incalculable impact on vital desires of increasing segments of humanity.

The second possibility is for the humanity to arrive at a better but not ideal organisation of life sustained by increasing circling of the powers of the Reason, somehow adjusted with demands of ethics and religion, accommodated by various compromises, which can easily be bombarded by the greater inrush of the downward pull of the gravitational pull of the powers of Unreason. This is the possibility towards which enlightened but not illumined leaders of humanity are striving to actualise, hoping that such a possibility will not only be actualised but will also sustain itself over a long period of time to come.

The third possibility is contained in the increasing realisation that neither of these two possibilities is worthy of the higher destiny of humanity or any one of them would or should eventually succeed. It envisages the rise of a new aspiration and a new awakening; it perceives that a great psychological revolution will break out that will push humanity beyond its borders of limitations and open up the gates of spiritual and supramental future. This possibility is still not widely understood or shared, but the speed with which humanity is rushing forward or downward will create the power of necessity to be liberated from the imprisoning walls where life-giving oxygen will be found suddenly depleted. It is when this situation will begin to be felt that with increasing pressure humanity will turn to a new quest.

From this brief review of the whole situation, we can formulate the following questions :

When the best possibilities confront the worst possibilities, what are the means by which the triumph of the best possibilities can be secured?

If it is a part of the nature of the human being to continuously cross the limitations of nature, is there evidence that the limitations that confront us even at the borders of our highest possible achievements can be crossed? In other words, do we have any assured knowledge of those faculties and powers, which, when developed, give us a basis for the future evolution of the human being that would open up the path for a better world order?

Do we have any body of knowledge with the aid of which we can build a path leading us from the present critical condition of the world towards a better and smoother progress ensuring the needed perfectibility of the individual and collective life?

It will be seen that these questions are interrelated and demand a vast and strenuous effort of research. Fortunately, the supreme help that we can get in this task of research is the body of writings of Sri Aurobindo, who has left for us a synthetic body of knowledge that includes the best possible articulation of the sum total of humanity's quest from the most ancient times to the present day. With his vast mastery over some of the important Indian and international languages as also over the vast range of the relevant disciplines of knowledge, he has presented comprehensively the result of his studies of Indian and Western culture, social and political development of humanity, scholarly exegesis of the Veda, Upanishads, and the Gita as also of the religious, scientific and other secular literature that has bearing on the problems of human evolution and its future; he has given us basic clues to be found in the ancient Indian wisdom and in the theistic religious traditions and in the recovered sense of Buddhism, as also in the revelations of the modern knowledge to those answers which we need

so urgently and imperatively. In fact, his writings have opened up the lines on which we can fruitfully pursue our question.

Speaking of the ancient Indian wisdom, Sri Aurobindo has said that the recovery of the knowledge contained in the Veda, Upanishads and in the Bhagavadgita is of capital importance and that this recovery should aim at utmost fullness and amplitude. He has further underlined that this research should be accompanied by the development of new philosophical, scientific and critical knowledge in such a way that that ancient knowledge gets fully channelised and utilised for the building up of the new knowledge that is required for breaking the boundaries of the present evolutionary moulds, which are imprisoning humanity into stagnancy or downward gravitation or else into horizontal but vain efforts at amelioration. He also suggested that a supreme effort will be required, particularly on the part of India, to build up a spiritualised society that would synthesise the best of the East and the West and which would undertake an original handling of our contemporary problems.

In a memorable passage, Sri Aurobindo has stated :

“India has the key to the knowledge and conscious application of the ideal; what was dark to her before in its application, she can now, with a new light, illumine; what was wrong and wry in her old methods she can now rectify; the fences which she created to protect the outer growth of the spiritual ideal and which afterwards became barriers to its expansion and farther application, she can now break down and give her spirit a freer field and an ampler flight: she can, if she will, give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solutions is there in her ancient knowledge.” (Sri Aurobindo: *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, Centenary Edition, Vol.14, p. 433)

The Veda is, as Sri Aurobindo has explained, a book of knowledge, — not a collection of primitive aspirations and prayers of superstitious barbarians, as many modern commentators have attempted to portray it. It contains “truth of a science the modern world does not at all possess.” Sri Aurobindo also discovered in the Vedic hymns the knowledge of the supermind, which he had arrived at independently in his own Yogic research and realisations, and in his great book, “*The Secret of the Veda*”, Sri Aurobindo has described in detail the victory that the Rishis had attained in breaking limitations of human consciousness so as to create a sound foundation for the surpassing of the limits, — a task which humanity needs today to undertake in order to solve its critical problems. When towards the end of the Rigveda, the future task of humanity is described, in brief but powerful words, “*manurbhava janaya daivyam janam*”: (Be first the mental

being in its perfection and then generate the divine being), it has behind it a vast body of experimentation with those faculties of inspiration, revelation, intuition and supramental discrimination that begin to operate when Reason is surpassed and faculties of true knowledge and comprehensive knowledge begin to operate. Crossing through the symbolism of *Sarasvati, Ila, Sarama and Daksha*, Sri Aurobindo has shown how Vedic Rishis had mastered the operations of suprarational faculties so that when we read of them now at a time when we are obliged to transcend the limitations of the Reason, we can move on the right path with an assured body of knowledge, and we may not fall into those irrational and exaggerated claims that often dilute and mislead those who, without necessary ripeness and without perfecting the powers of the Reason, try to enter into the untrodden paths that lie beyond the borders of the Reason.

There is one faculty according to the Vedic knowledge, which can be singled out as the best aid that can facilitate our entrance into the higher realms of true and comprehensive knowledge. That faculty, intelligent mind, is described in various aspects of its operation,— *dhi, medha, mati, smriti, buddhi, manas, chitta, hrit, prajna*.

As Sri Aurobindo points out :

“In man as he is at present developed, the intelligent mind is the most important psychological faculty and it is with a view to the development of the intelligent mind to its highest purity and capacity that the hymns of the Veda are written.” (Sri Aurobindo: *Hymns to Mystic Fire*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 11, p. 443).

From this point of view, it can be said that the Veda is a science of the mind and the supermind, which lays down effective technologies by which man can carefully be trained, perfected and transported into the operations of the supermind.

The entire discipline of the Veda is an elaborate methodised effort in which various human powers can be intertwined, purified and developed, and they are symbolised under specific and discernible symbols of *Agni, Indra, Usha, Pushan, Surya, Savitri, Varuna, Mxtra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Soma, Brihaspati*, and many others in a systematic manner. And in the hymns relating to the *Rihbus*, we have a summary of the entire process of perfection, which can be repeated in human beings. It is fortunate that humanity has this great treasure available to it precisely at the moment when the knowledge contained in it is needed.

There are, according to the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Gita, three important powers by the combined application of which, humanity can bring about the triumph of the favourable possibilities in their battle against the unfavourable. The first of them is the power of what may be called a king-idea or the seven-

headed Thought or the power of the seven-rayed Thinker, *saptaguh*. Is it merely a legend when we are told that one can rise into higher plane of swar and rise also into the highest plane of Truth, symbolised by the Sun? A famous hymn of the Rigveda declares the passage from darkness to the supreme light, when it states: “*ud vayam tamasas pari swar pashyanta uttaram; devam devatra suryam aganma jyotir uttamam.*” (We, in our ascent, crossed over darkness and perceived the superior light of the realm of intermediate knowledge; and then the aspirants of the cosmic powers ascended still upwards and arrived at the abode of the sunlight, which is the light of the supreme knowledge). Again, is it a mere legend when the Chhandogya Upanishad refers to this verse when it is said that Krishna, son of Devaki, attained to supreme knowledge, when Ghora, his teacher, pronounced to him that one Word, contained in that verse. In one sentence, the Veda declares that mere crossing the darkness is not enough, mere attainment of the intermediate light is not enough, but one must rise to the source of the supreme knowledge, the rays of which are multiple and constitute a vast complex multiplicity.

And when Vishwamitra, the great Rishi speaks of the necessity of uniting our intellect with that sunlight up to such a degree that the intellect not only contemplates the supreme knowledge but is also directed by it, — we have only a summary statement of the methodised effort that is needed for the discipline of the intellect before it can act in the light of true knowledge and in the light of comprehensive knowledge. King-ideas are born of that comprehensive knowledge.

The second power, which is celebrated in the Veda is the power of the master-act, which is inspired by the highest knowledge and executed by the highest will. A master-act is an expression of inextinguishable fire of aspiration, Agni, and as it is described in the very first hymn of the Rigveda, that fire of aspiration is *kavi kratu*,— Seer-will, the substance of which is *satyascitrasravastamah*, the collectivity of the highest inspirations that express multiple aspects of the Truth. Action that is inspired by the fire of aspiration has still to pass through mental consciousness, and that consciousness, even when not confined to the surface and even when enlarged into greater widenesses needs to be disciplined by the power of Will, and this disciplined will can be made truth-bearing only when it becomes Goodwill. We find, therefore, in Yajurveda, which can be looked upon as the science of the knowledge of action and its right methodology, the famous hymn where mental consciousness is described in detail, and each of its powers is proposed to be united with Goodwill, *shivasankalpa*. At a higher level, master-action is manifested only when it begins to burn with self-giving, which in the Vedic language, is called *yajna*.

In the Bhagavadgita, we have a most explicit statement of the assured knowledge that governs perfection of action, of *yajna* — the knowledge, which could deliver Arjuna, the greatest protagonist of action but gripped by a crisis in which dilemmas of action, inaction and wrong action confronted him and disabled him so completely that he was led to think of escaping from action altogether. We of the modern humanity are facing today a similar crisis, and each one of us is facing similar dilemmas in regard to action, and therefore, that ancient knowledge expounded with incomparable mastery is directly relevant. For each one of us is called upon to recognise what is favourable and what is unfavourable to the future of humanity, and moreover we need to make a difficult choice that can be arrived at by the certainty about the tightness of the needed action. In the ultimate analysis, the master-act that is needed needs to be based upon heroism of the fire of the will, guided by the certainty of knowledge and strengthened by goodwill that would denude us of all our self-conceit, selfishness, and egoism.

The third power is connected with the knowledge of our inmost being and its real origin and its adherence to the support on which our inmost being is rooted. At its highest, it manifests as utter self-giving, adoration and prayer. And here, too, the Veda, the Upanishads and the Gita give us the profoundest message “Know Thyself “, which has been perceived as the fundamental need, if we are to relate ourselves properly with the world and with all that may be beyond ourselves and the world.

An important message of the ancient wisdom in regard to self-knowledge is that of bondage and liberation and immortality — a knowledge that is so secret and so precious that in order to be qualified even to enter into the portals of that knowledge, what is needed is, as the Kathopanishad clearly indicates, not only utter sincerity but such an earnestness that the seeker is prepared to surmount the highest possible temptations of pleasure, wealth, fame, and all that is normally considered by human beings as desirable, *preyas*. And yet, it is in the Veda, the Upanishads, the Gita and other records of ancient Indian wisdom that we find non-dogmatic accounts of explorations and a systematic body of repeatable and verifiable knowledge pertaining to this theme. The intricate knowledge of the concept of Purusha in its various poises at the levels of body, life, mind and beyond, both in its dynamic and static aspects, and its relationship with still more difficult concepts of *the jiva*, and *atman* or Brahman is considered to be useful if the individual is to be liberated and is to be prepared for perfection. It is on the basis of this knowledge that, according to the ancient Indian wisdom, the harmony between the individual and the collectivity can be created and perfected. Examples of great Rishis and personalities like Rama and Krishna, Mahavira and Buddha and a number of Siddhas illustrate what profundities of knowledge are

required if we are not only to repeat what was achieved in the past but also if we are to recreate, with new knowledge, the perfect relationship between the individual and the collectivity, — perfection in which the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity are reconciled with the perfections of the power of wisdom, heroism, harmony and skills in works, to which reference is made in the famous Purusha Sukta of the Rigveda. When the Rigveda closes with the call to join together, and to commune together in harmony, — *samgacchadhvam samvadadhvam*, the vision that has been placed before us is that of the perfectibility of the collective life.

In sum, it can be said that the ancient fund of knowledge that India possesses, which even Indians have largely lost or forgotten, needs to be explored with fresh eyes and with scientific rigour as also with unfailing powers of experimentation, so that the challenges that humanity faces today can be met effectively. It will be obvious that a mighty effort is required and we need to be awakened from the facile and soporific gospels that give us false assurances that humanity will somehow muddle through its difficulties and arrive at normal and happy routine of life. Considering the nature of challenges and the issues that have been raised by these challenges, we have to realise that our crisis is an unprecedented crisis and that even ordinary people like ourselves have to share some mightiest efforts in order to surmount our present predicaments and various threats that are directly relevant to the issues of our survival and fulfilment.

We may hasten to add that while the importance of the ancient wisdom of India is to be underlined, we should not be blind to the need of exploring other systems of wisdom and even new knowledge. Ancient Indian wisdom has always counselled us to rise higher and higher and to be always more and more luminous, unfettered by the past and any dogmas or preconceived beliefs. In India, we speak of the Aryan spirit, and the Aryan spirit is not something narrow or communal or racial, but the spirit of the free man that wants to labour and work with wisdom and with one supreme motive of *loka sangrah*, the motive of preserving and creating solidarity and unity of the people.

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Revisiting The Vedas In The Light Of The Yogic Experiences Of Sri Aurobindo

L Vijai

The Vedas constitute the bedrock not only of Indian Philosophy, but of the Indian ethos in its entirety. Even the schools that claimed an independent origin and the ones which rose in opposition to the Vedas had to reckon with the philosophy of the Vedas either directly or indirectly. The Vedas not only stand at the pinnacle of philosophical glory but are masterpieces of literary beauty, poetic charm and profound mystic symbolism. The attempt to understand the true import of the Vedas has been a real challenge for the scholar in the field largely due to the complexity of the subject matter and the mysticism that shrouds its presentation. This has posed several problems regarding the interpretation of its true meaning. Attempts to discern them have given rise to theories that have interpreted the scriptures in such a manner that the very integrity of the texts has been challenged. The fault of these attempts lies in the methods adopted for interpretation and the inability to fathom the conceptual dimensions of the Vedas. The Vedas represent the experiences of seers (*ṛṣṭā*) who had visions of truth born out of their yogic experiences. The truths were revealed and expressed in a language that far surpassed the limitations of human reason and intellect. Only a visionary seer who had yogic experiences similar to or identical with the Vedic *ṛṣis* could bring out the true import of the Vedas in all its depth and clarity. This great work was accomplished by Sri Aurobindo, one of the greatest luminaries that India has produced.

In every sense of the term, Sri Aurobindo was a *ṛṣi*. The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is a product of his yogic realisations. The revival of ancient knowledge and its application for solving the challenges posed by life was the great mission of this visionary thinker. In his work, "*The Renaissance in India*" he says:

The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour, depth and fullness, is its first, most essential work; the flowing

of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge is the second; an original dealing with modern problems in the light of Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is the third and most difficult.¹

The Problem

Sri Aurobindo's '*The Secret of the Veda*' that takes up the task of reinterpreting the Vedas in the light of his yogic experiences, opens with a fundamental question of great relevance – 'Is there at all or is there still a secret of the Veda?'. The methods of comparative philology, comparative mythology and comparative religion have failed to reveal the true philosophical significance of the Vedas. The interpretations on these lines have reduced the hymns of the Vedas to "sacrificial compositions of a primitive and still barbarous race written around a system of ceremonial and propitiatory rites, addressed to personified Powers of Nature and replete with a confused mass of half-formed myth and crude astronomical allegories yet in the making"² The Vedas when interpreted with the tools stated above, present a number of insoluble difficulties. Ancient Sanskrit in which the Vedas have been written contain ancient forms and words that do not appear in later speech and therefore their meanings can be fixed only through intelligent conjecture but its sense will forever be a matter of doubt.

In the course of the several thousands of years through which the Vedas have been handed down, there have been three considerable attempts that have differed entirely in their methods and results, to fix the sense of the words used in the Vedas. The differences in the sense of the words have contributed to varying complexions to hymns and passages which in turn have brought about serious variations in the whole thought process of the Vedas. The earliest of these interpretations can be found in the Brahmanas and Upanishads themselves, but are available only in fragments. The most widely accepted traditional interpretation has come from the great Indian scholar Sayana. The interpretations constructed by European scholars on the basis of painstaking comparisons are the third and the latest.

The greatest difficulty with the last two interpretations is that they stamp upon these ancient hymns an extraordinary incoherence and poverty of sense. Not only that, when taken as a whole, they fail to convey a connected strain of thought. Except in some simple hymns, the language is so obscure and artificial that it

cannot be woven into a whole without considerable distortions. Yet from these apparently incoherent utterances have sprung forth the subtlest of metaphysics profoundest systems of religion. Sri Aurobindo argues that such systems of metaphysics and psychology as can be found in the Upanishads cannot spring from a conceptual void.

An important hiatus left by the interpretations of the European scholars is the divide between the material worship of external Nature powers in the Vedic hymns and the highly developed psychological and spiritual functions attached to the Gods in the Upanishads and the Puranas. Agni in the Vedas is avowedly Fire; Surya is the Sun, Parjanya the Rain-cloud and Usha the Dawn. In the Upanishads the material attributes of Gods are effaced or have become subordinate to psychological conceptions. Here Surya is the revealer of truth and presides over poetical and prophetic inspiration; the Goddess of Dawn acquires the status of the Goddess of knowledge and wisdom. Agni in the Upanishads is invoked for purely moral functions as the purifier from sin, as the leader of the soul by the good path to divine bliss and is identified with the power of will and held responsible for human actions. Soma, the plant which yielded the mystic wine for Vedic sacrifice, has become not only the God of moon but manifests himself as mind in the human being. This problem is taken up by Sri Aurobindo seriously. He proposes that the gulf between the connotation of terms in the Vedic hymns and in the Upanishads and later literature like the Puranas, is a human creation, born out of an incomplete and peripheral understanding of the Vedic hymns.

Sri Aurobindo points out that the true import of the hymns lies in their philosophical dimension which was effectively hidden "in a veil of concrete and material figures and symbols which protected the sense from the profane and revealed it to the initiated"³. The seers to whom the Vedas were revealed were fully conscious of the true philosophical sense conveyed by the hymns. They were keen on preserving the sacredness and secrecy of self-knowledge and the true knowledge of the Gods. They deemed it unfit, even dangerous to convey the truth to the ordinary human mind and liable for perversion and misuse and loss of virtue if revealed to vulgar and unpurified minds. Hence they favoured the existence of an outer worship, effective but imperfect, for the profane, an inner discipline for the initiate, and clothed their language in words and images which had equally a spiritual sense for the elect and a concrete sense for the mass of ordinary worshippers. Sri Aurobindo says:

Their formulas and ceremonies are, overtly, the details of an outward ritual devised for the Pantheistic Nature-Worship which was then the common

1 Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, seventh edition, 2002, p. 16

2 Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust 1990, p. 1

3 Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust 1990, p. 6

religion, covertly the sacred words, the effective symbols of a spiritual experience and knowledge and a psychological discipline of self-culture which were then the highest achievement of the human race. The ritual system recognised by Sayana may, in its externalities, stand; the naturalistic sense discovered by European scholarship may, in its general conceptions, be accepted; but behind them there is always the true and still hidden secret of the Veda, — the secret words, *nirṇā vacāmsi*, which were spoken for the purified in soul and the awakened in knowledge.⁴

This theory of Sri Aurobindo, discovered in the light of his experiences in Integral Yoga, elucidates effectively the parts of the Upanishads that have remained a mystery for the scholars and sheds light on the origin of the Puranas. It justifies and rationally explains the whole ancient tradition of India and establishes that the Vedanta, Puranas, Tantras, various philosophical schools and the religions born in the Indian soil go back in their source to Vedic origins. The fundamental conceptions of later Indian thought can be found in their germinal primitive forms in the Vedic hymns. This theory also explains the apparent incoherencies in the Vedic texts. A classical example of an allegory that conceals the spiritual truth within it is that of the story of Savitri found in the Mahabharata. The epic poem ‘*Savitri*’ is a masterpiece of Sri Aurobindo. The story of Satyavan and Savitri narrated in the Mahabharata is a classical example of how the march towards the divine, complete with all its experiences can be expressed in a story with its characters embodying the principles of spiritual life. In his ‘Author’s Note’ to the poem, Sri Aurobindo writes :

The Tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the Mahabharata as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save; Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena, Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities,

but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.⁵

The Vedas belong to an age anterior to the intellectual philosophies. The aim of the Vedas is illumination and not logical conviction. The *Rṣi* was not the individual composer but the seer (*dr̥ṣṭā*) of an eternal impersonal knowledge. The language of the Veda itself is Sruti, not composed but heard by the seer who made himself eligible for acquiring that knowledge through rigorous self-culture. There is no suggestion of miracle in this process of revelation. The illumination acquired by the seer was the final prize of a hard-earned victory. The Vedas often bring out the image of a journey; the soul’s march on the path of Truth.

The hymns possess a finished metrical form, a constant subtlety and skill in their technique and great variations of style and poetical personality. It is therefore obvious that these hymns are not the work of crude barbarians. The invariable fixity of Vedic thought and its depth, richness and subtlety help us to conclude that they are not the work of a period of the beginnings of thought. They are in all probability the mature conclusions that mark the end of an era of intense spiritual quest. Even in the Vedic period, the true significance of the hymns was lost due to excessive ritualism and materialism. The Upanishads mark a powerful revival of ancient knowledge. The movement from Vedic hymns to Vedanta is marked by two strong tendencies. First it tended to subordinate the outward ritual and the material utility of the mantra and the sacrifice, to a more purely spiritual aim. The second tendency of the Vedantic movement was to disencumber itself progressively of the symbolic language, the veil of myth and poetic figure in which the Mystics had shrouded their thought and to substitute it with a clearer statement and a more philosophical language. Thus the Upanishads with their explicit statements of philosophical truths became the fountainhead of Indian wisdom. The age of intuition was replaced by the age of reason. The advent of Buddhism and Jainism further diminished the importance of the Vedic hymns. It is to the scrupulous diligence and the conservative tradition of India that we owe the preservation of the Veda after its secret had been lost and the hymns had ceased in practice to be a living scripture.

⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust 1990, p. 6

⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri A Legend and A Symbol*, Author’s Note, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1996

Insights from Integral Yoga in the Interpretation of the Vedas

The true conceptual structure of the Vedic hymns dawned on Sri Aurobindo as a result of his realisations in the path of Yoga. His experiences helped him to comprehend the symbolism hidden in the mystic allegories and stories of the Vedas. Sri Aurobindo began his practice of Yoga in 1904. At first gathering into it the essential elements of spiritual experience that are gained by the paths of divine communion and spiritual realisation followed till now in India, he passed on in search of a more complete experience uniting and harmonising the two ends of existence, Spirit and Matter. Most ways of Yoga are paths to the Beyond leading to the Spirit and, in the end, away from life; Sri Aurobindo's rises to the Spirit to redescend with its gains bringing the light and power and bliss of the Spirit into life to transform it. Man's present existence in the material world is in this view or vision of things a life in the Ignorance with the Inconscient at its base, but even in its darkness and nescience there are involved the presence and possibilities of the Divine. The created world is not a mistake or a vanity and illusion to be cast aside by the soul returning to heaven or Nirvana, but the scene of a spiritual evolution by which out of this material inconscience is to be manifested progressively the Divine Consciousness in things. Mind is the highest term yet reached in the evolution, but it is not the highest of which it is capable. There is above it a Supermind or eternal Truth-Consciousness which is in its nature the self-aware and self-determining light and power of a Divine Knowledge. Mind is an ignorance seeking after Truth, but this is a self-existent Knowledge harmoniously manifesting the play of its forms and forces. It is only by the descent of this Supermind that the perfection dreamed of by all that is highest in humanity can come. It is possible by opening to a greater divine consciousness to rise to this power of light and bliss, discover one's true self, remain in constant union with the Divine and bring down the supramental Force for the transformation of mind and life and body. To realise this possibility has been the dynamic aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo's yoga couples an ascent to super-consciousness and a descent of the Divine Sacchidananda into matter. The ascent to super-consciousness is also marked by a movement from the outer Being to inner Being. This journey to the truth or core of existence is the ultimate truth hidden in the Vedic hymns. It is Sri Aurobindo's journey in the path of Yoga that revealed to him the same path that lay hidden in the mystic allegories of the Vedic hymns. One can observe that the movement suggested in the Vedas is also a movement from the gross

physical to the subtle spiritual. Without taking into account the inner spiritual dimension of the Vedic hymns, the gross physical meaning appears incoherent and erratic. This is because the performances of the sacrifices mark only the earliest stage in a development, an ascent from matter to mind and then to the pure spirit. The Vedas when interpreted ritualistically confines itself to the material dimension of existence which as Sri Aurobindo remarks is only the tip of the iceberg of existence. The psychological and spiritual interpretations of the hymns are necessary to arrive at a complete picture of reality and the complete journey of the soul to its final destination which is the true import of the Vedas.

In Sri Aurobindo's yoga, this journey is marked by a concentric system where the innermost Being occupies the core and the inner Being and outer Being occupy the penultimate and ultimate layers respectively. The ultimate and penultimate layers each have three parts – the physical, vital and mental. The innermost Being is the universal Atman. In Sri Aurobindo's words "There are, we might say, two beings in us, one on the surface, our ordinary exterior mind, life, body consciousness, another behind the veil, an inner mind, an inner life, an inner physical consciousness constituting another or inner self"⁶ The evolution is also represented in a vertical ascent that depicts the various levels of ascent of consciousness from the Inconscient to the Subconscient to the Physical to the Vital to the Mind to the Higher Mind to the Illumined Mind to Intuitive Mind to the Overmind to the Supermind and finally to Sacchidananda – Absolute existence, consciousness and bliss. *The Life Divine* of Sri Aurobindo brings out this long journey of the soul on the basis of Sri Aurobindo's realisations in the path of integral Yoga. It is in the light of his Yogic experiences that Sri Aurobindo interprets the Vedas and this affirms a stamp of authenticity on his interpretations. It would be more apt to regard his findings as a revelation rather than an interpretation, since it springs from an intuitive plane beyond the reach of the discursive intellect.

Conclusion

The Vedic hymns are one of the least understood among the sacred scriptures of India. Their true import has remained shrouded in mystery owing to the mystic mode of their expression. Their true meaning can only be grasped through Yogic insight gained through a life of self-culture. The intellect as an instrument of

⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol.23, pp.1020-21

knowledge is far too insufficient for revealing the meaning of the Vedic hymns. The Vedic hymns have been so designed by the seers to ensure that only the person worthy of that knowledge can understand it. But the ignorance of its true meaning has only led to its misinterpretations in the course of history. Great interpreters like Sayana failed in bringing out their true meaning in their interpretations. The western scholars further belittled them by portraying them as crude primitive utterances that merely amount to the worship of the forces of Nature. The interpretation of the Vedic hymns by Sri Aurobindo in the light of his experiences in Integral Yoga shed much needed light on the true meaning of the hymns. His interpretation revealed not only the multiple dimensions of the meanings of the hymns (on physical, psychological and spiritual lines) but also established beyond dispute the unitary nature of their teaching by dissolving all the inconsistencies created by the earlier interpretations of them. *The Secret of the Veda* that brings out Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Vedic hymns is an invaluable treasure that helps us in looking at the Vedas afresh.

Spiritual Activism, Spiritual Passivity And Integral Yoga

Larry Seidlitz

Spiritual Activism has recently become a popular movement in the New Age spiritual literature and community, having received strong impetus from the work of Andrew Harvey, author¹ and founder of the Institute for Sacred Activism;² Deepak Chopra, author, and founder of the Chopra Foundation³ and member of the evolutionary leaders network;⁴ Michael Lerner, author^{5,6} and founder of the Network of Spiritual Progressives;⁷ Claudia Horwitz, author⁸ and founder of Stone Circles;⁹ Will Keepin, author and co-founder and director of Satyana Institute;¹⁰ Carla Goldstein, director of the Women's Institute,¹¹ a unit of Omega Institute, as well others. It has been an increasingly important topic in academics with influential books and papers by such writers as Barbara Marx Hubbard,^{12,13} AnaLouise Keating,^{14,15} Alastair McIntosh,^{16,17} Roger S. Gottlib,¹⁸⁻²³ Ken Jones,²⁴ David Loy,²⁵ Donald Rothberg,²⁶ and many others.²⁷

As AnaLouise Keating puts it,

...spiritual activism is a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics — a way of life and a call to action. Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognises the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation... The spiritual/material, inner/outer, individual/collective dimensions of life are parts of a larger whole — interjoined in a complex, interwoven pattern. This synergistic synthesis of apparent opposites distinguishes spiritual activism both from mainstream “New Age” movements and from conventional organised religions. Whereas “New Age” belief systems focus almost, if not entirely, on the personal and thus leave the existing oppressive social structures in place, spiritual activism requires both the personal and the structural; it starts with each individual but moves outward as we challenge and transform unjust social structures.

Although spiritual activism begins at the level of the individual, it does not result in egocentrism, self-glorification, or other types of possessive individualism.

Rather, spiritual activists combine self-reflection and self-growth with outward-directed, compassionate acts designed to bring about material change.²⁸

As Harvey puts it, an impending perfect storm of crises facing the world, including overpopulation, global warming, environmental pollution, corporate greed and corporate controlled media is leading towards a catastrophe that can be averted only through a large-scale spiritually-based activism.²⁹ Harvey described the essence of his vision for confronting this storm as follows: “It is my prayer that this book and the vision of sacred activism it embodies will inspire the spread of inter-linked cells of ‘Networks of Grace’ all over North America and the world. The time has come, in Teilhard de Chardin’s words, to “harness the energies of love, and so for the second time in the history of humanity discover fire” — in this case a grassroots movement of the sacred fire of sacred activism organised through ‘networks of grace.’”³⁰ The Institute for Sacred Activism’s website is designed to facilitate the formation and spread of such activist networks.³¹

Various key principles for spiritual activism have been advanced by different proponents. Some of these emphasise compassion and related emotional and attitudinal underpinnings, others focus on the practicalities of effecting change on the ground. For example, the first of the Satyana Institute’s principles of spiritual activism cites the transformation of negative emotions such as fear, anger and despair to positive emotions of love, compassion, and purpose.³² The Humanity Healing Network website emphasises the role of compassion in several of its key principles.³³ The Integrative Spirituality website cites the values of love, forgiveness, inner connection with God and others, and equanimity as its first four principles, but then discusses other practical components such as mindfulness, creativity and strategy.³⁴ The Activist.org website, based on Horwitz’s work, focuses on practical strategies that have been used successfully in a variety of different contexts, such as “mapping of the range of people and groups who would be affected or connected to a particular issue, campaign, strategy;” “SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats);” “storytelling and ‘case studies;” and the “six-stage campaign framework, as developed and used by MLK [Martin Luther King] and the [American] Civil Rights movement... gathering info, doing education and leadership development, negotiate, increase motivation for struggle, direct action, new relationship with opponent;” “scenario work;” “tableaus, that allow us to reconnect with a particular moment in time (from our activist work) and the visceral impact of success or transformation or pain.”³⁵

Spiritual activism and Integral Yoga

Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s Integral Yoga provides a natural and strong basis for spiritual activism, and can contribute a greater depth of insight into its spiritual dimensions. The aim of Integral Yoga embraces a spiritual transformation, a radical divinisation of individual and collective life. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother continually contrasted their Integral Yoga with the traditional yogas of the past in India which they argued focused on an inner individual realisation and neglected the transformation of the outer life of the individual or of humanity as a whole.³⁶ The transformation they envisaged is of a thorough-going nature, and would necessarily take within its sweep the more limited political, social, or environmental aims of spiritual activism. They argued that it was only by a radical change of the consciousness that this transformation of the outer life of humanity could be realised, starting with individuals, but progressively spreading to others and into communities.³⁷ While concentrating on effecting this transformation within themselves,³⁸ they worked tirelessly to guide and materially and spiritually assist others to this change,³⁹ laid out a detailed teaching and practical method for humanity to follow,⁴⁰ and acted inwardly through spiritual means on the world at large to assist it in its progressive change and transformation.⁴¹

Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga and philosophy should not be taken as a full endorsement of spiritual activism as it is presently articulated. Integral Yoga is a discipline aimed at an integral union with the Divine, the Divine both in its passive aspect as the underlying ground of all existence, and in its dynamic aspect as the conscious Force which drives all energies in the universe; something far more profound than an activism motivated by spiritual as well as social justice and environmental concerns. It aims at the realisation of a spiritual and supramental consciousness, a divine consciousness vastly superior to the ordinary human consciousness, involving a long and difficult discipline to achieve. It aims at a spiritual and supramental transformation of individual and collective life, not simply at social change based on moral or idealistic principles. The realisation of the Self and Spirit — silent, immobile, immutable — was seen as a necessary prerequisite to the realisation of the dynamic supramental consciousness and force and its transformation of life.

Sri Aurobindo did not view outer social activism as a necessary or a primary outer activity that was to flow out of the inner spiritual realisation. Indeed he suggested that during the development of this spiritual consciousness, the inner life would take precedence over the outer life, so that it would not be overflooded and submerged by the ignorance, but as the spiritual consciousness

developed further to the supramental consciousness, this vulnerability of the inner consciousness would be overcome, enabling a natural and full outflow of the established inner spiritual peace, love and power in a full engagement with the world. As Sri Aurobindo wrote :

The peace of God within will be extended in the gnostic experience of the universe into a universal calm of equality not merely passive but dynamic, a calm of freedom in oneness dominating all that meets it, tranquillising all that enters into it, imposing its law of peace on the supramental being's relations with the world in which he is living. Into all his acts the inner oneness, the inner communion will attend him and enter into his relations with others, who will not be to him others but selves of himself in the one existence, his own universal existence. It is this poise and freedom in the Spirit that will enable him to take all life into himself while still remaining the spiritual self and to embrace even the world of the Ignorance without himself entering into the Ignorance.⁴²

Because the supramental consciousness embraces the world with which it feels its inalienable oneness, it naturally pours its influence on all around and contributes to the spiritual elevation and transformation of others and the world as whole. Thus, concern with and an extension of a powerful helping assistance on others and the world would be a natural consequence of the integral realisation, but this action could take a variety of different forms depending on the individual. It might well take predominantly the form of a silent inner action, but would be capable of taking whatever outer forms its inner knowledge and vision saw as useful or necessary.

In order to elucidate a perspective on spiritual activism based on Sri Aurobindo's teaching, it will be useful to clarify distinctions between what I will call true and false forms of both spiritual passivity and spiritual activism. After elaborating on each of these principles, I will come back to consider what an integration of true spiritual passivity and activism might look like in the light of Sri Aurobindo's teachings.

False spiritual passivity

At the basis of false spiritual passivity is inertia, plain and simple. This is perhaps the most likely and common mode that spirituality takes, because inertia is the dominant principle of our material existence, and the higher evolutionary principles of vital activity and mental understanding and equilibrium develop out of it, against its natural resistance. Its influence permeates, limits, and distorts the embodied life and mind's own characteristic tendencies.

False passivity is passive to all kinds of inner and outer influences. Inwardly, all kinds of mental movements — thoughts, perceptions, memories, imaginations — may impinge on the mind unfiltered and carry it away in various directions one after another. Whereas the mind may become concentrated and directed toward specific aims, it characteristically wanders and loses focus. At the same time, all kinds of lower vital movements — desires, cravings, impulses to action, anger, fear, worry, regret, disappointment, sadness, pride, sentimentalism, ambition, striving, struggle — are allowed to continue their unquiet, upsetting, and shifting play in the emotional and dynamic centres of the being. In addition to these varied inward influences, this type of passivity receives, with little or no discernment, all types of mental, vital, and physical influences from without — from family, friends, and acquaintances in the immediate environment, from the media and internet including its unremitting onslaught of advertising, news, and entertainment, and the more subtle influences from the physical environments in which we live and move. All these influences impinge on the passive person in a continuous manner and the individual remains more or less unconscious and oblivious of their influences upon him. Sri Aurobindo characterises it this way :

To the ordinary man who lives upon his own waking surface, ignorant of the self's depths and vastnesses behind the veil, his psychological existence is fairly simple. A small but clamorous company of desires, some imperative intellectual and aesthetic cravings, some tastes, a few ruling or prominent ideas amid a great current of unconnected or ill-connected and mostly trivial thoughts, a number of more or less imperative vital needs, alternations of physical health and disease, a scattered and inconsequent succession of joys and griefs, frequent minor disturbances and vicissitudes and rarer strong searchings and upheavals of mind or body, and through it all Nature, partly with the aid of his thought and will, partly without or in spite of it, arranging these things in some rough practical fashion, some tolerable disorderly order, — this is the material of his existence.⁴³

Spirituality for this type of passive person may consist mentally in interjecting into this swarm of influences some recurrent ideas of the Divine or of some spiritual ideal, whether through reading or concentration, emotionally through movements of devotion, and/or physically through engaging in religious or spiritual activities such as going to a place for devotion activities, performing rituals, or engaging in a work which is seen as helpful to the spiritual life. Thus, upon this shifting basis of unconscious influences, a measure of dynamic spiritual activity is attempted or achieved, but this is done in a consciousness still passively receptive to all kinds of other influences, interjected into this shifting flux at longer or shorter intervals. There is little or no filtering or curtailment of the

mental, vital, and physical influences entering from within and from without. As a result, the spiritual activity takes place on an unsteady and shifting base, has to compete for time and attention with innumerable other influences, and when it does occur, is likely to be swept away by them without a moment's notice.

True spiritual passivity

In contrast to this troubled state of affairs, true spiritual passivity is to be passive only to the Divine influence, and to be able to confront whatever outside forces or contacts that may enter one's psychological and spiritual space and atmosphere with equanimity, such that they do not upset or even touch the inner peace and contact with the Divine. While it is not advisable or incumbent on the individual to indiscriminately expose himself or herself to adverse outward contacts or conditions, it may not always be practicable to exclude them, or for other reasons, it may be deemed necessary to face them. Thus, we see that there are two main aspects of true spiritual passivity: one is passivity to the Divine Power and Influence so that it may work unhindered in the inner and outer life; the second is the maintenance of an unmoved, impartial inner equality to all outside contacts, whatever their character.

In the course of the practice of Integral Yoga, the Divine pours its divine Power and Influence upon the individual in order to purify, shape, and remould the whole consciousness. The central movement of the practice of Integral Yoga is to enter into conscious relation with this Divine Presence and Power, to open and surrender to it, so that it may act upon and transform the consciousness. The first aspect of true spiritual passivity is to open to the Divine and to no other power or influence so that it may enlighten and transform the consciousness. Sri Aurobindo explains :

In this yoga the whole principle is to open oneself to the Divine Influence. It is there above you and, if you can once become conscious of it, you have then to call it down into you. It descends into the mind and into the body as Peace, as a Light, as a Force that works, as the Presence of the Divine with or without form, as Ananda [spiritual delight]. Before one has this consciousness, one has to have faith and aspire for the opening. Aspiration, call, prayer are forms of one and the same thing and are all effective; you can take the form that comes to you or is easiest to you.⁴⁴

In general, a firm distinction must be seized between the influence of the higher Divine, or of that which leads towards it, and all that hampers one's spiritual progress. A conscious contact, a clear inner perception of the Presence or influence of the Divine is a necessary prerequisite to the true passivity to the divine Influence. This inner contact and perception is something that develops

with spiritual practice over time, and is not necessarily an easy achievement. It generally requires some diminution of the unquiet activity of the mind and vital nature. If the mind is constantly busy with its own ideas and preferences, and the vital nature is constantly busy with the pursuit of its own desires and the play of emotions and ambitions, this noisy activity makes it difficult to become conscious of and perceive the influence of the Divine in us. Therefore an inner calm and peace are a necessary foundation for the Integral Yoga.

According to Integral Yoga, deep within each of us there is what is called a psychic being centred around our divine essence or soul. It is the psychic being in us that is most directly in contact with the Presence and Power of the Divine, is open and responsive to it, and is able to clearly discern its influences from those coming from others or from our own mind and vital nature. It is through a growing contact of the outer consciousness with this psychic being and its coming forward into the outer nature that a conscious contact with the Divine and the true response to it comes about. Most people are not conscious of their psychic being precisely because they are identified with their surface mental and vital nature. Nevertheless, the psychic being does exert an influence on the outer life in spite of this unconscious condition, urging it towards all that is good, true and beautiful. However, in this case it acts indirectly through the intermediaries of the mental, vital, and physical nature, and because it works indirectly, its influences tend to be relatively weak and may even be distorted.

Therefore, as this development of the inner contact and conscious perception of the Divine proceeds, it is generally important to utilise our own mental discrimination between those influences which further our spiritual development and those which retard it. Indeed this mental discrimination should remain in place and work hand in hand with the development of the psychic contact and discrimination until the latter is well-established and secure. Thus, together with the development of the psychic being's more intuitive subtle discernment of what is true and to be accepted as coming from the Divine, there should be developed and enforced a quiet, dispassionate, yet vigilant mental discernment of what is helpful or harmful to one's spiritual growth to see that one is not led astray by wrong "intuitions" or "inner feelings."

In the earlier stages of spiritual development, one's sense of the Divine's influence on one's consciousness, and of what kinds of outer events, persons, or activities are supportive of one's spiritual growth, may be limited and subject to error. One's inner discernment of vibrations, which might originate from the higher spiritual consciousness, from movements of the deeper soul within, or from more ordinary mental, vital, or physical sources either from within oneself

or from outside, may yet be deficient and inadvertently allow mixtures or wrong influences to enter. Nevertheless, such errors of discernment which open oneself to wrong influences is different from a non-discriminating passivity to any and all influences. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother stress the need for a constant vigilance to detect wrong influences and reject them before they take hold of the consciousness.

The second side of the true passivity is more properly referred to in Integral Yoga by the term equality. Equality is a key inner state and condition that is to be developed in the course of the practice of Integral Yoga. Sri Aurobindo explains that “Equality is to remain unmoved within in all circumstances,” and adds, “whatever the unpleasantness of circumstances, however disagreeable the conduct of others, you must learn to receive them with a perfect calm and without any disturbing reaction.”⁴⁵ This unmoved inner poise has its basis in the spirit which underlies and supports all the movement and multiplicity of the universe. Firmly seated in the spiritual conscious, no adverse event or circumstance, even intense physical pain, can break or unsettle the realised yogi’s inner peace and composure. Thus, an equal, quiet, undisturbed, unelated response to outside contacts and conditions, both those which appear good and those which appear bad, may appear to be a kind of passivity, but ideally the inner being is not touched or affected by them at all, and at least should not be allowed to be swept away by them as in the false passivity.

In the course of establishing this inner equality and poise of the spirit, progress may be marked by a gradual development of endurance, philosophical detachment, or spiritual submission to and acceptance of outside influences. While each of these three different types of psychological attitudes or poises is not yet the true spiritual equality, each can be a stepping-stone towards it.⁴⁶ During the development of one or more of these attitudes, it may outwardly appear that the individual is passive to events or circumstances, but this passivity is quite different than the false passivity, because the individual’s aim is to remain concentrated within on the Divine and remain unaffected by these influences, rather than to allow them to influence one’s condition or action.

In addition, when the development of the true spiritual equality is incomplete and the contact with the divine presence within is still tenuous and subject to breaks, the individual may elect to focus more time and effort on inner concentration, and as an aid, temporarily retreat to a more protected environment free from distractions and disturbing influences. The person may find that a partial withdrawal from external activities and contacts may be useful or necessary in order to permanently establish and maintain the inner contact with the divine Presence.

To the outside world, this may appear as passivity, because he or she is less engaged with the world and with personal and social contacts. However, in actuality the individual is simply focusing full attention on the immediate aim, and is being especially vigilant to protect the developing inner contact with the Divine. It is not a relapse into inertia, but rather an intensified one-pointed concentration on the Divine. Sri Aurobindo has cautioned practitioners of his yoga not to enter into a complete withdrawal from all outer contacts, as this may lead to certain dangers, but he permitted partial temporary withdrawals from outer activities and contacts during certain phases in the development of the inner consciousness. Furthermore, a withdrawal from contacts and activities which are both unnecessary and detrimental to the aims of the sadhana would not only be permitted, but encouraged.

False spiritual activism

False spiritual activism is activism that does not have a real or sufficiently stable basis of spirit behind to support and guide it, nor a real or a sufficiently pure dynamic spiritual power flowing in and through it. Instead, it is supported by mental ideas or ideals mixed with emotional reactions to perceived injustices or wrongs, and is infused primarily with the mental will for change and vital life energy for dynamic power. Because both the mind and vital are subject to error, distortions, and even perversions, false spiritual activism can be or become misguided, degraded, and even dangerously destructive. It would even seem that when it is informed or supported by a limited, narrow religious ideology, carrying a certain absoluteness of conviction and need of converting others, there is the greatest danger for wrong application and perversion, as evident in the history of violent religious persecution and more recent religious fundamentalism-inspired terrorism.

A clear distinction must be made between mental ideals and the true spiritual consciousness, the latter of which is something vast, calm and eternal, while at the same time extremely powerful. The mind, on the other hand, is a thing of ideas and convictions, which sometimes may be based on sound reasoning, sound data, careful reflection, but nearly always is partial and subject to errors and omissions. It often is seriously deficient and perverted by wrong influences.

Let us take the general case of science as an example. Science is supposed to be based on careful reasoning, sound evidence, experimentation and testing, and is supposed to provide us with sound and reliable data about and explanations of our existence. But even here philosophers of science have argued that it is generally based on assumptions which may be faulty, is typically oriented towards particular “fashionable” issues and tilted in favour of certain preferred outcomes,

and is subject to biases of the investigator and of the institutions in which they work, biases which may be either conscious or unconscious. It should be borne in mind that scientific conclusions are never certain, and that many of even the most important and basic scientific conclusions have been overturned and undergone revision.

In some cases, scientific investigations and conclusions may inform and support activism, for example, certain types of environmental activism. While careful scientific study can provide a strong basis or measure of support for activism, the point is that even here it is not infallible and one is likely to find dissenting scientific opinions. Often, however, activists may have little basis of sound scientific evidence to support their cause, and it may be based more on beliefs and political preferences. For example, environmental activists who support the protection of a certain beautiful area of the country from industrial development may be expressing a preference for maintaining the particular environmental ecosystem in question over economic development. While they may demonstrate that the proposed development will damage that particular ecosystem, there may be other unforeseen adverse consequences of not developing it. For example, it may adversely affect the livelihoods of people in the region leading to economic hardships and adverse social conditions, or it may lead to the industrial development of an alternate site, perhaps with less stringent environmental protections, leading to even greater environmental damage. Or in the political arena, activists may prefer a particular social agenda which they fight to advance, against other activists with a diametrically opposed social agenda. The point is that in many spheres of social and political controversy, activism is based on particular partial mental opinions and preferences, rather than either a scientific or a spiritual basis.

Whereas we may admit that many of the social, political, and ecological projects of activists may express partial viewpoints and preferences, there are certain injustices which would seem incontrovertible and absolute. Take, for example, human trafficking and forced prostitution, child abuse, the toxic pollution of the air or water of a community by a company. Surely standing up to issues such as these is not simply based on mental preferences or partial viewpoints; can we not take up such causes as spiritual necessities, as spiritually-inspired activist causes? Whereas there certainly are causes that are just and social changes that imperatively must be made in the forward evolution of human society and civilisation, it is not the justifiability of the cause taken up that makes activism spiritual, but rather it is the underlying consciousness of the activist and the quality of the force which expresses itself in his or her acts. If these

are not spiritual in their essence, even if the cause is undoubtedly just, it is simply activism and not spiritual activism. Ecological, social, and political activism have their rightful place and can serve just causes, but they should not be confused with spiritual activism or be falsely imbued with the sanctity of the spiritual label simply to further their cause.

When it comes to specifically religious or so-called spiritual matters, the same criteria apply. The world is now awash with religious fanaticism. Religious zealots are busy blowing up crowded airport and bus terminals, bombing places of religious worship, assassinating government leaders, and trying to replace democratically-elected governments, all in the name of God. The individuals involved in these acts are convinced of their justness, of the sanction and perhaps the command of God for their acts. While the evil of their acts may seem obvious to others who do not share their fanaticism, it may be impossible to convince these extremists. A firm distinction must be made between the spiritual consciousness, and a religious and mental and vital consciousness. The distinguishing factor that makes such fanaticism evil is the underlying consciousness that drives them — the hatred, the desire to kill, the perception of others as separate and expendable.

True spiritual activism

In assessing this inner condition of the activist, we must refer back to our earlier formulation of true spiritual passivity, and assert that true spiritual activism must be based on a true spiritual passivity. It is precisely on the basis of the vast, calm, eternal spiritual consciousness that spiritual activism must be founded. If it does not have this stable grounding of spirit, this passivity and receptivity to the inspiration and power of the inner Divine, this stable basis of unmoved, dispassionate equality to outer circumstances and influences, it will not be the true spiritual activism. If activism is motivated by mental preferences, emotional recoils or attachments, vital desires for particular outcomes, then it is not the true spiritual activism in the deeper sense of the term. It may be a noble activism, but it is not true spiritual activism.

While spiritual activism must be founded on a calm, equal, wide spiritual passivity, it requires something more: it also requires the dynamic inspiration, guidance, and driving force of the spiritual consciousness. According to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and yoga, as well as to ancient Indian spiritual thought, there are both passive and active aspects of the Divine and the spiritual consciousness, represented in the Indian tradition by Shiva and Kali. The dynamic aspect is the One Force that acts in all forces, that expresses itself in all forms in the universe, but can also act sovereignly and intervene in the play of world forces. Supporting this vast dynamic movement in the universe is the

passive silence of conscious Being, the Witness and Enjoyer of the creation. The ideal spiritual activist is conscious of both the underlying Oneness of Being and this One Divine Force energising all things and flowing into him and driving all his or her activities. The spiritual activist is no longer merely a separate individual trying to effect change in a resistant world, but a conscious and responsive instrument of the Force of the Divine breaking up established forms and forces and creating new ones. It is not done out of pity or anger or revulsion, but as a conscious and natural flow of the Divine Force through the activist's words and actions. As Sri Aurobindo says,

How he shall do this, in what particular way, can be decided by no general rule. It must develop or define itself from within; the decision lies between God and our self, the Supreme Self and the individual self that is the instrument of the work; even before liberation, it is from the inner self, as soon as we become conscious of it, that there rises the sanction, the spiritually determined choice. It is altogether from within that must come the knowledge of the work that has to be done. There is no particular work, no law or form or outwardly fixed or invariable way of works which can be said to be that of the liberated being.... The action of the liberated doer of works must be even such an outflowing from the soul; it must come to him or out of him as a natural result of his spiritual union with the Divine and not be formed by an edifying construction of the mental thought and will, the practical reason or the social sense.⁴⁷

Just as it is not easy to realise the passive spiritual consciousness underlying all things, it is not easy to realise this dynamic spiritual Force working in and through ourselves in a free and unhindered manner. Whereas ultimately all our actions have this One Force behind them, it normally works *through* the limitations of our mental, vital, and physical nature, and therefore, not in a direct and spiritual manner. The aim here is to allow it to substitute its own higher and more powerful working for our stumbling, misguided, and faltering efforts. This cannot be done at once, it occurs gradually over time through a disciplined practice of karmayoga. All the parts of the dynamic nature must progressively open and surrender themselves to the guidance and action of the Divine Force, rather than move in their own accustomed manner at the behest of a mixture of inner and outer influences, mental, vital, and physical.

The Bhagavad Gita is the great scriptural authority on this matter, and in discussing it, Sri Aurobindo brings out the underlying principles and processes that would lead to a true spiritual activism. The central processes that lead to this taking up of the dynamic parts of the nature by the divine Force can be

briefly summarised as follows: "Equality, renunciation of all desire for the fruit of our works, action done as a sacrifice to the supreme Lord of our nature and of all nature, — these are the three first Godward approaches in the Gita's way of Karmayoga."⁴⁸ Sri Aurobindo elaborates,

This, in short, is the demand made on us, that we should turn our whole life into a conscious sacrifice. Every moment and every movement of our being is to be resolved into a continuous and a devoted self-giving to the Eternal. All our actions, not less the smallest and most ordinary and trifling than the greatest and most uncommon and noble, must be performed as consecrated acts. Our individualised nature must live in the single consciousness of an inner and outer movement dedicated to Something that is beyond us and greater than our ego.⁴⁹

It is through this continual reference of all our actions to the Divine Force that is their true source and power that we overcome the sense of our own ego as the initiator of our acts. As long as we engage in activism based on our own preferences, for the satisfaction of our own preferred outcomes, we are not yet engaged in the true spiritual activism. It is through a progressive and continually expanding self-offering of all our dynamic activities to the Divine Force that we remove the barriers to its unhindered and undistorted action in and through us. The spiritual activist is not merely a person fighting for higher principles, but is a conscious and surrendered instrument of the Divine.

As this process of inner surrender progresses, the spiritual activist continues to act according to the highest and most clear vision of what is to be done as he or she is capable, and carrying out the action with as much skill and precision as possible, all the while offering the action to the Divine. The activist must continually seek and call for the guidance as well as the originating and sustaining power of the Divine in the action undertaken. We must leave the results of the action in the hands of the Divine, and remain entirely equal whether they are successful or not. It is not the end result that must be the motivation for the action, but the act of offering, the growing consciousness of the Divine Presence in ourselves and in our activity. These are the inner signs of the deeper and true spiritual activism.

Summary and Conclusion

The recent explosion of interest in spiritual activism is a healthy development in the field of spirituality, carrying it beyond a self-centred focus on individual health and development towards a fuller embrace of the world and its challenges. However, in its movement outward towards engagement with world challenges, spirituality must maintain its inner centre and poise in the spirit. Sri Aurobindo's

ideal of the divine life, which entails a radical transformation of both the individual and collective existence, does just that. In order to bring to bear the necessary spiritual power that can truly transform and divinise the outer life, it strives to reach the highest heights of inner spiritual experience and realisation. It is relatively easier to attain a settled inner state of spiritual peace and harmony when one withdraws from the world and its problems, it is when one aims to change the outer life and the world that the fullness of the inner spiritual realisation is more severely tested and challenged. Thus, the spiritual activist has a double task, to attain the inner poise of the spiritual consciousness, and to maintain it in the midst of engagement with the problems of the world.

What we have called the true spiritual passivity reflects this inner poise of the spirit which must attend and serve as the necessary foundation for a true spiritual activism. As briefly described here, it consists of two main elements. One is an exclusive passivity to the inner Divine Presence and Power, as distinct from other inner or outer mental, vital, or physical influences. It is not that no other ordinary human forces are allowed to enter the psychological space of the individual, but rather that they are not *passively* allowed to enter. First one must become conscious of their presence and influence, and one must admit only those which are helpful or at least not harmful. The second element is the development of an entire equality or equanimity to all circumstances, conditions, and events. For this latter condition to become complete, one must have a secure poise in the inner spiritual consciousness, because this spiritual consciousness alone is pure and untouched by all that happens in the world. This spiritual consciousness is distinct from mind, it is the fundamental ground of the universal existence we see around us.

From this poise of the spiritual consciousness, all conditions, all events are movements of nature, and nature is driven by one conscious Divine Force that dominates all existence. In Sri Aurobindo's view, the world is a progressive evolution of the divine spirit that lies concealed in the stone, emerges in the plant, and becomes progressively more conscious in animals and humanity. It is a difficult evolution of consciousness in the matrix of matter. It progresses through a working out of conflicting forces towards a progressive harmony and is leading towards a divine delight. Birth and death are merely incidents in the long evolution of the eternal spirit. As the Isha Upanishad puts it, "He whose self has become all existences, for he has the knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief, he who sees everywhere oneness?"⁵⁰ The spiritual activist should be able to look upon the world and its problems with a calm and equal regard, without repulsion. As the Mother said, "You are trying to fix

what the Divine has created." We should have, or we should try to develop, a perfect equality for things as they are.

But this does not mean that things should remain the way they are, or that we should not be involved in the change of the world. The world is a progressive manifestation of the Divine, it is not complete. It is constantly changing, constantly evolving into something that more purely expresses the higher qualities of the divine nature. Love, harmony, beauty, delight, knowledge, power must emerge in ever higher and ampler forms. As conscious instruments of the Divine, we must be luminous instruments of its higher evolution and manifestation. But here it is necessary that we do not mistake our own limited ideas and notions of what must emerge and when with the Divine's. We must inwardly unite with the Divine within so that these higher divine qualities may flow through us into the world and into all those who are around us, awakening them to these emerging forces within themselves. Our activism should be more as a catalyst awakening these divine powers in others than as a combatant, though sometimes combat too is required when the opposition is fierce and unrelenting in its obstruction to the truth that is emerging from within.

These are all very fine as high spiritual ideals, one might counter, but as long as we remain stuck in our limited human consciousness, tethered to our mental and vital existence, what are we to do about the gross injustices and the destruction of our planet? Are we to sit quietly and meditate while our fellow human beings are abused and the world is destroyed? This is the difficult dilemma in which we find ourselves, and we feel that we must act. It is here that the Bhagavad Gita advises us to act, but to do our actions as a conscious offering to the Divine. We must act more and more with the sense and feeling that it is the Divine within us that is carrying out the actions through us and that we are merely conscious instruments for his work. Indeed it is the Divine that in reality always acts through all actions, whether we are conscious of it or not. The key is to become conscious of it, and to more and more align our will and force with the Divine Will and Force, to filter out competing mental preferences and vital desires. If we act unconsciously of the divine impetus behind our actions, the Divine will work through our unconscious and limited instruments, but if we act consciously, the Divine will work through our conscious, responsive and therefore more effective and powerful instruments. This inclusion of the dynamic parts of our nature, our abilities to carry out effective and complex actions in the world in conscious unity with the Divine, is the important and necessary ingredient in a true spiritual activism. This comes only through practice, through work done while consciously referring the work to the Divine

Force behind. It does not come through meditation or inaction. Act we must, it is impossible to completely cease to act, so it is best that we act consciously, referring our actions to the Divine, seeking the Divine's guidance, and progressively aligning and attuning our actions with the Divine Will and Force.

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38. Sri Aurobindo withdrew from politics in 1910 to focus on his spiritual life.
39. In the 1930s, Sri Aurobindo kept up an enormous correspondence with his disciples regarding their spiritual practice, at the peak working up to 10-12 hours per day on this correspondence. The Mother, meanwhile, looked after all the needs of the growing community of Ashramites, showering them with love and attention.
40. Sri Aurobindo's writings extend to 37 volumes. The Mother's collected works consists of 17 volumes, and her conversations with a disciple, Satprem, during the latter part of her life, extends to 13 more volumes. Just as importantly, many of their disciples still feel that they are inwardly guided by them.
41. See Nirodbaran's *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* for an account of their active use of spiritual force to assist the allies during World War II, and see Satprem's *Mother's Agenda* for accounts of her spiritual interventions in world affairs during the latter part of her life.
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"Huta, 'The Offered One' - A Very Special Child Of The Mother"

Shraddhavan



On November 17th 2011 – the anniversary of the Mother's passing – at 1.30pm, a very special child of the Mother, born Savita D. Hindocha, quietly left her body in the Ashram Nursing Home. She had been there for about a month with her condition gradually deteriorating, after ailing for several months. When she joined the Ashram permanently on February 10th 1955 in her late teens, the Mother gave her the name 'Huta' meaning 'The Offered One'. Although she had no artistic training, the Mother perceived in her a potential artist and a soul

belonging to a world of beauty. She trained her in painting, and worked with her from 1961 to 1966 to create the series of oil paintings illustrating passages from the whole of *Savitri* called *Meditations on Savitri*. During this time Huta recorded the Mother's readings of the passages corresponding to the paintings, which are now familiar to many accompanied by the compositions of Mother's musician Sunil.

Huta had a very special connection with Auroville – a letter of hers to the Mother in 1965 inspired the creation of Matrimandir, the Mother's Shrine; and it was to Huta that the Mother first explained, with sketches, her concept for the town-plan of Auroville. In 1966 Huta produced the painting which the Mother named '*The Spirit of Auroville*.' All this is told in her books *Matrimandir – the Mother's Truth and Love* and *The Spirit of Auroville*. In 2001 Huta entrusted the care of the *Meditations on Savitri* paintings and a lot of other related art works and materials to Savitri Bhavan.

She has also become well-known for her many books, beautifully designed by Huta herself, all inspired by her contacts with the Mother, such as *White Roses* (translated into Tamil, French and Russian by Aurovilians), *The Story of a Soul*, *About Savitri*, and most recently '*You said So ...*' a record of some of the Mother's talks with her. In fact she was still working on her latest project, *My Savitri Work with the Mother*, when she became too weak to continue. She was extremely happy to learn, some six weeks before her passing, of the completion of a series of 18 DVDs made by Italian Aurovilian Manohar of her *Meditations on Savitri* paintings, and even more recently of another film made by him of her *Paintings Inspired by Sri Aurobindo's Poems*. This film will be premiered at Savitri Bhavan on December 5th.

Huta had no fear of death. During the time when she was working with the Mother on the *Savitri* paintings the Mother had guided her through all the subtle worlds, even the darkest subconscious, and assured her that when the time came she would be immediately carried up by Sri Aurobindo to her true home. She chose a significant day on which to leave, indicative of her identification with the Mother.

She has been a true friend of Savitri Bhavan and all of us here remember her with deep gratitude and affection.

Notes On Authors

(Includes names of those contributors whose writings have not appeared in this journal before)

Daniel Grings was born and raised in Germany. He came to Auroville in 2002 for a year of social work, teaching and helping with research in education. He has been staying in and around Auroville since, pursuing studies in Sanskrit, Indian philosophy and related subjects as well as freelance writing.

Hilary Anderson, Ph.D. is Professor Emerita and Adjunct Faculty at California Institute of Integral Studies. She formerly served CIIS as Professor, Dean and Founding Board Member. In 1992, she founded the Universal Way Foundation in Los Angeles to support educational programmes and seasonal celebrations promoting self-sovereignty and cross-cultural regard for all spiritual pathways. As a scholar, lecturer, therapist, she presents a rich synthesis of Eastern and Western mythology and psychology, emphasising major Divine Feminine orientations. Publications include numerous essays/articles on Integral Studies and oracular symbolism.

(Dr.) Kalpana Bidwaikar is working as an Assistant Professor of English in a Government Post Graduate College at Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh). She has kept herself engaged with intense study of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* and was awarded PhD for the same. She has been delivering lectures on the vision and works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at various places in the state and Delhi. She is an active member of Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry. She has authored a book titled —“Transformation of Consciousness in *Savitri*” which was published by SACAR in 2011. One of her recently published paper is “Odyssey of The Life Divine”, brought out by the magazine “Mother India” in the October issue from Pondicherry.

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