

Sraddhā
श्रद्धा

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24 April, 2012

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Courtesy : Nirmal Sethia Charitable Trust



An occult godhead of this beauty is cause,
The spirit and intimate guest of all this charm,
This sweetness's priestess and this reverie's muse.

Savitri, 1993 rev. ed., Bk IV, Canto I, p.356

Śraddhā

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Śraddhā

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Editorial

Let us, for a change, dispense with our usual editorial format and turn our eyes inward and look inside, not quarter of an inch within but deeper and deeper till we arrive at the ‘welling core’ of our being where on an ‘argent floor’ burns the untrembling fire of aspiration lit in her infinite love and compassion for her children by the Grace and ever living Presence of the Mother. There let us pause for a while and concentrating in the heart’s calm and silence, let us hear what Nolini Kanto Gupta has to say about the Mother in his simple but far-reaching, luminous and moving words. The chosen passages have been taken from the first few pages of his essay ‘On The Brink’ in vol. 6 of his Collected Works.

On the Brink

One of its legs the Swan does not lift,
as it soars upward out of the waters;
if perchance it lifted that also,
there would be then neither today nor tomorrow,
nor would there be day nor night
nor would there be dawning any more.

Atharvaveda, 11.4.21

THUS the Vedic Rishi.

Even so when the Mother withdrew physically from this earth we presumed that she did so with one foot only, the other foot she left planted here below for us to worship. Well, was that only a presumption or things have changed since?

Here on this earth, we know, a battle was raging and is still raging between the Gods and the Asuras: men are their agents and instruments. The battle is to decide the destiny of earth and humanity. Mother was the leader of the divine army here. Now human beings are a very uncertain quantity. They themselves do not know on which side they are ranging. Some perhaps may know to some extent but that does not seem to count much in the actual reckoning of things.

... the pity is that man does not know much and yet so much, if not the whole thing, depends on him. For man as he is now is so far removed from godliness and so

close to Asuras that the battle upon earth between Gods and Asuras seems to be an unequal game. Man by actual nature is asuric: it is through aspiration that he is trying to be godly but it seems he is now out of breath with his aspiration and has fallen back on his normal nature of the Asura.

Man enshrines in him the individualised Godhead, the personal Divine: the possibility of the incarnation of the Divine lies in him alone. Hence the struggle between Gods and Asuras for the possession of the human vessel.

It was the intention of the Mother to implant the Divine upon the turbid soil of normal humanity purifying it of its dross and suffusing it with the heavenly breath. If that is not done, then she will have no other choice but to leave the field altogether to the Asuras, in whatever camp or form they are, to fight it out among themselves and finally destroy themselves in the act even like the Yadavas of old after Krishna’s retirement.

Then only, consequent on the self-annihilation of the Asuras, can this earth be free and open for the incoming of the new race of beings born divine, not made. Whether any remnants of the human race will be left and in what condition, if any part of it could be incorporated or integrated into the new dispensation, is a mystery that will remain so till the actuality reveals it.

But there is always hope and cheer, vistas of escape; the tunnel ends at last and at the end there is always the light The Lord says indeed: I am Time, the Destroyer of the worlds —*kālo’smi lokakṣayakṛt*— but he also declares in no uncertain terms his voice of assurance, the resounding bugle-call of his *panchajanya*, the Divine Conch:

anityam asukhaṁ lokam imaṁ prāpya bhajasva mām.¹

...māmekam śaranaṁ vraja

ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ.²

Let us now conclude with these stirring words of the Mother herself speaking to some of her senior disciples in April 1972, a year and a half before she relinquished her physical body. The selected pieces have been reproduced from vol.13 of the *Mother’s Agenda*, pp.124-127 with due acknowledgement and thanks to Institut de Recherches Evolutives, Paris.

For centuries and centuries, humanity has waited for this time. It has come. But it is difficult. I don’t simply tell you we are here upon earth to rest and enjoy

¹ “To this ephemeral unhappy world you have come. Love me and turn to me.” Gita, IX.33

² “Take refuge in Me alone, I will deliver thee from all sin and evil, do not grieve.”

ourselves, now it is not the time for that. We are here ... to prepare the way for the new creation....

So I have called you to tell you that. Take what you can, do what you can, my help will be with you. All sincere efforts will be helped to the maximum.

Now is the time to be heroic. Heroism is not what people say, it is to be completely united — and the divine help will always be with those who have, in all sincerity, resolved to be heroic. Voilà.

.....

You must make an effort, you must conquer pettiness and limitations, and above all tell the ego: your time is over. We want a race without ego, with the divine consciousness in place of the ego. That's what we want: the divine consciousness, which will enable the race to develop and the "supramental being" to be born.

I ask only one thing: don't listen to the ego. That's all. The time of the ego is over. We want to go beyond humanity and its ego, to leave it behind, we want a race without ego, with a divine consciousness in place of the ego. There, that's all.

If there is a sincere "yes" in your hearts, you will have satisfied me fully. I don't need words: I need your hearts' sincere adherence. That's all.

(silence)

.... We must give to the world the example of what must be, not petty egoistic movements, but an aspiration towards the manifestation of Truth. Voilà.

(silence)

I can assure you that all sincere effort will be *pleinement*, fully helped by the Divine. Of that I am sure. And I can assure you of that.

(silence)

That is all I had to say. (*Mother's Agenda*, vol.13, pp.124-7)

We are grateful to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, for its kind permission to publish the following :

— the essay by Sri Aurobindo entitled 'The Path' appearing in the book *Essays Human And Divine*, 1994, pp.178-180

— the Mother's self-portrait (1935) taken from p.2 of the book '*The Mother : Paintings And Drawings*' published by The Trust in 1992

— Krishnalal's painting, attached herewith, taken from the resources of The Studio

— extracts from the essay entitled 'On The Brink', pp. 20-22 from vol.6 of Nolini Kanto Gupta's Collected Works.

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgements and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Our special thanks to the Studio-Archives duo of Samata and Chaitanya for their timely and consistent help in respectively identifying the painting for the cover of the journal and providing their high resolution image.

We regret to say that the name of the translator of Srimat Anirvan's short piece entitled *Vande Mataram* in the February '12 issue of **Sraddha**, Smt Kalyani Bose, was inadvertently omitted. Smt Kalyani Bose is a long time devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and presently resides in New Jersey, USA. We are yet to receive the final version of the sequel to Kittu Reddy's series of articles on 'Indian Democracy' but have been assured by the author that it will soon feature in one of our forthcoming numbers.

Contents

The Path	Sri Aurobindo	9
The Mother	Barindra Kumar Ghose	11
Some Thoughts On The Vedic Godheads	Vladimir Iatsenko	13
Gitanuvachan-Part I	Srimat Anirvan	17
Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata In Sri Aurobindo's <i>Savitri</i>	Prema Nandakumar	34
Fate And The Problem Of Suffering	Debashish Banerji	44
A Dialogue Between Thomas Aquinas And Sri Aurobindo	Donald Goergen	62
How To Research Consciousness? Suggestions From Indian Psychology	Matthijs Cornelissen	76
An Entanglement Of Chaotic Unity : The Global Age And The Auroville Experiment	Richard Hartz	80
Sri Aurobindo's Concept Of Education And The Mother's Contribution To It	Anurag Banerjee	85
Individualism — Precursor To A Subjective Age	Deepali Gupta	93
<i>Rasa</i> Theory, <i>Bhakti</i> , And Psychic Enfoldment: A Psychologist's Perspective	Suneet Varma	102
Unity In Diversity	Tapan Banerjee	110
Notes on Authors		133

श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Cover : Krishnalal's painting
Our hidden centres of celestial force
Open like flowers to a heavenly atmosphere;
Savitri, Book II, Canto 12

The Path

Sri Aurobindo

The supramental Yoga is at once an ascent towards God and a descent of Godhead into the embodied nature.

The ascent can only be achieved by a one-centred all-gathering upward aspiration of the soul and mind and life and body; the descent can only come by a call of the whole being towards the infinite and eternal Divine. If this call and this aspiration are there, or if by any means they can be born and grow constantly and seize all the nature, then and then only a supramental uplifting and transformation becomes possible.

The call and the aspiration are only first conditions; there must be along with them and brought by their effective intensity an opening of all the being to the Divine and a total surrender.

This opening is a throwing wide of all the nature on all its levels and in all its parts to receive into itself without limits the greater divine Consciousness which is there already above and behind and englobing this mortal half-conscious existence. In the receiving there must be no inability to contain, no breaking down of anything in the system, mind or life or nerve or body under the transmuting stress. There must be an endless receptivity, an always increasing capacity to bear an ever stronger and more and more insistent action of the divine Force. Otherwise nothing great and permanent can be done; the Yoga will end in a breakdown or an inert stoppage or a stultifying or a disastrous arrest in a process which must be absolute and integral if it is not [to] be a failure.

But since no human system has this endless receptivity and unfailing capacity, the supramental Yoga can succeed only if the Divine Force as it descends increases the personal power and equates the strength that receives with the Force that enters from above to work in the nature. This is only possible if there is on our part a progressive surrender of the being into the hands of the Divine; there must be a complete and never failing assent, a courageous willingness to let the Divine Power do with us whatever is needed for the work that has to be done.

Man cannot by his own effort make himself more than man; the mental being cannot by his own unaided force change himself into a supramental spirit. A descent of the Divine Nature can alone divinise the human receptacle.

For the powers of our mind, life and body are bound to their own limitations and, however high they may rise or however widely expand, they cannot rise above their natural ultimate limits or expand beyond them. But, still, mental man can open to what is beyond him and call down a supramental Light, Truth and Power to work in him and do what the mind cannot do. If mind cannot by effort become what is beyond mind, supermind can descend and transform mind into its own substance.

If the supramental Power is allowed by man's discerning assent and vigilant surrender to act according to its own profound and subtle insight and flexible potency, it will bring about slowly or swiftly a divine transformation of our present semiperfect nature.

This descent, this working is not without its possibility of calamitous fall and danger. If the human mind or the vital desire seizes hold on the descending force and tries to use it according to its own limited and erring ideas or flawed and egoistic impulses, — and this is inevitable in some degree until this lower mortal has learned something of the way of that greater immortal nature, — stumblings and deviations, hard and seemingly insuperable obstacles and wounds and suffering cannot be escaped and even death or utter downfall are not impossible. Only when the conscious integral surrender to the Divine has been learned by mind and life and body, can the way of the Yoga become easy, straight, swift and safe.

And it must be a surrender and an opening to the Divine alone and to no other. For it is possible for an obscure mind or an impure life force in us to surrender to undivine and hostile forces and even to mistake them for the Divine. There can be no more calamitous error. Therefore our surrender must be no blind and inert passivity to all influences or any influence, but sincere, conscious, vigilant, pointed to the One and the Highest alone.

Self-surrender to the divine and infinite Mother, however difficult, remains our only effective means and our sole abiding refuge. Self-surrender to her means that our nature must be an instrument in her hands the soul a child in the arms of the Mother.

(Reproduced from *Essays Divine and Human*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1994, pp.178-180)

The Mother

Barindra Kumar Ghose

In the Yoga-Ashram of Pondicherry, the Mother is the living embodiment of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. The touch of her creative genius has given the Ashram its present shape. The work of each department bears the stamp of her originality and constructive genius. It is doubtful if there is any other place on earth where such a big family could be seen carrying on like clock-work its day-to-day activities in silence and harmony, without a shade of conflict. The constructive power of the West and the whole-hearted surrender and self-giving of the East are moving hand in hand in the life of the Ashram.

But to have given a perfect shape to the Ashram is not the Mother's greatest achievement. She is the living image and the other expression of the Yogic Power that is operating everywhere in the Ashram as its centre. To attribute Divinity to a human being may seem to others a sheer fantasy of the devotees or nothing but sentimentalism. But one who has had the slightest touch of the spiritual Power of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga knows for certain that the open sesame of his Integral Yoga lies in the Mother alone.

Sri Aurobindo once said to me that he doubted if there was in the past any figure embodying so great a Yogic power. He added that he had done ten years' Yoga by one's (one year's) contact with her. The Yogic Power of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo opened wide the doors of the unostentatious Ashram, so long in the grip of want and difficulty, to the steady inflow of sufficiency and prosperity. Spontaneous offerings came from disciples and admirers. The most ordinary men found in themselves an outflowing of the poetic power, a wonderful talent for painting, a capacity for meditation, occult vision and skilfulness in work. Day by day the Pondicherry Ashram grew into a Yogic place of pilgrimage for the entire world. An aspirant had a vision: the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were inside a golden tabernacle on the top of a luminous hill, and men from different climes from all directions thronged to the place in endless streams. Today his vision has materialised.

In the course of repeated experiences, a restless fellow, mad after work, with impurities unpurged, a man of vitalistic temperament, I have realised, from the play of the Mother's miraculous Power, how true were the words of Sri Aurobindo. From the angle of Yogic vision the Mother has no equal even in India, the *tapobhûmi* (the land of Tapasya).

(Reproduced from a posting by Overman Foundation. This tribute to the Mother was first published in *Khulnabasi* on 21 Feb, 1940 on the occasion of the Mother's birthday)

Some Thoughts On The Vedic Godheads

Vladimir Iatsenko

The hymns of the Rig Veda are mainly dedicated to the gods, devatas, or universal forces, which are to be invoked by men in their spiritual journey. There are many gods and godheads in the Veda and it is not immediately clear how they relate to one another and what their major functions are. Some gods are often invoked and have many hymns in the Rigveda, such as Indra, Agni, Maruts, Ashvins, etc. Others have less number of hymns, or even sometimes only a few, but nevertheless are considered to be important and are often mentioned throughout the text of the Rigveda. These are Adityas, Vishnu, Brihaspati, Surya, Savitar, Rudra, Usha, Dyauh, Prithivi etc.

Among all of them Indra has the largest number of hymns. He is the Lord of the Divine Mind, who is striking and destroying the forces of darkness with his thunderbolt, *vajra*, which is essentially of the substance of the Supramental light, adjusted to the needs and aspirations of men calling from the lower hemisphere. It is known to us as the action of the Intuitive Mind, or Intuition, by Sri Aurobindo, which is nothing else but the 'individualisation' of the Universal Action of the Overmental realms of Vishnu, where the Overmind itself is the result of the cosmic outburst of the Supramental Creative Force of Surya-Savitri.

So among these three higher deities, or the godheads acting from above, Indra is most frequently invoked, because of his immediate action upon our lower being and because of its effectiveness in the destruction of the resisting forces of darkness, which obstruct our evolutionary progress. So, whenever we meet Indra in his action in the Veda, the other godheads are automatically implied: Surya (the Supramental Sun) and Vishnu (the Overmental realms), for without them there can be no action of Indra as such. So, whenever the Rishi invokes Indra, these two are understood, for it is ultimately the light of the Divine Surya that is acting and transforming our lower and unrefined Nature through the universal application of Vishnu. Indra is therefore only an individualised application of the ongoing Action of the Supermind into more concrete events in time and space; He is the one godhead who breaks through and enters the Darkness and

destroys their formations and resistance against the Truth with His Intuitive Light of the Supreme Knowledge and Force. It is this Intuitive Light, most effective in knowing and acting, which was constantly invoked by the Rishis. Therefore, there is a lesser need in invoking and addressing Vishnu and Surya in their separate domains, for their action in the world will be addressed and dealt with as that of Indra. In other words if Surya is to reach out to our manifestation with his Supreme Light of the Truth it can be done most effectively for us, who dwell in the lower hemisphere, through the action of Indra.

Nevertheless there are several hymns dedicated to Vishnu and Surya-Savitri in the Veda which are the invocations and experiences of the highest kind and therefore of the utmost importance for the Vedic system of Knowledge. These invocations create a vision of the Overmental and Supramental experience with which the Rishis are most concerned in the Veda. That's why, perhaps, they are not many in number.

The Godhead who is constantly invoked in the Veda is therefore Agni. In fact He is the first to be invoked, for without him summoning the higher light, the action of Surya itself would be impossible. So the Divine Flame is to be kindled first to bring all other universal forces into play here. Agni is not only a summoner of the higher forces but also the gate through which they enter and act upon our lower being — the altar or the place of transformation. This transformative action was called Yajna, the Sacrifice. It is in Agni and through Agni alone that the transformation of our lower nature can take place. It is through him alone that the offering can be done, and the higher cosmic forces can descend and effectuate the transformation. In the Rig Veda all is centred on and around this Godhead. Agni is seen as the very action of the Divine amid and upon its own unregenerate being. If Indra is entering from above with the original light of the Supreme (*vajra*), Agni is already in the midst of Darkness, rising from below, the Immortal among mortals, always aspiring towards the higher truth, invoking all higher godheads to act upon the parts of the lower being which are offered to him for transformation.

These two, Indra and Agni, are invoked most in the Veda. There are more than 260 hymns to Indra alone and more than 220 to Agni. If in the case of Indra Vishnu and Surya are implied, in the case of Agni all the godheads are implied, who are involved in the transformative action upon the lower being and consciousness. All of them can be activated (invoked) by Agni.

The ascent of Agni is supported by Maruts, spreading all over the mental and vital plane, known also as the forces of invocation, the energies of the mind, the singers of the Hymn. These two, Agni and Maruts, are mentioned as powers of the Great Lord Rudra. Maruts are known also as his sons in the Veda. Rudra is

thus seen as the Godhead rising from below, the involved and evolving Godhead by the means of Agni and Maruts.

All other gods and godheads are seen as intermediaries and helpers of these two great movements of the Divine involved and evolving from one side (Rudra, Agni, Maruts), and from the other side of the uninvolved, but who is getting involved by invocation and descending from above, the Divine Knowledge-Power of Surya, Vishnu and Indra to support the growth of the Divine rising from below.

Other gods are there to help this interaction of the involved and yet uninvolved divine forces. The greatest among them are Adityas, the sons of Aditi, Infinite Consciousness. They are seen as the faculties and actions of the Divine Mother, representing the whole hierarchy of the divine Being, Consciousness, Power, Bliss, and Truth of the triple Supermind in the lower hemisphere and the transcendental realms. These are the higher principles and therefore they are rarely invoked separately in the hymns but mentioned throughout the Veda. The seven Adityas are represented by Surya-Savitri, the Supramental Godhead. And when it is projected into manifestation and sacrificed for its sake it is known as the eighth Aditya, which is the image of the involved or fallen Sun, known in the Rigveda as Vivasvat. Agni according to the Veda is rising from Vivasvat. Therefore Rudra (whose son is Agni) is also identified with Surya, as well as Vishnu who descends directly from the yet unfallen Surya, and thus they both approach manifestation from different ends of the same Surya-Savitri, as it were. So, manifestation is seen as a gap within the divine being, where all things of the infinite existence are spelled out, as it were, in time and space. This vision is later confirmed by Sri Krishna in the Gita, saying that the universe is within him and not he in the universe. Therefore, though the Sun is one, it can be viewed from two different ends: fallen and unfallen, involved and uninvolved or evolving and involving. All the gods in the Rigveda are intermediaries of these two movements of the Supramental Godhead. They must get involved into manifestation if they are to get to the supreme perception of things; in the words of the Rigveda, they must rise to the highest Throne from which they shall see both Aditi and Diti, the Infinite and the Finite. Thus through man they get involved into the Sacrifice: the ascent to the supreme perception, and being thus involved they bring back the supreme consciousness to the fallen being and transform the Nature.

Among these intermediaries the most remarkable are Ashvins. These twin godheads assist man in his journey to go beyond by uniting within him the transcendental knowledge from above and the power from below on the level of the vital realms of his existence, providing thus access for the light of Indra to reach out into the depth of his vital being. In the later Puranic and Tantric

literature they are known as two powers of Ida and Pingala whereas Indra is associated with Sushumna.

There is one more essential representative of the Divine to be mentioned here. It is Brihaspati, the Lord of the Divine Word rising from the Heart; he brings into motion the Intention of the Divine to manifest certain aspects of creation. He is connected with the action of the Divine Rivers: Ila, Saraswati and Mahi as the currents of the Divine Word acting upon the creation from above. In the later synthesis of the Gita, these three movements of Rudra, Brihaspati, and Vishnu become the three major yogas: Karma, Bhakti and Jnana Yoga, and in the Puranas are viewed as trimurti of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra.

Gitanuvachan-Part I

Srimat Anirvan

[Translator's note: Rabindranath had said in his famous poem “*Sadhana*” something like ~ ‘my abilities could not match my wishful thinking.’ (*Jato sadh chhilo, sadhya chhilo na*). That is exactly what I feel, whenever I try to translate anything written by Sri Anirvan. Fortunately, the most applicable comment has been supplied in the Introduction to the very edition in Bengali from which I have translated:

This unique commentary of Gita is possible only from the pen of Sri Anirvan. Gita is the Vani sprouting from the speech of Purushottama Sri Krishna and Gitanuvachan is the commentary of Gita coming out of the pen of Purushottama Sri Anirvan.

‘Gitanuvachan’ is a series of Questions by Swami Satyananda and answers by Srimat Anirvan. It is divided into three parts containing the Q/A on three different Shatakas]

Question :

In the hymn of meditation, the Gita has been addressed as ‘Amba’ (Mother). What is the inner meaning? Why has the Gita been compared to a Mother?

Answer :

The Gita has been classified with the Upanishads. All Upanishads are part of Shruti. Shruti is the same as Goddess Vak as well as Saraswati. The Veda has addressed Goddess Saraswati as the Highest Mother (*Ambitame*), and has given an exquisite description of Her Maternal Form. With all these associations, Shruti is termed as Mother and so Gita is also *Amba* or Mother.

Question :

What should be the real term? Srimad Bhagavatgita or Srimad Bhagavatgita? If it is the ‘Divine Song of the Lord’ it should be ‘Gito’ (Sung). Whatever is sung with a tune is ‘Git’ (Song), is not it? Then like the Sams of Samveda, is Gita also to be sung? ...Why does Gita have such adjectives at the end of each chapter as Upanishad, Knowledge of Brahman and Yogashashtra?

Answer :

The name is ‘*Srimad Bhagavatgita*’ — an adjective to Upanishad. It is not plausible that the Lord was delivering the advice singing. Most probably He spoke in regular prose. The lyrical form was given when it was arranged the way we see it now. Gita basically is a scripture of Devotion. It can be proved even from the Vedas that the devotees used to worship their Lord by singing. Even in Gita, there is a mention of continuous chanting. (Ch. IX, Sl.14) The instructions of the Lord, after being arranged, probably got the form of a ballad, which was sung at that time. It was the devotees who used to sing. Gradually, an idea emerged that the slokas were sung by the Lord.

It is an old tradition to compose the spiritual instructions in the form of a verse, and this practice continued right up to the Middle Ages. Hence it is neither surprising nor impossible that the Lord can deliver instructions in the form of verse, but it is hard to visualise that Krishna and Arjuna were conversing in poetry on the disastrous battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Actually Gita is a part of History. Both Ramayana and Mahabharata are known as History. Itihasa (History) and Puranas together are considered as the Fifth Veda. Hence there should be no restrictions to consider some specific part of the Fifth Veda as Upanishad. In those days, a large part of the general mass followed the path of Devotion. To them the verbal words of Vasudeva is verily Veda, therefore Upanishad. And all Upanishads expound the study of Brahman. Therefore Gita is also a study of Brahman. Gita has not only given advice of the Reality, but has also given instructions of how to manifest that Reality in life by sadhana or practice. Each and every system of sadhana is Yoga — Gita expounds an idea like that. Hence each and every chapter of the Gita is a ‘Yoga.’ As a result, Gita is a scripture of Knowledge as well as of Yoga.

Question :

During the great battle of Kurukshetra, Sri Krishna advised Gita to Arjuna before the war started. The need was to inspire Arjuna to rise up to his natural Dharma and to fight against the Asuric forces of the Kauravas. Is it not so? Were the Eighteen Chapters delivered holding off the battle? The background of Gita was the great Battle, is it not so? According to many the great battle is not historical and there are many who put importance on Gita only as a spiritual exposition. What are the hidden mysteries?

Answer :

I do not see any valid reason for promoting the opinion that the battle of Kurukshetra was not historical. It is true that 'India did not produce a Herodotus or a Thucydides.' Therefore everything about her past is nothing but imagination. Even the western scholars do not hold this opinion any more.

Sri Krishna is an historical figure; the time of the great battle has been identified in Mahabharata itself and a lot of research has been carried out to identify the exact date. Perhaps this battle took place around 1400 B.C. For those who want to bring down the Vedic Era, with some selfish motivation, might have some disadvantage with this timing, but their denial is gradually getting feebler and feebler.

The illusion of Arjuna and the removal of that illusion by Sri Krishna are natural incidents. It is hard to say if Gita, as we find today, has been in the same form from the very beginning. That is why Mr. Otto is searching for the 'Original Gita'.

That the message of Gita is original, even if the language is not, can be proved with references from Chandogya Upanishad. To accept the whole life as Yajna and to be desireless — these two are the basic principles of Gita. The way Work, Knowledge and Devotion have been synthesised in Gita is unique in the spiritual history of India. This could not have happened without the influence of a great and unique personality. It can be observed, too, that in depicting the personality of Sri Krishna, the Itihasa and Puranas have everywhere followed a single basic structure of philosophy of life. So much cohesion can never be accidental. Therefore, there can be no objection to the veracity of Sri Krishna and His dictum.

The Gita was delivered before the onset of the war; there is no question of stopping the battle there. There is nothing surprising in the fact that a great soul will bring back to senses a like-minded relative with the help of a couple of hours' advice!

In addition, please note that there was a marked characteristic in writing history of this country. If there were any events in a human life that was an expression of Universal Truth, then the life and experience of that man was included as part of history. Elsewhere there was hardly anything other than the list of names according to the genealogical table. This way Itihasa and Purana used to acquire the dignity of the Vedas by being carriers of mass education. I think the success of writing history lies in the art of presenting it as a guide to an ideal life. Gradually, an event becomes just a pretext, expression of the truth behind the event becomes the theme. The philosophers want to avoid that saying that the 'narration is the real meaning.' But that is wrong. The blazing Truth

expresses itself through human life. On one side there is an event, on the other a truth. The presentation of the Itihasa and Purana becomes successful when there is a balance between the two. And human life then exemplifies the proposed truth.

Question :

In the mantra for meditation, Gita has been referred to as 'showering the nectar of Eternal Adwaitabad'. What is the hidden meaning?

Answer :

In the introduction, the body and the conclusion of Gita, everywhere is the presentation of the doctrine of Non-Dualism. At the very onset, Arjuna is faced with a very well-known problem — how to accept and adjust with the departure of near and dear ones. Sri Krishna solved the problem with the doctrine of Non-Dualism, saying, 'Know Him to be Eternal by whom all is pervaded.' Life and death are like bubbles rising and falling in the ocean of Consciousness. The bubbles die down but the ocean remains the same. If you remain with the consciousness of ocean, death cannot cause grief or distress.

From this we get the idea of the Eternal Self. In the middle, where He is introducing Himself there, too, Sri Krishna expresses Himself as an all-pervading Supreme Reality, as Unmanifest Brahman, as Time, as Purusha manifested in myriads of divine qualities, the adorable beloved Lord of our beings. Furthermore, he added no matter in whatever way one worships, it is the worship of that One and Only One. Here we get a hint of monotheism.

He makes it very clear in the Eighteenth Chapter (conclusion). 'All instincts of life originate from the One Who is all-pervading. By worshipping Him with one's designated work, man attains salvation.' Again we are getting the application of Adwaita in life itself. The whole life is His worship (or Yajna whatever you call it). He is all-pervading; from Him bursts forth the joy of life. This way at the beginning, in the middle and at the end, the Gita has given instructions of the same doctrine of Non-Dualism in the form of all-pervading Reality.

Clouds send forth showers. This Dark Cloud is also sending us showers, showers of the nectar of Immortality. The cloud is dark because He is beyond the effulgence of the white rays of the Sun; He is that Supreme Blue Black in whose unfathomable depth life and death both get lost. The showers of immortality from this cloud bring healing balm to the life scorched by the blazing flame of the three Gunas and barren life begets lush foliage. Patanjali has termed the 'Perfect Yoga' as the Cloud of Dharma, meaning that the one stationed in that Yoga is always being bathed by the shower of Dharma, which is beyond the mundane world. The same idea is echoed here too.

Question :

What is the purport of the arrangement of Chapters from the Vishad to the Moksha Yoga?

Answer :

In the Gita, Sri Krishna is gradually revealing Himself in the consciousness of Arjuna. That is why it is wise to keep the context in mind while discussing Gita.

In Vishad Yoga, the manifested self (Jiva) is desirous of knowledge. He is facing the greatest problem in life, the mystery of death. The question, how to overcome death has dramatically appeared before him.

In the second chapter we get the full answer to that from the philosophical aspect of Self. Both dissolution in Brahman (Brahman Nirvana) and existence in Brahman (Brahmisthiti) has been expounded here. This is the core chapter of the Gita. The other chapters are expansion of the same thought.

The third chapter gives the clues of Karma Yoga as conclusion to the second chapter.

The fourth chapter synthesises Work and Knowledge. Incidentally the theory of Avatarhood has been mentioned. This is important. Whatever has been given as hint will be expressed in detail in the ninth chapter.

The fifth chapter gives the hint that Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga eventually culminate in Bhakti or Devotion.

The sixth chapter gives practical instructions on Yoga.

This far is the First Shataka. Its main subject is Self-Knowledge, because one cannot become Brahman without knowing oneself. Sri Krishna has said very little about Brahman or of God so far. The main point is Samkhya or the Yoga of Knowledge, that too not without Work. One may achieve success by following this path only. So answers to Arjuna's quest might have ended here. But it did not. Without being asked any question, out of His own Grace, He is about to shower the knowledge about Himself in the totality in the seventh chapter. To know Him after knowing the Self, thus sadhana goes deeper. To know oneself is Jnana, to know Him is Vijnana. Seventh chapter is the introduction to that.

To know Him one has to know the mystery of the universe. There are seven great mysteries. The eighth chapter deals with them. Particularly one has to know the mystery of death and that has been discussed well here. This has to be noted that death is not extinction of a lamp, it is dissolution in Him.

The ninth chapter is the most important one. Once I know all the mysteries of life and death, and of the universe, I know what is the True Self of this incarnation in 'Human Form.' That knowledge is the highest Vijnana. He reveals

himself by bringing to light the Highest Secret (Raja Guhya) in Arjuna's consciousness. We have to understand that after this ninth chapter, each and every word of the Gita is a grand revelation by the Lord Incarnate.

To make that understanding more vivid is the Bibhuti Yoga of the tenth chapter. The hint is to see Him manifested everywhere. The concrete realisation of that is in the vision of Universal Form in the eleventh chapter. But of course Arjuna saw the Universal Form as Time the Destroyer in the context of Kurukshetra. Vrindavan is understood here.

True Devotion is possible only by observing the universe in Him and by realising the Highest in a human form. This devotion comes from the fullness of Self-Knowledge. The Second Shataka is complete with the twelfth chapter. With that comes the completion of knowing oneself as well as knowing the Supreme Self.

Here, too, is the end of all questions but his Grace is again showering the Universal Knowledge, and again even without being asked. Remember though that the basis of this knowledge is the Universal Vision. The sadhaka is established in Cosmic Consciousness. From that level he is seeing Prakriti and Purusha, the three gunas, the three Sraddhas, the play of the Devas and Asuras, the diversities of the Universe (chapter eighteen) and all other. The central point of all that is the Reality of Purushottama (chapter fifteen).

By and large, this is the meaning of the arrangement of the Chapters in the Gita.

Question :

There are three shatakas (group of six) in the Gita, Work, Devotion and Knowledge. Many say that Gita is the scripture of Bhakti, some say of Knowledge and others say of Work. Is not Gita a synthesis of different ways? Where is the beginning and where is the end of Gita, in Knowledge, Devotion or Work?

Answer :

Verily, Gita is the scripture of synthesis and from this aspect Gita has no equal among spiritual scriptures. It is a matter of abject sorrow that even in three thousand years we could not apply the teachings of Gita in our practical life. The whole life is a Yajna or a Yoga, that is the ultimate announcement of Gita. Even from the ancient times, Yajna was termed as Karma, meaning whatever one does, should have a sense of sacrifice or offering towards the gods. And that is applicable both to daily work as well as Yajna. According to the language of the Gita, where there is no sense of sacrifice, no presence of divinity, no sign of advancement of human consciousness, there work is nothing but misguided action.

A doctrine like renunciation of all action and the ensuing result of knowledge was very much prevalent during the time of Gita. Sri Krishna did not pay any heed to that. Again He has openly attacked the ceremonial rituals aiming at the worldly enjoyment and wealth in the name of Yajna. According to Him performing all work with a firm footing in Yoga is the basic aim and leads to the eventual perfection of life.

Life starts with work. The teachings of Gita also start at Kurukshetra (Field of Work) at the onset of a dire activity. Work has to be performed according to whatever has been allotted to each one of us. But work is to be done without any expectation of results and with equality to success and failure. Knowledge will emerge from this understanding. It will be clear that whatever is to happen is happening due to the determinism of Nature. There is no way to avoid that nor is there any point in being involved in that. Once this discernment dawns, mind becomes peaceful. It becomes easier to enjoy without attachment or aversion and work with detachment and a feeling of non-doership.

This way knowledge comes after work. With knowledge consciousness expands. We understand that it is the Divine Guidance that is at the root of all natural motivation of work and eventually consider ourselves as Divine instruments. He is the Player and I am His Flute, this feeling is very conducive to the ultimate devotion. All knowledge culminates into desireless work and ultimately attainment of perfection comes from doing all work with devotion and a sense of offering. This is the living philosophy of the Gita.

Question :

What is the implication of the word 'Karpnyadosho' in the Seventh Sloka of Chapter Two of Gita? Hasn't the word 'Kripana' been used in the Upanishad to identify those who leave the world without self-realisation? Why is the word 'Prapanna' being used even after 'Sishya'? Is it natural with human beings to go through the confusion about Dharma that Arjuna went through? Does a time come to every man when he cannot choose his own good? Could Arjuna not have received the direction from the Divine who resides in every soul? I find the 'Guruvada' as the foundation of Gita to start with.

Answer :

The word 'Kripana' comes from the root verb, 'krip' and from that comes 'Karpanya'. The ancient meaning of this root is 'to lament'. One who laments is a 'Kripana'; he is overwhelmed with sorrow, so lamentation is also 'Karpanya.' That word connotes misery too. The Gita says, 'Kripana Falahetava' (Ch.2, Sl. 49), meaning whoever considers results as the cause or initiator of work, is a 'kripan', he is lacking in understanding. Grief and illusion torment and eventually completely engulf mind. These two are actions of Rajas and Tamas. As a result,

our natural state of understanding gets crippled and cannot blossom in its own dignity. This mastery of grief and illusion over our normal self has been termed here as 'Karpnyadosho'.

One who is ready to follow the instructions is a 'sishya', that is, fit to be instructed. Basically, a 'sishya' is 'Videheya', a follower of discipline. 'I follow orders without question', can be done even being unattached. Subservience or surrender is much deeper in nature. Unless one can offer both heart and intellect, absolute self-surrender cannot be achieved. Not all disciples have surrendered.

Delusion about Dharma is natural for a human being. The reality of Dharma is 'hidden in the cave'. It is not easy to understand. That needs prolonged cultivation too. So everybody faces dilemma or delusion regarding Dharma, particularly, when the law of family or race, in other words, the traditional social Dharma rises up against the eternal Inner Dharma. At that point, only the direction of the Divine within can dispel all doubts and show us what is good and right. But that direction can be understood only with his Grace, only when He kindles the lamp of Intelligence in our hearts. Then there is no difference between Him and me. The outer instruction is secondary. For people of lesser understanding, that might be needed, but not for those with higher intellect. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, "Then as if Someone tells from inside, 'This follows that and that'"

Man is a social being. All of his character and samskaras are fruits of his upbringing. Hence, immediately after birth, in whichever way it does not matter, he is under a teacher. Therefore, from one point of view, 'Guruvada' is a universal truth. But man learns from the outer instructions well as from inner inspiration. The mortal teacher outside and the Divine inside, both are Gurus. Between them, the Divine inside is closer than the mortal teacher. He is verily the Sadguru. To invoke the Divine within the disciple, to teach the disciple to walk the path with His Light, is the duty of the right teacher. Sri Krishna has done the same in Gita. After completing eighteen chapters, He has told Arjuna,

'Whatever I had to say, I have said. Now do whatever you want to do'. How many Gurus can say that nowadays?

Question :

What is the mystic interpretation of the 29th sloka of the Second chapter in the Gita? What is the meaning of the word, 'Ashcharya'? What is the reason for 'Not known in spite of having heard?' Does the word 'Ashcharya' occur in the Veda? If it did, in what connection?

Answer :

The word 'Ashcharya' does not occur in the Veda, not even in the ancient Upanishads. It has been used for the first time in the Kathopanishad. This particular sloka of the Gita is from there only. But Panini* has used an expression,

* The famous Sanskrit grammarian of circa 5th or 6th century B.C.

‘Ashcharyamadbhute’. Therefore, the word is an ancient one. In the Vedas the word ‘Adbhuta’ meaning, ‘something that never happened before’ has been used in place of ‘Ashcharya’.

In the ancient Book of Rasa, two Rasas, according to two different sections of philosophy, are called the original Rasa. One is erotic or Shringar and the other is Adbhuta. In reality Adbhuta is the main Rasa. At the vision of the Supreme Reality, human consciousness gets completely amazed as if gasping in the depth of the unfathomable ocean of Sacchidananda, experiencing something that it had never done before. This feeling of Beyond is the real feeling of the mystics. After that comes the tremendous attraction towards the Beyond who is ‘Ascharya’ and ‘Adbhuta’. That is the erotic or Shringar Rasa, which too is an original Rasa. In ‘Adbhuta’ is the merging of Self and in Shringar is rejoice of Self. So, actually, as you see, the ‘Adbhuta’ Rasa is the original one.

To see Him and to hear Him — ‘Chakshah’ and ‘Shravah’ of the Veda — are the supreme limits of knowing. Again, it is but natural to develop an urge to express That, whom we have come to know. Hence this seeing, hearing, understanding and expressing all are expressions of that ‘Adbhuta’ Rasa. After seeing-hearing-knowing Him, when a mystic talks about Him, people hear dumbfounded. But how many do really understand? That is why even the Veda has said, ‘Whoever hears, hears in vain’, man does not understand even after hearing. The fault lies with the impure mind and partly with the limitations of language. Surely, the Supreme Mystery cannot be expressed in our day to day language.

Question :

In the Thirty Ninth sloka of the Second Chapter in the Gita, Sankhya and Karma, both Yogas have been referred to. Which path did the Lord Ask Arjuna to follow to be free from the bondage of Karma?

Answer :

The way of Sankhya is one of Discrimination, and Yoga (Karma) is of its application. First is discrimination and next is action. Sankhya establishes consciousness on the concept of Non-Dualism, which shows that the whole creation is nothing but a play of the Eternal That. With this thought firmly rooted in the intelligence, doing work without any desire for the results and always having the feeling of a non-doer is Yoga. ‘Everything is He.’ Therefore, ‘I am working as non-doer’ and ‘I am unattached towards the results of the work too’, a synthesis of these three understandings helps cut asunder the knots of Karma. In the field of application, Yoga is more important.

Questions :

Please explain with your interpretation the Forty Fifth Sloka of Chapter 2 of the Gita.

Answer :

By the expression, ‘The Veda deals with the Three Gunas’, the Lord has hinted at the narrow dogmatic interpretation of the Veda which aims only at the enjoyment and opulence saying, ‘There is nothing other than that.’ In Gita, he has vehemently objected to that, saying, ‘That is not the real Veda. Verily do I know what Veda is and I created the Vedanta’. Reference to Vedanta aims towards the theory of Purushottama. And the foundation of that is in being beyond the Gunas. Enjoyment and opulence, both are plays of the Gunas. One has to go beyond that, one has to be established in the Atman. In that condition, mind is as serene as the Akash, there is no duality of pleasure or pain, gain or loss, victory or defeat, no desire to acquire anything, nor to protect anything. Yet this is not the condition of merging in the Indeterminate Akshara. One has to go beyond Gunas but the earthly life should be based on the Eternal Sat. Eternal Sat or Existence is nothing but the Purified Sat which does not have the disturbances of Rajas or the covering of the Tamas. It is like the rays of the radiant knowledge on a clear blue sky. To live with the feeling and work as His instrument for the good of all, this is the proper following of the Veda or performing Karma which in essence is nothing but Yajna.

The result? To receive His *sadharmya*, *sadharmya* of the One who is beyond Kshara and better than Akshara. He has said that Purushottama has been mentioned in the Veda too (Ch.XI, Sl.18). Verily, He is the Eternal Existence or in the words of *Srimad Bhagavatam*, the body of Pure Existence.

Question :

*Traigunyavishaya Veda nishtraigunya bhavarjuna
Nirdwanda nityasattastha niryogaksema Atmavan (Ch.II, Sl. 45)*

The Vedas deal with the three Gunas. Oh Arjuna, you be beyond these three gunas. Be above dualities, always established in eternal Sattwa, do not aspire for unattained possessions nor try to hold on to the ones you have. Be your true self.

Please give me the mystic explanation of this sloka. Why have the Vedas been termed as subjected to three gunas or desires? What is the mystery of ‘beyond three gunas’ of Gita? What is the meaning of ‘established in eternal sattwa’? Verily, the Vedas have sections of religious ceremonies as well as of knowledge. As there is ‘Do work here and wish to live for hundred years,’ so is there the essence of oneness beyond all states of existence and three gunas. The Vedas mention actions with desire. Sri Krishna asked Arjuna to be without desire. But

giving up desire does not mean giving up work. Please clear my doubts by bringing to light the deeper meanings of these words.

Answer :

Sri Krishna has put down only those who have no clear judgment and merely engage themselves talking about the doctrines of Vedas (Ch. II, sl.42). He is critical about those who say that there is nothing other than the Vedas yet consider the Vedas as nothing but a means to satisfy their desire. Hence He has hit hard the so-called Vedic theory created by the dogmatism of underdeveloped minds. The same way he had dealt a blow to the doctrine of Wisdom preached by Arjuna at the onset of the battle. Sri Krishna has criticised those, who without understanding the wisdom of the Vedas only go for the verbosity and follow dogmatism. Otherwise, He has said elsewhere, ‘I am verily the subject of all the Vedas; I have created the Vedantas and am the Knower of the Vedas too (Ch. XV, sl. 15)

This cannot be said either that Sri Krishna has supported only the part of Knowledge of the Vedas and not the part of Action. He has censured the ‘extravagant rituals of the desirous souls’, yet at the same time added — never give up Yajna, because Yajna purifies the great souls (Ch. XVIII, Sl. 5). He had received a comprehensive idea about Yajna from his guru Ghora Angirasa, and had learnt that the whole life is a Yajna and, knowing that, himself became ‘Desireless’ (Chhandogya Upanishad). He tried to introduce a new movement in the spiritual life, spreading the teachings of Rishi Ghora, through Gita.

To be without three Gunas (Nistraigunya) is to be beyond the lower nature. He has explained in detail the symptoms of one beyond gunas at the end of the fourteenth chapter, both from the aspect of knowledge and from devotion. The symptoms for a follower in the path of Knowledge are to be completely detached from all activities of illumination, attachment and illusion. This does not happen without attaining the state of Natural Being. There is no reaction of the gunas on the one who has gone beyond the gunas. Now he can play with the gunas because by being beyond he has become the master of the gunas. This is the result of sadhana of the Purusha. Again if we perform our sadhana by being His Prakriti, we will get the same result (Path of Devotion).

The Sattwa that does not have even a shade of Rajas or Tamas is known as ‘Eternal or Purified Sattwa’. Then by dint of my utter devotion and surrender to the Supreme Self, I will easily sail the disturbing attacks of Rajasic and Tamasic Gunas. From the state of Gunatita or beyond Gunas, the Being or Soul, with the support of the purified sattwa and from the state of eternal Sattwa or Yoga, comes down on this world of Gunas. But the Gunas can never bind him. In mundane condition what was ‘Guna’ or tying rope changes to ‘Guna’ or innate quality.

Because he is beyond gunas, he is attributed with endless virtue. And its expression is in benevolent actions, divine enjoyment and absolute bliss.

Question :

What is the real meaning of, ‘One who knows the Brahman needs all the Vedas as much’ (as the place flooded with water needs smaller ponds) of sloka 46 of Second Chapter? The word ‘Brahmanasya’ has been attributed to whom?

Answer :

The complete Veda is comprised of the two sections of Jnana (Knowledge) and Karma (Work). The higher Knowledge, (Vijnana) evolves out of a study of the section of Knowledge and then a human being really becomes a Brahman — ‘One who knows the Brahman is a Brahman’. For a Brahman, who has attained this knowledge, ritualistic actions (and here the Lord has meant that part of the Veda with elaborate ritual activities) are of no use. The performance of ritualistic actions may be needed for purification of mind, but once the Supreme Knowledge dawns in the mind, there may not be any inclination towards the excessive ritualistic performances, because all work ends up in knowledge.

Question :

What is the mystery of ‘Yoga is the skill (Kaushala) for work’ in the sloka No. 50 (Ch. II)? Does the skilful person go beyond good and bad work? ‘Be attached to Yoga’ — what is this Yoga? Has not the Gita used the word Yoga in a very wide and comprehensive sense?

Answer :

The original meaning of the word ‘kushala’ is one who separates the *kusha* grass adeptly. Hence ‘*kaushala*’ means skill in doing something. The real skill in work lies in the ability to work while established in the Yoga whereas being established in the Yoga means mastering absolute equality. To master equality, one has to live within oneself and not be disturbed by outward dualities.

Kathopanishad mentions that the speaker and the listener of Spiritual Truth are both ‘*kushalas*’. At the root of that is the sense of wonder and response to the Higher Intellect. The same has been suggested here too. The ideal of the *kushala* worker is Sri Krishna who has neither anything to do nor anything to obtain, yet is always involved in work. Because of his Supreme Nature, he is beyond good or bad work. The discrimination between good and bad is at the mental plane for a non-Yogi. But for the one established in the Yoga, this question does not arise. Of course the word Yoga has been used in a very large and comprehensive sense in the Gita, and the two basic characteristics have been mentioned earlier also. They are to be beyond dualities and to be established in Pure Existence (*Nirdwanda and Nityasattwastha*).

Question :

Is Shruti confusing (Sl. 53, Ch.II)? Is it needed to give up ‘everything to be heard’ (Shrotavya) in order to attain steadfastness? How does that bring consistency with the saying, ‘The words of Shruti are to be heard?’

Answer :

In reality, Shruti is not the cause of confusion. It is the lack of understanding on the part of the listeners that creates confusion too often.

The following two answers are based on Swami Satyananda’s various intricate questions on the 58th sloka of the second chapter of the Gita written in two separate letters. The questions are not easy to reproduce and might not be needed for all. But the answers are, as usual, like the flow of Bhagirathi, in a class by themselves and will solve many questions in the mind of a sadhaka.

The Sloka goes as follows:

*“Yada samharate chayam kurmoanganiva sarvasah
Indriyan indriyathevy shtasya prajna pratisthitah”*

One, who withholds his senses from their objects everywhere, as a turtle does with its limbs, is firmly established in Wisdom.

Sri Anirvan’s answer : (one)

It is true that Higher Wisdom (Prajna) is established when withdrawal of senses from their objects becomes natural. Yet the Gita propounds Karma. That Karma or action is verily the action of a ‘*Sthitaprajna*,’ (One established in Higher Knowledge) and Sri Krishna is the ideal among the *Sthitaprajnas*. Time and again, He has said, ‘I am Absolute! I am Non-Doer. There is nothing I have to do, nothing I have to obtain. Nor do I not have everything. Yet I am always in the midst of work.’ By a constant meditation on this thought process of Sri Krishna, one clearly understands the characteristics of a *Sthitaprajna*. All of us know that action cannot be performed without involvement or inclination, which are just the opposite of withdrawal or rejection. Then how does a *Sthitaprajna* act if he follows the path of rejection? That is the enigma and this is the solution.

Natural withdrawal takes place in sleep, swoon or death. A Yogi withdraws in samadhi which results in the vision of Reality. That Reality, in its very nature, is both Akshara (Indeterminate) and Kshara (Determinate) aspects of the Supreme. One who realises both Kshara and Akshara simultaneously within himself during samadhi, gets the Purushottama, who is definitely beyond Kshara (and here he rejects) and yet greater than Akshara. This greatness is at the root of his all-Pervading Self. Then he is the divine Witness (This is His Akshara Nature), yet at the same time the Sanction Giver, Master, Enjoyer and the Supreme Lord. This permitting, protecting, enjoying and controlling — all are undoubtedly proof of

involvement. But this involvement is not the ignorant involvement of Jiva, but the overflowing of action from the Eternal Self of Siva. Hence, in Siva, withdrawal and action both are simultaneous, though the force of withdrawal is much stronger. Actually three fourth is Mere Existence, only one fourth is involvement. To be always established in the Self or three fourth withdrawn, therefore being *Sthitaprajna*, and using only one fourth of the Self to be involved in Action and Enjoyment is the Divine Nature of Siva, the natural manifestation of his Shakti. This is the Absolute Condition at the root of Universal Creation.

Jiva, on the other hand, is away from this condition. He is unaware of the fact that there is the backdrop of withdrawal behind all involvement. That is why to understand the meaning of withdrawal, he has to behave like a turtle. The initial sadhana is that of rejection and renunciation.

That is the Yoga of Discipline. The control of senses like the limbs of a turtle is the result of that — to examine oneself in and out, whether any tint of desire for either action or enjoyment is lurking anywhere or not. This is the basic theory of this Yoga. It is like a ship sailing on a voyage of no return. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the ship does not come back from there. One has to respond to the call of Unknown with the firm conviction of never returning to this petty known world again. This is what has been expounded through this particular sloka of Gita.

But there is an epilogue too. Someone might send you back from there. If you come back, the flow of involvement and inclination will also start afresh. But now, that will not be born of earthly desire. That would rather be a part of the divine Enjoyment which is at the root of creation. Your will and enjoyment would be nothing but a radiant part of His Will and His Enjoyment. Then you do nothing while doing everything and your enjoyment is not from the worldly objects but from the inner source, your Self.

Sri Anirvan’s answer : (two)

Prajna (in reference to *Sthitaprajna*) is a technical term. Prajna appears when Atman dwells within Itself. This is a condition of samadhi during waking state. It takes time to be established in that. Remember, samadhi is only a means, not the ultimate state. With the opening of Prajna as a result of samadhi and an eventual establishment in that — which has been termed as ‘*Brahmishthiti*’ (established in Brahman) at the end of the chapter, one can enjoy a steady blissful condition and yet move around in the sense world, having complete control over mind (Ch.2, Sloka 68). This is the outer characteristic of *Sthitaprajna*. The inner characteristics have been described in (Ch.2, Sloka 58). Two previous Slokas (57 & 56) throw some light on how this condition can be achieved.

It is something like this. In that condition, there is a complete separation between inner and outer, like a betel nut within another dried betel nut, as per Sri Ramakrishna. With normal people, the senses get excited by contact with objects and run outwards (Ch.2, Sloka 60). But with the *Sthitaprajna*, it is just the opposite. The touch or worldly objects brings about the touch of Brahman and the same senses carry the Brahmic Consciousness to the mind.

The images of worldly objects reflect on consciousness as the moving objects reflect on a mirror. This is just the secondary goal, a playfulness of the waking moments. The real object is not the fulfilment of deep-rooted desires of the mind (Ch.2, Sloka 55), but the attainment of bliss (Ch.2, sloka 64). When perfected, the contact with sense objects creates a kind of inner flow of enjoyment. Floating on that flow, gradually the objects transform into subject. In the words of Sankhya, in the close proximity of Purusha, Prakriti changes as his own Nature. Rabindranath Tagore has drawn a similar picture in his dance drama '*Natir Puja*' (worship of a Court Dancer), where the court dancer, in the course of dancing in front of the Stupa of Buddha, sheds off all her apparent fineries and emerges as a nun.

The pulling inward of the limbs of a turtle is not rejection, not even restraint. You can call it, in the words of Upanishad, going inwards. But it is really hard to realise without understanding the Vast as the real goal beyond the apparent touches of sense objects.

Question :

Please explain the mystic interpretation of "the attachment towards objects given up lingers, till one 'sees' the Higher Being." 'Seeing' the Higher, who or what is the Higher? What is the hidden meaning of the expression that yearns, for sense objects do not go away before seeing the Highest Being?

Answer :

The one who is 'controlled' meaning one who can restrain the natural human inclination to run after sense objects due to practice, develops a sense of detachment in course of time. But this Vairagya (detachment) does not change to higher Vairagya immediately. The thirst for worldly objects is still hidden in the depths of mind. True, it is checked up to a certain point, does not appear on the surface and the upper mind does not want it and has completely forgotten it. But if ever it appears and takes us unaware, we find the mind is enjoying it even without knowing. In that case the thirst for sense objects is still there, the detachment is not yet complete. That is what the Gita is saying here. The thirst for sense objects, that lies deep within, can only be completely ousted if once

we see the Highest Being, who, according to the Taittiriya Upanishad, is 'Verily He is the Rasa (concentration of all enjoyments) and knowing that Rasa, one attains Ananda.' According to the Kaushitaki Upanishad, the taste for sense objects can be controlled and changed into the 'taste of Brahman.' The spontaneous Ananda that ensues without any object is the Ananda of self, or Ananda of Brahman, or Ananda of Truth whatever you may call it. Once you get the taste of that, there is no more thirst for sense objects. That is what is meant by restraint of sense objects by 'seeing the Highest.' This way restraint of senses eventually culminates into an eternal inclination towards the Divine.

Question :

What is 'Prasad' or 'Graceful state of mind' referred to in the 65th sloka of Second Chapter?

Answer :

'Prasad' is a very old technical term meaning Transparency. In the Ramayana, there is the reference of Godavari (a river) of transparent water. The Upanishads refer to the realisation of Self by the transparency of elements, elements meaning physical-vital-mental existences. Once they are made transparent, then like light through a prism, the radiance of consciousness glows through body-vital-mind. That is the sign of 'Prasad' or Grace.

Question :

What is the hidden meaning of 'an abstinent keeps awake at night and it is night for the Muni (ascetic) during the waking state of the common people?' (Sloka 69, Chapter 2)

Answer :

All creatures are either asleep or shrouded with ignorance regarding Brahman. But an abstinent is not. He is ever awake in the consciousness of Brahman, whereas the rest of the people are awake with the outer consciousness of the world. As a matter of fact, our culture, our civilisation — everything pertains to the waking field, an outer state. Nobody has any inkling regarding what is happening deep down in the mind. But to a Muni, this puffing and blowing of the outer world are like passing of pictures on a screen in a movie theatre or like a dream at night. Yet he is 'seeing' in the midst of all that with open eyes. The human ignorance and the so-called knowledge both are floating on his surface consciousness. Actually his is the eternal consciousness of the Sun beyond the earthly rotation of day and night.

Question :

Are 'Brahmanirvana' (Nirvana in the Brahman) and 'Brahmisthiti' (stationed in the Brahman) the same? It seems one hints at dissolution and the other at eternal existence.

Answer :

Brahmanirvana is what has been termed in the Upanishad as the realisation of Non-Existence or the Great Void or the realisation of the Akasha. In the path of ascension that appears as dissolution but in reality that is a condition of ever existence or what has been described in the Gita as the 'Complete Brahma Nirvana of one who knows the Self' and *Brahmisthiti* is to stay awake in that Akasha like the radiant Sun.

Question :

Is this not so that Action based on Sankhya Yoga is really Karma Yoga? Otherwise aimless action can never be termed as Karma Yoga. Is it wise to bring in a sense of lower and higher between Jnana Yoga and Karma Yoga? Is it not right to look at both with equal eyes? What is Karma according to the Upanishads?

Answer :

One Supreme Reality is covering everything (Sloka 17, Chapter 2) this is the Knowledge of Sankhya. Towards the end of the Gita, Sri Krishna has said again, 'One from whom ensue all activities and efforts of all creatures, One Who is encompassing and covering the whole creation, a man can reach his goal of spiritual perfection by worshipping Him through his work.' (Sloka 46, Chapter 18)

This great sloka gives instruction to work as the worship of the Highest Lord, following the paths of Sankhya, Shakti and Bhakti. This is the real Karma yoga and the essence of Gita's teachings. Whatever Knowledge is attained by Sankhya or the Karma Yoga results are the same. Hence, to have the same devotion towards both has been expounded by Gita (Slokas 4-5, Chapter 5). The Upanishad, too, has never asked to give up action, rather mentioned about working and living up to hundred years. Furthermore, Upanishad has said that action with detachment does not involve anyone.

Question :

Does the speaker of Gita put too much importance on Sannyasa (renunciation)?

Answer :

No.

[This is the end of Q/A on Sankhya Yoga in the *Gitanuvachan*. Translated from the original Bengali by Smt. Kalyani Bose, a long time devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother now resident in New Jersey, USA]

Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata In Sri Aurobindo's Savitri

Prema Nandakumar

(Continued from the previous issue)

12. Dawn to Greater Dawn

The attempt to exhaust the Vyasan inspirations in Sri Aurobindo's writings is indeed very daunting. The *Mahabharata* was not only a base for his creative writings and a guide to get at the history of ancient India but also an instrument to study the contours of Indian philosophy and from the heights of the epic, look towards the spiritual horizons of Sanatana Dharma. For instance, Adi Sankara had taken up the *Gita* segment from the Bhishma Parva and had written a commentary to explain his Advaita Vedanta. Then came Ramanuja who has given us an equally erudite commentary on the *Gita*. Many others have written commentaries too for the verses. Nearer our own times was Bal Gangadhar Tilak, whose monumental *Gita Rahasya* was written when he was undergoing solitary imprisonment in Mandalay Jail during the Bande Mataram Movement. Sri Aurobindo wrote *Essays on the Gita* after he was released from the Alipore Jail.

If the *Mahabharata* can be compared to an ocean, the *Gita* happens to be the nectar that was churned out of the ocean. Here the Lord speaks to a mortal: Narayana to Nara, and that is inspiration which has given us the remarkable canto on Everlasting Day in *Savitri*.

The Kurukshetra War is the culmination of a sublime tale. Yet, the *Gita* speaks of it as Dharmakshetra, the Stage of Righteousness. For, the aim of the *Gita* is not a description of the war which took to unrighteous pathways. The killing of Abhimanyu, the killing of the teacher-Drona by the disciple, Drushtadhyumna, the destruction of the sleeping sons of Pandava by Aswaththama are but a few scenes of the war which went contrary to dharma.

Yet, Kurukshetra remains the Stage of Dharma, for it was here that the dharmic scripture, *Gita* was taught to Arjuna by Krishna. This is why we go there in a

worshipful mood, to remember the great scene where Narayana taught Nara the pathways of transforming the human into the divine.

Essays on the Gita appeared originally in *Arya* from August 1916 to July 1920. The book is in two parts. Instead of explaining each verse in sequence as the commentators do, the work proceeds to present the teachings of Krishna as flashes of revelatory lightning. Coming upon the *Gita* while reading the *Mahabharata*, Sri Aurobindo must have wondered about the total transformation effected by Krishna's words on the sorrowing Arjuna who had lost his will to act and remained dejected. What was this yoga about? So many pathways and yet leading to the same ideal end! It appeared as Advaita but accepted the dual reality. It spoke of the three-fold Maya but did not accept the Maya theory. Nor could it be fixed into Sankhya yoga. A paean of Bhakti which projects Krishna as the Supreme, and yet it is no Vaishnava bhakti yoga. Certainly a direct descendant of Upanishads in its tremendous thought-currents. Yes, *Essays on the Gita* instils in man a great hope for a brighter future, with its mahavakya: 'We do not belong to past dawns, but to the noons of the future'.

Just as Aswapati is seen as the forerunner of humanity's aspirations, Arjuna is also representative man. Man should listen, analyse and engage himself in action. That is the way for transformation, not a withdrawal from the field of action. With the mind firm on Dharma, one must remain in action. After all, it is the transformative movement of Prakriti that has put him in this post of action. He is a 'nimitta', no more. As for Karma Yoga, while Patanjali's Yoga Sutras speak of it being the first step in a yogin's life, it becomes a life-long experience in Poorna Yoga. Hence the *Gita*'s significant statement, *yogah karmasu kausalam* (Yoga is skill in works).

"Our physical life, its maintenance, its continuance is a journey, a pilgrimage of the body *sarira yatra*, and that cannot be effected without action. But even if a man could leave his body unmaintained, otiose, if he could stand still always like a tree or sit inert like a stone, *tisthati*, that vegetable or material immobility would not save him from the hands of Nature; he would not be liberated from her workings. For it is not our physical movements and activities alone which are meant by works, by karma, our mental existence also is a great complex action, it is even the greater and more important part of the works of the unresting energy, — subjective cause and detriment of the physical."ⁱ

We can keep working while engaged in yoga by self-discipline. Naturally, this state will become possible only if our mind is shorn of all cravings. Such a sadhak's work finds fulfilment in wisdom says the *Gita*: *sarvam karmaakhilam*

paartha jnane parisamaapyate. As the Supreme, the Lord is beyond the mortal and immortal states of being. He is the Universal who pervades all creation. Yet we are not able to recognise him. This is the reason why he incarnates, out of his boundless love for humanity, so that he can guide it on the right path. Man must recognise this and gain the divine's help by total surrender:

"This then is the supreme movement, this complete surrender of your whole self and nature, this abandonment of all dharmas to the Divine who is your highest Self, this absolute aspiration of all your members to the supreme spiritual nature. If you can once achieve it, whether at the outset or much later on the way, then whatever you are or were in your outward nature, your way is sure and your perfection inevitable."ⁱⁱ

With the *Essays on the Gita* in hand, it becomes easy to draw close to Savitri's movement in the Eternal Day in *Savitri*. Earlier, one could see the inspirations from Vyasa in Sri Aurobindo's vision of Death. Indeed a lot of work remains for the future researcher to take up the filiations between the two epic poets. Thus, what was the tri-ratra vrata that Savitri undertook in Vyasa that gave her the strength to accompany Yama in the regions beyond human habitation? Sri Aurobindo has given us the Book of Yoga, and we find Savitri to be following Dhyana yoga. Her experiences in meditation get personified as the triple soul-forces and other images. He was no doubt drawn to the importance of the meditational technique to overcome Mrithyu by the Yajnavalkya-Janaka dialogue in the Santi Parva :

"If, however, instead of wishing to die he desires to live in this world, he casts off all enjoyments, — all scents and tastes, — O king, and lives on in abstinence. He thus conquers death by fixing his soul on the Supreme Soul. Indeed, the man, who is blessed with knowledge of the Soul, O monarch, practises the course of life recommended by the Sankhyas and conquers death by uniting his soul with the Supreme Soul. At last, he attains to what is entirely indestructible, which is without birth, which is auspicious, and immutable, and eternal, and stable, and which is incapable of being attained to by men of uncleansed souls."ⁱⁱⁱ

We know that the entire Book of Yoga is devoted to this search and the fifth canto of the Book, 'The Finding of the Soul' culminates in Savitri uniting her soul with the Supreme Soul.

"Here in this chamber of flame and light they met;
They looked upon each other, knew themselves,
The secret deity and its human part,
The calm immortal and the struggling soul.
Then with a magic transformation's speed
They rushed into each other and grew one."^{iv} (*Savitri*, 4th rev ed, 1993. p.527)

After the experience with Death earlier, and having overcome the dark regions by her yoga, Savitri finds now that Death was but a facet of the Supreme Soul:

“As one drowned in a sea of splendour and bliss,
Mute in the maze of these surprising worlds,
Turning she saw their living knot and source,
Key to their charm and fount of their delight,
And knew him for the same who snares our lives
Captured in his terrifying pitiless net,
And makes the universe his prison camp
And makes in his immense and vacant vasts
The labour of the stars a circuit vain
And death the end of every human road
And grief and pain the wages of man’s toil.
One whom her soul had faced as Death and Night
A sum of all sweetness gathered into his limbs
And blinded her heart to the beauty of the suns.
Transfigured was the formidable shape.
His darkness and his sad destroying might
Abolishing for ever and disclosing
The mystery of his high and violent deeds, (ibid, pp.678-79)

It is we who compartmentalise the totality of the Supreme into Life and Death, Day and Night. Having shown the side of the Supreme as Death with which we are unable to come to terms as yet, Sri Aurobindo now proceeds to show the various images of the Supreme as Life in the traditional language.

The *Mahabharata* itself concludes with the Swargarohana Parva, the ascent to Heaven. The opening reference is to “*trivishtapam svargam*”, which we find in the “triple mystic heaven” of Sri Aurobindo :

“Arisen beneath a triple mystic heaven
The seven immortal earths were seen, sublime:
Homes of the blest released from death and sleep
Where grief can never come nor any pang
Arriving from self-lost and seeking worlds
Alter Heaven-nature’s changeless quietude
And mighty posture of eternal calm,” (ibid, p.672)

The point to be noted is that in Vyasa’s heaven, one remains in a state of brilliance and is in the company of the deities, the devas. Who were the deities? Who were the chief creator-deities Vyasa found in the heaven? There are no

names given but the argument presented by Indra to Yudhistira after the latter sees both heaven and hell, is that, after the falling away of the physical body, there are no differences made between souls as good or bad. The tortures and the foul odour found in Hell by Yudhistira are but illusions.

The ‘*trivishtapam svargam*’ is explained as made of Bhu, Bhuv and Svar lokas in the Vishnu Purana for which Sri Aurobindo had high regard. They are known as ‘*trailokyamethadkrithakam*’ (the *kritaka* three-fold world) and the worlds of Jana, Tapa and Satya are known as *a-kritaka*. Between the two is the Maharloka which becomes empty at the end of the Kalpa, and is known as *kritakaakrita*. Vishnu is the cause of all creation and illumines all of it from within. He is everything, the Sat and the non-Sat :

“His form is the supreme base, it contains both the Sat and the Asat, it is indivisible, and from here is born all living beings. He is the unmanifest *Moolaprakriti*, the created world, and in whom the creation draws back in times of dissolution.”^v

Three gods are brought to us by name in this region of Everlasting Day. The Virat Purusha images the cosmos, the Vishnu referred to earlier.

Virat, who lights his camp-fires in the suns
And the star-entangled ether is his hold,
Expressed himself with Matter for his speech:
Objects are his letters, forces are his words,
Events are the crowded history of his life,
And sea and land are the pages for his tale.
Matter is his means and his spiritual sign;
He hangs the thought upon a lash’s lift,
In the current of the blood makes flow the soul.
His is the dumb will of atom and of clod;
A Will that without sense or motive acts,
An Intelligence needing not to think or plan,
The world creates itself invincibly;
For its body is the body of the Lord
And in its heart stands Virat, King of Kings.” (ibid, p.680)

The passage could well be a poetic recreation of the Vedic Purusha Sukta which is a description of the cosmic presence:

“Purusha has innumerable heads, eyes, feet. He pervades the fourteen worlds on all four sides and occupies all that is beyond count. The creation of the past, present and the future, the creation that escapes destruction thanks to food are all due to this Iswara who gives Realisation. Such is His greatness. All the

elements are but a quarter of His body. The immortal three quarters are in his divine residence.”

Having given us an idea of how a portion of the Virat is enough to send forth this immense creation and pervade it all, and how it has no image that can be individually limned, Sri Aurobindo indicates that in this cosmic figure may be seen the manifested form of Hiranyagarbha.

“In him shadows his form the Golden Child
Who in the Sun-capped Vast cradles his birth:
Hiranyagarbha, author of thoughts and dreams,
Who sees the invisible and hears the sounds
That never visited a mortal ear,
Discoverer of unthought realities
Truer to Truth than all we have ever known,
He is the leader on the inner roads;
A seer, he has entered the forbidden realms;
A magician with the omnipotent wand of thought,
He builds the secret uncreated worlds.
Armed with the golden speech, the diamond eye,
His is the vision and the prophecy:
Imagist casting the formless into shape ...” (ibid, p.681)

India’s mythological past has given a great deal of thought to this idea of the Golden Egg which is seen as the source of creation. The Rig Veda has a Hiranyagarbha Suktha with ten verses: *Hiranyagarbah samavarthathaagre hutasya jaatah patireka aseeth:*

“In the beginning was the Divinity in his splendour,
Manifested as the sole Lord of creation,
And he upheld the earth and the heavens.
Who is the Deity we shall worship with our offerings?
It is he who bestows soul force and vigour,
Whose guidance all men invoke, the Devas invoke,
Whose shadow is immortal life – and death.
Who is the Deity we shall worship with our offerings?”^{vi}

Indications for this had already been given when Death was referred to as the Shadow, for the inspiration is the phrase in this Suktha, “*yasya chaaya amrutham yasya mrityuh*”. Then we move to the image of the Supreme in yogic

sleep on the milky ocean. This image is very close to us thanks to its presence assured by the hands of the inspired Indian artist :

“A third spirit stood behind, their hidden cause,
A mass of superconscience closed in light,
Creator of things in his all-knowing sleep.
All from his stillness came as grows a tree;
He is our seed and core, our head and base.
All light is but a flash from his closed eyes:
An all-wise Truth is mystic in his heart,
The omniscient Ray is shut behind his lids:
He is the Wisdom that comes not by thought,
His wordless silence brings the immortal word.
He sleeps in the atom and the burning star,
He sleeps in man and god and beast and stone:
Because he is there the Inconscient does its work,
Because he is there the world forgets to die.” (ibid, p.681)

Paramapadanatha, Ranganatha, Seshasayana of Thiruvananthapuram ... so many recreations of the Supreme in his yogic sleep on the snake Adisesha. The figure has given rise to innumerable commentaries but this much is enough knowledge for the present. He is the “Creator of things in his all-knowing sleep.” This is paralleled by the other great image of the Indian genius, the dance of Shiva, the Nataraja figure. Fritzof Capra became aware of the cosmic dance of the atoms when he watched the Nataraja icon :

“...every subatomic particle not only performs an energy dance, but also is an energy dance; a pulsating process of creation and destruction...without end...For the modern physicists, then Shiva’s dance is the dance of subatomic matter. As in Hindu mythology, it is a continual dance of creation and destruction involving the whole cosmos; the basis of all existence and of all natural phenomena.”^{vii}

The stillness of the Seshasayana icon, again, teaches us how the all-pervading presence of the divine, seemingly quiescent, activates the matter at the right time. This knowledge of the Supreme’s presence in all creation is stated in just one, immortal sentence in the Isha Upanishad: “All this is for inhabitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion.”

The idea of a manifestation taking place as a cosmic godhead from what is the Unmanifested, the Akshara Brahman, has been a subject to which Sri Aurobindo returns often. We have a very finely moulded scene on this theme

in 'The Adoration of the Divine Mother'. It is just a moment's recognition of a manifest figure from infinity :

"Across the silence of the ultimate Calm,
Out of a marvellous Transcendence' core,
A body of wonder and translucency
As if a sweet mystic summary of her self
Escaping into the original Bliss
Had come enlarged out of eternity,
Someone came infinite and absolute.
A being of wisdom, power and delight,
Even as a mother draws her child to her arms,
Took to her breast Nature and world and soul.
Abolishing the signless emptiness,
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless hush,
Piercing the limitless Unknowable,
Into the liberty of the motionless depths
A beautiful and felicitous lustre stole." (ibid, p.312)

It is as if the yogic sleep of the Supreme has been disturbed for just a moment and the deity has a look at the creation. Enough gets conveyed by Sri Aurobindo's language that this manifestation is to let the mortal know about the never-flagging awareness of the Divine.

"For one was there supreme behind the God.
A Mother Might brooded upon the world;
A Consciousness revealed its marvellous front
Transcending all that is, denying none:
Imperishable above our fallen heads
He felt a rapturous and unstumbling Force." (ibid, p.313)

The Supreme Mother does not speak. Where is the need for words in a moment where the human soul meets its Divine Origin? No words but yet the message is carried to Aswapati that the Divine is very much with him, the unfailing guardian :

"Abolishing the signless emptiness,
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless hush,
Piercing the limitless Unknowable,
Into the liberty of the motionless depths
A beautiful and felicitous lustre stole.
The Power, the Light, the Bliss no word can speak
Imaged itself in a surprising beam
And built a golden passage to his heart" (ibid, p.312)

Of this Sri Aurobindo never had any doubt. The Divine does not speak but certainly acts. Sri Aurobindo had been immersed in the *Mahabharata* and had surely meditated upon the manner in which Krishna acted to save Draupadi in the Kuru Court. Did he come in person? Did he deliver a harangue? The miracle which was yet no miracle took place, for at the critical moment Dharma guarded Draupadi. Krishna was not present in the Assembly Hall of Hastinapura. But he was preceded by the Dharma that he restores yuga after yuga :

"When the attire of Draupadi was being thus dragged, she thought of Hari ... Hearing the words of Draupadi, Krishna was deeply moved. And leaving his seat, the benevolent one from compassion, arrived there on foot. And while Yajnaseni was crying aloud to Krishna, also called Vishnu and Hari and Nara for protection, the illustrious Dharma, remaining unseen, covered her with excellent clothes of many hues. And, O monarch as the attire of Draupadi was being dragged, after one was taken off, another of the same kind, appeared covering her. And thus did it continue till many clothes were seen. And, O exalted One, owing to the protection of Dharma, hundreds upon hundreds of robes of many hues came off Draupadi's person."^{viii}

As she became one with thoughts of the Divine in herself, Draupadi gained strength and was saved. So was Savitri who had come face to face with her secret soul and gained the needed strength to face and defeat Death. In innumerable ways Sri Aurobindo has brought Vyasa's epic to us. Like the Divine pervading creation, Vyasa pervades the works of Sri Aurobindo. When Draupadi had called out for him, Krishna had not answered: "Don't worry! I am coming!" There was only silence. Vyasa taught Sri Aurobindo that silence can be a strength too, a lesson noted by the disciple with reference to the Savitri legend :

"As Vyasa progressed in years, his personality developed towards intellectualism and his manner of expressing emotion became sensibly modified. In the *Savitri* he first reveals his power of imparting to the reader a sense of poignant but silent feeling, feeling in the air, unexpressed or rather expressed in action. Sometimes even in very silence;"^{ix}

Reading Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, one realises how many times the term 'silence' reverberates throughout the epic. It is a tablet for yet another critical study of the poem!

"A heart of silence in the hands of joy
Inhabited with rich creative beats
A body like a parable of dawn
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple-door to things beyond. ...

At once she was the stillness and the word,
A continent of self-diffusing peace,
An ocean of untrembling virgin fire;
The strength, the silence of the gods were hers.”^x (ibid, pp.15-16)

If one has sraddha to undertake such a study, the spaces of both the *Mahabharata* and *Savitri* will be illumined for the future generations. And that would also be golden service at the altar of India’s Sanatana Dharma.

(Concluded)

References

- i *Essays on the Gita*, Book I, chapter 11.
- ii Book II, chapter 24.
- iii Translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli
- iv Book VII, canto v
- v *Sri Vishnu Purana*, Amṣa II, chapter 7
- vi *Rigveda*, X, 121. Translated by A.C. Bose
- vii *The Tao of Physics*
- viii Translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli
- ix *The Harmony of Virtue*, SABCL, vol. 3, p.161
- x *Savitri*, Book I, canto ii

Fate And The Problem Of Suffering

Debashish Banerji

The problem of pain and fate or free-will, human destiny and the ability to make choices in our lives is a central one in *Savitri*. It is at the very core of the epic, because Savitri makes a choice and the choice is one that will bring pain. The choice involves pain and suffering since it involves the death of Savitri’s husband, Satyavan, within a year. In both Vyasa’s and Sri Aurobindo’s narrations, after Savitri has chosen her husband, she returns to her kingdom and at that very time a demi-god, Narada, also makes his appearance and prophesies that the person Savitri has chosen will die exactly after a year. As may be expected, this prophecy, coming from a demi-god, Narada, has the effect of a bombshell in the court of Savitri’s father, Aswapati. All are stunned by it and everybody expects that Savitri will renounce her choice, and choose another, now that she knows of this fate. But Savitri is adamant. She says her choice once made will not be changed, she has chosen beyond life and death. So this indomitable will, this force of free-will, is something we see pitted from the outset against adverse destiny.

Savitri’s mother, the queen of Madra gives voice to the experience of the hapless play of fate and free-will. After she realises that Savitri will not change her decision, she makes a plaintive call to the sage Narada, representing the human cry in the face of suffering, death and adverse circumstance, seen as the inevitable destiny of human beings. Why is it that we suffer such a destiny? Is there an alternative? It seems we are given no alternative. Pain is our inevitable lot. The same kind of a situation is presented to us in the life of Gautama the Buddha. We are told that when Buddha’s father, king Suddhodana, asked his astrologers how his son could be prevented from leaving the kingdom and becoming a wandering ascetic, they said to him that he should not see an old man, a sick man a dead man and a renunciant. Suddhodana then tried his best to imprison Gautama in a golden cage where these events could be carefully excluded. But the subtext of the story is that whatever cage we may build around ourselves, the helplessness, ignobility and suffering of old age, sickness and death are guests that inhabit the house of man. They are our inevitable lot, and Buddha cannot be prevented from seeing these things. Coming across this inexorable

dimension of the human condition, along with exposure to a life path devoted exclusively to its solution, that of the renunciant or sannyasi, as they are called in India — those who make it their business to leave the play of pleasure and pain and concentrate on finding a solution to the experience of suffering on earth — Buddha renounced his life in the palace and turned all his attention and energy to finding a subjective solution to the problem of suffering. Savitri takes up the same problem but offers a different solution. This is not a solution of withdrawal from life but one of coming to full grip with the entirety of human experience and overcoming it with divinity. The way in which Savitri does this is exemplified in the story and in Narada's response to Savitri's mother. Sri Aurobindo represents this problem in 'The Book of Fate' in *Savitri*.

Savitri's mother, the queen of Madra, voices the ideas that are intrinsic to our experience of adverse fate. She asks Narada why God, if he is good and all-powerful, has made a creation fraught with adversity and suffering. Perhaps, then, God did not make this creation, or there is no such thing as God. This is one of the foundations of atheism. One of the premises of atheism is that a benevolent God could not have created this world of adverse circumstances and pain which comprises the human condition. The other two possibilities in this scenario are that God is not benevolent but cruel; or else He is not omnipotent, but impotent — in other words, he doesn't possess power enough to prevent evil circumstance. The queen of Madra marshals all these arguments before Narada as the human being's helpless cry against the forces of fate. In response, Narada tries to answer the queen in a way which illuminates the cosmic condition of suffering along with Savitri's destiny and her choice.

According to Narada, adverse destiny, suffering, death, are temporary expedients to the evolution of consciousness in this creation. The premise behind this is foundational to the Upanishads — Delight is at the origin of all things, by Delight they are maintained and to Delight they return. In this manifestation, the one in which we find ourselves, there is a specific form of Delight at work, one which is made possible by a forgetting of the true nature of reality. The one Conscious Being forgets itself in an Inconscience and fragments its Oneness in a dispersed Infinity. This lapse of Consciousness becomes the basis for an evolution of knowledge, power, joy and individuality, which is of the nature of a re-membling of the dismembered body of Being. Of course, as time-bound creatures, we have of necessity to speak of such a lapse of consciousness and fragmentation of unity as an "event," but this is only an apparent event, an event in eternity or a condition of Being which paradoxically inaugurates the Time of evolution. The joy of this emergence out of what appears to be loss of

consciousness and oneness, is what characterises our particular creation and is the specific form of delight which marks it. If this was only a question of Ignorance, a question of self-forgetting and a growth out of an original amnesia of God, then it could as well have been a growth without resistance, a kind of gaseous expansion from Ignorance to Knowledge, from Insentience to Bliss and from Division to Unity. Ignorance itself inevitably brings certain conditions of pain, but that pain would not encompass the totality of the phenomenon of pain that we experience here.

Life is racked, as Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri*, with the sense of labour and of pain. There is a constant struggle, a perpetual striving against adversity here. Why so? Narada points out that this occurs because this evolution out of Inconscience into Consciousness would not have been able to develop its full potential, were it not for Inconscience to be, as far as possible, an independent truth or reality. In other words, in God's forgetting of himself, in the lapse of Consciousness to its opposite, there is a dark Infinity involved. There is the manifestation of Non-Being within Being. And it is this independent reality given to the potential infinity of the Inconscience, that inevitably bestows upon it a will to remain Inconscient. Even with the emergence of Consciousness, this will continues in the Ignorance as the will to remain ignorant. This can be called Falsehood. It is this adverse will in the cosmos against which Consciousness in nature and the individual must strive to evolve; this is what gives to human life, and indeed to the entire creation the sense of struggle, pain and adversity.

In the Mother's telling, there are four original archetypal qualities or properties of the Divine that became their opposites as a result of this plunge into the Inconscient. Knowledge becomes Ignorance, or put differently, Light turns to Darkness; Delight becomes Suffering; Truth turns to Falsehood and Life becomes Death. The Mother speaks of these as the four cosmic archangels who immediately take on their inverse qualities, and exist in the form of dualities at the inception of this universe. Seen from the vantage of Delight at the origin of all things, as soon as Delight chooses to express the Joy of a systematic evolution, it creates this set of dualities, which begin to function dialectically between the original properties of the Divine and their seeming opposites. It is out of this dialectic that the powers of Consciousness arise as through a churning of opposites. Arising from a zero state of Inconscience, these emergences may be thought of as measures of the powers of Consciousness. Of these, it is particularly the emergence of Truth, contested by Falsehood, which gives the measure of Divine Power, without which the self-exploration of the Divine would remain incomplete.

Moreover, such an evolution of principles through dualities is not only a cosmic condition. In the evolution of this idea, it is as if the Divine chose to express himself not merely as one universal Being but as his own multiplicity, a fragmentation of infinite beings. The One became Many. The infinite potency of Being made infinite self-conceptions of itself. These conscious self-formulations could be called souls. It is this fragmentation of the One into the Many and the plunge of this multiplicity into Inconscience that is called the holocaust of the Divine. Out of this sacrifice of the Divine, its own self-fragmentation and its own self-forgetting, innumerable possibilities of emerging into the divine self-conscious Being become the evolutionary project of this creation. Each of these possibilities carries the freedom of God in its self-exploration, since indeed, it is nothing but a self-conception of God. This is the foundation of individual free-will in the cosmos.

We as human beings find ourselves in the thick of this particular emergence. As we saw, the self-forgetting of the One, what may be called the oblivion of Being, forms the foundation of the cosmic emergence, while the fragmentation of Being forms the foundation of an individual emergence. What human beings experience is the consciousness of this individualised cosmic emergence, arising through the play of dualities. Thus, our experience of ignorance, pain, suffering, death, are individualised experiences of the cosmic struggle of dualities. Each one of these dualities is, in fact, a cause of pain, consequent on the self-oblivion of Being. Likewise, the fragmentation of Being, the fact that the One became Many is itself a condition of pain, peculiar to individualised consciousness. We find ourselves separated from each other and separated from the cosmos. This separation causes the emergence of ego, a materialised separate self constantly striving against its “others” in the world. This provides one of the primary bases of personal pain, the pain of separation, loneliness, rejection, abjection, fear of extinction.

Aside from this, the egos find themselves sunk in an Ignorance, a Darkness which is the opposite of the Light of God. Ignorance too forms a foundation of pain. Because we are ignorant, we find that our choices bring us suffering in our lives. However, such a pain of ignorance could be thought of as “innocent,” something that could be overcome through an expansion of knowledge. We would gradually but inevitably arise out of our wrong choices into a fullness of knowledge. This, in fact, is an assumption of the European Enlightenment, and forms an axiom of the international knowledge academy, a central pillar of modernity. According to this, a systematic employment of reason, carried out in a concerted effort through many disciplinary concentrations by all of humanity, will eventually allow us to piece together all knowledge, since Reality is

“reasonable.” This is a problematic axiom, because of the equation of human reason to a supposed cosmic rationality and the erroneous assumption that the whole can be grasped through an addition of parts. But aside from this, there are the other powers expressing in the cosmos and in an individualised form in human beings, which are not just powers of Ignorance but of Falsehood. We saw from the description of the sacrifice of the Divine, that Delight became Suffering, Truth became Falsehood, and Life became Death. These are adverse powers.

The conversion of Truth to Falsehood is that choice made in the Ignorance to remain Ignorant. In fact, without such an active power of adversity to anchor Ignorance, a true “ground zero” for the evolution would not exist, since Ignorance would have no independence to remain ignorant. Therefore, this introduces into the creation a cosmic power which opposes the growth of consciousness, which can lie, which can twist, which can pervert or distort the emergence of Consciousness in ways through which it is forced to remain hidden and seemingly absent or, at best, accidental. This is what is known as the asuric element in the cosmos. It is the individualised presence of this element which has made Theology posit the existence of “sin” and try to account for its origin at the inception of our cosmos.

There is also the appearance of Death. The presence of Death is the ultimate stamp of the shadow of Non-Being in Being. We make an appearance in the world with our birth, live for a few years, then disappear with our death. Within our lifetime, we act as if we are immortal. We experience passing phenomena with a fullness as if they will never go away and yet all our experiences are shadowed by the knowledge of transience and death. Death also is an appearance; we may call it an appearance of disappearance. It is a cloak or veil, arising from the discontinuity of the principles of consciousness manifesting through our life-appearance, specifically the refusal of inconscient Matter to host Life except temporarily. We may overcome death by realising the eternity of Spirit and the continuity of individualised consciousness. But Sri Aurobindo, in principle and potential, challenges even the material phenomenon of Death, reclaiming Matter as transformable in the name of Spirit. In *Savitri*, he presents a complete eradication of Death. This indeed is the very meaning of the birth of Savitri and the symbolic form in which her life is presented as one in which the powers of Falsehood and Death are to be overcome. The appearance of Death is not the reality of the Divine, and it cannot be the ultimate reality of the universe. This is central aspect of the message of *Savitri*.

How can these particular conditions of suffering be overcome in the individual experience? If we look at pain from an individual point of view, arriving at Knowledge from Ignorance is certainly one aspect of our seeking for release from

suffering. But human seeking is not restricted to a seeking for knowledge. We seek for Knowledge, we seek for Power, we seek for Delight, we seek for Freedom, for the overcoming of our limitations, we seek for Harmony, we seek for Oneness. All these are natural aspirations in the human being because these are the cosmic aspirations with which the evolution of consciousness is seeded. Behind all these forms of seeking is the specific form of Delight out of which our cosmos is born – it may be called a delight in a systematic and evolutionary Self-exploration. Thus Knowledge, Power, Delight, Freedom, Immortality, Unity, Harmony are the forms of consummation of the human journey. In the case of Savitri also, we find an evolution of all these powers of divinity. Similarly, in each of our cases, it is all these powers that need to evolve. Behind all of these, as the leader of the human journey, is Delight in self-discovery and in the recuperation of Wholeness, which is the meaning of the cosmos. In the epic *Savitri*, and in the life of its protagonist, Savitri, this Delight, in its primordial power to overcome all dualities, viz. Love, fuels the evolution of Consciousness in an individualised form. It is this which also grants meaning to human lives. We seek an integral fulfilment of Love and Delight which carries with it all these powers. This is what makes *Savitri* an epic representative of the Human Aspiration.

We can see how Sri Aurobindo approaches the problem of Pain as a problem of Delight in his yoga and in *Savitri*. First, our experience of pain is seen by him as a temporary experience that comes from lack. It arises from the experience of a limited and separate consciousness. Even in this world of the play of dualities, we would experience everything as a Delight, had we the right consciousness. If we could be impersonal to our own experience and view the world as spectators, it would be to us like the enjoyment of theatre or cinema, in which we delight in the play of characters and their interactions with each other and with circumstances. Adverse circumstance, perverse behaviour and suffering resulting from either provides us with specific feelings, which bring an aesthetic enjoyment. We do not involve ourselves in the play and we do not experience personally the pain, suffering and adversity as our entrapment in a certain condition. Sri Aurobindo says it is possible for us to have this impersonality, this freedom to realise that the world in which we find ourselves is not an imprisonment even while we live in it and experience its phenomena. This is what has been called in Vedantic terms '*jivanmukti*', an ideal of the Upanishads and of the Gita. The *jivanmukta* is a kind of overman, and it is arguable that the overman that Nietzsche idealised was exactly of this kind, a person who could accept all the experiences of the cosmos with a fullness of aesthetic enjoyment, while being free from them.

Within the experience of pleasure and pain, a certain delight is at work. But Sri Aurobindo indicates a greater realisation. He points to the fact that we can transform our experience. At the level of our feelings, our nerves, and our physicality we can transform our reactions so as to experience them all as forms of ecstasy. According to Sri Aurobindo, death itself is a condition where the body breaks down, because it cannot bear an intensity of experience. Since body itself is a form of consciousness, as are our nervous reactions our emotional life and our intelligence, if we could discover the essence of Consciousness which could transform itself in all its forms, then our experience would be different. In other words, what normal human beings feel as pain, we would be able to experience as an intensity of delight. What normal human beings experience as death, we would be able to withstand because our bodies would respond to it consciously with an equal intensity. So, too, in our emotional experiences; what is felt as pain could be a sting of delight. We would experience it as a wave of the One flooding the One in its own self by its own intensity, something normal human beings experience as grief.

These would be the possibilities of transformation of pain within individual human experience. But such an experience would be a *yoga siddhi*; pain would remain what it is for the rest of the world. The world would remain a veiled play of Ignorance, Avidya, not a play of unveiled divinity. And, therefore, as far as the manifestation of suffering on earth goes, we are faced with a cosmic condition and need a power to challenge the conditions of the cosmic manifestation. We saw that we can be victorious over suffering through a liberating impersonality; further, we can be victorious over suffering through a transformation of our normal reactions; but can we be victorious over the cosmic condition of suffering? This is the ultimate victory, the divinity that mankind can express in its evolution and this is what *Savitri* represents. In the growth of Savitri, she will attain to all these forms of the victory over suffering, leading ultimately to victory over Death and the foundational condition of Suffering on earth. This is the message of *Savitri* from the viewpoint of Fate and Free-Will. Free-Will is the individualised will of God pitting itself against adverse destiny, and achieving victory not only at an individual but at the cosmic level, through a transformation of the powers of duality.

The first passage (*Savitri*, Bk VI, Canto II, 4th rev. ed, 1993, pp. 436-445; 453-456; 458-460) is about Fate and Free-Will and is Narada's answer to the heart-rent query of Aswapati's wife, the queen of Madra, on the human condition and the place of free-will and fate in it. Are we subject to a destiny without any power over it? What kind of a future are we thrown into as human beings, whether by the cosmic powers, by God or by material accident? In Narada's answer, he

indicates that there is no fate without free-will; that the play of fate and free-will is a possibility within the Divine, a possibility of adventure that arises out of an obverse self-conception of God, God representing himself to himself as his own opposite. The Divine conceives of his own infinite Being as a Non-Being, a negative Infinity. This self-oblivion is also a dispersion of the Divine's Unity into a radical infinity. From this arises the possibility of the adventure of the recovery of Self in many selves. And this adventure is not alien to us as human beings, in fact it constitutes the essence of our being and becoming. Our souls are the creators, the authors of this adventure, we are the divine's dispersed self-possibilities. We are one with the Divine, who has multiplied himself into all the selves of this creation in the act of carrying out this possibility. Thus the gist of Narada's reply is that we are the creators of our fate :

O mortal who complainst of death and fate,
 Accuse none of the harms thyself hast called;
 This troubled world thou hast chosen for thy home,
 Thou art thyself the author of thy pain.
 Once in the immortal boundlessness of Self,
 In a vast of Truth and Consciousness and Light
 The soul looked out from its felicity.
 It felt the Spirit's interminable bliss,
 It knew itself deathless, timeless, spaceless, one,
 It saw the Eternal, lived in the Infinite.
 Then, curious of a shadow thrown by Truth,
 It strained towards some otherness of self,
 It was drawn to an unknown Face peering through night.
 It sensed a negative infinity,
 A void supernal whose immense excess
 Imitating God and everlasting Time
 Offered a ground for Nature's adverse birth
 And Matter's rigid hard unconsciousness
 Harboured the brilliance of a transient soul
 That lights up birth and death and ignorant life

Here we find the movement describing the beginning of evolutionary creation in an original duality. Sri Aurobindo brings this out as a kind of attraction, what today we may call a fascination, that the Conscious Being or Self felt towards its opposite. The root of self in each conscious being can be traced to this primordial Self, the centre of the circumferenceless circle of Being or Brahman. In the Indian tradition, this origin of self is known as Paramatman, Supreme Self.

Sri Aurobindo's use of the term soul here refers to that original Soul. Each of us is a self-presentation of that soul in our essence. In this sense, we have created the circumstance or condition we experience. It is our own choice. The self-conception of Infinite Being as a Negative Infinite immediately brings about the appearance of all archetypal dualities, and the possibility for nature's adverse birth, birth of nature through adversity, the birth of a self-representation of God through the adversity in nature.

A Mind arose that stared at Nothingness
 Till figures formed of what could never be;

This primordial attraction for the Other, an intrinsic tendency of radical infinity and a form of creative Delight, brings into existence a faculty of Conception, Mind. To "arise" is "to appear" or "to stand out," the literal meaning of "to exist" (existere). This faculty, Mind with a capital 'M', 'stared at Nothingness' — in other words, cast through Imagination the shadow of Non-Being in Being. To characterise the primordial intrinsic properties of Being, Sri Aurobindo here mentions deathlessness, timelessness, spacelessness and unity, or Immortality, Eternity, Infinity and Unity. We may say that each of these is a dimension of divinity — Immortality pertains to Consciousness, Eternity pertains to Time, Infinity pertains to Space and Unity pertains to Substance. The conception of Otherness brings the appearance of death to Consciousness, discreteness to Time, limitation to Space and fragmentation to Substance. By the Shadow, the opposites arose as apparent realities within Being.

Till figures formed of what could never be;
 It housed the contrary of all that is.
 A Nought appeared as Being's huge sealed cause,
 Its dumb support in a blank infinite,
 In whose abyss spirit must disappear:
 This is the Inconscience.
 A darkened Nature lived and held the seed
 Of Spirit hidden and feigning not to be.

The appearance of Nature as a Dark Infinity, a primordial Absence, becomes the "ground zero" housing the Involution of Spirit. Hidden in a seed form, this is the foundation for the systematic self-exploration of the powers of Being, the fullness of their measured manifestations. This is the Evolution.

And, breathed no more as spirit's native air,
 Bliss was an incident of a mortal hour,

There is a fragmentation of Self into multiple selves, of eternity into temporality, constrained by the appearance of births and deaths and because of the experience

of mortality, of that which ends. Bliss has to make its home within this mortality just as freedom has to make its home within this multiplicity.

A stranger in the insentient universe.

As one drawn by the grandeur of the Void

The soul attracted leaned to the Abyss:

The soul is eternally free in the enactment of all its possibilities. The entrapment in its opposite is a limit possibility which forms an extreme attraction for its self-experience and propels it into the adventure of self-loss and self-measure.

It longed for the adventure of Ignorance

And the marvel and surprise of the Unknown

And the endless possibility that lurked

In the womb of Chaos and in Nothing's gulf

Or looked from the unfathomed eyes of Chance.

Chaos, chance, the unknown, are opposites of that which is constant, eternal, predictable; that which is Knowledge Incarnate becomes the seed or condition from which the adventure of evolution can occur and the birth of Sachchidananda as an extension of the measures of its powers, can occur through its resistance to the adverse Will which exists to smother it out of existence. This forms the meaning of our universe.

It tired of its unchanging happiness,

Eternity is a static condition; but the contemplation of the Other gives birth to Time, the dynamic obverse of Eternity, which is perpetuity, its dynamis the powerful emergence of evolution.

It turned away from immortality:

It was drawn to hazard's call and danger's charm,

It yearned to the pathos of grief, the drama of pain,

Perdition's peril, the wounded bare escape,

The music of ruin and its glamour and crash,

The savour of pity and the gamble of love

And passion and the ambiguous face of Fate.

All these contraries of adversity that form the hallmark of human existence have an attraction and a delight to them. We may call it a vital attraction and a perverse delight, but within this, there is also a psychic attraction, a delight of the soul in overcoming impossible odds, in knowing freedom even in bondage and laughter in the midst of ruin, and in being able to wrestle with adversity towards fulfilment here under these conditions, leading to their eventual transformation.

A world of hard endeavour and difficult toil,
And battle on extinction's perilous verge,
A clash of forces, a vast incertitude,
The joy of creation out of Nothingness,
Strange meetings on the roads of Ignorance
And the companionship of half-known souls
Or the solitary greatness and lonely force
Of a separate being conquering its world,
Called it from its too safe eternity.
A huge descent began, a giant fall:
For what the spirit sees, creates a truth
And what the soul imagines is made a world.

In the absolute sense there is no manifestation, everything is an appearance. It is a dream of God but that dream of God is no less Real because each manifestation or part of God is none other than a self-presentation of God. Here, a possibility of existence finds manifestation and every such possibility is a play of delight. Infinite Delight finds a new form of self-manifestation as the emergence of consciousness through the struggle of dualities.

A Thought that leaped from the Timeless can become,
Indicator of cosmic consequence
And the itinerary of the gods,
A cyclic movement in eternal Time.

The Idea generated by the possibility of its Opposite becomes a reality which runs the course of its ramifications. This is a thought of God, a thought that can leap from the Timeless but is held as a *tapas* of Purusha, an image which spawns a movement or a cycle, a perpetual rebirth, a recurrence that is a structure of time. This is what this evolutionary universe is all about, a cyclic or spiral movement in eternal time.

Thus came, born from a blind tremendous choice,
This great perplexed and discontented world,
This haunt of Ignorance, this home of Pain:
There are pitched desire's tents, grief's head quarters.
A vast disguise conceals the Eternal's bliss.

Consenting to be trapped in its own opposite, the soul experiences perplexion, discontent and pain. Yet this entire appearance of grief, error, desire, pain and ignorance is a vast disguise that conceals the Eternal's bliss. The Divine delight hides in this world possibility and unveils itself through an evolution which is the soul's choice, its free-will, its freedom, not some blind destiny thrust upon the human soul.

The problem of pain arises due to the destiny of the earth. Here, Narada responds to Aswapati's queen's doubt as to whether some mechanical force has created this adverse appearance and thrust it upon human consciousness or whether a cruel or an impotent god was responsible for it. He says :

Was then the sun a dream because there is night?
Hidden in the mortal's heart the Eternal lives;
He lives secret in the chamber of thy soul,
A Light shines there nor pain nor grief can cross.
A darkness stands between thyself and him,
Thou canst not hear or feel the marvellous Guest,
Thou canst not see the beatific sun.
O queen, thy thought is a light of the Ignorance,
Its brilliant curtain hides from thee God's face.

It is the "vast disguise" that Narada is speaking about here, the disguise of pain and suffering which is not experienced as pain or suffering by the divine guest within us. It is experienced instead as a play of delight — not a lila without meaning or cause, but a purposive play that is a form of the delight of self-manifestation by the Divine. At the same time, Narada brings out the fact that the appearance of pain is a necessity within this play. It is a necessity because the will of Inconscience would keep consciousness asleep, were there not an intense force to smite it awake. Pain is that force. In the cosmic scheme of things, consciousness lies involved in the Inconscience and would so lie in its inertia, but intensity of force acts on its subconscious and rudimentary sentience, which feels the force but cannot bear its intensity. Thus it experiences pain and is forced to aspire for strength to meet the demands of force. This fuels the process of evolution. The force of pain was created so that it could reach the sleeping entity within the Inconscient through its intensity, an intensity of delight experienced as a whiplash, as something that goes so deep within that even the seeming death of Matter will yield up a stirring of consciousness, which is the beginning of a Will that turns into the full-fledged appearance of aspiration within the Inconscient. Thus pain is seen in this passage to be the original act of the Divine to wake an evolution of consciousness from its involvement in its Opposite. As Narada puts it :

Thy mind's light hides from thee the Eternal's thought,
Thy heart's hopes hide from thee the Eternal's will,
Earth's joys shut from thee the Immortal's bliss.
Thence rose the need of a dark intruding god,
The world's dread teacher, the creator, pain.

Where Ignorance is, there suffering too must come;
Thy grief is a cry of darkness to the Light;
Pain was the first-born of the Inconscience
Which was thy body's dumb original base;
Already slept there pain's subconscious shape:
A shadow in a shadowy tenebrous womb,
Till life shall move, it waits to wake and be.
In one caul with joy came forth the dreadful Power.
In life's breast it was born hiding its twin;
But pain came first, then only joy could be.

The power of consciousness is held under an adverse will of Inconscience and cannot rise out of its inertia unless an external agent smites it awake:

Pain ploughed the first hard ground of the world-drowse.

Just as we need to plough the ground to let the grains of fertility appear, so Pain ploughs the Inconscient, causing Spirit to evolve from Matter.

By pain a spirit started from the clod,
By pain Life stirred in the subliminal deep.
Interned, submerged, hidden in Matter's trance
Awoke to itself the dreamer, sleeping Mind;

The powers of Consciousness, Life, Mind and powers yet to come, awake because Pain forces an aspiration; consciousness hidden within the Ignorance is forced awake, and calls to its own origin of freedom, deathlessness and delight, because its contraries are experienced in the condition of suffering, making it sense its helplessness and call to its own potential to emerge.

It made a visible realm out of its dreams,
It drew its shapes from the subconscious depths,
Then turned to look upon the world it had made.
By pain and joy, the bright and tenebrous twins,
The inanimate world perceived its sentient soul,

Sri Aurobindo draws out the contribution of the dualities of pain and joy, to the awakening of the soul.

Else had the Inconscient never suffered change.
Inconscience would never change, it would remain inconscient.
Pain is the hammer of the Gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart,
His slow inertia as of living stone.

In human lives, much of our potential is submerged in an Inconscience or Subconscience. The experience of pain makes us aspire intensely to awake to our own divinity. Else, we would have remained sunk in *tamas*.

If the heart were not forced to want and weep,
His soul would have lain down content, at ease,
And never thought to exceed the human start
And never learned to climb towards the Sun.

After talking about pain as an external cosmic power helping the soul to emerge, Narada conjures another powerful image to explain pain. He says

The earth is full of labour, packed with pain;
Throes of an endless birth coerce her still;

We see here that the individual is a representative of the cosmic condition. In the idea which Narada expresses now, the experience of pain is clearly not the experience of a personal force waking up the human soul, but a cosmic force waking up the cosmic soul. This process of waking is being experienced by the Cosmic Being, an experience which is one of giving birth. It is a very interesting passage where Sri Aurobindo suddenly interjects the word 'labour' in a double sense, a powerful pun, labour as toil but labour also as the "labour pains" of the mother giving birth. "The earth is full of labour packed with pain." That pain is not merely the labour of the struggle of the work that is going on in the world to give birth to an impersonal Divine Soul but the labour pain of the Cosmic Mother giving birth to her own child. This sense is further reinforced by the next line. We can experience the fact that pain is not merely a dark intruding god but an experience of the Divine Mother giving birth to her own divine possibilities. He continues with this sense of the image of giving birth :

The centuries end, the ages vainly pass
And yet the Godhead in her is not born.
The ancient Mother faces all with joy,
Calls for the ardent pang, the grandiose thrill;
For with pain and labour all creation comes.
This earth is full of the anguish of the gods;

Once we understand that this pain is the labour pain of the mother trying to give birth, if we were to experience it, that is experienced as a form of joy, the mother's fierce joy in birthing, the pain is transformed into a form of delight and at the same time, a hint of the Cosmic Mother's consciousness of the world is experienced by us. This is a profound opening towards the transformation of the power of pain.

Narada next moves to the gods. How do the gods experience the pain?
This earth is full of the anguish of the gods;
Ever they travail driven by Time's goad,
And strive to work out the eternal Will
And shape the life divine in mortal forms.
This is the struggle of the cosmic powers.
His will must be worked out in human breasts
Against the Evil that rises from the gulfs,
Against the world's Ignorance and its obstinate strength,
Against the stumblings of man's pervert will,
Against the deep folly of his human mind,
Against the blind reluctance of his heart.
The spirit is doomed to pain till man is free.

And here we see the adverse powers pitted as dualities with the gods, the power of light having turned to darkness, truth turned to falsehood, life turned to death, and of joy turned to sorrow, all as causes of pain. Narada says :

His will must be worked out in human breasts
Against the Evil that rises from the gulfs

This is the power of Falsehood that must be vanquished and transformed or replaced by Truth.

Against the world's Ignorance and its obstinate strength

This is the power of Darkness that must be vanquished and transformed or replaced by Light..

Against the deep folly of his human mind
This continues with the power of Darkness, the absence of light.
Against the blind reluctance of his heart

This is the power of Suffering that must be vanquished and transformed or replaced by Joy. There is a reluctance in the human heart to affirm a shadowless Bliss. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother attribute this to an attachment to the human condition of limitation and mortality, a condition personified by a cosmic being known as the Man of Sorrows. Till to the aspiration to overcome all these is strong and one-pointed, our condition will remain what it is :

This spirit is doomed to pain till man is free.
There is a clamour of battle, a tramp, a march:
A cry arises like a moaning sea,

The human condition is one of great suffering. The vastness and depth of this suffering only the avatar can truly experience. Here Sri Aurobindo, with Narada

as his spokesperson, gives us the full sense of this cosmic suffering. Thus it is not imagination, it is something full of profound inner significance and power.

A desperate laughter under the blows of death,
A doom of blood and sweat and toil and tears.
Men die that man may live and God be born.

All the suffering, innumerable human beings like ants groping through countless experiences of wars, thousands and millions of lives passing through terrible suffering measure the emergence of archetypal man, the preservation of its possibility of evolving to the overman or God.

An awful Silence watches tragic Time.
Pain is the hand of Nature sculpting men
To greatness : an inspired labour chisels
With heavenly cruelty an unwilling mould.

Here the earlier idea, Falsehood would keep us Inconscient and waylay our divine possibilities, were it not for the experience of pain that pushes us always towards our divinity, is reiterated with a different nuance. Here the extra-human agency wielding Pain to aid the evolution is seen as an arche-artist, sculpting an epic. Like the image of the labour pains of the cosmic Mother, this image puts us in contact with the creative Delight behind the pain of the cosmos.

Subsequently, a long passage follows dealing with the suffering of the embodied Divine, the avatar. The suffering of the cosmos is the holocaust of the Divine in three ways – it is the self-limitation and abjection of the cosmic Being, it is the experience of the evolving soul in the cosmos and in each human being, and it is the experience of the embodied divine, the avatar, who repeatedly assumes the Ignorance, Falsehood, Suffering and Death of the universe to lead it from within to a self-overcoming. This passage pertaining to the avatar in the image of the sacrificed God-man, the Christ, will be dealt with in greater detail in another chapter, when we consider Sri Aurobindo's views on divine Incarnation.

Following this Narada wraps up his talk by saying that though suffering aids the evolution, it is necessary only when we lack consciousness. We should not seek it, when necessary it will come to us. It is not meant to be the end of this creation and should not be glorified.

The soul suffering is not eternity's key,
Or ransom by sorrow heaven's demand on life.
O mortal, bear, but ask not for the stroke,
Too soon will grief and anguish find thee out.

Too enormous is that venture for thy will;
Only in limits can man's strength be safe;
Yet is infinity thy spirit's goal;
Its bliss is there behind the world's face of tears.
A power is in thee that thou knowest not;
Thou art a vessel of the imprisoned spark.
It seeks relief from Time's envelopment,
And while thou shutst it in, the seal is pain:
Bliss is the Godhead's crown, eternal, free,
Unburdened by life's blind mystery of pain:
This unveiled bliss is what the entire creation, is trying to manifest.
Attesting the secret god denied by life:
Until life finds him pain can never end.
Calm is self's victory overcoming fate.
Bear; thou shalt find at last thy road to bliss.

Narada concludes with the vision of the manifestation of Divine Bliss, Ananda in the last few lines of that passage. The hermeneutic circle comes whole, Delight out of which the holocaust of the Divine and the suffering of the evolving cosmos took its birth, vindicates itself eventually in a Divine Life on earth, the essence of whose experience is an unveiled and unshadowed Delight.

Bliss is the secret stuff of all that lives.
Even pain and grief are garbs of world-delight,
It hides behind thy sorrow and thy cry.
Because thy strength is a part and not God's whole,
Because afflicted by the little self
Thy consciousness forgets to be divine
As it walks in the vague penumbra of the flesh
And cannot bear the world's tremendous touch,
Thou criest out and sayst that there is pain.
Indifference, pain and joy, a triple disguise,
Attire of the rapturous Dancer in the ways,
Withhold from thee the body of God's bliss.
Thy spirit's strength shall make thee one with God,
Thy agony shall change to ecstasy,
Indifference deepen into infinity's calm
And joy laugh nude on the peaks of the Absolute.

Pleasure, pain and neutrality are the three affective experiences through which Delight manifests in the play of Ignorance in the cosmos. With the divinisation

of human consciousness, each of these will reveal the Delight of which they are a disguise, to express the fullness of an unveiled life of Bliss. It is instructive to note that even in the earliest formulations of Sri Aurobindo's yoga to himself, in his diary entries (*The Record of Yoga*), this triple transformation of affect is a key aspect of perfection (*siddhi*). The conversion of pain to bliss in the body is called by him there *raudrananda*; the condition of a neutral equality (*samata*) deepens to a peace (*shanti*) and happiness (*sukham*) which nothing can disturb; and the ultimate fulfilment of affect is a perpetual ecstasy and inner state of laughter (*hasya*), "the image of the smile of Sri Krishna playing, *balavat*, as the eternal *balaka* and *kumara* in the garden of the world."

(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)

A Dialogue Between Thomas Aquinas And Sri Aurobindo

Donald Goergen

In the twentieth century, among all the sages of India, Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghose) stands out as philosopher and mystic par excellence.¹ To his followers, he is even more. In a somewhat comparable vein, for Christians in the Catholic Tradition, Saint Thomas Aquinas plays a similar role: unsurpassed Christian philosopher, theologian, spiritual master.² Granted that the periods of history from which they come (1224-1274; 1872-1950), and granted inevitable differences between a thirteenth century mystical and philosophical theologian from the West and a twentieth century luminous guru from the East, both transcend history and culture while at the same time being embedded therein. Aurobindo was a spokesperson for Indian culture and spirituality; Aquinas for the Christian Middle Ages and beyond. Aurobindo, born in India, was nevertheless educated in England and grew up with English as his first language, and Aquinas was quite conversant with Jewish and Islamic thought, although he could not read Greek nor had ventured east. Both were men of wide intellectual experience. But the questions we are asking are: what of their insights into the divine? Who or what do we say that God is? There are many potential areas of contrast: metaphysics, epistemology, anthropology, interpretations of Jesus Christ, spiritual practice, and an understanding of grace and freedom along with many others. But we must step into the river somewhere. What might a follower

¹ Biographies recommended. Nirodbaran, *Sri Aurobindo for All Ages, A Biography* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1990), a delightful and shorter work; and A.B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1978), an insightful and more extensive work than that of Nirodbaran, are both works by devotees. Purani's also contains valuable appendices and a chronology of Aurobindo's life. Purani's book contains valuable bibliography.

² For scholarly biographical works, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 2 vols., vol. 1: *The Person and His Work*, vol. 2: *Spiritual Master*, both trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996 & 2003 respectively); and James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino, His Life, Thought, and Works*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983).

of Sri Aurobindo have to gain from reading Thomas Aquinas, and vice-versa, if anything?

It is not our intent to speak about who may be right or who may be wrong. The question is simply what the points of divergence are, how divergent are they, and whether the divergences are incompatible. How “Aurobindonian” might a Catholic Christian be, or how “Thomistic” might a follower of Sri Aurobindo be? What is to be gained from their dialogue? Scott Steinkerchner, in a pathmaking way, explored what dialogue might mean beyond the desire to find agreement.³ If a follower of Sri Aurobindo never becomes nor has any intention of becoming Christian, and if a student of Thomas Aquinas would not see himself going all the way with Sri Aurobindo, what is there to be gained? How far apart are we? Are we far apart at all? How far is “far”?

And so I propose to begin this dialogue between two spiritual masters with the question of God’s relationship to the world – setting aside for now the many other questions that can and ought to be raised. What do they say of the Ultimate? Even here we cannot explore every question that lies before us. Thomas Aquinas was a master of the question, the *quaestio* and the *quaestio disputata*.⁴ He would neither be uncomfortable with contrasting points of view nor too quickly resolve a dilemma without a look at more than one side. Likewise, Sri Aurobindo was quite aware that he and the Mother were treading new ground, tilling new soil, and taking us where others had not gone.⁵ He was familiar with religious thought both West and East. Thus we proceed, with a little fear and trembling, to use a Pauline phrase (Philippians 2:12). We step into the river.

What word shall we use? By what name dare we name the Ultimate, the Absolute? For Thomas Aquinas, the word is clearly “God.” Already in the first part of his *Summa Theologiae*, in his exploration of the preambles to Christian faith, he is able to say, “And this is what all people call God (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q 2, a 3). And as comprehensive as were his interests, he is always theologian⁶ – looking at the real through the eyes of Christian faith – seeking truth, grounded in faith in Jesus Christ, for the sake of the gospel of God. His two *summas* (the earlier *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the later *Summa Theologiae*) are all about God. Although we could begin with the word God for Sri Aurobindo as well,

³ Scott Steinkerchner, *Beyond Agreement, Interreligious Dialogue and Persistent Differences* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011).

⁴ Cf. M.-D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, trans. A.-M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago: Regnery, 1964).

⁵ E.g., for an exploration of his thought, see Satprem, *Sri Aurobindo, or The Adventure of Consciousness*, trans. Luc Venet (Mt. Vernon, WA: Institute for Evolutionary Research, 1993).

⁶ Thomas F. O’Meara, *Thomas Aquinas Theologian* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

we might be led astray as points of contrast. For Aquinas the God of whom he speaks is certainly the Triune God, and for Aurobindo the ultimate is *sat-chit-ananda*. But the word “God” does not capture the fullness of this ultimate reality, not that the ultimate is not divine. It is the divine that Aurobindo seeks and seeks to disclose. But at this point we may wish to stay with the Upanishadic concept of *Brahman* (perhaps best left untranslated or translated as ‘the divine’ or ‘God’).⁷ What are some, and only some, points of contrast between Aurobindo’s approach to Brahman and Aquinas’s approach to God?

God and Creation

How are creatures produced, where does *maya* come from? How does creation come forth from God, the many from the One? What is the relationship between *Brahman* and the worlds of spirit and matter? The relationship between *Atman* and *Brahman*?

For Aurobindo, all things come forth from the divine Absolute; likewise for Aquinas as well. However, for Aurobindo, Brahman produces the created order *from Itself*; for Aquinas, God brings forth creatures *ex nihilo*. For Aquinas there is *nothing* that explains the reality of creatures, ontologically or epistemologically, other than God. One could say the same of Aurobindo except for the kind of causality that seems involved. For Aurobindo, creation or the world or *maya* is an emanation of the divine. Aquinas himself uses the word emanation in his discussion of the production of creatures in the first part of his *Summa Theologiae*.⁸ However, for Aquinas, there is always the bringing into being that which, in its origins, is *other* than God. There is a separation at the same time that there is a connection. God and creatures are distinct; the world itself is not divine. The creature is not God. For Aurobindo *maya* is not Brahman, yet *Atman* is. We might put it this way for now : for Aurobindo, the divine is the material cause of creation, or *quasi*-material cause. For Aquinas God is the efficient cause. Therein lies a difference. For both, however, God remains in the order of final cause as well. These words are clearly Aristotelian in their origin but can have clarifying power for us. “How” God allows a world to come to be differs. How God’s involvement in that production is envisaged differs. Who God is then is at least somewhat different. Who is the God of Sri Aurobindo, and what is the divine for Thomas Aquinas?

⁷ For Aurobindo’s own commentary, see Sri Aurobindo, *The Upanishads, Texts, Translations, and Commentaries* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1981).

⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, the treatise on creation, questions 44 and following. “The next question concerns the *mode* of the emanation of things from the First Principle, and this is called creation (I, q. 45, italics mine).

While at this point it might appear as if the two are far apart on this particular question of the coming to be of the many, both clearly see the world of creatures as *real*, but not ultimate, and both see God and the universe intricately and intimately connected, the universe as permeated with the divine – granting a *separation* due to ignorance for Aurobindo or due to the nature of creation itself as well as to sin which is another whole topic for discussion. But Aquinas sees traces of God everywhere and the presence of God in creation is immense.⁹ Yet creation is not God. What are we to make of this distinction, and how does Aquinas see the relationship?

For Aquinas, the so-called material cause of creation is absolutely nothing. Tracing material causality back as far as one intelligibly can, there is only potentiality, pure potentiality, what Aristotle and Aquinas would have called prime or primal matter, a material principle so to speak but one that lacks all actuality. Even this primal non-actual but actualisable reality comes from God. It does not pre-exist or exist alongside of God. God creates the potential along with the actual at the same time as God creates time. Prior to God, there is no potentiality in the strict sense, although there is certainly the power of God, but one does not speak of potentiality in God, for God is pure actuality. God Himself is the Source of potentiality in the universe that He creates.

The ‘connection’ between God and creation, for Aquinas, is expressed through his teaching on participation, itself complex and not always unambiguous.¹⁰ All of creation participates in God – to ever greater and greater degrees: from the presence of God in all things through the presence of immensity whereby God is present in *all* things by his substance, presence and power, and particularly in spiritual creatures in their intellects and will; to a special presence in rational creatures through a supernatural reality that Thomas in accord with his tradition names grace; to a unique presence in the humanity of Jesus Christ.¹¹ Christ’s humanity participates in the divine nature, is more closely united to the divine nature, is in fact hypostatically united to the divine nature, that is in one person, more than one finds elsewhere among all God’s creatures. But God is incredibly one with all intellectual creatures to an astounding degree of participation.

⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, question 8.

¹⁰ Rudi, A. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995). Numerous references in Aquinas’s *ST* to the theme of participation could also be listed.

¹¹ Following his discussion of God’s presence in all things, and in a distinct way in rational creatures, Thomas writes: “No other perfection, except grace, added to substance, renders God present in anything as the object known and loved; therefore only grace constitutes a special mode of God’s existence in things. There is, however, another special mode of God’s existence in man by union [i.e., the hypostatic union] which will be treated of in its own place (Pt III) [the Treatise on Christology and the humanity of Christ]”, *ST*, I, q 8, article 3, reply to fourth objection.

Aquinas devotes a major section of the *prima pars* of his *Summa Theologiae* to the angelic world although the more focal point of creation remains the human person whose life is (by grace) animated by a supernatural principle that is none other than the Holy Spirit itself. There are traces of the divine everywhere although only the rational creature images the divine, is truly like the divine, created to be like God Himself.

The doctrine of participation can in fact be seen as the underlying cohesive and organisational principle of the three parts of the *Summa Theologiae*.¹² God’s presence in all things, or all things’ participation in God, including rational creatures in terms of their natures alone, comprises the first part of the *Summa*. An even deeper degree of participation in God or manifestation of God is the subject of the second part of the *Summa* where the teaching on grace as partaking of the divine nature and of our being gods by participation is the link between the two parts of this second part of the *Summa* — the life of grace and its overflow into the life of supernatural or infused virtue that comprises Christian life. And the *tertia pars* of the *Summa* treats of Christ and His sacraments, especially the Eucharist, a greater degree of participation in the divine than which there could not be. So all of creation is deeply connected to God, inexplicable apart from God, never indeed ontologically separated from God, although not in essence God. There is an ontological divide as well as an ontological link. We are creatures and only God is God, but we too are gods by participation,¹³ and in that sense created gods.¹⁴ But only God is the Uncreated God. Only God is uncreated. Before turning to Sri Aurobindo, let us ask another question of Aquinas.

Is the relationship between God and the world real? This may seem like an odd question. Of course it is real; God creates the world; the world is God’s creation and all the world participates in being which is what God ultimately is – That Which Is.¹⁵ However, upon reflection, undoubtedly God’s relationship

¹² The first part pertains to God as Unparticipating or Participated Being in His Triune Life and the participation of all creation through the omnipresence of God by immensity. The second part pertains to the rational creature and the pivotal questions on grace connecting the first and second parts of the second part, grace as a distinctive form of participation. And the third part deals with Christ and the sacraments of the Church, Christ’s humanity participating to an even higher degree or in a different way, as Incarnation, in divinity and the sacraments as actions of the risen Christ through His Church.

¹³ This theme of deification is most strong in Eastern and Orthodox Christian theology, but it is also found in Augustine and Aquinas. E.g. in Aquinas, “God is happiness by His Essence: for He is happy not by acquisition or participation of something else, but by His Essence. On the other hand, men are happy, as Boethius says (De Consol. iii), by participation; just as they are called ‘gods’, by participation. And this participation of happiness, in respect of which man is said to be happy, is something created” (*ST*, I-II, q 3, a 1, ad 1).

¹⁴ This is emphasised strongly in the writings of the twentieth century Spanish Dominican mystical theologian, Juan Arinero, *The Mystical Evolution in the Development and Vitality of the Church*.

¹⁵ *Ipsam Esse Subsistens*, or *He Who Is*. See Aquinas, *ST*, I, q 13, a 11.

to the world is quite different from the creature's relationship to God. God does not need the world in order to be. God's Being is necessary; the being of a creature is contingent and dependent. In other words, for Aquinas, God's relationship to the world is *not* real in that it lacks any basis in God Himself that requires relatedness to anything 'outside' Himself, is a relationship for sure but a relationship of an entirely different order than that kind which constitutes our relationship to God. We are participating beings; God is Unparticipating or Absolute Being¹⁶ or Being Itself whose very essence is His existence, whose very essence is to be. We could not be. We only are due to God's causing us to be. God cannot not be. Our being is, so to speak, on loan from God¹⁷ who creates and sustains us. Were God to withdraw His act of being from us we would no longer be. So great is our dependence on God whose being is totally independent of us. This is what Aquinas means when he says that creatures are really related to God but God not really related to creatures.¹⁸ God's relationship to us, namely that of a Creator to His creatures, is more of a *relatio rationis* than a *relatio realis*. It is one that we can "see," that we can understand, that we know is real from the vantage point of creatures, but from the vantage point of the divine all is different. In other words we know God from His effects, according to Aquinas, and from the perspective of his effects our relationship to God is real, dependent, like maya in so far as maya is understood to have a degree of reality to it. But, on the side of God, it is a relationship of pure dependence on our part, of having no necessary basis in what is ultimately real, of being utterly free and

¹⁶ "Therefore all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation. Therefore it must be that all things, which are diversified by the diverse participation of being, so as to be more or less perfect, are caused by one First Being, Who possesses being most perfectly" (Aquinas, *ST*, I, q 44, a 1). "Everything participated is compared to the participator as its act. But whatever created form be supposed to subsist per se, must have existence by participation; for even life, or anything of that sort, is a participator of existence, as Dionysius says. Now participated existence is limited by the capacity of the participator; so that God alone Who is His own existence, is pure act and infinite. But in intellectual substances there is composition of actuality and potentiality, not, indeed, of matter and form, but of form and participated existence. Wherefore some say that they are composed of that whereby they are and that which they are; for existence itself is that by which a thing is" (Aquinas, *ST*, I, q 75, a 5, ad 4).

¹⁷ Meister Eckhart uses this image of "loan" in his Book of Divine Consolation: "Everything that is good and is goodness God has loaned him, not given him. Anyone who sees the truth knows that God, the heavenly Father, gives everything that is good to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; but to his creatures he gives nothing good, he lets them have it as a loan. The sun gives heat to the air, but makes a loan of light; and that is why, as soon as the sun goes down, the air loses the light, but the heat remains there, because the heat is given to the air to possess as its own. Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense, trans./ed. Colledge and McGinn, Classics of Western Spirituality ((New York: Paulist Press, 1981): 224.

¹⁸ See the text in Aquinas, *ST*, I, q 6, a 2, ad 1. Also see Eleonore Stumpf, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 115-127.

gratuitous. In fact, that is what the teaching on creation is for Aquinas, or hopes to undergird, the freedom of God, and hence the mercy and the love of God, that we who could not be in fact are – due to God's freely having chosen to share life with us. Certainly for Aquinas God's relationship to us as not being a *relatio realis* does not mean His not loving us and calling us into intimate union with Himself. But let us now see how different this may be from the way Sri Aurobindo sees it.

From the Perspective of Sri Aurobindo

At this point let us move to a brief dialogue between Aurobindo and Aquinas. At first sight it may seem strange to invite the two of them into a dialogue, except that both represent almost unsurpassable moments in intellectual and mystical history – one for India, the other for the Christian West. Neither has as such been surpassed in depth. Yet one might expect to contrast Aurobindo more with a Christian philosopher of a more Platonic or Plotinian bent; some parallels come more quickly to the surface. On the other hand, given Aurobindo's awareness of the evolving nature of this world, there is an Aristotelian dimension there. For Aurobindo, in contrast say to Shankara, *this world is real* – even if the character of its reality is not the same as that of Spirit, which would be true for Aquinas as well. This world is real, and the starting point in our journey toward God, even if this world is not ultimate but contingent. In the end Aurobindo sees more of a future for this world, transformed, for the body, than any emphasis in Aquinas might lead one to believe – although for him the resurrection of the body flows easily from his less Platonic world view.

But where to begin this dialogue? The writings of both are voluminous. We will stay primarily with insights from Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, a work of his mature years, and Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*. A.B. Purani gave very well crafted (and concise for Western ears) lectures in the United States on Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*.¹⁹ So the prospect for this dialogue may go better by taking some statements from Purani's lectures, more poignantly put than I could do and more concisely stated than Aurobindo's text would allow in this context. Our focus will be on certain thoughts in the thirteenth chapter of the *The Life Divine*. These will be direct quotes from Purani's lectures. To these Aquinas will respond — not with the intention that there will be agreement. Indeed the goal is beyond agreement, but there can in both cases be deepened understanding.

¹⁹ A.B. Purani, *Sri Aurobindo's Life Divine* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1997). All the quotations from Purani that follow are from this series of lectures delivered in the U.S.A. in 1962, from pages 132-141.

AUROBINDO (Purani) : “The problem is: how can the One, Infinite and Eternal – free from all limitations, and relativities – create something that is finite – a world of conflict, suffering, pain and evil? How does the One Being manage to become the world?”

AQUINAS : An important question indeed. I too see the One, the One-Who-Is, the One self-revealed already to Moses as portrayed in the Book of Exodus, as infinite, eternal, not a composite, utterly simply, beyond our capacity to know, yet one to whom our language fittingly but analogously applies. He is free from all limitations, all relativities, and yet is the Source of all that is. In Him there is no distinction between what He is and that He is. His essence, so to speak, is simply to be. And so how can many come forth from this One, this unlimited One? We may later get to His freely chosen self-limitation for the sake of others, but that gets us much further ahead.²⁰ I too have struggled with the origins of evil, pain, and suffering, and how they might relate to an infinitely good, all-good God. But how does this One manage to become a world, as you ask? I would ask as well, does this One *become*, truly become, become the world, His creation, *maya*? In other words, from where does this world come? How understand its origins?

AUROBINDO (Purani) : “The explanation of the process may be the three-fold movement of the Absolute – or, what to the mind appears to be the triple movement. The first process seems to be the involution of the Divine into the Inconscient. That which we see or know as the Infinite and Eternal has involved itself in Something quite opposite of its own Self.”

AQUINAS : I deeply appreciate your way of putting this. I myself would not put it that way. If I understand you, I could not put it that way. I like the expression, “the three-fold movement.” But it is the first movement that does not resonate with my understanding. I am not sure how to understand this involution. Do you see this God as actually projecting, inserting, immersing Himself into creation – losing Himself in some sense in what He creates? Or is this more akin to what I would call an emanation? Or would it be more like planting seeds of the divine in things, in what I call creation? This is a word that I myself use, but in a different way. Emanation might more reflect the thought and experience of someone like Plotinus, or even our St. Augustine in some sense, although he too would see it differently. To my more Aristotelian way of putting it, it strikes me that you make God not only the efficient cause and the final cause of all that is, but also in some way the material cause. God *becomes*. Also, the “Something quite opposite” raises a question. The only opposite to the One is, so to speak,

nothing, *nihil*, that which lacks any reality whatsoever. God gives beings being for sure, but those beings are distinct from God even though their acts of being, acts of existence, come from God. Nor do I question the omnipresence of the divine in all of creation. Your emphasis on involution suggests more than this. He is the Source for sure, but things come to be from nothing. God lets them be – indeed creates them. I would not want to see that nothing in too positive a light, not as Something in its own right. Until God brings forth beings other than Himself, there is *nothing* other, nothing into which he might involve Himself, although He certainly is involved in creation in another sense. So let us reserve this notion of involution for further reflection.

AUROBINDO (Purani) : “Second is the process of Evolution or rather emergence. The One, Infinite that is involved in the inconscient is rising, emerging from there into the triple world of matter, life and mind.”

AQUINAS: I can follow you here and go along with how you put it. Although the notion of evolution was not available to me when I struggled with these questions, it can be today an insightful way to understand God’s creation and God’s way of creating. God creates the world evolutively. I myself was always open to new ways of understanding. Perhaps that is why I so consistently attempted to understand Aristotle and to use him to help me. So the notion of evolution fits well even though the concept was not available to me as such. And today, more and more, even scientifically, even for materialists who neither of us is, evolution takes steps by way of emergence. Evolution is emergence. The question will still remain how the One is involved in the emergence, in the inconscient as you put it, in the world of matter. But I too have seen these stages of matter, life, and mind. Even if I had not put them together evolutively, I did nevertheless hierarchically. The first part of my *Summa Theologiae* dealt with God and creation. And I saw traces of God in the material world itself. And I understood there to be even more being, or deeper participation in Being, among the living. There is more to life than matter alone. The same is true with sentient life. I saw living creatures as having a vegetative soul, and sentient creatures as have a sensory soul, and of course human creatures, or mental creatures as having an intellectual soul, just one soul of course that performs all the functions of life and sense and thought. I also saw that there was more than a trace of God in mind or the mental world; these creatures, we creatures, were images of God, like God in a unique way. Thus mind, soul, and the human person were the focus of the second part of my *Summa*. It is as if each part of the *Summa* moved from God’s omnipresence, God’s immensity, in the first part, to God’s presence in rational creatures through intelligence, freedom, and grace. Grace in fact becomes

²⁰ Donald Goergen, *The Power of Love* (Chicago: Thomas More, 1979): 192-213.

crucial here. And the third part of the *Summa* yields the highest degree of participation, that of the humanity of Jesus Christ in the Godhead. But we need not go into grace and Christ here. We have just begun this dialogue. But I like your way of putting this ‘second process,’ the unfolding of God’s presence in the universe.

AUROBINDO (Purani) : “Third is the process which is working out the One at play in the World. It would end by the recovery of Satchidananda.”

AQUINAS : Aha! Although our linguistic forms differ, our ways of putting it, and undoubtedly some nuances as well, I am comfortable with what you say. For each of us, of course, at this point, there remains much left unsaid. We come now to God’s purpose in all this, God’s purpose in freely creating a world distinct from Himself, or as you might put it, the Divine’s intent when involving or involuting Itself or the purpose of that involution. Clearly the Absolute is at work in the world. You use the word “play.” It is an attractive, even if it may need to be nuanced for some Westerners. I myself can use words like delight or enjoyment, how God takes delight in His creatures, enjoys His creation. But at the heart of the matter is “the recovery” of Satchidanada, as you say. We must set aside for now this way of speaking of the Absolute as Being-Consciousness-Bliss, and how it connects if at all to our Christian Trinity, although we certainly do see God as Being, as Pure Awareness, and as Beatitude. But that would be too tempting a diversion. Let’s just stay with the word recovery. Something is being recovered. Something lost is being found or restored. That Something is Someone. You might not as immediately put it in a personal way, but we both see matter, life, and mind as a movement toward the divine as its finality. Indeed, this pleases me – that we can both see it this way – as union with the Godhead, or emergence into the Godhead, being what it is all about. In fact, many, especially recently, in the twentieth century, have seen a theme of *exitus-reditus* as the underlying thematic structure of my *Summa Theologiae*.²¹ I also saw the structure as patterned after God’s deepening presence in creation, in humanity through grace, and in the Christ, or we might say three degrees of participation. But it is also true to say that I see the whole story as one of all things as coming forth from God (*exitus*) and returning (*reditus*) to God. God is the beginning and the end; the Alpha and the Omega. I think this is a point of our deepest agreement, even if we speak differently about how it all gets produced or comes forth, and how we get to the end, and how we even envision that end. We both do see the noble goal of recovering God — perhaps here as our saintly Augustine might

more likely put it, remembering God. We might also be bold enough to say, becoming God. But that too is for another day.

AUROBINDO (Purani) : “The next question is: what is or could be, the actual process by which the Reality – the One, infinite Reality turns itself into phenomena, this world. It must be some law within itself. It cannot be that something outside itself made it act – as there is nothing outside of it. It must be by a self-determining Power. And in the working of the power of self-determination, there must be a kind of selective power at work. When one takes up a determination it is a selection out of the whole material presented to oneself. When God said: ‘Let there be light and there was light’ – what does it mean? There were any number of things in the Infinite as potentialities – light as well as not-light were present. After selective self-determination by the Supreme, light was there – light that was a potentiality became an actuality. So light was selected as against non-light.”

AQUINAS : Respecting what we have already said, could I phrase the question differently? What within the infinite One accounts for its bringing into being creatures other than Itself, outside Itself so to speak, although nothing is truly outside the One? I do not see the Absolute turning Itself into something other than itself. It shares being with Its creatures, but that act of being by which all creatures are is a created or finite act of existence, not a part of the Absolute Itself. As I see it, we are not apart from God, but neither are we a part of God. God is Other as well as Presence, infinitely other than ourselves, yet infinitely present to and within us. The ‘law within’ to which you refer seems to me simply to be the law of freedom, thus, yes, self-determination, but an Absolute Freedom, and therein lies mystery which I have never been able adequately to put down other than to acknowledge it. The law, as you say, does not determine the One; the One makes the determination. It is a freely chosen self-limitation on the part of the Absolute, and here we get to the heart of the matter. I do not think you would disagree with this although you might not put it this way. But we need to acknowledge both the Absolute Freedom of the Infinite, indeed a Power as you put it, but at the same time Its Self-Limitation, which we Christians see supremely manifest in the Incarnation of Christ and its *kenotic* character. But again we are not ready to go there. I also need to clarify that for me it is not that there are potentialities in the Infinite that It can *become*, if you are suggesting that, but rather infinite possibilities that lay before Him, that He can actualise. I speak about these as future contingents. There are in the mind of God, so to speak, possibilities that God does not choose to actualise, other universes than our own that He could have created, future contingents still to come but also contingents that will never be. I said earlier that we come face to face here with

²¹ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 301-318.

mystery, but that mystery is the mystery of Love – Absolute Freedom, Absolute Love, the Power of Love. It is only love that explains the free decision of God to become entangled in a world other than Himself and yet a universe of His making, and this love can be described as a freely chosen self-limitation for the sake of the other. It is pure gratuity on God's part. Now I know that you will agree with most of this although we still conceptualise that creative moment, or I should say non-moment, differently.

AUROBINDO (Purani) : “There are two kinds of *maya*: the higher and the lower; the one by which the Infinite determines his own self-manifestation by the selective power, the second is the lower play of the *maya* in the mental, in the vital and in the material world. It is the higher *maya* that creates the world, the lower *maya* of mind, life and body which is concerned with intermediate terms.”

AQUINAS : This is important. I think I like this, but here we have to recognise that we are speaking different languages, and so it is not always easy to know for sure if we are intending the same thing. That is the difficulty in trying to speak across world-views. But the difficulty ought not prevent us from attempting to do so. Indian philosophical traditions, as I inadequately understand them, have many varied conceptions of what *maya* is. So there is that Power within the Infinite, that Power of the Infinite, to freely determine its Self-manifestations, or we might say also Self-limitations, or Self-revelations. There is that Power in God, that Power that is God, that Power that is of God, that is determinative of the manifestations (or creations) that the Absolute takes. In these manifestations, or this manifestation, God has already begun to reveal Himself or disclose His innermost Being. And you do speak of this higher *maya* as creating, although we may not understand this in the same way. I do not feel drawn to speak about Infinite as becoming the creation. The Creator creates it. It comes from nowhere and out of nothing except for the power of God. God is the only explanation for what is, but I am not sure we actually disagree on this point although it seems so.

But now to what you call a *lower maya*. I think we are in one accord here in so far as what you say acknowledges the *reality* of the world, of creation, indeed of *maya* in that sense – namely, that the world is not all illusory but is real, really real, even if not the ultimate but only relatively real, contingent, dependent. Its being is borrowed, so to speak, but it is really *ours*,²² even if ours on loan, not ours as the ultimate owners. God does not participate in Being, God is Being, but we *participate*. Our being is a participation in being. But back to

²² *Summa Theologiae*, I, q 6, a 4: “And so of all things there is one goodness and yet many goodnesses.”

this lower *maya*. I have a sense here that you are reflecting from within a different conceptual world (and I know how difficult that can be as I attempted to integrate or use an Aristotelian conceptual framework to express my deepest convictions, and how wonderful it would be today if someone were able to express their Christian convictions from within your frame of reference or from within Indian traditions)²³ but that from within your conceptual world you are talking about what I consider God's immense omnipresence, God's immanence, God's real presence in the world, God's presence outside Himself so to speak, that presence whereby God is in the world by His Presence, His Power, and His Essence. You give a degree of reality to *maya* that not all the philosophies of India acknowledge although you do so through your own deeply developed understanding of evolution. You stretch us when you take us beyond the mental world to the Supramental but unfortunately we cannot go there now either. It is just that your theory, if I may use that word, of evolution is more developed, more spiritual, more filled with consciousness than Western scientific accounts, and so were I to have had the theory of evolution available to me, and certainly were I to have had your theory, I could have seen good fits. Your universe is filled with the divine, immersed in the divine, all about the life divine, and so is my universe, drenched in God, participative in the divine, a divine milieu to use words from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin²⁴ with which I am quite comfortable. So the twofold *maya*: a Power within God to create, a Presence of God in the world – a Power and a Presence – that Power manifesting Itself in stages, that Presence present in degrees.

An Inconclusive Conclusion

We cannot go on longer at this time, although we have barely touched the surface. There are so many other areas for consideration to which we have already alluded. But so far, do we see more differences or more similarities? I am not sure. Certainly both Aquinas and Aurobindo have a deeply spiritual sense and an awareness of the reality of spirit in the world. Both appreciate the reality of matter as well. Aurobindo is explicitly open to the value of an evolutionary perspective or way of speaking; Aquinas implicitly so. Both see the interconnectedness of all there is in the world as well as the world's real relationship to the divine. Both see the divine as in some sense constitutive of the universe. Both use the word ‘creation,’ although the manner of this creative

²³ See the work of Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths, but especially the dialogue between Bede Griffiths and K.D. Sethna (Amal Kiran) in *A Follower of Christ and a Disciple of Sri Aurobindo*, Correspondence (Waterford CT: The Integral Life Foundation, 1996).

²⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu* (1927), trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

movement seems to differ. For Aquinas it is simply creation. Aurobindo speaks about an involution that seems to be more than what Aquinas sees as the omnipresent traces of the divine that emerge by stages from matter through life to the world of human consciousness. Aurobindo will develop the evolution of consciousness in greater detail than Aquinas but we have not yet gone there. Both affirm the Freedom and the Power of the divine. Both see the facet of Self-limitation involved in creation and for Aquinas supremely manifest in the Incarnation. But we have not gone there either. In both we see a world drenched in God, in the Divine, in the Absolute, and God's Love for the world. For both, all comes from the Absolute and is returning to the Absolute. Both see the Absolute as Infinite Being, Consciousness, and Supreme Happiness (or Bliss, Delight). Aurobindo also suggests God's play or *lila*. This is not absent in Aquinas even if not explicit in the same way. A Christian will speak about the glory of God. More can be said for sure, but the question at this point, and at a very preliminary point, is how different are the differences? They are two quite different thinkers, quite different mystics, for sure, but what might they learn from the other? An Aurobindonian might ponder the pure gratuity of God's creation and what one means by grace – so central to the thought of Aquinas. And the Thomist might ponder God's involvement in the world, in the creation that is real for each. How involved, or involuted, is God. Could both be described in some way by that highly ambiguous term “panentheistic”? Clearly God is in all and all is in God (1 Cor 15: 28). And there is a personal aspect to God for Aurobindo even if we have not explored that, while that aspect remains paramount for Aquinas. But let us let this be for now as we allow each to think about their way of articulating what they see – for the conceptual tools which each uses are clearly distinct.

How To Research Consciousness? Suggestions From Indian Psychology

Matthijs Cornelissen

One of the hallmarks of Indian Psychology is the central role it gives to consciousness. But how do you study consciousness? Consciousness is quintessentially subjective, and mainstream science does its level best to be as objective as possible. Can subjective and objective research be brought together in one single framework?

During the last few hundred years, the hard sciences have produced a stupendous increase in our knowledge of the workings of the mind and the physical correlates of our consciousness, but even their most fascinating findings have failed to shed much light on consciousness itself. One could even argue that all this effort has actually diminished our understanding of consciousness, as the physicalist bias of the hard sciences has strengthened the idea that consciousness is no more than “a causally ineffective epiphenomenon of the physical processes that take place in our nervous system”. And this, to borrow Dennet's phrase, is an exceedingly dangerous idea, because it trivialises virtually everything that is of real value in human life: meaning, truth, agency, feelings, love, beauty,

Social constructionism has added a radically new perspective to the world of science, as it has “problematised” the very idea of objective knowledge. Though this has led to the amusing “science wars”, constructionism and the hard sciences need not look at each other as implacable enemies: it is not hard to figure out that their views are not so much contradictory as complementary. While constructionism has focused on the first and the last stage of the scientific process — the formulation of the research question at the beginning, and the formulation of the results at the end — the hard sciences have focused on what comes in between — conducting experiments, collecting data, and using mathematics to analyse the results. It is in this middle stage that the hard sciences have made their greatest contribution to society, and it is this stage that researchers in the hard sciences value and enjoy.

There is much to be grateful for in the massive, collective labour of the hard sciences — its findings are valuable, effective and valid within their boundaries. Yet, it is also good to acknowledge its limitations and for scientists to pay attention to the wider social context in which they work. Only by working harmoniously together, the positivist and constructionist approaches to knowledge-generation can produce a harmonious picture that takes the social as well as the physical aspects of reality into account.

But what about psychology? It appears, unfortunately, that psychology has not yet found its *swar*, its own “song”, and its place in the collective harmony. What happens if we apply the dual perspective of social constructionism and objective science to psychology and consciousness studies? It is easy to see that social constructionism and its sister cognitive constructivism have something to contribute. Social influences do play a role in how people are aware of themselves and their surrounding, and how they “construct” (or perhaps rather give a form to) their knowledge. The hard sciences tell us about the workings of our nervous system and the physical correlates of consciousness. The quantitative methods of traditional mainstream psychology tell us reliably how large populations of citizens “behave” and what they know about themselves. The newer qualitative methods provide some insight in how individuals experience themselves. And yet, psychology has hardly scratched the surface. It has hardly gone beyond what people already know about themselves. Psychoanalysis and Transpersonal Psychology have made brave attempts to go deeper and go beyond, but their methods are not rigorous and self-critical enough, and as a result, the knowledge they provide is often lopsided and limited. Collectively we have not reached a clear understanding of what goes on within the deeper and higher layers of consciousness, the stuff most people are not aware of and that, yet, determines what happens on the surface of our being.

It is here that the Indian tradition can make its crucial contribution. Its yoga-based methods of enquiry that have been honed for millennia can do for the deep, subjective study of consciousness what the hard sciences have done for the in-depth, objective study of matter. If taken together, the three approaches may then produce complementary, and mutually enriching knowledge in all three fields, in the physical, social and psychological domains.

So, what would research in Indian Psychology look like? Its core would be the use of yoga (in its widest, deepest sense) to affect inner changes, to activate and undergo processes within the realm of consciousness, to move through and study the complex, subtle, inner worlds that our ordinary waking consciousness doesn’t allow us to see, and then to use this new knowledge to transform one’s outer and inner nature. The other half of the effort would be to share the new

knowledge and know-how in a manner that helps others to do the same. Interestingly the sharing of yoga-based research can take three very different but equally effective forms: The first is an “objective”, technical, prosaic description of a method, of something concrete and explicit which others can “do”. Good examples of this method might be the *Yogasutras* of Patanjali or Kamalashila’s *Bhavanakrama*: both give detailed, step-wise descriptions of how to reach higher states of consciousness. The second way is to describe the inner states and processes in such an evocative manner that the reader (or listener) can be carried by the language to a similar experience, or at least to a shadow of it. Typical examples of this second method are the verses of the *Rig Veda* and the *Upanishads*, the writings of Shankara, the poetry of Rumi, and Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*. All these authors did massive inner work, which then enabled them to write in such a manner that their texts carry the reader to far beyond his or her normal level of being and understanding. The third method is simply by sharing one’s “presence”, one’s style of being and responding to the world, so that the student can grow in his consciousness through some form of osmosis or “contagion”. All great yogis do this, but as typical examples of the third way, one could name Sri Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi. Both masters wrote little, hardly ever gave systematic instructions, and yet by their very being influenced millions and increased our knowledge of the “further reaches” of our human potential.

All this may seem very unscientific, and yet it may have more in common with the way science operates, than may be clear at first sight. After all the progress of science as a collective enterprise is not only made through the publication of scientific papers. New insights are also shared through their application in technology, and through the complex process of learning that takes place in universities and other research establishments. For students who want to become the next generation of scientists, it is not enough to study textbooks and research papers. They also have to absorb the methods and practices of their discipline, and, just as in yoga, the best amongst them have to manage spending time under the direct influence of the great exemplars of the preceding generation.

Perhaps one should consider then not only systematisers like Patanjali, but also poets like Rumi as researchers in the field of consciousness: both mastered complex inner processes, developed new knowledge, and an effective way to share their findings. While acknowledging fully that it may be more difficult to reach consensus on the value of a poem than on the validity of a mathematical formula or the effectiveness of a yogic “method”, one could perhaps argue that poetry plays a somewhat similar role in the field of inner consciousness studies,

as mathematical algorithms in the hard sciences: for those who can read them, they light up large and complex issues in a precise and quick fashion that ordinary, linear prose cannot match.

Finally, it may be relevant to note that in the hard sciences, one can distinguish a continuum that has, on the one side, a small number of really great scientists who help the field to take large steps forward, and on the other side a huge mass of minor researchers who corroborate the findings of the really great. The former get famous, and rightly so, and yet, the latter are also important, as they add solidity, mass and sometimes detail to the body of science, even if they add little of entirely new knowledge. Similarly, in the field of consciousness-based psychological research, one can make a difference between the really great — yogis like the Rishis of the *Rig Veda*, Rumi, and Sri Aurobindo — and a large mass of “small-timers”, people who can take up the texts of the really great, try to apply them in themselves, and then, for example through the qualitative methods of collaborative research, corroborate, refine, or problematise the findings of the great.

Putting the various elements of the argument together, we could then say first that the positivist methods of the hard sciences, the constructionist approaches of the social sciences, and the yoga-based methods of (Indian) psychology may give humanity a fairly comprehensive science of ourselves and the social and physical worlds we inhabit.

The second point is that within this triple framework, psychology should employ the whole range of methodologies: objective, positivist research for the study of the nervous system and its workings; quantitative, standardised surveys for large populations (and for the relative placement of individuals within those populations); qualitative research methods for in-depth studies of individuals and small groups; and first-person, yoga-based research for those who can discern and describe their inner processes with sufficient precision for others to profit from their findings.

Those interested in some further reading on the subject, could have a look at the IPI website, <http://ipi.org.in>, and especially at this web-page, <http://ipi.org.in/second/teaching-ip.php>, where some more information is available on teaching and research in Indian Psychology.

An Entanglement Of Chaotic Unity The Global Age And The Auroville Experiment

Richard Hartz

We have stumbled into the global age, but have yet to develop a global consciousness. Outer change has raced ahead of inner change. As the expansion of modernity collides with the finiteness of the earth, we struggle to reconcile progress with sustainability. Meanwhile the Westernisation that went with modernisation confronts the resurgence of civilisations that insist on preserving their own distinctive spirit. Though this complicates the problem, the dialogue of cultures could also help us to solve it by pooling our diverse resources in a coordinated effort.

Despite the differences between East and West, leading thinkers in both parts of the world arrived early in the twentieth century at similar diagnoses of the human condition. In Europe, for example, Henri Bergson noted that in humanity’s “excessively enlarged body, the spirit remains what it was, too small now to fill it, too feeble to direct it.” Reflecting on the machinery under whose weight modern life “groans half-crushed”, he concluded that “the mechanism demands a mysticism.”¹ In India, Sri Aurobindo saw that man “has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites.” Yet he was cautiously optimistic in his view that “the feeling that there is no other solution than the spiritual cannot but grow and become more imperative under the urgency of critical circumstance.”²

We live in a time when, as Sri Aurobindo observed almost a hundred years ago, “men and nations are drawn close together and partially united though in an inextricable, confused entanglement of chaotic unity.”³ The process creating this entanglement is now called globalisation. The word dates from the 1960s, but the drawing together of the human race has been going on for millennia. For

better or worse, it began to accelerate with the joining of the hemispheres at the time of Columbus. By the late nineteenth century this process had entered the phase commonly recognised as globalisation, implying a heightened interconnectedness and mutual impact on a worldwide scale, not only economic, but political, social and cultural.

Globalisation in this sense has been a manifestation of the expansive dynamics of the modern age. Since the late twentieth century, the dynamics of modernity have shown signs of breaking down. But the consequences of globalisation remain and are intensified, justifying the description of our times as the global age.⁴ On the most material level, as we become aware of the limited resources of the earth and the vulnerability of the Gaia system, the core value of expansion is replaced by that of sustainability. Progress itself, so central to modernity, is called into question. But perhaps what is needed is a more integral concept of progress.

This is the potential contribution of Auroville, which was initiated by the Mother as “a collective experiment for the progress of humanity”.⁵ A unique long-term field experiment with participants from all over the world, Auroville was set up to explore the possibility of unity in diversity under the conditions of the global age. Its design takes into account all the elements of the complex problem we face today: ecological, economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual. Situated on wasteland reclaimed through extensive afforestation, the experiment’s ecological component is most conspicuous in the Green Belt. The industrial, international, residential and cultural zones of the proposed town, first indicated in a sketch made by the Mother as early as 1965 and still gradually taking shape, show a conscious recognition of the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of the world problem. And since the hypothesis being tested in Auroville is that a viable human unity requires a spiritual foundation, this dimension is visibly symbolised by the Matrimandir with the silence of its luminous meditation chamber at the heart of it all.

The Mother insisted “on the fact that it will be an experiment, it is for making experiments – experiments, research, study.”⁶ The experimental nature of Auroville has to be kept in mind if the vicissitudes the project has passed through are to be seen in the right perspective. Experimental science proceeds through a combination of “successful” and “unsuccessful” experiments. Both are considered to be of equal value for the discovery of truth. An experiment is a failure only if nothing useful is learned from it, whether because of poor design, careless execution or shoddy documentation. From this point of view, whatever the apparent successes or failures of the Auroville experiment so far, its inspired

conception and the undiminished commitment, passion and integrity of the participants more than forty years after its inauguration ensure that it will continue to be worth observing.

It was to be expected that such an attempt at a dynamic spirituality grappling collectively with the complexities of contemporary life would confront inner and outer difficulties commensurate with the scope of its objective. Sri Aurobindo, at least, would not have been surprised. Anticipating the evolutionary need for such communities, he also foresaw the kinds of problems they were likely to face. “It might be,” he wrote, “that, in such a concentration of effort, all the difficulties of the change would present themselves with a concentrated force; for each seeker, carrying in himself the possibilities but also the imperfections of a world that has to be transformed, would bring in not only his capacities but his difficulties and the oppositions of the old nature and, mixed together in the restricted circle of a small and close common life, these might assume a considerably enhanced force of obstruction which would tend to counterbalance the enhanced power and concentration of the forces making for the evolution.”⁷

Sri Aurobindo was speaking from experience. He had encountered this disconcerting phenomenon even before an Ashram grew up around him. In a diary entry in 1913, when as yet only a few young men were staying with him, he observed: “The atmosphere of the house is full of the struggle and the opposition to the dharma of the satyayuga of which the assistants of the satyayuga are the chief instruments owing to their clinging to their egoism and small selfishnesses.”⁸ Later, when the Ashram had been established as a “laboratory” for his Yoga, Sri Aurobindo described it as “an epitome of the human nature that has to be changed” and commented: “Wherever humans are obliged to associate closely, what I saw described the other day as ‘the astonishing meannesses and caddishnesses inherent in human nature’ come quickly out.... But when one tries to do Yoga, one cannot fail to see that in oneself and not only, as most people do, see it in others, and once seen, then? Is it to be got rid of or to be kept? Most people here seem to want to keep it. Or they say it is too strong for them, they can’t help it!”⁹

Auroville’s aspiration for human unity was not likely to exempt it from similar contradictions. From the beginning, even with the best will, the members of the community struggled to live up to its ideals. One of them asked the Mother: “It seems very difficult to be able to want to achieve any specific aim and at the same time to love everyone. When we begin to want something and try to act with a particular result in mind, immediately we cut ourselves off from everyone who does not agree with that. In practice, how can we do both at the same time?” The Mother seemed momentarily puzzled : “You cut yourself off from people

who do not think as you do?...But not a single person thinks as you do!... So how can you love anyone?" The young Aurovilian explained: "As long as I don't want anything, it is all right."

A time-honoured solution to this dilemma would have been to give up the will to act. But the quietistic method was ruled out by the very nature of Auroville. After concentrating for a few minutes, the Mother said: "It is because when you want something, it is the ego that wants. So, the ego... must be ignored. The first thing to do is not to act for yourself but to act in obedience to the Divine, to express the divine Will.... When conflicts arise, and they arise all the time, for all of us – immediately it is as if one were drawing back into one's own skin. For that is what happens: each one draws back inside himself.... When we say, 'We are at the service of the Divine', it is not just words. It is He who should act through us, not we ourselves. The greatest objection is: How can we know the divine Will? But as a matter of fact, I tell you: if you sincerely renounce your personal will, you will know."¹⁰

Perhaps the thing we most need to do today, on the threshold of a global age, is to widen our too narrow, egocentric consciousness. The Mother suggested a number of simple exercises for making a beginning in this direction. These range from mind-expanding visualisation to methods of enlarging one's outlook by seeing things from other points of view.¹¹ At a more advanced level, we have the account of her experience of global consciousness in the truest sense, recorded on November 26, 1915. She described her physical body as "seized, first in its lower members and next the whole of it, by a sacred trembling which made all personal limits fall away little by little even in the most material sensation." The experience continued:

It was as a progressive dilatation of the cells until there was a complete identification with the earth: the body of the awakened consciousness was the terrestrial globe moving harmoniously in ethereal space. And the consciousness knew that its global body was thus moving in the arms of the universal Being, and it gave itself, it abandoned itself to It in an ecstasy of peaceful bliss.¹²

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Sri Aurobindo's Concept Of Education And The Mother's Contribution To It

Anurag Banerjee

Sri Aurobindo is considered to be one of the greatest poets and philosophers of the bygone century. His contribution in the field of politics is also invaluable though the span of his political career lasted for four years only. However, apart from the said fields he has also contributed significantly in the field of education. But the fame of Sri Aurobindo as a poet, philosopher, politician and seer is so vast that it has eclipsed the pivotal role he has played in the field of education.

History tells us that Sri Aurobindo's career as a professor began in 1898 when Prof. Littledale who taught English in the Baroda College went on leave. The next year, on the occasion of the Baroda College Social Gathering, Sri Aurobindo spoke on the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. After discussing elaborately on the social effects of the said universities he remarked that the same influences should also be exercised by the Indian universities to create a feeling of unity and natural brotherhood among the pupils. He also pointed out that every student of Oxford and Cambridge University craves to see the customs of his college well-preserved and hence he attempts to justify the customs to the world by the merit of his success in his area of work. This feeling, Sri Aurobindo mentions, was not yet developed among the Indians and he advised the students to develop this feeling. While concluding his speech, Sri Aurobindo said that the students must strive for eminence and greatness in their respective lines without dropping the influence of the college training and by the brilliance of their names "add lustre to the first nursing home" of the capacities of the students and to treasure the memories of the years spent at the institutions which have equipped and developed their intellectual faculties and transformed them into men.

Following the recommendation of Principal Tait of Baroda College, Sayaji Rao Gaekwad, the Maharaja of Baroda, appointed Sri Aurobindo as a permanent professor of English. Let's not forget that Sri Aurobindo's elder brother Manmohan Ghose, who was a famous poet of his time, was also a reputed professor of English but unlike his brother and the other professors of his time,

Sri Aurobindo never quite prepared himself with well-researched notes. Instead, he would first give a series of introductory lectures to initiate the pupil into the theme of the text and then give his opinions on certain points related to the main text; once the pupil had understood the text well, Sri Aurobindo would read from the text and whenever and wherever the necessity to explain the meaning of difficult or ambiguous sentences rose, he would stop to explain them. After completing the text he dictated general lectures related to the various aspects of the text at the end of the term and one of his students has recalled that the notes he had dictated were made good use of by many students who studied at other colleges.

As the professor of English and later of French, Sri Aurobindo was quite surprised to observe that the students noted down everything that came from the lips of the professor and memorised them by heart. Once, when his students observed that his lecture on Southey's *Life of Nelson* did not tally with their notes, they expressed the deviation to Sri Aurobindo who answered that he had not read the notes which, he added, were all rubbish. These experiences and his own observations led him to develop the foundations of his concept of integral education.

We all know that Sri Aurobindo was associated with the National Council of Education right from its inception in 1906. When the National College was established in Calcutta in August 1906, Sri Aurobindo left his services at Baroda and joined the institute as its first Principal. Since he was well aware of the deficiencies in the then present system of education he formulated the programme of National Education and worked tirelessly for the acceptance of this programme along with the resolutions of Swaraj, Swadeshi and Boycott.

Sri Aurobindo knew that the system of education established on theories of mere academic perfection hampered and prevented the growth of intellectual faculties among the students. He identified the study of the human mind, infant, adolescent and adult as the true basis of education and he pointed out the three principles on which the education system should be developed to produce "a perfect and perfectly equipped mind." We shall briefly discuss these three principles of education.

Sri Aurobindo's first principle of education is that nothing can be taught. The teacher should act like a guide or helper who should only suggest and show the student how he can perfect the instruments of knowledge. He must not be a task-master or a dominating instructor whose job is only to stuff the minds of pupils; on the contrary, he should show the pupil how to acquire knowledge for himself by leading him to the knowledge rooted deep within and helping him in bringing it up to the surface. He further explains this principle (though in a different

context) in his book *'The Synthesis of Yoga'* where he writes: "Nothing can be taught to the mind which is not already concealed as potential knowledge in the unfolding soul of the creature. So also all perfection of which the outer man is capable, is only a realising of the eternal perfection of the Spirit within him. We know the Divine and become the Divine, because we are That already in our secret nature. All teaching is revealing, all becoming is an unfolding. Self-attainment is the secret; self-knowledge and an increasing consciousness are the means and the process."

The second principle of education states that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The teacher must not hammer anything into the mind of the pupil; on the contrary, he should be induced to study according to his nature. If a pupil does not like mathematics or history, he must not be compelled to study these subjects; he should be given the freedom to choose the subject which interests him. The parents tend to pre-fix the careers of their child even when he is a toddler and sometimes try to fulfil the dreams they had had by making the child pursue them. For instance, X wanted to become a doctor but was compelled to study law by his father; when he had a son named Y he instructed him to become nothing but a doctor while Y craved to become an engineer; following the insistence of his father Y studied medicine but his dream of becoming an engineer remained unfulfilled. And when his son Z grew up, he instructed him to study engineering. And in this process what the child wanted to study or become in life was completely ignored. Sri Aurobindo has brilliantly summarised this never-ending system of unfulfilled dreams in the following words:

"It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common. Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it." And he further adds: "The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use."

The third principle of education states that that one should work from the near to the far. This is very important. We have a profound knowledge about the culture, heritage and economy of Europe, America or even Africa but we don't know much about the traditions and cultures of our own country. This is again detrimental to our own growth and development. We must first acquire knowledge about what is around us or near us and then we can proceed towards something

afar. One must first know what is happening in India before trying to understand what is going on in some other parts of the world. Sri Aurobindo has advised that anything imported from outside should be offered and not imposed on the mind for genuine development can only be brought about by a free and natural growth. At the same time we have to develop the instruments of knowledge which include the senses, the mind and intuition. First we have to develop the senses, then the mind and finally intuition. Sri Aurobindo has, in fact, provided us with a clear plan which is bound to make a considerable difference in the field of education if it is implemented properly. He has aimed to activate the innate intelligence and interest in the pupil and wean him away from the practice of learning 'by rote and cramming.'

If Sri Aurobindo had laid the foundations of integral education, it was the Mother, his spiritual collaborator, who gave shape to his thoughts. During the Second World War, many followers of Sri Aurobindo came to stay in the Ashram at Pondicherry for their safety. They brought their families with them which comprised children as well. So the Mother decided to open a school for the benefit of the children and on 2 December 1943 she formally established a school with twenty students. She herself was one of the teachers and she was joined by some of the Ashramites. For instance, Sisir Kumar Mitra, who was a professor at Viswa Bharati, became the Headmaster of the school and Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, an ace boxer, became the Director of the Department of Physical Education. The aim of the school could be summarised in the following words of the Mother:

"If we have a school here, it is in order that it be different from the millions of schools in the world. It is to give the children a chance to distinguish between ordinary life and the divine life, the life of truth — to see things in a different way. It is useless to want to repeat here the ordinary life. The teacher's mission is to open the eyes of the children to something which they will not find anywhere else."

Not only did the Mother give shape to Sri Aurobindo's concept of education but she also developed it into a system which incorporated the various aspects of the human being namely physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual. We shall discuss them one by one.

1. Physical : In a series of articles written shortly before his withdrawal, Sri Aurobindo remarked that the perfection of the body should be the ultimate aim of physical culture. He was quite aware of the fact that physical education rendered not only a robust physique but also the development of discipline, character, team-work and obedience which are indispensable for man if he wants to be successful. Physical education develops not only the qualities of courage,

energised actions and steadfast will but it also awakens the body consciousness which sees and does what is required without depending on any hint from the mental plane and it also creates a harmony in the combined physical movements of the body. According to Sri Aurobindo, physical education also leads to the growth of 'sporting spirit' which includes endurance, a sense of friendliness to rivals or competitors, self-control, acceptance of defeat in the right spirit, no ill-will towards the successful rival, avoidance of foul means to win, etc. The development of these qualities would be able to make human existence more smooth and harmonious in the world which is always rocked by troubles. And he concludes his message dated 30 December 1948 by declaring that the country which possesses the qualities developed by physical education in the highest degree 'is likely to be the strongest for victory, success and greatness' and it can also bring about a more harmonious world order and perfect unity. Physical culture, according to the Mother, was to put consciousness into the cells of the body and when one concentrates to move the muscles as per the will of the individual, a consciousness is infused into the cells of the body and it gets transformed into a homogenous and receptive instrument which progresses by the virtue of its activities. To develop physical culture among the young children as well as the adult members of the Ashram, the Department of Physical Education was established in 1945 which now comprises a gymnasium, a playground, a sports ground with a beautiful swimming pool and a sea-facing tennis ground.

2. Vital : The Mother considered the vital to be the most significant and most indispensable among all the aspects of education. The vital is the kingdom of life-forces (both lower and higher); in other words, it is the seat of impulses, cravings, passions, depression, dynamism and even violence; it is capable of building, realising and destroying as well and that is why it is considered to be the most difficult part of human nature to discipline. So how can we dominate and conquer the impulses of the lower vital and develop those of the higher vital? It can be done in three ways.

(1) Through will — the will has to be constant, sustained and backed by 'concentrated aspiration'. It has to be, to quote the words of the Mother, 'an almost exclusive occupation of the consciousness.'

(2) Through the capacity of concentrating the attention — concentration is indispensable for studies, sports and also for the development of the mental and physical beings. In fact, it forms the basis of everything. If one concentrates with a persistent will, no obstruction would be able to resist it. The Mother rightly remarked that the value of an individual is proportionate to the value of his attention.

(3) Refining the vital through all the forms of beauty, harmony and artistic creations — the Mother has said that beauty expresses the Divine in the best possible way. In a letter to a disciple she wrote: "The physical world is the world of form and the perfection of form is beauty. Beauty interprets, expresses, manifests the Eternal. Its role is to put all manifested nature in contact with the Eternal through the perfection of form, through harmony and a sense of the ideal which uplifts and leads towards something higher." And she explained the pivotal role played by art in the development of the vital in the following words: "True art means the expression of beauty in the material world. In a world wholly converted, that is to say, expressing integrally the divine reality, art must serve as the revealer and teacher of this divine beauty in life." And it was precisely because of this very reason that she encouraged the pursuits of artistic endeavours in the Ashram which included music, painting, dancing, acting, embroidery, marbling for these activities were aimed to create a harmonious atmosphere by stimulating the qualities within.

(1) Mind: Why is the mind so important? Let's first read what the Mother has said while explaining the importance of mind. "The true role of the mind is the formation and organisation of action. The mind has a formative and organising power, and it is that which puts the different elements of inspiration in order for action, for organising action. And if it would only confine itself to that role, receiving inspirations — whether from above or from the mystic centre of the soul — and simply formulating the plan of action — in broad outline or in minute detail, for the smallest things of life or the greatest terrestrial organisations — it would amply fulfil its function. It is not an instrument of knowledge. But it can use knowledge for action, to organise action. It is an instrument of organisation and formation, very powerful and very capable when it is well developed." So, not only the mere acquisition of knowledge but also the development of the mind should be the aim of true education. Through the study of each subject, the student is led to spiritual realisation. The Mother has said that Spirit exists in science and history, so a study of these subjects would eventually take the pupil towards the ultimate Truth. Studies are a medium to reach the Truth. It reminds me of an occasion when the Mother was asked how could subjects like mathematics, history and science help the individual to find her, that is, the Mother. She replied: "They can help in several ways. (1) To be able to receive and support the light of the Truth the mind must be strengthened, widened and made supple. These studies are a very good means to achieve it. (2) Science, if you study it deeply, will help you to learn that the appearances are illusory, and will thus lead you to the spiritual reality. (3) The study of all

aspects of the movements of Physical Nature will put you in contact with the Universal Mother and thus you will be nearer to me.”

(2) Psychic Being: The psychic being, as we know, is the spark of Divinity or the representative of the Divine within us. Integral yoga aims at the awakening of the psychic being. The development of the psychic being is immensely important in the yoga of Sri Aurobindo for it helps in the process of human evolution. But one cannot adopt a general process in awakening the psychic being. For instance, in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, every inmate is given the liberty to practise the integral yoga through the paths of *karma* (action), *bhakti* (devotion) and *jnana* (knowledge or wisdom) for integral yoga is the culmination of all these three yogas and it begins where the aforesaid yogas end. So an individualistic approach has been adopted. Similarly, an individualistic approach should also be adopted to educate the pupil. The Mother had realised that a common curriculum of education was detrimental to the progress of the children for each child was different from one another. Hence the academic courses in the Ashram were so designed that the progress of the pupil was brought about through the various grades of education. This programme was guided by the soul and was free from all preconceived notions, conventions and habits. This system is known as the ‘Free Progress System’. The student is given the freedom to choose the subjects he would love to study and also the teachers they would prefer to have. The Mother believed in freedom and she realised the importance of freedom in the development of a child. That is why she had once said that no one must compel the student to study; if he did not feel like studying let him be on his own but at the same time she pointed out that the student must be warned of the consequences of lack of education.

(3) Spiritual: The foremost objective of integral education is to lead the individual to the higher layers of consciousness and hence the children were introduced to a spiritual life quite early. Through spirituality, the children are trained to become hero warriors belonging to the future so they could valiantly fight the battle that would be born against the past and help in the manifestation of the new race of supermen. The Mother wanted the children to be the representatives of this new race so they were introduced to spirituality for the awakening of the supramental consciousness in them and for its growth as per its law. She emphasised the need of spiritual training which is above all religions and strives towards the global Truth. It is considered to be the “teaching of the future” because “it illumines the consciousness and prepares it for the future realisation” and that “it teaches us to enter into a direct relation with the Divine.”

So far we have discussed Sri Aurobindo’s views on education and the Mother’s role in giving shape to his ideals. But education can only be rendered properly when the student has a competent teacher as his guide. The teacher is not only expected to live as per the principles preached and taught by him but it is also essential for him to realise what he actually taught. That’s why the Mother would compare teaching with priesthood and proclaim that the school has to be an opportunity for progress for students as well as teachers and each one must have the liberty to develop freely. According to her, ‘a method is never so well applied as when one has discovered it oneself. Otherwise it is as boring for the teacher as it is for the student.’ She would further add that through teaching others one can learn ten times more than while studying, so teaching itself is a learning process.

I would like to conclude by pointing out the most striking difference between the existing systems of education and integral education in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. While the other systems of education aim at the creation of brilliant students, only integral education aims to create living souls. It is easy to find brilliant students but how many of us can vouch for the fact that we have come across a living soul? This is why integral education is so important.

Individualism—Precursor To A Subjective Age

Deepali Gupta

“As the free development of individuals from within is the best condition for the growth and perfection of the community, so the free development of the community or nation from within is the best condition for the growth and perfection of mankind.”¹

Introduction

The Individualistic age in the evolution of society is marked by an attempt to find, through reason, a questioning intellect and moral sense — the true law of the world and that of the individual being. The validity of conventions which once ruled the society is put to scrutiny by the individual intellect and there is a seeking for a general standard of Truth to which the individual judgment could willingly subscribe without imposition by any dominant or irrational authority. The discovery that has resulted from such seeking finds roots in the sciences of physical laws, biological theories and the social orders of democratic and socialist states. It has come as tremendous achievement for mankind but does not constitute ‘the all’ of existence, as the truths discovered are only the outward facets of life. Also, in the process of affirming an identity for the self, the individual has severed his deeper connect with the society and the environment of which he is an inherent part and has become more assertive of the ego self. It can be seen without much difficulty that in the present times, the ego as the consciousness of one’s own identity is seeking to fulfil itself in the outer physical world by gratification of its needs of position, power, wealth and the desire for supremacy, though it stands to be much more than that, being actually the power of self focus or the concentration to realise the divinity within. In Sri Aurobindo’s view, the individual in its body and form is, in its deeper meaning, an entity to express the divinity which is preparing to emerge in the process of evolution. It has started becoming apparent to humanity that the knowledge of the physical world is not the whole of knowledge and every individual in his own capacity

has to fathom the subjective secret of his self and the surroundings. In this paper I intend to review the present social scenario in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s thought to assert that individualism is destined to lead further to a greater Subjective age.

The Emergence of Individualism

In the words of Sri Aurobindo, “The dawn of individualism is always a questioning, a denial.”² It refuses to blindly follow the set conventions of fixed hierarchies, oppressive mannerisms and customs with their meaning lost way behind. The individuality, fully conspicuous in form but not in mentality moves a step further and affirms its intellectual freedom and reasoning prowess, declaring acceptance of only that which makes a real appeal to the reasoning mind and denying all that whose sense and utility cannot be established by intellectual inspection. There is an effort to discover the substantial truths of life, thought and action. The emergence of this kind of individualism is necessitated by the ‘stress of the hidden spirit’ for further evolution. Sri Aurobindo writes, “The spirit is infinite, illimitable, eternal; and infinite, illimitable, eternal is its stress towards manifestation, filling endless space with innumerable existences.”³ But since the spirit hides behind the apparent matter, the individual is not able to perceive beyond his individual physical constitution and the ego. He fails to recognise that his existence is only a wave of becoming thrown up from the sea of its being. He takes his body and form to delimit him from ‘the other’ in the universe though in actuality his association with the rest of the universe is fluid. There may be strife and conflict between individuals or groups in trying to affirm their own individuality and freedom, yet the Individualistic age is inevitable in the evolutionary process of life as Sri Aurobindo puts it, “A temporary reign of the critical reason largely destructive in its action is an imperative need for human progress”.⁴

Influence of the Age of Individualism and Reason on Society’s Evolution

An individual is the smallest unit, a cell in the organic mass of society, so it is apparent for the age of individualism to significantly contribute towards society’s evolution. In the ages prior to it, the individual tendencies were curbed in the name of convention, social order or religion and reason was subjugated to obeisance of an unquestionable fixed order. With the advent of the Individual age it may be said the progress of society took a trend towards greater finesse as there came about an era of freedom and development of the individual supported by his or her own reasoning capability. The assertion of the individual identity and the freedom to form one’s own beliefs and to pursue one’s own interests became perfectly valid and admissible. Alongside, with all the niceties

that the individualistic age brought about, it was not without the perils of disregarding the freedom of 'the other' and the urge for fulfilment of the individual self even at the expense of others. Individualism degenerated into egoism which asserts itself but refuses to accept the same right for others. The question that society is merely evolving or it is progressing, too, became even more significant. Scientists and sociologists found it difficult to equate 'social evolution' with 'social progress' as according to them the former is scientific and can be objectively assessed while the latter is based more on perception and a subjective evaluation which cannot be standardised as different societies have different valuations of ethics, ideals, aesthetics and religion and they may even undergo change overtime, in the same society.

Sri Aurobindo provides an insight into the concept of evolution and progress by finding its base within the individual self, and the 'self', he says, is the same in all individuals. His view is integrative because it is not based only on the external view of things but in the essence of the very being. But the 'self' is not evident to the senses to be easily perceived, rather it is hidden and one has to grow in consciousness to discover the real self within. Simply put, the progress of mankind may be assessed by the state of consciousness which its people have reached at any given stage on the evolutionary scale because it is 'consciousness' that results in our thought leading to will and further to action. Some of the parameters on which we assess individuals, societies or the humanity are ethics, ideals, aesthetics, temperament, culture and religion. The development in consciousness is reflected in all of the above. Sri Aurobindo holds an optimistic view of evolution and progress of the society which, he opines, progresses as cycles and considers the intermittent phases of decline only as a means for perfecting and including that which was left behind. The optimism that surrounds Sri Aurobindo's social thought proves to be a flashlight in the darkest of days that humanity may witness; as according to him, the cycle representing a period of decline would surely move up again until the purpose towards which it is progressing is realised, "For Nature effects her evolution through a rhythm of advance and relapse, day and night, waking and sleep; there is a temporary pushing of certain results at the expense of others not less desirable for perfection and to a superficial eye there may seem to be a relapse even in our advance."⁵

Limitations of Intellectual Objectivism

According to Sri Aurobindo, "The Principle of Individualism is the liberty of the human being regarded as a separate existence to develop himself and fulfil his life, satisfy his mental tendencies, emotional and vital needs and physical being according to his own desire governed by reason; it admits no other limit to this right and this liberty except the obligation to respect the same individual

liberty and right in others."⁶ But since the egoism of individuals, groups and nations by its very nature tends to cross boundaries and interfere with the rights and liberty of others, there have to be brought in social, national and international laws. The Objective view looks at the world as an object with mechanistic rules or settled forces acting on the individual and the group. The individuals, the groups and communities, the governances are looked upon as separate entities which need to be organised, managed and ordered. The greatest and most widely accepted truths have been revealed to man by science which itself is based on an objective view of things. It has almost resulted in a view of life as a struggle for existence by harnessing the environment for self-fulfilment which may even be at the expense of others. But in spite of the correlation that seems so evident between Individualism and Objectivism, the Individual and the society experiences the need for a greater formula for its fulfilment and hence are impelled to grow further. Presenting a higher aim to humanity Sri Aurobindo writes, "Therefore we must find out that the true individual is not the ego, but the divine individuality which is through our evolution preparing to emerge in us; its emergence and satisfaction and not the satisfaction of the mere egoistic will-to-live for the sake of one's lower members is the true object at which a humanity subjectively seeking to know and fulfil its own deepest law and truth should increasingly aim."⁷

The Subjective View of Life

Subjectivism proceeds from within and tends to take a large and complex view of our nature and being. The subjective view is not separative but relates each existence to be an expression of a greater existence. The fact that Individualism leads further to a subjective view of things is evident from the following lines of Sri Aurobindo, "For the effort of the individual soon shows him that he cannot securely discover the truth and law of his own being without discovering some universal law and truth to which he can relate it. Of the universe he is a part; in all but his deepest spirit he is its subject, a small cell in that tremendous organic mass; his substance is drawn from its substance and by the law of its life the law of his life is determined and governed."⁸ True subjectivism teaches us that we are a higher self than our ego and that we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others i.e., we are in solidarity with all that is in the universe. In the subjective view, the development of the individual beings does not proceed on separate, opposite or conflicting lines but each grows in harmony with the development of the other. Sri Aurobindo observes, "That which we are has expressed itself through the individual, but also through the universality, and though each has to fulfil itself in its own way, neither can succeed independently of the other."⁹ The progress is along parallel lines and each helps in the growth

of the other by support or by opposition to arrive at a larger unity. The subjective view calls for a greater knowledge of the individual self, the collective self and the divinity within.

Difference between True and False Subjectivism

The evolution of the subjective age has come forth from the age of individualism. It takes a trend towards a search for a deeper truth of existence and self-knowledge from within the being. But the individual may initially arrive at a very preliminary form of knowledge that he or she is not an isolated existence but actually woven into a greater collectivity. Just as one identifies the self with the ego sense, similarly the collectivity may come to identify itself with a collective ego. This is a false subjectivism as it is not real unity but only a formation of collectivities which may even go to the extent of hurting and wounding others in a process of asserting themselves and preserving their interests. Sri Aurobindo warns us against false subjectivism which may bring disaster to humanity rather than social progress, as it happened in the case of Germany which held the greatest promise of unity of its people and progress of humanity in subjective terms had it not fallen into the hands of powers with vested motives. “It is evident that there is a false as well as a true subjectivism and the errors to which the subjective trend may be liable are as great as its possibilities and may well lead to capital disasters. This distinction must be clearly grasped if the road of this stage of social evolution is to be made safe for the human race.”¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo considers Nation-ego an example of false subjectivism, in which national identity and pride are stressed to affirm a nation’s superiority with intent to suppress or exploit the rest. The Nation-soul, as an example of true subjectivism, attempts to capture the national heritage and values in its pristine form. A World-state founded upon the principle of centralisation and uniformity, a mechanical and formal unity, is an example of false subjectivism, while a World-union founded upon the principle of liberty and a serene unity in its rich diversity is an example of true subjectivism. It is only through true subjectivism that the individual and the collective will be able to find the true law of their inter-relatedness to each other and to the universe.

Group-ego vs. Group-Soul

Since early times man has formed aggregates by joining together into groups as a basic need for association. In modern time, however, the individual has the choice and freedom to associate himself or herself with the group based on his or her liking and also not limited by distance or reach because of breakthrough advancements in communications technology. Sri Aurobindo’s views and concerns about the group and the individual are far more relevant today in the

global context as the groups of today are armed with a thorough mental and high-end technical prowess with large scale instruments of power and are not simply limited by physical capability. A clash of group egos may be harmful for one another. It is important that the society moves beyond in exploration of something beyond the ego, individual or group as the existence of group is ‘real’ just as the existence of the individual. We get an idea of how realistic the existence of a group is by the conceptualisation of ‘group’ that Sri Aurobindo acquaints us with. According to him, just like an individual a group has a group body, group mind, group energy, group life and a group soul. The group body is formed of the individuals comprising the group. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, “The nation or society, like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and a soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist. One may say even that, like the individual, it essentially is a soul rather than has one; it is a group-soul that, once having attained to a separate distinctness, must become more and more self-conscious and find itself more and more fully as it develops its corporate action and mentality and its organic self-expressive life.”¹¹

The primitive groups were formed of a physical proximity with the basic need of safety but in recent times the groupings are based more on preferences of the mind and surpass geographical boundaries. Societies globally have come to evolve to the present stage but more commonly witnessed is the fact that any group in its accustomed manner identifies itself more with the ‘group ego’ and is far from realising the ‘group soul’ which, as Sri Aurobindo observes, is the true self and the divinity within. Just as the soul is hidden to the perceptive capabilities of the individual who would identify himself more easily with the ego, the group too is conscious only of an ego-sense and not of the soul which holds together its members. The group ego is necessitated by nature so that the group is able to proceed on its path of evolution in a focused manner, preserving and affirming the group interest and aim. It is indeed a developmental need, as being a member of a group the individual learns to subjugate his personal ego to the group ego in the interest of both and in turn the group gradually learns that it has to respect individual identity and freedom for the stability and progress of the group as a whole. In its external view, the group ego seeks to fulfil itself by asserting itself to other such groups or units, which may even lead to conflicts and strife. More so, there is an innate tendency of a group to expand itself irrespective of the purpose that it serves, progressive or regressive in its contribution to society. The point of concern is that the group may get so involved in pursuance of its own interest that it may even neglect the interest of the larger

group of which it is a smaller unit. The realisation of the group soul is very significant for an ideal unity of the entire humanity because all such group souls merge into the Universal All Soul whose principle and purpose is supreme. The ideal of peaceful coexistence and mutual support will be realised, not on a defined world order but based on individual freedom and the correct sense to use that freedom as a member of a subgroup, group, the larger group of which it is a unit and so on. Just as Sri Aurobindo's idea of spiritualism does not negate matter, his ideal of global unity does not negate the idea of national freedom. Nations bring their own civilisational diversities and they need to preserve their cultural autonomy even whilst coming together and contemplating in terms of global issues.

Readiness for an Age of Subjectivism

Just as the rational age is a link between the infra-rational and the supra-rational, similarly the Subjective age will link the Individualistic age and the Spiritual age. Though we are into the rational age, yet reason has not advanced in the same measure in the entire society. Only some people have been able to capture the light of reason in its real sense while the masses are yet to grow in this ability. Similarly the readiness for a Subjective age may be found in a few individuals and societies who are seeking something beyond material fulfilment and yearn for something that could bring peace and concord to the society for mutual development and progress. Those who have realised that such formula of unity cannot and will not be found in any external manoeuvre but within the depths of the very purpose of being, will be the ones in whom the light of subjectivism may first seek to establish itself as such realisation leads to an inward turn for self knowledge and greater awareness which are the very principles of subjectivism. A deeper knowledge of the psychic being within and becoming conscious of its influence is also a step in the direction of the subjective. It is also evident in the search for group soul or nation soul to bring about real solidarity in thought and practice. Sri Aurobindo enlightens us on how the evolution of a group soul takes its course, "...for the group-soul rather works out its tendencies by a diversity of opinions, a diversity of wills, a diversity of life, and the vitality of the group-life depends largely upon the working of this diversity, its continuity, its richness."¹² After many diverse view points coming from different quarters, the realisation has finally dawned upon humanity that the environment is not just to be harnessed for self-fulfilment but has to be preserved and conserved to be able to live and survive. The corporate and the business groups of today have started viewing collaboration as a better strategy to survive and grow rather than competing with one another and also are becoming more

and more concerned about corporate social responsibility. The way future cities are being planned and constructed by bringing together experts in every field be it scientists, doctors, builders, environmentalists, educationists or inter-disciplinarians reveals that there is a bridging of gaps between different mindsets or islands of knowledge. The richness of the group mind thus formed and the recognition of each other's role in the interest of humanity is realised which indicates some light coming from the group soul which was earlier generally being mistaken as the group ego. The way some sections of the society are dealing with anti-social elements trying to understand them and not just sentencing them, points towards growth of the subjective element. Providing training, facilities and resources to prisoners to bring out their creative talents and to do some meaningful work points towards efforts to enable them to find their real good self within which may have got behind the scene due to unfavourable external circumstances. It can also be seen in new forms of literature, music and art and greater inclination of the intellectual community towards the spiritual.

Conclusion

The Individual age is a precursor to the Subjective age which impels the individual to look within for a deeper self and not only become conscious of one's soul but of others' souls as well and to relate oneself with the greater collectivity and the universe as a whole. The rationalistic ideal begins to subject itself to the ideal of intuitional knowledge and a deeper self-awareness. The individual and the collective are able to find the true law of their inter-relatedness to each other and to the universe. The will to be, the will to power, the will to know are considered perfectly legitimate in the subjective view but their satisfaction should never be egoistic. Though Subjectivism is in its nascent stage, yet we may say that the utilitarian standard of life has given way to the aspiration for self-realisation and inner fulfilment and the Individualistic age has led to a deeper psychological investigation of the subjective self and society. The deeper subjectivism is evident in the new forms of educational systems which aim at bringing out the natural potential of the child in its true form without curbing or distorting it by outward means in the name of education. A deeper knowledge of the psychic being within and becoming conscious of its influence is also a step in the direction of the subjective. It is also evident in the search for group soul or nation soul to bring about real solidarity in thought and practice. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "The ideal of human existence, personal and social would be its progressive transformation into a conscious outflowing of the joy, power, love, light, beauty of the transcendent and universal spirit".¹³

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Rasa Theory, Bhakti, And Psychic Enfoldment: A Psychologist's Perspective

Suneet Varma

Introduction

In Sanskrit, the term used to depict a state of well-being or good health is *swastha*, which means 'rooted in the self'. The self which is being referred to here is the deeper or higher self, and so perhaps it is more appropriate to use the term 'Self' (for convenience, I will continue to use the term 'self'). The self is our true identity, the hidden divinity within each of us, concealed under the outer sheaths of our being. We may also use the term soul for our divine essence, our essential core, which lends us our unique identity as an individual. Sri Aurobindo uses the term 'psychic' or 'psychic being', for the soul. What is unique in Sri Aurobindo's depiction is that, though in agreement with the pre-existing conception of the soul's immortality and its transmigration from body to body, the psychic is not a static entity, but immensely dynamic in the sense that it continues to evolve from lifetime to lifetime. The psychic is that part of us that responds to the true and the beautiful, joy and love being its essential nature. Perhaps the single most defining characteristic of psychic consciousness is its groundedness in a deep and unconditional love, devotional in essence, accompanied by a state of sincere and total surrender to the Divine.

This brings us to the subject of *bhakti*. In *Bhakti Yoga*, the emotional life of the aspirant or seeker undergoes a gradual transformation, and (s)he begins to reside more and more in a state of pure and unconditional love of, and for, the Divine. Looking at it from the *rasa sastra* perspective, the Indian meta-theory of emotions developed by Bharata in the third century AD in his treatise entitled *Natyashastra*, the aspirant attempts to reside more and more in the eighth and highest *rasa*, that of love (Paranjpe, 1998).

The Rasa theory of emotions and Bhakti Yoga

Rasa is translated into English variously as emotion / meta-emotion / sentiment / aesthetic mood. The details of the theory have been discussed by many

authors in different contexts (e.g., Gnoli, 1956; Jain, 1994; Kapur, 1998; Lynch, 1990; Masson & Patwardhan, 1970; Misra, 2004; Pandey, 1959; Paranjpe, 1998; Shweder & Haidt, 2000; Sinha, 1961).

The literal meaning of the word *rasa* is essence or relish, and it is more commonly used to describe the aesthetic experience that follows from watching the expression of emotions in various forms of art. Bharata, whose main concern was developing guidelines for actors and directors of plays, identified eight major *rasas*, viz. — love (*sringara*), the comic (*hasya*), pathos (*karuna*), the furious (*raudra*), the heroic (*vira*), horror (*bhayanaka*), the odious (*bibhatsa*), and the marvellous (*adbhuta*). A later commentary on *Natyashastra* by Abhinavagupta adds a ninth *rasa* — the *santa* (quietude) or the mood of total freedom in which neither happiness nor unhappiness occurs (Misra, 2004).

To enter into the state of pure unconditional love, the devotee commonly uses the aids of chanting the name of the preferred deity (Rama, Krishna, Durga etc.), and singing about his love for the chosen form of divinity. In so doing, the aspirant, or shall we say *rasika*, experiences a dissolution of his/her ego self, wherein everyday connotations and experiences in the mundane human realm around the emotion of love are transcended, and the devotee enters into a state of pure and absolute universal love, devoid of any sense of “I” or “mine”.

In general, when we are immersed in an aesthetic experience via exposure to art (for example music or dance), the experienced emotions are located in a context far removed from one’s everyday personal life, and hence we are able to derive *rasa* or a sense of pleasure or delight, even if we are experiencing so called negative emotions like anger and fear. In a sense, the personal or “I” element melts away, and we find ourselves transported to the realm of pure emotion, devoid of any ego involvement.

An important development in understanding the nature of emotional experience came about when scholars in Bharata’s tradition recognised that spectators of a drama *collectively* share a specific aesthetic mood grounded in a basic emotion (Paranjpe, 2008). The *rasa* theorists thus proposed the concept of the “generalisation” (*sadharanikarana*) of emotions. This apparently simple idea has profound implications for recognising the nature of emotions as a phenomenon not restricted to individuals, let alone lodged in bodily tissues, but as belonging to a trans-individual domain of reality.

Now in *Bhakti Yoga*, the aspirant as seeker of the Divine, gradually dis-identifies with all emotions except that of love. Thus Rupa Goswami offered a reinterpretation of the original *rasa sastra* perspective in terms of major and minor devotional states (Paranjpe, 1998). In this depiction, love is conceived of as the major *rasa*, the essential emotional state to be sought and attained by the

bhakta (devotee). All other emotions, the minor devotional states, are to be understood as resulting from our seeking of love, which in the early stages of *bhakti* often eludes the devotee, resulting in a state of frustration in our seeking upon encountering failure, or loss of the love we thought we had possessed.

Over time, through continuous and sincere *sadhana* (sustained effort), the devotee begins to reside more and more in a state of universal love and *ananda* (joy/bliss) which is the very nature of the soul and the Spirit. Then out of the sheer joy and sense of completeness of the act, we surrender our entire being to the Divine. In other words, the attempts of the devotee to ground him/her self in universal love leads to the coming forward of the soul or psychic being, our Divine essence. The coming forward of the psychic being results in a shift of power in terms of what element of our being exercises control over our life, from the ego to the psychic. This is accompanied by a major affective transformation in our life, as well as profound behavioural change. Our life becomes increasingly characterised by a feeling of goodwill towards all human beings, and we view all and relate to all in terms of unconditional love. And true love is not about taking or getting, only about giving; and thus selfless service becomes part of our very nature. Perceiving our ground in the Divine, and the ground of all other human beings, all of existence for that matter, in the Divine, we at last experience the truth of the Upanishadic tenet “*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*” (the entire world is one family).

The coming forward of the psychic being has another profound consequence. The search for direction in our life, for which we often seek a *guru*, comes to a close, with the inner *guru*, our psychic, now performing that function completely and perfectly. There is a certain knowingness about psychic consciousness, which acts as a sure guide in matters of truth and the good and the beautiful. In short, our life is transformed from the life human, to the life Divine.

The place of love in psychotherapy and spiritual healing

Being a psychologist, I cannot stop at this point, for I must reflect on the fuller psychological consequences of the emergence of the psychic as the true centre of our being, and its impact on individual and collective well-being. Well, first of all, we become from a seeker to a ‘finder’. In general, an individual who resides in a psychic consciousness radiates an aura of ‘healthiness’ and well-being. For the psychic ever guides us to what is good for our whole being, and the dominant emotion is that of love and joy, which by its very nature is integral and complete.

Consciousness is contagious, and psychic consciousness is more so. Thus, in my opinion, a psychologist or more accurately a counsellor/psychotherapist who

is chiefly concerned with restoring a state of health and well-being in his clients, must him/herself be a relatively permanent member of the abode of well-being, which in itself is a hallmark of psychic existence. In other words, to be an effective therapist, a tremendous amount of self work/*sadhana* has to be carried out on the part of the therapist (one who facilitates healing, and thus restores health). More than anything else, it is the consciousness of the therapist interacting with the consciousness of the client that brings about a positive change in the client, from a state of suffering to a state of well-being. In my opinion, to be a truly effective counsellor/psychotherapist, the helping person must have first found his/her soul before s(he) helps others in the coming forward of their psychic.

In general, the Indian view of existence is that of the journey of the Divine in a person. All struggles and suffering in life represent a movement from an infra-rational (animal) existence, to a more rational (human) existence, and further, towards a yet greater supra-rational (Divine) existence and end-state of Truth and Bliss and Peace and Beatitude. This is the human journey; from a life of obscure beginnings in a half-lit animal-human consciousness, to an increasingly diviner humanity. And the counsellor/therapist who can assist us in this journey is but of course a fellow traveller who has walked ahead of us from a life of relative darkness to a life of increasing Light. Only one who has mastered swimming to a high degree can save the one who is drowning, and so is the case with therapy.

For convenience, the process of psychotherapy can be divided into two stages. The first is the movement from a weak ego state (low level of autonomy) to a strong ego state. This is the goal of most psychotherapy in the West. The second, and in my opinion the more important goal is the movement from the ego to the self, or the shift in government from the ego to the psychic. This is the more common goal in the context of spiritual healing. Thus Sudhir Kakar, the noted psychoanalyst, stated (in personal conversation) that “Psychoanalysis is undergraduate work, and spirituality is post-graduate work”. Freud had stated that the goal of psychoanalysis is ‘To make the unconscious, conscious’. In the original German, Freud (in Sen, 1998; p. 111) said “*Wo es war soll ich werden*” – Where it (impersonal and unconscious) was, let the I (personal and conscious) become. Kabir Das has beautifully expressed the transformation that takes place on the spiritual path: “*Jab mai tha tab Hari naahi; Ab Hari hai, mai nahi*” – ‘When I was, God was not; Now God is, I am not’ (in Das, 1996). Thus from the vantage point of spirituality, the goal of psychotherapy/healing and growth is summarised, in my words, as such : “Where I was, let Thou become”.

In general, I can confidently state that the most essential pre-requisite on the part of the therapist/spiritual guide for healing to take place, is a posture of and groundedness in unconditional love. Without this, healing cannot begin, and thus the importance of self work/*sadhana*. This has been noted in the western context by the eminent psychotherapist Carl Rogers (1961) in his emphasis of the absolute necessity of the attitude of “unconditional positive regard” on the part of the therapist toward the client, and more explicitly by the eminent psychiatrist M. Scott Peck (1978) in his well-known work, “*The Road Less Travelled*”. A moment’s reflection on healing in the traditional Indian context immediately reveals that when individuals in distress approach their *guru*, the healing process begins with the love and unconditional acceptance of the person in distress, by the *guru*. Thus, at the risk of overstating, I again underscore the key importance of self work on the part of the therapist/*guru*.

Love has an extraordinary transformative power which can heal all breaches and wounds in our consciousness, and eventually liberate us from fear, guilt, and egoism. It is via the showering of love from without that love awakens in our being (psychic consciousness), may it be love in the romantic human sense, or in the spiritual Divine sense. One of the greatest discoveries that we can make in our lifetime, is that of the source of love being within us, and not without. Till some such time, we continue to roam about lost like the musk deer, forever seeking the fragrance of love all about, not realising that the secret source of love lies within us hid deep in our very bosom, waiting to be discovered. Thus Huston Smith (1997, p. 334) notes :

It remained for the twentieth century to discover that locked within the atom is the energy of the sun itself. For this energy to be released, however, the atom must be bombarded from without. So too, locked in every human being is a store of love that partakes of the Divine – *the imago dei*, image of God, as it is sometimes called. And it too can be activated only through bombardment, in its case, love’s bombardment. If we too felt loved, not abstractly or in principle but vividly and personally, by one who unites all power and perfection, the experience would melt our fear, guilt, and self-concern permanently. As Kierkegaard said, if at every moment both present and future I were certain that nothing has happened and nothing can ever happen that would separate us from the infinite love of the Infinite, that would be the reason for joy.

In the context of the West, Smith (1997; p. 334) in his profound work on early Christianity, speaks of the impact of Jesus on his immediate followers, in explicit detail. He notes that “The people who first heard Jesus’ disciples proclaiming the Good News (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour), were as impressed by what

they saw, as they were by what they heard. They saw lives that had been transformed – men and women who were ordinary in every way except for the fact that they seemed to have found the secret of living. They evinced a tranquillity, simplicity and cheerfulness that their hearers had nowhere else encountered. Here were people who seemed to be making a success of the very enterprise everyone would like to succeed at – that of life itself. Specifically, there were two qualities in which their lives abounded. The first of these was mutual regard – a total absence of social barrier – a sense of genuine equality. Second, they had laid hold of an inner peace that found expression in a joy that was radiant. Life for them was no longer a matter of coping. It was glory discerned. They were released from the burdens of fear, guilt and the cramping confines of the ego”.

Smith (1987) notes that Paul’s famous description of Christian love in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians is not meant to be interpreted in terms of an attribute one was already familiar with in the West. His words describe the extraordinary qualities of a specific person, Jesus Christ. In phrases of sublime beauty it describes the Divine love that Paul conceived Christians would feel towards others once they had undergone the experience of Christ’s love for them. Paul’s word’s (in Smith, 1987; p. 335) have to be interpreted as a description of a unique capacity which fully manifested for the first time “in the flesh”, only in person of Jesus Christ :

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. (*1, Corinthians 13:4-8*)

Love and the transformation of human evil

An equally or even more profound impact of love is its capacity to transform evil. As a therapist/spiritual healer, one encounters all sorts of individuals, even those who have a chequered past and may best be described as “bad” or even “evil”. These are individuals who have no regard for the happiness and well-being of others, and do not hesitate to hurt others, even those who are supposedly close to them. Upon encountering such persons, one feels disgust in their presence, and the first reaction is to distance oneself from them. As a therapist/spiritual healer, one may at times be unable to feel love for these individuals, and is thus unable to help them. In such cases, the person remains unchanged, the world remains the same, and evil continues to exist. Yet, perhaps the only truly effective way to deal with evil is to transform it through love. M. Scott Peck (1990, p.309)

who has deeply reflected on this issue and has worked extensively in this area, points out that :

The healing of evil – scientifically or otherwise – can be accomplished only by the love of individuals. A willing sacrifice is required. The individual healer must allow his or her soul to become the battleground. He or she must sacrificially absorb the evil. Then what prevents the destruction of that soul? If one takes the evil itself into one’s heart like a spear, how can one’s goodness still survive? Even if the evil is vanquished, thereby will not the good be also? What will have been achieved beyond some meaningless trade-off? I cannot answer this in language other than mystical. I can say only that there is a mysterious alchemy whereby the victim becomes the victor. As C. S. Lewis wrote: “When a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the table would crack and death itself would start working backwards.”

I do not know how this occurs, but I know that it does. I know that good people can deliberately allow themselves to be pierced by the evil of others, to be broken thereby, yet somehow not broken. To be even killed in some sense and yet still survive and not succumb. Whenever this happens, there is a slight shift in the balance of power in the world.

Conclusive Remarks

In this way we obtain a glimpse of the extraordinary transformative potential of *Bhakti*. To begin with, to reside more and more in a state of love is in itself an extremely positive state of being, one most conducive to health and well-being. And this also has a profound impact on one’s dealings with others, as these are characterised by a posture of giving and serving, devoid of any ulterior motives of gaining something. Further, the increasing experience of universal love facilitates the act of complete surrender to the Divine, as a spontaneous and integral process. This is an extraordinarily empowering experience – the shift from a narrow ego-bound consciousness to a psychic consciousness grounded in the true Self.

A groundedness in love is perhaps the most essential quality which must be present in the being of a psychotherapist/spiritual healer. This quality cannot be obtained by any external study or degrees, and can be acquired only through intense self-work/*sadhana*. The role of love in the healing of psychological wounds and hurts, and the transformative power of love in its encounter with evil, are only beginning to be fully appreciated by psychologists, in India and elsewhere. The future of psychology as a truly useful, emancipating, liberating, and life-giving discipline lies in bringing back soul and Spirit to its rightful place at the centre-stage of psychology, and existence at large.

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Unity In Diversity

Tapan Banerjee

In the sequel to follow I propose to consider the idea/concept of unity in diversity in its possible ramifications: historical, social, religious and philosophical. I shall divide the discourse into numbered sections and draw out implications as needed. The method will be partly analytical and partly descriptive.

The theme has a long global history and, philosophically, it appears as a problem of the one and the many. History of a country lies in the mosaic ideas of thought and in the problems of that country. The problems again bear evidences of moral and emotional conflicts of the people of a country. In history, therefore, the past has to be found moving; else it fails to lay any impression on the mind of the present. A definitive recorded history of ancient India is lacking — most of it is being shrouded in super-human myths, so laments Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. Obviously then, the present theme is found feebly floating in the documented pages of Indian history. But since it becomes a global issue, let me quote some precious documents that sing of the opposite polarities:

1. *Ekam sat viprâ bahudhâ badanti* (R.V. I.164.46)
2. *Ekam santam bahudhâ kalpayanti* (R.V. X.114.5)
3. *Eko devah sarvabhuteṣu guḍah* (S.U. VI.11)

In these three citations the One Existent (of the divine realm) has been conceived of as the many (in the phenomenal realm), i.e. the One or the *unity* being thought of as the reality.

4. *Tat aikṣat vahu syâm* (C.U. VI.2.3)
5. *Sah akâmayat* — vahu syâm (T.U. II.6.1)
6. *Sa iṣat lokân nu srijâ iti* (A.U. I.1.1)

The One Existent visualises and desires to become or create the many (worlds), i.e. the necessity of empirical plurality or, the *diversity*, is being felt as the experiential reality.

7. So the Lord scattered them all over the earth.

(The Old Testament: Genesis – 11.8)

8. I pray that they all may be one.

(The New Testament: John – 17.21)

We find the need of a diversity of people and language as well as Jesus' prayer of unity for his disciples in these two citations.

9. The One remains, the many change and pass;

Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly: (*Adonais* / P.B.Shelley)

10. Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold ;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. (*The Second Coming* / W.B.Yeats)

While Shelley appears to subscribe to Platonic monism, Yeats shows that at some turn of a century, history belies the faith in the One.

The evidences picked up from different spatio-temporal boundaries go sometimes in favour of *unity*, at some other time, *diversity*. The prolonged worldwide endeavour to resolve the problem has never arrived at mutually consistent premises and that is why the theme has ever remained fascinating.

Focusing our attention on India, we find the idea of *unity in diversity* being proclaimed down the ages. The culturally varied country earns its distinction in the endeavour to establish oneness as the fundamental of its process of growth in various spheres. If this oneness be given the status of having been pervasive across the country so as to survive its identity, cultural and religious, in spite of the whirligig of time, one has to accept the oneness to have survived all sorts of transformations so far. In this view, it becomes the prime tending towards what could be said philosophical monism. It is being expressed as the *unity* in question to make the question buoyant. This might have remained a social practice in this enormously diversified country of multicultural ground where social exploitations and power plays were never switched off. The practice was, therefore, possibly a motive to minimise the challenging queries that were about to sprout at different times. In his landmark book, *The Argumentative Indian*, Amartya Sen reminds us that the “exaggerated focus on religiosity has also contributed to an underestimation of the reach of public reasoning in India and the diversity of its coverage”¹. It could be seen as a social neglect.

A. Unity in diversity : what it is

‘Unity in diversity’ is essentially an evaluative statement, but the question is whether it is accepted as an inference too. If so, then one could ask if the unity is one of material or spiritual or the two together. There could be many more pertinent questions. Before the answers are discussed, we may take up the basic point that matter is the cause and basis of all diversities, for matter exists (cf: T.U. 3.2.1). Now, if existence be taken as the basis of unity of the world as a whole, it has to be an objective one, i.e. the unity should lie in its materiality that focuses on the properties and relations existing in the human system. Diversity of life appears as one aspect of existence and as the mother of plurality, while unity

grows symbiotically with diversity in this world of existence in varying extent. However, to enliven the adage, unity requires offering an unvarying quality as a basic attribute. Also, in the interplay of diversities, unity has to remain a to-be-derived perception, since, to be precise, even in the Self itself, there is found no element that remains self-identical throughout.

B. Culture in relation to unity in diversity :

People enjoy talking on cultural unities and the talk begins with man as a unit. No man in the world is a lone traveller in society. Wherever he goes, he has to make relation (natal, sanguineous or circumstantially chosen) with another individual and the relationship emerges as the fundamental truth of the world of existence. Relationship is nothing but a connection that essentially strikes us first whenever we look forward to consider anything in the world. It is a bond between two persons (entities) and each of the myriad bonds of existence appears as mere imperfect relation of Platonic, ‘the bond’ idea, which means that, phenomenally, relations are of diverse kinds. That is why with the increase in volume of relationships, number of units is sure to increase proportionately and, mostly everyone in the nexus, in course, develops fear of losing one's freedom. This is primarily because differences in views associate the relationships' volume. If such differences, however, appear less conflicting and more complementary to each other, there originates toleration (about expressing of views). It is found valid in every form of human society beginning with the family. Toleration, that apparently has a passive face having stored in it certain degrees of condescension, reveals its positive and active side too — it is compassion. The nicety of toleration finds expression in seeking the truth that goads man inward to unearth the self-force. This had remained natural at the dialectical interface of the cultural remains of the Indus valley civilisation and the serial Indo-European (Aryan) invasion, with a little more tilt to the former. The study helps us to comprehend that the whole basis of the Indian mind lay in the inward turn and this was where the probable cultural solidarity of the country had its birth. Sen has rightly argued in favour of long Indian history of tolerant pluralism and has said: “The tolerance of variation in different walks of life has also had support including in Sanskrit drama, in Sanskrit poetry, with celebration of diversity, perhaps most elegantly expressed in Kālidāsa's *Meghadutam* ...”², where anyone can notice “a united view of India as a country with very rich variations”³.

Culture, then, appears as a broad-spectrum coverage for humans. It appears to ‘evolve’ non-genetically and, yet at a faster rate than a genetic evolution. It is because the transmission of culture offers rapid flexibility and any country with huge bi-directional migration is sure to help the process. India, for maintaining

living contacts with various other nations since some 5000 years, can boast of an ancient multicultural interactive history. In reality, cultures are not discrete islands, they are parts of the continents of history and that is why we come across both cultural mergers and clashes. Both of these fall in the category of cultural interaction that operates as an integrating factor towards a conceptually conceivable unity. It gears up the growth in diverse forms within the society. Believing unity to have such force does not mean that every Indian has to imbibe an exact account of this; but if every individual could exercise one's own way of interpreting the idea, then only unity could flower into diversity.

C. Unity in diversity — its Indian perspective :

'Unity in diversity' has become the Indian credo, the Indian sentiment, down the ages. In India's pluralistic society religion, culture, philosophy, politics etc. flourished as different phenomena, i.e. an immense diversity made the foundation of Indian society. There were frictions between the phenomenal growths, like between religion and philosophy, between spirit and matter and so on. There were ideological confrontations too. Yet, on this diversified base, there grew the Indian unity in the form of the Indian spirit of endurance to and cohabitation of varied faiths and more varied followers of faiths. Examples of such unity in diversity are recorded in age-old festivals like *Kumbh-Melâ* or the long history of Hindu-Muslim combined spiritual discipline (*sâdhanâ*). A vivid delineation of the *Kumbh-Melâ* is recorded in the Bengali novel, *Amṛta Kumbher Sandhâne*. The author Kâlkut (pen-name) sketches people from diverse class, society or organisation with the single aim to search for *amṛta*. Here we discover a convergence of diversity for a unity. However, the nature and explanation of that *amṛta* are found to vary as we proceed with the novel. It became *punya* for some, mere joy or enjoyment for some others, gathering news or meeting a wide variety of crowd or beliefs for still some others and so on. It indicates that such unity is again replete with diversity. What is focused is the spirit of the search. The spirit, in any case (whether *Melâ* or *Sâdhanâ*), did never emerge in a friction-free way — rather there were (and, there are still more) conflicts, rejections, deviations and slips at every step ahead. The question arises: how could then the unifying spirit come out as the country's sentiment? The answer primarily lies in exploring our history as one that had always disregarded inquisition and encouraged a coexistence of diversities. Also, the grammar of universal connectedness was never unfamiliar with the Indian sentiment. Every form is connected with other to bring out a harmony, a unity. In this view, religion, philosophy, spirit, matter, culture etc. could be regarded as different forms that are connected by imperceptible bonds in the society. Now, if these different forms

(empirically distinct phenomena) can each be explained in terms of a particular spirit (force), that would be taken as a unifying model; otherwise, the different phenomena or, simply the manifestations of the principle of different systems, which are mutually exclusive and sometimes competing, would have to be lumped together into one larger whole, which is, however, an invalid proposition. India, a home for "an odd mixture of many races"⁴, had remained an advocate for a valid proposition and, therefore, "despite all its variations, has consistently invited recognition and response"⁵ to find a unity of attitudes.

D. The global scenario :

The present theme recurs not only as a philosophical problem of the one and the many, but often emerges as a global problematique evoking, thereby, a curiosity among men of varied disciplines to discern the nature of reality and to bridge the gap between the two. The intellectual insights concerned with the problem throughout the world exhibit a slow-but-steady movement of mythical state of thought to that of dialectics through an explicit scientific elaboration and orientation of the problem itself, whereby an objective view shifts towards a subjective one. The all-evolving and all-embracing divine unity of the ancient thought process, due to its enduring influence, still motivates the present thinkers and its encounter with the experiential diversity kindles in the search of exact nature of reality, i.e. whether it is unity or, diversity, or, some duality or, unity consistently buoyed up in diversity.

D – 1. The quest of the Western philosophers :

Nature is replete with opposites: hot/cold, symmetry/asymmetry, unity/diversity and the like. The question is: what is real of the two and what is its exact nature? The question has had a long impressive history the world over.

In the evolution of notion of *physis* (nature), the ancient Greek thinkers show a ceaseless search in determining the nature of the ultimate principle (and process) that would explain and unify all phenomena by them. Such all-embracing material principle (or, the primordium) was understood as 'water' by Thales (640-542 BCE). One of his disciples, Anaximander, assumed, in order to account for the existence of opposites, the existence of a non-material primordial principle. He called it *Apeiron* (that means 'without boundary, limit, definition') and, was postulated as "the beginning without beginning and the sole primordial cause of things"⁶ (cf: the *Brahman* of the Upaniṣads). Anaximenes found the 'apeiron' devoid of qualitative particularities (like *nirguna Brahman*) and, hence unable to justify the perceivable heterogeneity. In response, he selected all-permeable 'air' as the supreme unity (divinity), and, viewed the heterogeneity

as the outcome of its quantitative variations in a given space. He was the first to provide a naturalistic causality behind the transformation of one to many. His view is comparable to what Yâgnavalkya says on *Vâyu=Hiranyagarbha* (B.U. III.3.2 & III.7.2). Anaximenean clarity thus opened the door of reasoning in the Milesian thought process. (We may here take a note that, similar to Thales's 'water' or Anaximenean 'air', there run Indian views too in R.V. X.82.1. and I.2. respectively).

Pythagoras (c. 569-494 BCE) and his followers, being mathematical investigators, made a radical departure from Milesian monism and claimed the world being built up from abstract numbers. The Pythagoreans proposed a geometrical duality in the form of limit and unlimited (cf: A. Coomarswamy's view of Indian art and culture swinging between two such poles — the 'static' *yogi* Buddha and the 'dynamic' Śiva *Nataraj*) as the ultimate principle. Later, they developed the ethical opposites as Good and Evil and associated them with limit (harmony) and unlimited (chaos) respectively. Reducing the reality to numerical values brought both an impetus and a challenge to the Pythagorean successors.

Heraclitus (c.500BCE) and Parmenides (c.485BCE) encountered the problem of nature against a metaphysical horizon. This problem was definitely the problem of reality that involves the validity of permanence/unity or, the problem of 'being' and change/plurality or that of 'becoming'. Heraclitus conceived the divine 'Logos' or Reason (or rationale) as the fundamental to bring orderly change in the universe and he saw reality as "unity in plurality and plurality in unity"⁷, for he saw his Logos to include all the manifested opposites, i.e. the Logos could transcend all opposing forces. Since the Logos preserves the unity of the diversified world, reality became "unity in plurality, identity in difference"⁸ to Heraclitus. Parmenides, on the contrary, held 'Being' as the absolute one, that alone exists as the unique reality without suffering any change. He deduced homogeneity, continuity and indivisibility as the three inherent properties of 'being' and discarded its possibilities of becoming many. The plurality reflects mere appearances to him. These two thinkers were radically so different that philosophy of 'becoming' emerged synonymous with Heracliteanism, philosophy of 'being' as Parmenideanism.

In the understanding of unity and plurality (diversity), the Greeks had made a series of brave attempts. Here we recall Anaxagoras who tried to mediate between the two opposing views of Heraclitus and Parmenides by postulating 'Mind' (or *Nous*) as the 'quantitatively divisible, yet qualitatively unchangeable' independent principle. Further, the idea of Being and Becoming was reconciled by assuming Being as manifest in certain invariable substances, the mixture and

separation of which brings out changes in the world. This led to the concept of atom, and it found its clearest expression in the philosophy of Democritus (c. 494-404 BCE) who, as the foremost representative of atomism, tried to construct an all-embracing conception of reality. According to this view, atoms, as the impenetrable ultimate unity, are endowed with properties of motion, and their motion is able to constitute the infinite variety of the world.

The Greek philosophical thoughts moved from cosmos to man with Socrates' (470-399BCE) emphatic orientation of moral excellence about human existence. His best known disciple, Plato (c.427BCE), put the intellectual life in Greece to a unique pedestal. His deep concern of ethical life and his encountering the problems of man and the world led him to develop an all-embracing insight, 'Idea', as the unifying principle. Plato denies Heraclitean view of Logos and appears basically Parmenidean about world of being. His own view of "being penetrates not-being and unity becomes visible through multiplicity. This allows the perspective of Heraclitus' one Logos, which expressly contains manyness and even allness, to coincide with that of Parmenides' one Being, which is meant to exclude not-being and the multitude of things"⁹. Plato's Idea is, therefore, Logos (empirically) as well as Being (transcendentally).

Both Plato and his pupil, Aristotle (c.383BCE), appreciated that change could be explained ultimately only by a transcendental unity. But, to resolve the problem of reality, the latter held 'Form' as the fundamental principle of both being and becoming. Aristotle's study of nature is specified by perceptible changes and he viewed Form as the source of all movements. He depicted every change as "a process of realising something that did not previously exist"¹⁰. Thus change, the most common reality to man, is always associated with a new existence or Form. The actuality/unity manifests in becoming only through this Form.

D – 2. The Indian images :

Different Indian images may be seen encapsulating in this quote: "The sense of unity can only occur, as a spiritual reaction on the mind, against a manifoldness"¹¹. The Vedic seers of different times independently announce the 'One Existent' idea. In the tenth *mandala* of Ṛg-Veda there is one *Nāsadiya sukta*, where we find, even before creation began, the existence of 'That One' ('*Tadekam*' — R.V. X.129.2). It appears as an unprecedented flash to the Indian mind though the ṛṣi becomes skeptical about the original cause of creation and asks who else knows from whom the diversities emerged. In an earlier ṛk, however, the One Ultimate principle expresses both an immanent and a transcendental nature (R.V. X.90.1, the *Puruṣa sukta*). In a still earlier time (R.V.

V.62.1) the word *Tad ekam* (That One) has been used as a synonym for the Supreme truth as the only existent in the cosmic system.

The Upaniṣads are valued for authoritatively disseminating the spirit of an unchangeable unity as the only reality (*Brahman*) with the phenomenal diversities as neither real nor unreal, nor both real and unreal, i.e. indefinable (*anirvācya*) objects. In the transactions of positive consciousness, comments Sri Aurobindo, “even Unity has to make its account with multiplicity; for the Many also are Brahman”¹². The manifested Many of the Vedānta show eternal dependence on the One. It further implies that, multiplicity/diversity is understood in this school as a need to realise the significance of one and, as an ensured basis to return to that oneness too.

The schools of the *Vaiśeṣika* and the *Nyāya*, although show commonness in their essential principles, the atomistic pluralism of the former school defines its distinction. In the spirit of science, it sees the world of diversities as real and, never binds such world by an all-embracing formula. It believes that true individuality resides in atoms which are qualitatively different. The atoms combine variously during every creation with vibration (*parispanda*) and the form of time (and no cosmic power) is felt essential to bring about concrete changes of nature (cf: Aristotelian view).

The reality is not one, but many, believe the Jains. Their *anekāntavāda* stands on their belief that every object is fundamentally *anekānta*, i.e. possessor of diverse characters that require to be analysed individually. So, diverse elements are the realities for them, while unity is only time-bound experience. In their atomic theory, the Jains, however, differ from the *Vaiśeṣika* view in that the atoms are qualitatively alike (cf: Anaxagorean ‘Mind’).

Mahāyāna Buddhism, following Nāgārjuna, views *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* fundamentally identical; the difference arises from our way of looking at them. The view is read from the silence of the Buddha over the so-called inexpressibles. That is why, to this philosophy the Real is neither one (*ekārtha*) nor many (*nānārtha*), it is utterly devoid of any attribute and is simple as it is. The doctrine uses ‘Thatness’ (*tathatā*) to suggest the nature of Reality. Such a view has had a long lasting influence on the Indian cultural growth. The essential unity of all beings, the Buddhists believe, becomes an integral part of spiritual life only (cf: 11th citation), otherwise they accept phenomenal variety as the essence of life.

A radical departure is noticed in the *Sāṃkhya* system for: a) being dualistic about the view on reality and, b) substituting evolution (*pariṇāma*) for creation of the world. It recognises two ultimate entities — nature (*Prakṛti*) and spirit (*Puruṣa*) — neither of which can be derived from the other. It also holds that the world is the product of the interaction of innumerable spirits (the Jaina idea

of existence of infinite number of individual souls or *jīva* may be recalled here) with the ever-active nature. It implies that *Puruṣa* is multiple in contrast to *Prakṛti* and the doctrine, therefore, may be described as pluralism. *Prakṛti* is ‘non-being’, while *Puruṣa* is ‘being’, the consciousness. The infinitely potential *Prakṛti* shows only change of form (*pariṇāma*/evolution), and no spatial change at all, but the diversities of the universe — that shows both kinds of changes (being finite in nature) — become latent in *Prakṛti* during periods of dissolution or *pralaya*. The static *Puruṣa* of the *Sāṃkhya* is the principle for the sake of which dynamic *Prakṛti* evolves. So they cooperate and “virtually act as one”¹³. *Puruṣa*’s influence on *Prakṛti*, though real, is unintelligible, and the relation between the two remains a mystery. The final aim of life, according to this system, is to attain a knowledge of absolute distinctness of *Prakṛti* from *Puruṣa* (= *vivek-jñāna*) for emancipation (*kaivalya*). This *vivek-jñāna* goes against the *tathatā* view of Buddhism on reality. The *Sāṃkhya* idea of manifold *Puruṣa* and a single *Prakṛti* (which is seen as the field of experience of *Puruṣa*) appears advantageous to account for the “multitude of things and the oneness in diversity of their experience”¹⁴.

A colonial impact always associates a strangling pressure on the traditional culture of the dependent country, for the impact moves in the direction of undermining the self-confidence of the dependent people. India could not come out as any exception during the British colonialism. Yet, it was the colonial pressure that made room for some 19th century Indian mystic and intellectuals like Ramakrishna, Tagore, Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo etc. to awake and combat in their own way for resurrecting the Indian culture, one of whose aspects is viewing the reality in the frame of their ancestors. Thus, once again, the problem of the one and the many got a revival.

Although Ramakrishna was primarily an uncompromising believer of a (spiritual) unity, he had the innocence to welcome and enjoy (phenomenal) diversity. Through his recorded versions in the *Kathāmṛta* we come across a series of parables, one of which is that of *vahurūpī* (chameleon) that clarifies existence of diversified views on even the Oneness of reality, which is otherwise beyond any word or concept according to a Vedāntin — *yato vāco nivartante, aprāpya manasā saha* (T.U. II.4). This may, however, be compared with the Buddha’s silence over the nature of reality. The diversity of views on it reflects the individualistic differences of looking and, nothing else. Contemporary to Ramakrishna there was Keshabchandra Sen who was worried to find out a unity in the diversified India. In *Sulabh Samâcâr*, a Bengali newspaper of the time, he proposed the use of only one language (and, it was suggested ‘Hindi’) throughout the country to let the countrymen sense an inner unity. A common language was thus viewed by him as the centralised force able to bring the

multiplicities into a convergence. Sri Aurobindo, too, believed that the unity of the human race demands unity of language. Yet, the binary role of language did not escape his vision and he realised that language as a bond “tempers division where division exists and strengthens unity where unity has been achieved”¹⁵, i.e. it serves both the ends: unification as well as variation. Of diversity of language in particular he asserts that, it “is worth keeping because without that diversity life cannot have full play”¹⁶.

It was Vivekananda, for whom “Knowledge means finding this unity in variety”¹⁷, creations have always been a ‘unity in diversity’. One can’t evade the problem arising out of the quoted demonstrative adjective, ‘this’, here. Vivekananda was totally unhesitant to float the adjective as the union of being with the divinity (cf: views of Heraclitus and Parmenides of ancient Greece). The question is: if there be any such ‘perfect’ unity, could there be any more progress as empirical expansion that also facilitates evolution towards enrichment? If not, would anyone ever discern a divinity?

In his *The Religion Of Man*, Tagore is equally emphatic about the divine reality and, he says: “The truth that is infinite dwells in the ideal of unity”¹⁸. This ‘truth’, he believes, corresponds to ‘one’s own inner spirit’. The whole idea of Tagore recalls Buddha’s idea of *Brahmavihāra*, i.e. ‘living in the infinite’, for both of them realised ‘truth’ through man of this world of diversity. It means there is variety and diversity ‘outside’, while oneness and unity ‘inside’. The contextual flavour of Tagore emerges from acknowledging both the practices (with unity and diversity being objectively entirely different) and, showing a cyclical relation between the two. When he says: *bhāv hote rupe abirām jāo-āsā (Āvartan/ Utsarga)* — ceaseless oscillation from idea to forms or, *mukti nânâ murti dhari dekhâ dite âse nânâ jane, ek panthâ nahe (Mukti/Puravî)* — freedom comes in different forms to different people, there can’t be a single path — he appears to entertain perusal of the two together without any friction.

Sri Aurobindo was probably the first Indian thinker to have harmonised the idea of evolution with the Indian philosophical views on man’s exceeding own manifestation (terrestrial limitations). Darwin’s ‘struggle for existence’ could well be viewed as one for attaining perfection which, Sri Aurobindo, in the novel orientation of evolution, placed as: ~~matter~~—~~life~~—~~Mind~~—~~Supermind~~—~~Spirit~~. The impulse may not, however, always follow the rigid straight line ascent; rather every forward movement is subject to reversion/recoiling in order to reappear in new combinations/forms to help advancement. The differences in degree of advancement create the kinds or phenomenal diversities, yet “to the principle of

unity every divided form must therefore subordinate itself in one fashion or another by mechanical necessity, by compulsion, by assent or inducement”¹⁹.

In the search for India’s national personality, though Nehru was “fully aware of the diversities and division of Indian life”²⁰, he continues to write “The unity of India was no longer merely an intellectual conception for me; it was an emotional experience which overpowered me”²¹. He was astonished at such quintessential unity and, even after acknowledging ‘tremendous’ and ‘obvious’ diversities within, he thinks that “at almost any time in recorded history an Indian would have felt more or less at home in any part of India”²². Such a sense of unity amid a wide diversity has long remained our national identity. The concept of Indian unity, in Nehru’s vision, appeared deep ‘within its fold’ and that was why the country encouraged ‘every variety’ since the dawn of civilisation.

The modern Indian thinkers under discussion tread the same path in: a) viewing unity and diversity as mutually compatible and, b) preaching a cyclical evolutionary relation between the two. This was possibly felt as a need to arouse the sleeping Indians against the colonial pressure.

E. Viewing unity in diversity against the socio-political history of India :

The growing popularity of the phrase descending as an unbroken narrative allowed little room for a critical review of it. It was differently used for a very long time: either as a shield or, as a preaching *mantra* or, sometimes even as the country’s synonym by the people of India. There is nothing negative in precisely claiming the phrase as the subject of pride for a multilingual, multi-racial and multi-religious India, but the very fact often poses serious threat to move forward for retrospection. There is no regret admitting that several social injustices, prejudices and vices are still being kept safely buried under the mosaic of ‘unity in diversity’.

History reveals that India had long remained a persistently invaded country in succession to allow trade, plunder, conquest to rule etc. take shape. In order to do so the invaders (like the Śaks, the Pārthiāns, the Kuṣāns) in course got acclimatised as the country’s inhabitants (i.e. Indianised) and, in this job, every group of invaders, every alien society, had to follow a give-and-take policy during their respective tenures. The policy was adopted as almost a common practice by the intruders. However, the underlying idea behind most of the invasions was to establish a centralised empire towards achieving at least a political unity. The *Mahābhārata* was compiled in order to let the country discover and taste a unity amid the socio-political diversities. The compiler Vyāsa (whom Tagore sees as a ‘social force’ rather than a particular individual) took pains to glue together the vastly scattered attitudes/ideas/incidents of the Aryan society towards making

the wholeness of a race and the Indian singularity. Moreover, the epic shows coexistence of two eternally distinct yet opposed causes — ‘love’ and ‘strife’ — which, according to the post-Parmenidean mediator, Empedocles (c.444 BCE), respectively begets unity and plurality.

Aoeka was one of the few rulers who could successfully stretch his territory from Afghanistan to almost Mysore under a centralised political umbrella. He inherited “a society with a wide range of customs, beliefs, affinities, antagonisms, tensions, and harmonies”²³. The quote shows the dual existence of unity and diversity of the period. His political achievement through social relations and fulfilment of commitments elicited a permanent significance during the pre-Christian period. Behind his success we find Aoeka’s viewing of the Buddhist ideology of *Dhamma* (the right principle/the social order/morality) “as a point of convergence for the existing diversities of people and activities”²⁴. The *Dhamma* inculcated the spirit of toleration and mutual respect. It had within the potentially nutrient seeds of a definite political unity of the past diversified India. Since politics deals with how humans should deal with each other and, in what systematic way, it is deeply concerned with society. A self-conscious political unity, therefore, shows concern in surviving under every calamity through selective absorption and rejection of ideas and values — that appear universal — for the sake of a state or a country, which is always characterised by diversified features. This is how Aoeka’s endeavour is being recorded in the history of India.

About two thousand years following Aoeka’s championing, we find the Moghul emperor “Akbar’s sponsorship and support for dialogues between adherents of different faiths”²⁵ which, in Sen’s analysis, “reflected a constructive search for an overarching unity, combined with a firm acknowledgement of plurality”²⁶. Akbar’s ‘pluralist commitments’ and encouragement enriched his court, helped elevate the North Indian music (the once folk vocal form, *dhruvada*, was raised to the classical status, for example) and his patronage prompted a large number of Sanskrit works to be translated into Persian, and drew painters from all parts of the Indian empire in the development and dissemination of Indian culture in its varied form. The records help one to understand the re-searching ancestry of a unity in the richness of variation.

Another king of the kind was Śivâji, who was a visionary to integrate the then disturbed and fragmented India towards attaining a socio-political unity. He at least “united the scattered and disorganised Mârâthâs into a secure state”²⁷. His vision got well echoed in Tagore: *Ek dharmarâjyapâse khanda chinna vikṣipta Bhârât/ venge diba âmi (Śivâji-Utsav)*. It indicates that, he too was eager and optimistic to bring a socio-political unity in the interest of multiplicity.

F. The preposition in the phrase :

Conceptually the phrase ‘unity in diversity’ describes a convergence of certain propositions which hold the system of identity and difference as the fundamental category towards all understanding. In this concept, presence of an all-controlling universal ‘unity’ appears more of a belief than a perception, for belief is simply the acceptance of a proposition as true. We enjoy a complacency at this, ignoring the only possible transcendental base of such all-embracing unity. Diversity, in contrast, is always an experiential reality.

Let us imagine that there are no numbers beyond 1 (i.e. there is no 2, 3, 4 etc.). Could we then expect any significance of 1/unity? No. It is only the diversity on which depends the realisation of unity. It cannot be expected in the same spatio-temporal situation where diversity evolves. It seems to be suggestive to *drop* the preposition ‘in’ from the phrase and replace with ‘and’ towards accepting independent existence of both the terms in two different realms, for, otherwise, unity has to obligatorily lie as a content in the bowl of diversity. It is true, however, that ‘unity in diversity’ is undeniably an outlook (personal/social), but it is, at the same time, difficult to experience it as such in practicality.

In the structure of language it shows vulnerability, for every language harbours in it the spirit of unity as well as diversity, both at the individual and social levels. Since language users vary, language becomes predominantly diverse. We basically have two kinds of language: mathematical and non-mathematical. The first category is syntactically true (for having a permanent relation), e.g. $2+2=4$, while the second one is semantically true (for following convention and making statements only conditionally true), e.g. the grass is green. The phrase in question falls under the second category. We admit multiplicity of languages and we admit multiplicity of religions, philosophical views, experiences, i.e. we admit diversity as an essential attribute of life. Conditionally, however, the preposition appears valid. The example of Brownian motion of fluids shows constantly moving molecules (which give the fluids their kinetic motion), but neither disrupts the cohesion nor brings any loss to their total energy. We can represent this as ‘diversity in unity’.

We thus rearrange first and third terms of the phrase to unearth a new problem. If, however, the converse be proved true, the phrase in question could unquestionably be taken as valid. Let us take an example of a seed (unity) slowly manifesting into a tree with its various organs (diversity). Is it ever possible to squeeze the resultant diversities down to the unity? A second question: which is real of the two — the seed or the tree? In fact, both of them (unity *and* diversity) are real in different spatio-temporal boundaries. It alludes to the view that both are real from different standpoints.

The converse statement, *diversity in unity*, however, enjoys an allowance when the ‘pulsating universe theory’ is taken into account. It claims that all matter is flying apart from a previously compacted mass (unity diversifying). Eventually it would stop and begin to contract under the mutual gravitational pull of its parts to ultimately condense (diversity retreating to unity) and, explode again as earlier (re-diversification of unity). The term ‘universe’ itself hides thus a rhythm of unity. Every theory of creation agrees on one essential point — it is expansion of something termed as unity. But in the phenomenal world, a reversal remains beyond physical experience — a premise that every philosophy holds as the best proof.

Mention may be made of the mediaeval mystics and saints of India who preached a oneness (in the divine realm) as the reality or, of Sufism that evolved as a blend of Buddhist monasticism and Upaniṣadic philosophy and preached the theory of Unity of Being (known as *Wahdatu’l Wujud*), or of the views of the Advaita Vedānta; but formation of even mutually conflicting schools from every predecessor creates an enigmatic situation on what has to be taken as real — the preached one or the followed many? (It would not be unworthy to adduce a note here: views differ even on the One *Brahman*, for example. It is the ‘impersonal Absolute’ for Śaṅkara, a ‘personal God’ for Nimbārka. Again the two Vaiṣṇava-Vedāntins, Nimbārka and Rāmānuja, respectively call the *Brahman* as Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by Rādhā, and Viṣṇu, accompanied by Lakṣmi. Also, Rāmānuja, while still admitting *Brahman* as the only real, teaches a changing *Brahman* that possesses the seeds of plurality, i.e. for him, both the experiential reality and the individual are modifications of the real *Brahman*. Should we attribute uniqueness to such diverse views?).

When the question of freedom or liberation (*mukti/mokṣa*) is brought under consideration, an *arhat*/a *sannyâsî* is found objectively oriented towards one’s own goal of salvation (unity for the sake of unity), while a *bodhisattva* exerts himself for universal emancipation (unity for the sake of diversity). Since every work is adopted for a particular purpose, and, since each self is a teleological unity (cf: B.U. IV.4-5), the nature of reality differs from an *arhat* to a *bodhisattva*, from unity to diversity. And, with this, we again encounter the same problem with the preposition in the phrase.

G. Different approaches to resolve the problem :

The problem not only swings round the preposition, but there are two completely different approaches in the study of the one and the many in forms of unity, diversity, unity versus diversity and unity in diversity. The approaches may be philosophical or sociological.

G-1. Philosophical :

Supporters of this school talk of *saṁyoga* (contact/conjunction) and, *samavâya* (inherence) among the manifold in the objective world. Śaṅkara regards the world of the many as *mâyâ* (the indefinable or indeterminate cause that allows one to see a world of distinct individuals) and says the manifestation disappears with the reality (*Brahman*) being known. A pertinent point is to be noted here: Śaṅkara accepts only the *saṁyoga* relation and rejects the *samavâya* altogether that, otherwise, advocates immutability. To explain the immutability, we can take a molecule of water formed from the union of two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen. Now, if we sever the bond between the two atoms, water no longer exists. It means such causal relation brings a radical change.

To an Advaitin like Śaṅkara, multiplicity does not involve any change at all, for only one identity manifests temporarily in diversified forms. Existence of a bond that links all the diversities together is the belief of an Advaitin. The Buddhists also deny the *samavâya* relation, while the Naiyâyikas — in their critical treatment of metaphysical problems — accept the unity and never see the diversities as fleeting. Both the Naiyâyikas and the Vaiśeṣikas view the two said relations as essential in their analyses, for in both, the physical conceptions appear almost the same.

The different schools of philosophy, however, rarely concur. Even Vivekananda, who is said to be a modern follower of Śaṅkara, differs from the latter in practical aspects when he is found to believe more in immanence than in transcendence. His belief in harmony and unity is significant, yet he explicitly says: “Variation is the sign of life”²⁸. Philosophically argued, we encounter the great problem with an Advaitin (like Vivekananda): how is unity in diversity accepted on the floor by rejecting the *samavâya* relation? Also, could we attribute personality as a unifying property of persons, where multiplicity of individuals is philosophically nullified?

G-2. Sociological :

The sociologists are troubled with two basic premises : *is* and *ought*. Associating these two with the present context we find plurality to lie in the former premise, pluralism in the latter. With the increase in population, classes of various distinctions are sure to arise and diverge to set a situation of diversity as a platform of society. This definitely belongs to the *is* premise. In this empirical plurality, views differ and diverge, too, to give rise to numbers of small, divided groups with vested interests. When it attains a sufficient volume, sociologists are faced with the problem of preferring the groups to a particular form of society. They get involved with this and as they do not belong to normative sciences,

invest less time in identifying the common properties of society-elements to propose ‘unity in diversity’ as a social road-map. Or else, in such cases, there remains enough scope to help emergence of pluralism (*ought* premise) that essentially offers more functional understanding of human nature by playing the role of a mosaic, and allowing interactions of many to go as independently valid constructions. This can be compared with Ramakrishna’s saying: *jato mat tata path* and it rightly deserves sociologists’ concern from every practical standpoint in order to create an open-window system towards social enrichment.

Sri Aurobindo, who dreamt of human unity in its social, economic or administrative aspects, was well aware that the “disappearance of national variation into a single uniform human unity might lead to the solution of a hundred material problems, but to what eventual good if it leads also to an uncreative sterilisation of the mind and the stagnation of the soul of the race?”²⁹ We find in him an apprehensive thinker here. Amidst widespread advantages of organisational unity, he found as disadvantages that individual life “loses its colour, richness, variety, freedom and victorious impulse towards creation”³⁰. Yet, for him, unity was the ‘first need’ parallel with the preservation of ‘variative diversity’. And, to see the present theme not as a floating idea, but as a sociological tendency; human principles, freed from belittling influences, *ought* to guide human intellect and attitudinal forces. It is true that unity confirms the basis of existence, but it is the diversity that helps move the evolutionary cycle.

Unity in diversity, under discussion, may be understood in two modes: descriptive and imperative. The socially oriented Advaitins are inclined to take it in the descriptive, i.e. indicative, ontological mode. The alleged description of state of affairs as unity in diversity is not vouched by any perceptual evidence. Taken as an imperative or *arthavâda* the phrase expresses a matter of desirability, an *ought*, distinguished from *is*. It is the second mode that the phrase is used in such domains as religious diversity, multi-cultural society and multi-party democracy. It is there more a matter of desired apperception than of perception.

H. Specific views on unity in diversity :

A discussion of three specific views as applicable to the present subject could make it more interesting. The views are: Conjunctive, Disjunctive and, Synergic.

Let P, Q, and R be three different social, cultural and religious or philosophical groups in the world of diversities and, let us study them vis-à-vis the three views.

H-1. Conjunctive :

If these three (P, Q, R) are found incommensurate with one another and they show such a casual look that none is found to be bothered by the presence of someone’s else’s views, the social scenario becomes one of conjunctive view.

Such indifference arises from non-learning or ignorance about the rest, and since neither of these can form a sound basis for harmony, only diversity is acknowledged in this view.

H-2. Disjunctive :

A disjunctive view holds contrary views at its top. Here, each of the groups, P, Q and R, considers its own view as the best, while the remaining ones are seen either as inferior or even false. Brought to the religious realm, it forms exclusivism. An idea of painful mutual accommodation is, however, nurtured by the view to such an extent as to allow toleration to become the sociological defence. But, the word ‘toleration’, as viewed by Vivekananda, is “that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live”³¹ hints at issuing of a license to someone else at one’s own discretion. Such painful accommodation and allowance out of mercy has been viewed by him as ‘blasphemy’. Toleration simply refrains one from doing something worse and no added advantage generates. That is why an underlying derision, struggle or destructive/competitive pressure and contradictory views sustain camouflaging.

Study shows that man likes to belong to some or other organisations which, in order to prove supremacy, adopt advertisement and networking in different forms. The human elements, while so organised, often exhibit their immunity to logic and exclude every other organisation as almost invalid or wrong. They ultimately find adaptive change a very difficult proposition to accept. Men of a particular organisation often “claim that the right to live belongs only to them”³². Organisations, in most of such cases, therefore, get ruled by orthodoxy that, on prolonged pampering, opens the door to fundamentalism.

This is predominantly why and where schools of different thought incessantly quarrel instead of coming close and behave a bit cynically with one another instead of sharing their mutual assets. Arnold Toynbee’s observation in this regard may be cited: “One generic evil of an institution of any kind is that people who have identified themselves with it are prone to make an idol of it”³³. The highly proclaimed unity, fraternity and amity becomes so narrowly bounded in such view that one quote needs to be brought into mention from *Annapurnâstotram* (Śloka-12) — *Mâtâ me Pârvasi devi pitâ divo Maheshwarah/ Bândhabân Śivabhaktâh ca swadeso bhuvanotrayam* — the follower of the Śaivite sect categorically emphasises the devotees of the sect as his friends/brothers. If it be so, what about the rest of the people belonging to other sect/organisation? Similar utterances are expected from his fellow groups, while everyone would use the word toleration in defence. In the *Gîtâ* (IV.11), Kṛṣṇa states ‘In whatever way a person wants to attain me, I bless him in that way’ (*ye yathâ mām prapadyante tân tathâ evo bhajâmi aham*). The question is: what warranty does the statement offer to those

who either does not know Kṛṣṇa or, does not worship him at all? Another such statement follows thus: *sarvadharmân parityajya mâmekam saranam braja* (XVIII.66), which appears almost a mirror image of the earlier Judaism, where God spoke: ‘worship no god but me’ (2nd commandment of the Ten Commandments in *Exodus/The Old Testament*). In both, the speaker’s command attempts to prove his supremacy. Fundamental to Judaism is the belief that the Israelites are ‘God’s chosen people’ and this marks a highly disjunctive thought. Even Ramakrishna’s statement, *Śiva jñâne jîva sevâ* (serving everyone knowing them as Śiva) appears as a culturally specific statement for hiding a singular idea-centricity in it. Those who do not know or accept Śiva, are then supposed to disown the moral right to serve the people. Let us keep the question open: could we deserve a unity in diversity under such circumstances? Vivekananda unhesitatingly criticises this view by saying — “He does not know that upon the proof of all the others depends the proof of his own”³⁴.

H-3. Synergic :

The third or synergic view offers a milieu where each of the P, Q and R remains concerned about the other — so deeply concerned that each one endeavours to meet, criticise to evaluate and crisscross values/ideas towards enrichment. The former idea of mutual accommodation is replaced by that of mutual help, respect and coordination. When Vivekananda states that each must assimilate the spirit of the other and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth, we find a sanction to be satisfactorily released towards viewing the same truth from different standpoints, without injuring anyone else’s uniqueness. One historical evidence in this regard is there with the Syrian Christians who, since their entry into the socially pluralistic Kerala in the first century AD, received impetus from their sense of mutual adaptation, interaction, communication and that of a respect for individual socio-cultural groups. It was mostly for this attitude that religious diversities throughout South India could develop a philosophy of religious tolerance (harmony) till the 16th century. The impetus of the migrated Syrian Christians owed simply to Jesus’ epoch-making outlook about neighbour — ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’. Aṇka, who stands in an earlier tradition of India, argued that “the sects of other people all deserve reverence for one reason or another”³⁵ and, therefore, he “was strongly committed to making sure that public discussion could take place without animosity or violence”³⁶. It tells of Aṇkan as well as Indian excellence in dealing with diversities since long past.

The view essentially recognises everyone’s independence and dignity and nurtures the true spirit of fraternity/oneness/amity. The non-exclusivist Sikhism emphasises a wider dimension of harmony through its synergic outlook: *Nâ ko bairi nahi bigânâ sagal sang ham ko ban âee* (‘We have no adversary, nor is anyone alien to us; we get along well with everyone’). Its aesthetic expression is found in the voice of Sarada Devi, wife of Ramakrishna, when she gives a sublime guarantee; ‘I am mother to both the good (*sat*) and the evil (*asat*)’ or, ‘I am mother to both Śarat (a Hindu) and Amjâd’ (a Muslim). A true unity in diversity is being acknowledged thereby. Tagore’s voice of a synergic view about the Indian unity in diversity may appropriately be re-echoed here: *dibe âr nibe, milâbe milibe, jâbe nâ phire/ ei Bhârater mahâmânaber sâgartire (Bhârattirtha)* — ‘will give and take, merge with, remake a reverse-less homogeneity/at shore of India’s grand human sea’. The vital essence of this view, supporting unity in diversity, is, however, found flashing in our national anthem and, it might be taken as a lesson.

H-4. Concept versus experience :

Prolonged use of any mundane aspect, as we know, calls for a restoration. The conceptual *unity in diversity* needs to be experienced. Before we set out, we must know what is meant by the two nouns of the phrase. In the world of rhythm, every ‘unity’ is a part of the infinite universe and, every ‘diversity’ (seen plurally) — parts of that universe.

Metaphysically then, ‘unity’ has to lie in ‘diversity’ and, unity in diversity of a particular spatio-temporally bound area will have some structural/behavioural similarity and commonality in the unity in diversity of some other area of this universe. The theme, therefore, becomes a natural property of the process of growth everywhere. The exclusiveness, if any, belongs more to its degree than its kind. An example of unity diluting into diversity is found in the first book of the Old Testament, *Genesis*. It is said that people of the whole world had originally only ‘one’ language, but the Lord — apprehending some unified provocation — scattered the people all over the earth to create a ‘mixed up’ (diversified) language of the people. At this point, around the 3rd millennium BCE got settled the city of Babylon (in Hebrew it means ‘mixed up’). The Jews’ dispersal throughout the world following the destruction of the second temple in AD 70 in the Jewish Diaspora marks a phenomenal unity in diversity in the world history, for the scattered Jews — though lost contact with the mainstream — still retained their religious faith through unified prayers. This spirit is felt imminent in the present socio-political scenario to help the concept appear in practice.

Conclusive discussion :

The theme of unity in diversity frequently appears as a problem of the one and the many (or, one and not-one). Some view it as a cosmos versus chaos problem. In a way, the two stands on the two opposite loci creating thereby a polarity. This is noticed in almost every facet of the universe. It means both of them exist in different spatio-temporal boundaries and this perception (*pratyakṣa* or, *sākṣāt pratītiḥ*) drops the preposition *in* between the two nominal terms, which are thus set apart independently. What is the harm? Why then should one feel the urge to prove the one within the other? Is it any obligation?

In both the *Sāṃkhya* philosophy and the materialism, the ultimate reality is asserted in terms of one primary homogeneity (=cosmos) while the multiplicity of heterogeneity (=chaos) only as surface appearances. This asserts a definite polarity. Indian *Brahmavidyā* too shows primarily two aspects: *aveda* and *bhedābheda*. Tagore views that worship or *pūjā* emerges when ‘two’ are accepted, but an acceptance of oneness in the two gives way to devotion or *bhakti* (vide his essay *Bhāratvarṣe Itihāse Dhārā*). The probable root of his view lies in the Indian tradition where worship has an emotional involvement and devotion, a mental association. The identity as well as the difference, therefore, exist, but on different planes. Similar expression is found in the Hellenic thought that admits of unity of the One (divine realm) and multiplicity of the matter (phenomenal realm) with an intermediate duality. Such duality, like *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* (of the *Sāṃkhya* system), or wave and particle behaviour (of the electromagnetic radiation in physical science), holds true in different aspects of life.

We often encounter the problem on whether we could ever reach a unity in every aspect of our ideas despite the undeniable diversities everywhere. The very thought of such a unifying proposition appears absurd and, so tends to a failure. But when Vivekananda — for whom ‘unity in variety’ becomes the plan of the universe— emphasises: “Every science must end where it finds a unity”³⁷, he apparently projects himself as a reductionist (?). The unity he visualises in this context converges towards the Unity of Science— an ontologically contentious concept developed within the positivist tradition in philosophy of science. It holds that nature is made of only ‘one continuous fabric’ and exhibits a reductive hierarchy. The phenomenal differences, according to this model, are of degree only, not of kind. Both the philosophers and the scientists, being basically ontologists at heart, wish to understand the cosmos and, in this game, they often seek for an idea of unification that could explain various diverse phenomena using the same fundamental principles. A relevant address from a modern theoretical physicist may be read: “The basic oneness of the universe is not only the central

characteristic of the mystical experience, but is also one of the most important revelations of modern physics”³⁸. He further goes on to say that quantum theory “forces us to see the universe not as a collection of physical objects, but rather as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole”³⁹, i.e. the theory has virtually abolished the notion of fundamentally separated objects (diversity). It seems to recall the Buddhist idea of things that derive energy by mutual dependence only and otherwise represent state of eternal momentariness. Do we not then face the problem of unity and diversity as one of a language?

It would not be unworthy to discuss the Pythagorean reductionism that opened the door to link Mathematics and our mysterious nature through Euclid of Alexandria (c. 300 BCE), known primarily for his highly influential treatise on geometry, the *Elements*. It was he who defined the Golden Proportion (Divine Proportion) and the Golden Number, represented by ϕ (*phi*). The ratio is considered to be an aesthetic ideal in classical design and, the Number— a magical phenomenon in Mathematics— is able to define Nature’s beauty. The secret of the Golden Number hides in the famous Fibonacci Series, which is a peculiar sequence of numbers. The Number is found in nearly every aspect of life. Our universe is an example of the Golden Ratio. This mathematical beauty is found dispersed even in DNA, the most fundamental molecule of life, in music or poetry, in the plant or the animal world. The discussion then concludes with an idea of singular origin of beauty, though Platonic beauty “implies the good as well as unity, diversity and integration”⁴⁰.

It then leads us to a point where we ask: does unity in diversity behave as the source of all goodness? Or, all beauty? If we take up rainbow or musical orchestra, we find diversities to exist in them, but the diversities do not exhibit any independent significance. It is the unity of the diversities that brings their respective goodness or aesthetic flavour. The examples conform to Sri Aurobindo’s view: “A diversity in oneness is the law of the manifestation”⁴¹, as diversities require to be integrated into a whole to mean order. Observations show that almost every fundamental unity is potential to flourish into diversities. Again, diversities of some other category tend to a unity during a calamitous condition, like warfare or quake though such unity obviously happens to be a conditional one. However, Vivekananda comes up with more clarity, “Variety in unity is necessary to keep man as man”⁴². To Kant, unity appears as a mere concept. On religious differences he says — “there being only one religion valid for all men and in all ages. There can, therefore, be nothing else than accidental vehicles of religion, thus changing with times and places”⁴³.

While summing up, we once again face the principal ontological question—what is reality? Does the answer lie in unity or diversity or unity in diversity? Can we assume an ‘either-or’ attitude here? Perhaps not. What then? There is more to come and this hope drives man to dive deeper into the unknown as ever. Perhaps the resolution lies in the direction of what the great Udayana expressed as *bheda-saḥiṣṇu-aikya* (the phrase occurs in Udayana’s classic *Atmatativaviveka*), the oneness that revels in diversity. Looking into our own body, we find its journey to start from the diploid zygote (I apologise for using a technical phrase here), the so-called uni-cell or the immediate result of fertilisation, that soon starts dividing to march for differentiation and subsequent developmental process (i.e. towards diversity) to construct a multifunctional and multi-faceted individual or being. This ‘being’, with the attributes of ‘becoming’, retains a coordinated system of unity within at the sub-cellular levels. The incessant flow of life obeys this principle everywhere. Does it not show that unity, in true sense, revels in diversity? Evolution, in our understanding, being the most inspiring subject of biology and beyond as well, and, seen as a light, is found to illuminate the unity as well as the diversity of the living world only on different planes. For us, who have yet only imperfectly discovered Nature, there are many surprises to come up with the unresolved subject of reality perhaps remaining as the foremost one as ever.

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Abbreviations :

R.V.= Rg Veda. **S.U.**= Śvetāswatara Upaniṣad. **C.U.** = Chāndyogya Upaniṣad.
T.U. = Taittirīya Upaniṣad.
A.U. = Aitareya Upaniṣad. **B.U.** = Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad.

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Anurag Banerjee is a researcher, biographer, essayist, translator and poet. A B.Com graduate from the University of Calcutta with Honours in Accountancy and Finance and an M.B.A. from ICAI University, Dehradun, with specialisation in Human Resource Management, he is the Founder and Chairman of Overman Foundation which runs an online research facility and the 'Auro-Ratna Awards'. He is a facilitator at SACAR, Pondicherry, where he conducts the course on Integral Management. His published works include, among others, 'Nirodbaran: The Surrealist's Journey' 'Achinpathar Dibyapathik', 'Debotar Shrom', 'The Alipore Bomb Trial Judgment', 'Sri Aurobindo: His Political Life and Activities', 'Sri Aurobindo on Ethics', 'Ananya Nishikanto', 'Sujata Nahar: Loving Homage', 'Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore', 'The Mother: The Birth and Growth of a Flame' and 'The Alipore Bomb Trial: Selected Documents'. He is the recipient of 'Nolini Kanta Gupta Smriti Puraskar' in 2011.

Barindra Kumar Ghosh was born in Norwood, England, on 5 January, 1880. Along with his sister, Sarojini, Barin came to India at the age of one. His childhood and youth were spent in great suffering in the company of his ailing mother, Swarnalata, at Rohini near Deoghar. In 1901, Barin passed the Pre-University Examination from the Deoghar School. He studied in the Patna college for six months for the FA Course and then joined the Dhaka College. But the University had no fascination for him and he left it to see the world for himself. He was sent to Calcutta in 1903 by Sri Aurobindo to help Jatindranath Banerjee in organising the revolutionary movement. However, Barin later developed differences with Jatindranath. In the wake of the Swadeshi movement in 1906, he started a Bengali weekly *Jugantar* to propagate revolutionary ideas.

Convicted in the Alipore Bomb Trial Case, Barin was sent to the Andamans in Dec 1909. He was released from the Cellular jail in Jan 1920 following a royal amnesty. After his release, he was given the task of editing the journal *Narayana* by C R Das. In his spiritual life, which started and developed at Deoghar, he adopted later several gurus and received initiations from them. But Sri Aurobindo's influence was the greatest in his life of sadhana. He first visited

Pondicherry in 1920. Later in 1923, he would return to Pondicherry and spend the next six and a half years of his life there.

Barin returned to Calcutta in 1929 and stayed for a while at the Arya Publishing House in College Street. In 1933, he started the English weekly *The Dawn of India* and even served for a while in the newspaper *The Statesman*. He became the editor of *Dainik Basumati* in 1950. In 1933, he married Sailaja Devi, a widow of a respectable family. He wrote on a variety of subjects and was the author of more than 20 books, nearly all of which were written after he came out of the Cellular Jail.

His last days were troubled by a long illness and his eventful life finally came to an end on 18 April, 1959 at the SSKM Hospital at the ripe old age of 79.

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