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Śraddhā श्रद्धा

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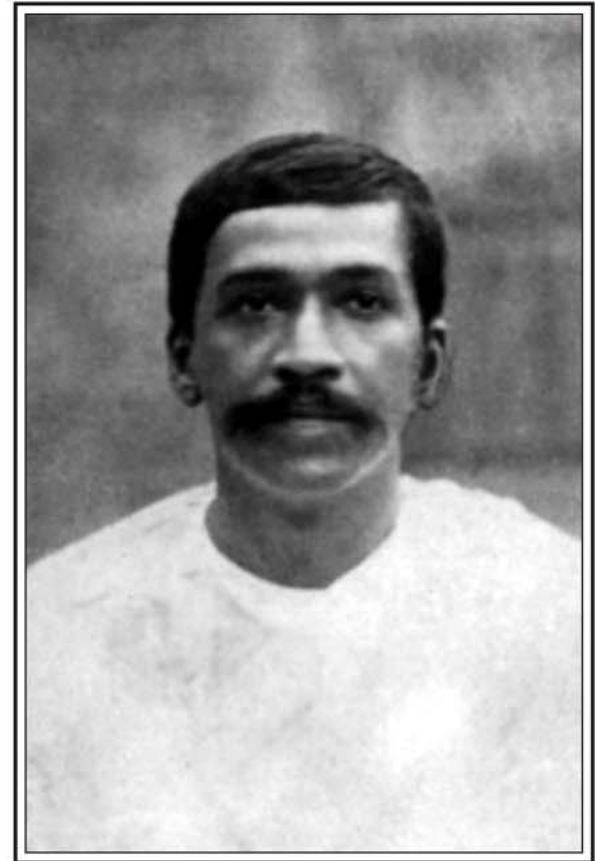
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15 August 2012



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*I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; not a physical strength ...
but the ...power of knowledge.. I was born with it, it is in my very marrow.
God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission.*

Sri Aurobindo — Letter to his wife, Mrinalini, 30 Aug, 1905

Śraddhā

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

Vol.4 No. 1

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All correspondence may be addressed to

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Sri Aurobindo Bhavan

8 Shakespeare Sarani

Kolkata 700 071

Editor: Arup Basu

Phone: 98302 58723

E-mail : arupbasu99@yahoo.com , arup.mbe@rediffmail.com

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Editorial

15 August, 1872. It was the Hour of God. Already Usha with its first few faint rays of light was slowly breaking over the far rim of the distant horizon, when a luminous finger of nude splendour aimed its keen spear-point of one mighty, white, untrembling virgin radiance at the soil of India. Mother Earth embraced this huge, columned shaft of Light and nursed it in her womb and thunder's force filled a human frame. 'A strong son of lightning came down to the earth', 'all the gods in a mortal body dwelt, bore a single name' – Aurobindo, the heaven-born lotus, 'a colonist from Immortality', Messenger of the Incomunicable, architect of tomorrow's creation, Announcer of the coming of the supramental being, the Avatar of the coming age, an age that will progress not from Ignorance to Knowledge but one that will itself be founded on Knowledge and Truth-Consciousness and move from Light to a greater Light. It was he who incarnated in himself the eternal soul of India, who was the greatest synthesis ever of the genius of the East and that of the West, who, in this adventure of consciousness, dared to do what even Krishna did not achieve – cleave a radiant path through dark abysses, delve into the deepest pits of hell, and on matter's tenebrous, hard and obdurate base light the undying, eternal flame of aspiration, Spirit's mystic fire that would weave 'a robe of spiritual light and beauty' around this earth and turn existence, for ever, into a breath of joy and life into 'a godlike game'.

In this blessed hour, beset as we are with doubts, anxieties, loss of faith, fears, incertitude, despair and helplessness, can we not, we the children of Mother-Sri Aurobindo, of the 'deathless Two-in-One', serving a 'diarchy of two united souls', once and for all, firmly set aside all our petty differences and shedding all self-deceit, hypocrisy and vain self-egoism make a conscious effort to look straight into the Spirit within and ask ourselves sincerely how far true and faithful we have been to the moving and poignant Invocation of the Mother inscribed on the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo?

À Toi qui fus le revêtement matériel de notre maître, À Toi notre infinie gratitude. Devant Toi qui as tant travaillé, lutté, souffert, espéré, enduré, Toi qui as tout Voulu, tout tenté, tout préparé, tout accompli pour nous, devant Toi nous nous inclinons en implorant afin que nous n'oublions jamais, même pour un moment, tout ce que nous Te devons.

To Thee who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to Thee our infinite gratitude. Thou who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before Thee who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to Thee.
9 December, 1950

This year celebrates the twin anniversaries, the conclusion of the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore and the ongoing 150th anniversary of the birth of Swami Vivekananda. Sri Aurobindo looked upon Tagore as 'our greatest lyric poet' and considered his work as 'a constant music of the overpassing of the borders, a chant-filled realm in which the subtle sounds and lights of the truth of the Spirit give new meanings to the finer subtleties of life'. And what was Vivekananda to Sri Aurobindo? 'A radiant glance from the eye of Shiva' ... 'the heroic soul destined to take the world between his two hands and change it'. In remembrance of this happy occasion and , we feature two articles by Supriyo Bhattacharya and Kittu Reddy as a humble token of our tribute to these two luminaries from Bengal.

Even as matter for the current issue of **Sraddha** was being prepared, news arrived from the Ashram in Pondicherry of the passing away of Arabinda Basu, our much beloved and revered Arindam-da, at the Asharm Nursing Home on the evening of 3 July, the day of Guru Purnima. His devotion to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo was unquestioning, total and absolute. It may be recalled that in 1967 at the call of the Mother, he renounced, at a moment's notice, the much coveted post of Spalding Lecturer in Indian Philosophy at the University of Durham, UK, and came away to Pondicherry to serve at the feet of the Mother. One of the brightest intellects with a mind suffused with luminosities of the Higher Mind, Arindam-da was one of the ablest exponents of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. Known specially for the exceptional clarity of his thought and a keen and perceptive analysis of highly abstruse metaphysical reasonings, his many writings on Sri Aurobindo are a distillation of the subtler nuances and finer strands of The Master's vision and ideal, apt to be missed by many a seasoned interpreter of Sri Aurobindo studies. His passing away on the day of Guru Purnima itself is a matter of great significance. It is commonly believed in our Indian tradition that on this very auspicious day, the disciple or the devotee specially concentrates in each and every part and on each and every plane of one's being to be united in body, mind and spirit with the divine consciousness of the Guru so as to call down his Blessings and Grace for spiritual upliftment. We have no doubt that Arindamda at the end of his earthly journey, has attained that

param dham, at the lotus feet of his Master, a far far better resting place than he has ever known.

Contributors to **Sraddha** and readers of our journal will be pleased to hear that NISCAIR, the National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources, the national centre of ISSN international centre for assigning ISSN to serials published in India, has assigned ISSN to **Sraddha**, thus making its contents now available worldwide. The benefits of being assigned ISSN include international publicity and recognition of the serial by automatic inclusion in the International Serials Directories. We are grateful to NISCAIR for bestowing this honour as a mark of appreciation of the qualitative content of the writings. We hope this would encourage readers as well as potential writers, academics, researchers and pursuants of Sri Aurobindo studies to come forward and further enrich the quality of the journal with thoughtful, serious and in depth studies on the teachings and ideas of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

We take this opportunity to welcome our readers with a new look **Sraddha**. The painting on the cover of the journal '*Country of the Mind*' is by Giles Herdman who lives in far away England and is the husband of our long time friend of the Ashram in Pondicherry, Sunayana (Panda), editor of *The Golden Chain*. We have decided to use this as a permanent feature on the cover and Giles has very graciously agreed to let us use his painting for this purpose.

We are grateful to Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for permitting us to reproduce the article by Sri Aurobindo, taken from vol.1 of *The Standard Bearer*, 15 Aug, 1920, the photograph of The Master taken from the Ashram catalogue of photos with a few lines taken from Sri Aurobindo's letter dt. 30 Aug. 1905 to his wife, Mrininalini, from the English Translations of his Bengali writings, the group photo of the Mother with Tagore and others in Japan and the Mother's sketch of James Cousins from the collection of the Ashram Trust. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgements and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

Contents

Ourselves	Sri Aurobindo Ghosh	9
Gitanuvachan – Parts 3 & 4	Srimat Anirvan	12
Impact Of Swami Vivekananda And Sri Aurobindo On Indian Freedom Movement	Kittu Reddy	25
Sri Aurobindo And Problems Of Human Unity	Amaury de Riencourt	35
Towards A New Science Of Society: An Integral Approach	M.S. Srinivasan	41
Social Progress Through Symbolism And Individualism	Usharanjan Chakraborty	53
The Genesis Of Sri Aurobindo's Superman	Sandeep Joshi	65
The Psychic Being	Debashish Banerji	79
Om In <i>Savitri</i> And The World	Pravir Malik	105
Tagore And Sri Aurobindo: How They Met In Their Vision	Supriyo Bhattacharya	127
Penal Labour, Mystical Longings And International Vision: The Paul Richard Story	Sachidananda Mohanty	145
Professor Arabinda Basu: A Tribute	Shraddhavan	160
Notes On Authors		161
Index To Authors And Articles In Sraddha , August 2011 – April 2012		162

श्रद्धाबाल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṃl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Ourselves

Shree Aurobindo Ghosh

“*The Standard-Bearer*” comes into the field today entrusted with a special mission and as the bearer of an ideal and a message. The standard it carries is not that of an outward battle, but the ensign of a spiritual ideal and of a life that must be its expression and the growing body of its reality. Our endeavour shall be to prepare the paths and to accomplish the beginning of a great and high change, which we believe to be, and aim at making, the future of the race and the future of India. Our ideal is a new birth of humanity into the spirit; our life must be a spiritually inspired effort to create a body of action for that great new birth and creation.

A spiritual ideal has always been the characteristic idea and aspiration of India. But the progress of Time and the need of humanity demand a new orientation and another form of that ideal. The old forms and methods are no longer sufficient for the purpose of the Time-spirit. India can no longer fulfil herself on lines that are too narrow for the great steps she has to take in the future. Nor is ours the spirituality of a life that is aged and world-weary and burdened with the sense of the illusion and miserable inutility of all God’s mighty creation. Our ideal is not the spirituality that withdraws from life, but the conquest of life by the power of the spirit. It is to accept the world as an effort of manifestation of the Divine, but also to transform humanity by a greater effort of manifestation than has yet been accomplished — one in which the veil between man and God shall be removed, the divine manhood of which we are capable, shall come to birth and our life shall be remoulded in the truth and light and power of the spirit. It is to make of all our action a sacrifice to the Master of our action and an expression of the greater self in man and of all life a Yoga.

The West has made the growth of the intellectual, emotional, vital and material being of man its ideal, but it has left aside the greater possibilities of his spiritual existence. Its highest standards are ideals of progress, of

liberty, equality and fraternity, of reason and science, of efficiency of all kinds, of a better political, social and economical state, of the unity and earthly happiness of the race. These are great endeavours, but experiment after experiment has shown that they cannot be realised in their truth by the power of the idea and the sentiment alone; their real truth and practice can only be founded in the spirit. The West has put its faith in its science and machinery and it is being destroyed by its science and crushed under its mechanical burden. It has not understood that a spiritual change is necessary for the accomplishment of its ideals. The East has the secret of that spiritual change, but it has too long turned its eyes away from the earth. The time has now come to heal the division and to unite life and the spirit.

This secret too has been possessed but not sufficiently practised by India. It is summarised in the rule of the Geeta — ‘Yogasthah Kuru Karmani’. Its principle is to do all actions in Yoga, in union with God, on the foundation of the highest self and through the rule of all our members by the power of the spirit. And this we believe to be not only possible for man, but the true solution of all his problems and difficulties.

That then is the message we shall constantly utter and this the ideal that we shall put before the young and rising India, a spiritual life that shall take up all human activities and avail to transfigure the world for the great age that is coming. India, she that has carried in herself from of old the secret, can alone lead the way in this great transformation, of which the present Sandhya of the old yuga is the forerunner. This must be her mission and service to humanity — as she discovered the inner spiritual life for the individual, so now to discover for the race its integral collective expression and found for mankind its new spiritual and communal order.

Our first object shall be to declare this ideal; insist on the spiritual change as the first necessity and group together all who accept it and are ready to strive sincerely to fulfil it; our second shall be to build up not only an individual but a communal life on this principle. An outer activity as well as an inner change is needed and it must be at once a spiritual, cultural, educational, social and economical action. Its scope, too, will be at once individual and communal, regional and national, and eventually a work not only for the nation but for the whole human people. The immediate (result) of this action will be a new creation, a spiritual education and culture, an enlarged social spirit founded not on division but on unity, on the perfect growth and freedom of the individual, but also on his unity

with others and his dedication to a larger self in the people and in humanity and the beginning of an endeavour towards the solution of the economic problem founded not on any western model but on the communal principle native to India.

Our call is to Young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new world — not those who accept the competitive individualism, the capitalism or the materialistic communism of the West as India's future ideal nor those who are enslaved to old religious formulas and cannot believe in the acceptance and transformation of life by the spirit, but all who are free in mind and heart to accept a completer truth and labour for a greater ideal. They must be men who will dedicate themselves not to the past or the present but to the future. They will need to consecrate their lives to an exceeding of their lower self, to the realisation of God in themselves and in all human beings and to a whole-minded and indefatigable labour for the nation and for humanity. This ideal can be as yet only a little seed and the life that embodies it a small nucleus, but it is our fixed hope that the seed will grow into a great tree and the nucleus be the heart of an ever-extending formation. It is with a confident trust in the spirit that inspires us that we take our place among the standard-bearers of the new humanity that is struggling to be born amidst the chaos of a world in dissolution and of the future India, the greater India of the rebirth that is to rejuvenate the mighty outworn body of the ancient Mother.

(*The Standard Bearer*, Vol. 1— First issue, the 15th August, 1920).

Gitanuvachan – Parts 3 & 4

Srimat Anirvan

Question: *Is there not a slight insinuation at the expression 'mithyachara' (act of falsehood) in the 6th verse of the Third Chapter? Why is there such a comment?*

Answer: This is a statement of fact, not an insinuation. In most of the cases, we control our senses to a certain extent while practising Samyama or discipline, but not the mind and go on thinking constantly about the sense objects. This is an act of falsehood and ignorance. This kind of control puts away only the sense objects but the desire for enjoyment does not die. Unless one realises the Absolute Truth, and knows that to be the fount of all enjoyment, mental cravings persist.

Question: *What is the difference between 'Yagnashishtashino' (one who partakes in the leftover from a Yajna) and 'Pachanti Atmakaraanat' (to cook for oneself) (Ch.III, SL.13)*

Answer: To work for one's own enjoyment is 'cooking' for oneself; and to work for His enjoyment and enjoy the results as His Prasad – no matter whether that brings happiness or sorrow, gain or loss – means taking the leftover from a Yajna or consuming 'Ida'. Partaking in consuming 'Ida' was a very common custom among the ancient performers of Yajna. The Gita's injunction is to put that consciousness in practice and expand that in all our activities.

(Towards the end of Chapter Four, Srimat Anirvan has mentioned Ida again as the leftover of the food offered in a Yajna)

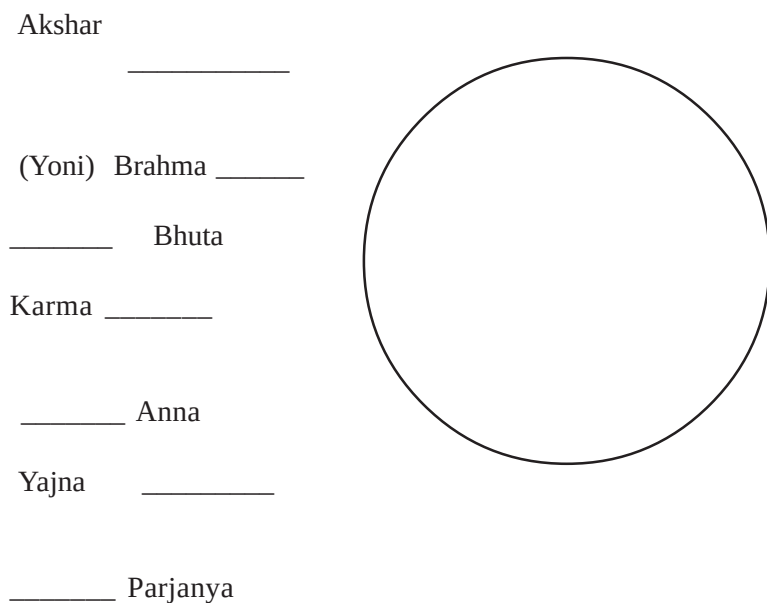
Question: *What are the inner meanings of 'Brahman is ever established in Yajna' and 'Action ensued from Brahman' in (Ch.III,SL.15)? What is the mystery behind the 'Introduced Wheel'?* (Ibid)

Answer: In Sl. 14 & 15 of Ch.III, a wheel has been mentioned. Swetaswara Upanishad (1/6) too refers to a Brahma Chakra which is similar to the one mentioned here. In Buddhist Scriptures again we have reference to the introduction of 'Dharma Chakra' by Buddha during the full moon of the month of Ashada. Here, in Gita too, in the following sloka (16), it is said that one who

does not follow this ‘introduced Chakra’ lives in vain. The similarity is to be noted.

Any point situated at the circumference of a wheel goes down and again comes up along with the rotation of the wheel. Obviously the opposite movement is equally true. By and large, movements in descending and ascending orders are there. Brahman is coming down and Jiva is going up. Brahman is coming down via Yajna and Jiva, with help of the same Yajna, is going up. Here lies the justification of understanding and following the movement of the Chakra. His Descent has been expressed in ‘Gayatri’, in the term ‘Dhimohi’ – ‘I hold deep inside my heart’ and Ascent of the Jiva is expressed just after that in the term ‘Prachodayat’ – ‘May He push us up’. In Upanishad as well as in Samhita, His Descent has been termed as ‘Aavesh’ or absorption. In the Bhagavatam it is ‘Avatar’. The going up then is Ascension, Reaching Heaven, etc.

Now the Wheel or Chakra will be something like this:



It is to be noted that Akshara is beyond the cycle, there is no movement for Him. The flow of Shakti is coming anticlockwise from Akshara to Brahman following the movement of the Chakra.

This Brahman here is the same as ‘Mahat Brahman’ or ‘Yoni’ (Ch.XIV, sl.3&4) or Source. Karma or Action is the ‘Visarga’ (Visrishti in Samhita) or manifested creation. All creative Will emanates from this Source.

Shakti comes down another step as the manifestation of Will in form of Action (Yajna). Apparently this might be regarded as a descent, but inwardly there is the will to rise up. Actually it is this upward pull that transforms all actions to Yajna (Ch.III, sl. 9 – all actions other than Yajna end up in bondage).

Verily, it is with the help of Yajna that the Divine life and wisdom is showered (Parjanya) on earth. This whole process has been described in detail in the Vedas.

Earth, the powerful receptacle, bathed in that ‘shower’, produces Sustenance (Anna). This, definitely, is not the ordinary food grains only but its inherent ‘Ida’ or the latent fire of energy that the Gita has described as the ‘nectar left over from Yajna’ (Ch.III,sl.13).

The Being (Bhuta, the Mahabhuta of the Upanishad), that is born out of this Sustenance is called ‘Annad’ in Samhita and Upanishad.

When this Annad Purusha, or the Knower of Vaiswanar (Universal Man) attains Vidya of Chandoggya Upanishad, and reaches Akshar, he realises that the whole Cycle of Brahman, Karma, Yajna, everything is originated from Him. This is the origination of Brahma Chakra – a cycle which is all-pervading and is based on Yajna.

Question:What is the art of working continuously without attachment?

Answer:Action is being performed continuously. Nobody can exist even for a moment without doing some kind of action. In Prakriti the three Gunas are constantly shifting and changing, causing continuous and automatic actions. Hence there can never be any question of giving up work. What one has to give up is the desire for results of work. In course of action, we are always getting involved with its results. There is a kind of avid expectation like, ‘this action should have that result’ or ‘that action should have had this result’, and so on and so forth.

Basically, there are two attitudes we have to give up: the sense of ‘Doership’ and the feelings of joy at success or sorrow at failure. That is the way of working without attachment.

Question:What are the inner meanings of the slokas from twenty to twenty three of the Third Chapter?

Answer:At the outset, Sri Krishna has told Arjuna that he should not be attached to the doctrine of Non-action (Ch.II, sl.47) and at the same time, He also had said that the work should be done with discriminative Intelligence or Buddhi (Ch.II, sl.49) and not in ignorance. In Gita, Buddhi means the same as Vijnana or Prajna. Karmayoga is achieved when all actions are performed by the doer firmly established in the Vijnanabhumi.

Doubt clouded Arjuna's mind. "If Buddhi is higher than Karma, why do you, then, employ me in Karma, that too, in such terrible Karma as a devastating warfare"? (Ch.III Sl.1)

What Sri Krishna implied earlier is, though Buddhi or Prajna is higher than regular Karma, there is no reason for giving up Karma under the pretext of following the doctrine of Non-action of JnanaYoga. He has given two practical reasons why Karma or action has to be performed under all circumstances.

First, giving up all actions is impossible, because without working no one can exist even for a moment (Ch III, sl.5). At least some minimal action is needed for livelihood. Modern economics is based on this theory and from practical point of view this is an indisputable theory.

The second reason is from a collective view point. In order to help the social system run smoothly, action is necessary. You can call this political aspect too. Therefore, according to both the laws – economical and political – everyone has to work, whether one does it as a Yogi or a non-Yogi. After presenting these practical arguments in favour of Karmayoga, Sri Krishna says that man is fond of imitating others, particularly he would imitate the actions of one he considers to be ideally great. "People think highly of Me," He continues. "If I set an example of renouncing Karma, they will follow that." Then the question would rise how they would sustain if they follow the principle of Non-action? If their number increases, would not that create a kind of topsy-turvy situation in the society and stop all progress? Needless to say that Sri Krishna's apprehension turned out to be a dreadful reality in our country. As prevention to this dangerous possibility He said, "In the Three Worlds, there is nothing that I have to do nor is there any result from action that I aspire to. I am already in possession of everything because I derive pleasure in Myself (Atmaram) and hence obtain everything I desire (Aptakam). Yet I am always in the midst of action in the most poised and perfect manner. And I do that," He adds, "because people will try to follow my examples since they consider me as the Ideal Man. If I minimise the importance of work, so would the rest of the society. The whole social structure would stumble due to inaction and that would lead to the instability of the moral values. As a result of the renunciation of activities, the impurities of the caste system you were afraid of (Ch.I,sl42) would prevail."

In this context let me mention that by 'impurity' the Lord is not referring to the intermixture of caste system only, but subtly hinting at the impurities and perplexities in following Dharma as well (Dharmasammurah), which we can see all around even today.

Question: Please explain the hidden meaning of sloka 26 of the Third Chapter.

Answer: Those who are merged in ignorance and by nature are attached to work, are also to be drawn on to the path of detachment, but in a modest way. Their reasoning power should not be confused with pedantic sermons. Moreover, withdrawal from outer action does not mean giving up of inner cravings. Renunciation is not an outward phenomenon – that is really an inner state. Once ripened, a fruit gets detached from its stem and automatically drops off from the tree. This process cannot be the same as plucking a green fruit before it is mature and ripened artificially. Knowing this, a wise man would never give up action fearing that that would set up an example, not conducive to progress. He would continue working the same way like any other ordinary person, though in the depth of his heart he knows very well that he is not bound by any action and whether he works or not, makes no difference to him. To bring a kind of outer revolution and confusion to the whole society can be termed as a play of Ignorance.

A wise man acts while established in Yoga works with everyone and like everyone. The apparent actions of a wise man and those of an ignorant one are the same. But the inner difference between the two is like heaven and hell. One works like Siva – in utter tranquility, with utmost desirelessness, and without any expectation for the results. The other works like a goblin, jumping and shouting, laughing and crying, disturbing everything and everyone around. But the influence of the wise man slowly has an effect on the other. Seeing him, the ignorant people also learn to work calmly and without expectation. Gradually, they get the taste of real action and understand that actually action is not to be performed raging and fuming. It is something like a bud blossoming into a flower. To bring this kind of rejuvenating sap into action is to bring about a great inner reformation, which a truly wise man does into the world of Ignorance. This has been referred to as "Joshayet Sarva Karmani" – a Yogic Doer will add a different flavour to work while working along with the non-Yogis.

Question: "The soul, deluded by ego, thinks 'I am the doer'." (Ch.III, sl.27). Wherefrom does the Jiva gets this egotism of a doer?

Answer: Brahman has been manifested as Jiva. Hence everything that a Jiva possesses comes from Brahman. "I am the Producer of everything, from Me everything is generated" (ChX,sl.8). The original egoism belongs to Brahman. "Brahman said, 'I am Brahman'." This ego passes onto the Jiva, and the Jiva feels that he is Vast. On the one hand, this feeling of vastness expands him, whereas on the other, because this feeling is adulterated with ignorance, it becomes a cause of bondage. It is but natural to feel, 'I am the doer', while

doing something. But there are two types of doers – independent and delegate. Apparently I am doing everything, but when we go deep within, we understand that actually I am not ‘doing’ anything. Everything is ‘happening’ – somebody is getting things ‘done’ by me. An analogy by Sri Ramakrishna: ‘Potatoes and parwals are jumping up and down in boiling water and thinking that they are moving and jumping by their own volition. But once the heat is taken out, everything is dead and still.’ At the root of my mundane actions, there is actually the divine inspiration. I am just an agent. He is the Master and I am just an instrument. In addition, He is both my action and the cause of my action. Action performed with this kind of belief becomes natural and free of illusion.

Question: *Why is it said that it is better to die following one’s own ‘Dharma’, rather than pursuing others’, which would be dangerous?*

Answer: ‘Dharma’ means that which is holding my being – meaning the Divine Will at the root of life is my Dharma. The Lord has not created everyone the same. His multi-faceted Will has been manifested in the diversity of creation. That is why everyone does not have the same Dharma. Under the present circumstances of the battlefield, what He wants to get accomplished by Arjuna is not asking for alms like a mendicant monk but a heroic warfare. Arjuna, a prey to utter delusion, thinks that begging is better than fighting his own Gurus (Ch.II, sl.5). It might have been true for some but not for Arjuna. The quality of a Kshatriya is still predominant in him. Still he would want to punish the wrong-doer. It is not possible for him to tolerate everything or be equal to adoration and humiliation like a true Sannyasi, not yet. Therefore, being a Kshatriya at heart, if he tries to embrace the Dharma of a Sannyasi or a True Brahmin, because he thinks that more glorious than or superior to the Dharma of a Kshatriya, its results would be disastrous – both for himself and for others. Before he acquires the qualities worthy of a true Sannyasi, he has to perform actions according to Dharma of a true Kshatriya to wear out his Karma.

Question: *In the first sloka of Chapter IV, the Lord says, “This Yoga had been narrated to Vivaswan.” Which Yoga is it, Hatha Yoga or Raja Yoga? Which Yoga had been lost in time and the Lord has reiterated its mysteries to Arjuna?*

Answer: The ‘Imperishable or Avyaya Yoga’ that has been mentioned at the beginning of the Fourth Chapter of the Gita is beyond Raja Yoga and Hatha Yoga. The primary means of practice in Hatha Yoga is Pranayama and of Raja Yoga Pratyahar, implying gradual control of breathing as well as of restless mind to reach a state of tranquillity. Elsewhere, the Gita has put emphasis on those two as well. These are indispensable for spiritual practice but not the ultimate end. This Eternal Yoga has been explained in detail in Chapter II – and

has been repeated in Chapter III to clear certain doubts from Arjuna’s mind.

Two kinds of Buddhi have been mentioned in Chapter II – Samkhya Buddhi and Yoga Buddhi. A dawning in the mind of “Yena Sarvamidam Tatam,” – the One who is All-Pervading – is Samkhya Buddhi. This Buddhi is “Vyavasayatmika” – firm rooted-which leads the mind to attain Samadhi. Of course that is the Samadhi of a Sthitaprajna, which remains unwavering even in the midst of all activities. Being firmly established in this state of Samadhi or being in constant union with the Divine and yet work with detachment is possible only when one acquires Yoga Buddhi. These two (Samkhya and Yoga), combined together, form the Buddhi Yoga of the Gita (Ch..II sl.49, Ch..X sl.10, Ch..XVIII sl.57).

This is the Yoga that Sri Krishna has mentioned here. Twice in the Gita there are directions for following this Yoga too. Once at the beginning, while describing the qualities of a Sthitaprajna, it is said that to one steadfast in Supreme Knowledge, it is imperative to be free from attachment and aversion, bring senses under control and move around amidst the sense-objects as an agent of the Divine and enjoy everything as Bliss (Ch.II sl.64). The next instruction comes towards the end, where it is said that the urge for action in the entire creation has been generated from the Supreme Being. He is All- Pervading. With this understanding (this is verily Samkhya Buddhi or the first part of the Buddhi Yoga), if a man can transform all his actions to His worship (this is Yoga Buddhi, the second part of Buddhi Yoga), then he would attain the Ultimate Goal.

(In other words, Samkhya Buddhi is the understanding of the All-Pervasiveness of the Divine and the Yoga Buddhi is to manifest that understanding into works by dedicating all actions to Him). It is very clear that this ‘Eternal Yoga’ is true for everyone, at all times and in all places. Hence Sri Krishna says “I had told Vivaswan about the Yoga at the beginning of creation, Vivaswan had told Manu and Manu told Ikshaku”(Ch.IV,sl.1)

In the Vedas, Vivaswan is Aditya, the Prajapatya Surya of the Upanishad, who is the source of all creation. It is again in the Vedas that Manu has been referred to as the ‘Primal Father’ – the original Purusha and in Vishnu Purana we see that Ikshaku was born out of breath or life of Manu, suggesting that he was the First Man. Therefore, the significance of Sri Krishna’s saying is that the Eternal Yoga has sprouted from the Sun at the beginning of creation and has come down to the Original Purusha and thence to the First Man. Ikshaku was the first to attain perfection in this Yoga. Thereafter this Yoga was spread among the other great Royal Rishis (Ch IV, sl.2). But it was lost in course of time. Sri Krishna expounded that again to Arjuna at Kurukshetra. This Yoga is verily the all-comprehensive Purna Yoga, where the synthesis of Knowledge, Work and Devotion has been achieved. (cf. Sri Aurobindo: *Essays on the Gita* “The Gita

has to synthesise the Yoga doctrine of liberation by works and the Sankhya doctrine of liberation by knowledge; it has to fuse karma with jnana.....It has too its own luminous thought to add, the crown of its synthetic system, the doctrine of Purushottama.”(p.88. Sankhya, Yoga and Vedanta)

Question:*The ninth sloka of Chapter Four mentions the Divine Birth and Work of the Lord. One who knows the mysteries of the divine birth and life does not have to be born again. What is the significance of this utterance ‘Mam Eti (goes to me)? Does not the Bhakta come along with Him, while He manifests Himself in every Yuga (Sambhabami Yuge Yuge)?*

Answer: To start with, let me tell you that your question can be answered very precisely. One, who knows about the divine birth and work in ‘Reality’ (Tatvata), reaches Him. In other words he becomes one with Him. After that, as the Lord does not have rebirths, so does not he. What happens at His Will, is manifestation or Divine Birth. Yet beyond this manifestation, He is also Unborn, Eternal and Immutable as the Supreme Lord of all creation. Rebirth is for the Jiva and Divine Birth for Siva. When you have Him and realise this process of manifestation in its totality, then along with each ‘Sambhuti’ you may also have the same and therefore partake in the divine work as His acolyte. That is not rebirth. Rebirth takes place in samsara, in the lower plains, where the rotation of birth and death takes place within the three lokas of bhur, bhuvah and swar. A non-Vijnani cannot go beyond swarloka, but a Vijnani can. Beyond that, he might move farther upwards towards a state of cessation from birth and eventually attains the ultimate Equality in Brahma Nirvana. Similarly a Jnani, a Bhakta or a powerful soul can be sent back as a chosen one in this lower world for a Divine purpose. But this return is not like that of an inert puppet controlled by Prakriti. The coming back is under His Will, as His servitor. This reasoning is applicable while the movement is upstream, from here to there. There can be a reverse movement downstream as well from there to here.

The Supreme Lord has become All. This becoming is under the control of Yogamaya, who is also an aspect, the dynamic power or Energy of the Divine Being. When He Becomes, He manifests with Vidya, not with Avidya like the Jiva. That is why He is telling Arjuna that a number of births have already taken place both for Arjuna and for Him. He knows them all, but Arjuna does not. As you understand, the divine birth and work of the Lord is a manifestation of Superconscience, and not of ignorance like you or me. Doing penance for cessation from rebirth is applicable for Jiva only. For Him everything is bright with the radiance of Consciousness. Even in the midst of our ignorance, He is the Hidden Light of Knowledge as the Indwelling Lord of our heart or ‘gopah’ as per the Vedic language.

According to traditional beliefs, there are two ways of working of the Divine

manifestation. According to the Saiva Philosophy, in one is expressed His Power to restrain. Willingly, He is constricting Himself from consciousness to matter. Yet matter is not all inert. There is a spark of consciousness deep inside the matter that wants to expand day and night. Off and on it becomes cognisant and active like the awakening of a seed under the soil. This awareness, which at its culmination, becomes an urgency for the Jiva to transform itself to Siva, is actually an indication of His playfulness. This urge for an upward movement happens in the life of an individual as well as that of a community. When that happens, it marks an epoch in the human history of evolution.

The whole process can be explained better with the example of an upward movement of a spiral rotation as we see when a pitcher is made on a potter’s wheel. The wheel is moving on a static plane but the lump of earth, rotating along with it, is going upward. In that spiral rotation there is a tendency of going forward and coming back; but even while coming back the baseline still remains above the previous mark – the same way as we see in a spring or a screw. This function of falling near to the base but again pushing up toward the upper level is possible only due to His Grace.

“An endless spiral of ascent and fall
Until at last is reached the giant point
Through which his Glory shines for whom we were made
And we break into the infinity of God.”

Savitri, Book I, Canto III

III

This happens in the world like this: When the kingdom of righteousness is established, it moves forward to advancement. But following the law of spiral movement comes the inevitable fall. In the language of the Jains, “Abasarpini” or downward movement follows the “Utsarpini” or upward movement. Uncontrollable evil power takes the hold of the whole situation and nothing can stop it. At this crucial period, He Manifests (Sambhabami). No doubt when an event like Kurukshetra takes place, the world consciousness rises up higher again following the same spiral movement. This advent of Grace at such point of time or at a particular moment of the growth of Universal Life is His Divine Birth. This is what is happening from age to age according to His Will and under His calm and merciful eyes. Verily, it is He, who is moving forward in the spiral movement of His Shakti from the whirlpool of Matter to the serenity of Consciousness. This is the reality of His Becoming. One, who knows this, gets

away from the spiral to a straight movement and does not come back or may choose to remain in the play of Becoming and joins the rest of creation in the spiral movement. In that case, there is coming back, there is a rebirth but that is not in Ignorance. Like Him and along with Him that is Divine Birth.

Question: Please explain the mysteries of Karma (Action), Akarma (Non-action) and Vikarma (Wrong action) as mentioned in the slokas 17 and 18 of the Fourth Chapter. Furthermore, it says that one who sees Karma in Akarma and Akarma in Karma is called the perfect doer of all Karma. Why is 'The movement of Karma hard to understand'?

Answer: Gita has defined a universal characteristic of Karma. Action is the effusion of feelings of the manifested beings (Ch.VIII, sl.3). 'Visarga' in Gita has been termed as 'Visrishti' in the Vedas. 'Visrishti' means an outflowing of the universe from an Ultimate Fount. A stream of that outflow has come down from Consciousness to Matter and another has gone up (Ud-bhava) from Matter to Consciousness, from becoming to being. Both are Karma – the Eternal Karma of the Divine (Ch.III, sl 22) (*Varta Eva Cha Karmani*)

But beyond this action of becoming or manifestation He is again a Non-Doer. Even while creating the four Varnas, He is doing nothing (Ch.IV, sl.13). We, too, can follow this example of His Witness Consciousness beyond creative power. Then we see that it is our Prakriti that is working incessantly, while as Purusha, we remain inactive and tranquil; moreover, we remain as instructor, approver, supporter, even enjoyer and above all the master. This is the state of non-doership or the state of Akarma. But because we are in this state of approver, supporter and enjoyer (note that Gita is not following the traditional Samkhya philosophy here since there may still be coming back even after moving up), the action has to be spontaneous and automatic. This is the Karma of one established in Yoga, where neither the self is deluded by ego as a doer nor is there any hankering after the results of action. Under this state, even when we work, there is no 'doing'. On the other hand, since we are not working with ego at the helm, this spontaneous outflow of energy brings forth action by itself. This is respectively the vision of Non-action in action and Action in Non-action. With this transparent, tranquil and radiant vision in the background, it is possible to perform action to its utmost perfection. Then we become 'Kritsnakarmakrit'. Our perception, then, is illumined by 'Buddhi' or Prajna, we are then the Karmayogis in the real sense of the term. Any work, other than performed like that, is Vikarma.

Question : The slokas 24 and 25 of the Fourth Chapter talk about reaching

Brahman by being in Samadhi in Brahmic Karma—'Brahmakarma Samadhina....Brahmaiva gantavya.' What is the difference between Yajna offered to devas and the Yajna offered to Brahman? Does the difference lie only in thought? Please explain the significance of different Yajnas mentioned here— Dravya Yajna, Tapa Yajna, Yoga Yajna, Swadhyaya, and Jnana Yajna.

Answer : The general characteristic of Yajna, as per Mimamsa is, 'Relinquishing material objects in the name of gods.' Of course, the whole function of Yajna is symbolic. In reality all objects to be relinquished are symbols of the inner being of the worshipper (Yajamana), on whose behalf the Yajna is being performed. With the offering of each object to the fire, this is to be said, 'Idam tava, na mamo', 'this is yours, not mine', and that object is to be considered as a part of one's self. Hence all Yajnas with material objects are, in fact, an offering of one's self to the gods. And the carrier of that offering is the rising fire of Aspiration lit at the core of one's own heart, which is represented by the Agni kindled at the altar.

In the Gita, the meaning of the word Yajna has been extended beyond its usual connotation. In the Vedas, Yajna is synonymous with Karma and occasionally god's work, By and large, people think of the ritualistic Karma performed in the name of god as Yajna, The Gita says, 'Why so?' Let each and every work be performed in the name of God, then that too would be a Yajna. Moreover, the Gita says that there are various kinds of Yajna stretched (Vitata) out to reach Brahman (Ch. IV, sl.32). (Vitata means extended from here to there. Hence, in the Vedas, another term for Yajna is Vitan).

The practice of Yajna ONLY with materials is Dravya Yajna. But that is for people of lower consciousness or for those following only the ritualistic part of the Vedas. Gita is propagating a Yajna much higher than that. Yajna performed with 'Bhavna' – the inner meaning – is the first step of Jnana Yajna. Real Jnana Yajna is an inner spiritual discipline. One has to realise that the whole life is a Yajna and its aim is Brahman. It is not aimed at any particular god with the object of having wealth and enjoyment. What, then, are the signs of an ideal Yajmana or the performer of a Yajna? He is void of any desire, liberated is he from any will for personal gain, eternally he is established in Pure Knowledge. Whatever he does, through all his actions, he merges into the Infinite and himself becomes completely void (Ch.IV, sl.23). This is called Brahma Yajna or Jnana Yajna. Then, himself becoming Brahman, the worshipper or the Yajamana offers Brahman as the oblation in the universally lit effulgent Brahmic fire (Ch.IV,sl.24). The whole function of Yajna that way is transformed to a comprehensive Brahmic Consciousness. That is being termed as offering to Brahma (Brahmarpanam).

Thus there would be no difference between Brahmic Consciousness and Karma or the actual performance of Yajna. The state in which all this is possible is called Brahma Samadhi – a unification of Brahma and Karma or merging of Karma into Brahman.

This view has been expressed by a number of Sadhakas in our country. Like: “Whatever I do, Oh Universal Mother! is nothing but Your worship!” “Whatever I do, I meditate on Thee.” “I am nothing but Thy Instrument”! And so on.

This is the way to realise Brahman in Its totality and everyone is doing Sadhana for that purpose only – some by Tapas, some by Swadhyaya (study of scriptures), some are following the path of Jnana and some are again practising Pranyama – different method for different seeker. They are all ‘Yatis’, they are all ‘Samshitavrata’ (Ch.IV, sl.28). Who is a ‘yati’? One who is controlled, whose mind moves inwards. Who is a ‘Samshitavrata’? One whose will (vrata, samkalpa) has the sharpness of higher intelligence. They are vigilant and ever-composed. Rightly practised, all these methods can take an aspirant to the highest goal – to the Eternal Supreme or Sanatana Brahman (Ch.IV,Sl.30)

Question :*The Gita says that even the recipients of the nectar in the form of ‘leftover’ from a Yajna can reach the Sanatan Brahman(Ch.IV, sl.30). What is the mystery in partaking in the leftover from Yajna? Has not the Gita asked to perform all works with the sense of Yajna?*

Answer:The basic truth behind Yajna is the sense of offering oneself. In Aitareya Brahmana, it is said that the materials for offering are actually ransom (English term used by Sri Aurobindo) for the Yajamana. Because the Yajamana cannot offer himself directly into the fire, so he offers oblations as substitutes. The material oblations are symbols of the Yajamana. A true Yajna cannot be performed without this feeling associated with it. The Yajamana should feel that the objects being offered to the gods are nothing but different aspects of his own self.

Following the teachings of Ghora Angirasa, Sri Krishna has taught us that our whole life is a comprehensive Yajna. A Yajna is not only a particular ritual performed as an offering to a particular god, but each and every action can be transformed to a Yajna or a self-offering to the Supreme Divine. Thus the Yajna is transformed from a mere Dravya Yajna to a Jnana Yajna. As a part of the Dravya Yajna, the remaining portion of whatever is offered as oblation, is to be taken by the Ritwik or the Yajamana as Prasad of the Divine Being. This was called Havirshesha (leftover of the Havir) or Ida. The thought behind this custom was that the Divine had accepted whatever was offered and had turned the remains of the offerings to nectar of Immortality. Hence with the intake of that as Prasad, I too become Immortal. In other words I become one with the Divine.

The Upanishad says:

Apamo Somam, Amrita abhuva

Agamya Joytir, Avidamo Devan

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, it is said that though it is customary to direct performance of Yajnas to different gods by saying, ‘Worship This’ and ‘Worship That’, in reality all gods are manifestations of One Atman. Therefore, Atman or Brahman is the Only God.

So, whoever is Ishta, is verily Brahman. Siva for the Saivas, Shakti for the Shaktas, Vishnu for the Vaishnavas – All are Brahman. The root of all worship is self-offering. I tell my Ishta, “I am offering myself. You accept me.” He accepts me, acknowledges me and enjoys me as offering. Being enjoyed by Him in the depth of my being, I become submerged in Him. My outer life continues with Ananda of His Enjoyment. Life, then, turns out to be His Prasad, the leftover of the Yajna offered to Him. That is Amrita, the nectar of Immortality. This way we have Him both outside and within the depth of our hearts – He who is the Sanatan Brahman.

[This is the end of the Q/A on Karma and Jnana Yoga of Gita.]

Impact Of Swami Vivekananda And Sri Aurobindo On Indian Freedom Movement

Kittu Reddy

If you look at the freedom movement, even before the Sepoy Mutiny, there is a very strong evidence of sannyasins having played a very important role in the freedom movement. During the Sepoy Mutiny, it has been recorded that the sannyasins played a very active role. Shivaji is not complete without Ramdas. The Brahmin power and the Kshatriya power have to go together.

The second point I would like to remind you is that ancient Indian polity was highly developed. Since the very beginning of Indian history, religion played a very important part and will continue to do so because religion and spirituality are the hallmark of India. It is a unique feature nonetheless, that although religion is very powerful in this country, never will there be a theocracy. Theocracy is never an Indian phenomenon. The Brahmin will never have political power in his hands. It is the Kshatriya who will hold political power. The Brahmin will stand behind and will be helping — whether it is Rishi Vashishtha or Rishi Vishwamitra advising Rama. Indeed, the sages have played a tremendous role in the development of India

Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo

There are certain points which are common to both Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. First and foremost is the adoration of India as the Mother. India is not a piece of land. India is not a collection of a billion of people. It is a living soul embodied in what we call the national soul — Mother India.

Swamiji's love for Mother India was intense. Sister Nivedita said, 'Throughout those years in which I saw him almost daily, the thought of India was to him like the air he breathed.' Then she added:

But he was born a lover, and the queen of his adoration was his Motherland. Like some delicately-poised bell, thrilled and vibrated by every sound that falls upon it was his heart to all that concerned her. Not a sob was heard within her shores that did not find in him a responsive echo. There was no cry of fear, no tremor of weakness, no shrinking from mortification, that he had not known and understood. He was hard on her sins, unsparing of her want of worldly wisdom, but only because he felt these faults to be his own. And none, on the contrary, was ever so possessed by the vision of her greatness. . His country's religion, history, geography, ethnology poured from his lips in an inexhaustible stream.

When Swamiji was in South India, in Belgaum most probably, he read in the newspaper that two Indians died of starvation. He was deeply aggrieved. He could not eat that day. Such was his heart!

The other thing that he believed was that India has a destiny. India has a mission. If India is a soul, then there is a conscious purpose towards which she has to proceed. It depends to a certain extent upon us, the political, intellectual and cultural leaders of the country. However, in reality She does not depend upon us — whether we like the statement or not. That which is pre-destined shall happen because this is Nature's way of doing things. India has a spiritual mission and it is to make spirituality the centre of all her activities, of her life, and use it as a guiding power behind all our endeavours. This spiritual mission will include all of life. This mission is not going to be fulfilled by just sitting in the Himalayas, or by going to the forests, moving away from the mundane world. We have to achieve our goal sitting in the very heart of a cosmopolitan city, living amidst its hustle and bustle, and still organising our whole life with spirituality as its central motive. Such an endeavour will include politics, economics, culture, education, and all other human activities. The distinction between spirituality and our everyday life is not that stark as we suppose commonly. In fact, life is spiritual if you know how to make it. Otherwise you say, 'Oh, he is in politics! He can't be spiritual.' Or, 'Oh, you are in business! You can't be spiritual.' It is utter nonsense to say like that because each of these activities can be extremely powerful spiritual tool which can ensure our growth and shape our destiny. And this is the mission of India.

The question arises: How do you do it? What are the defects that India has been suffering from for the last five or six centuries? One thing that India lacked completely was strength. Therefore, Swamiji says:

Strength, strength is what the Upanishads speak to me from every page. This is the one great thing to remember, it has been the one great lesson I have been taught in my life: strength, it says, strength. O man, be not weak. Are there no human weaknesses? — says man. There are say the Upanishads, but will more weakness heal them, would you try to wash dirt with dirt? Will sin cure sin, weakness cure weakness? Strength, O man. strength, say the Upanishads, stand up and be strong. Ay, it is the only literature in the world where you find the word ‘Abhīh’. ‘fearless’, used again and again; in no other scripture in the world is this adjective applied either to God or to man.

This is the main defect of modern India. By the term ‘modern’ I do not mean the last sixty years but the last few centuries. We have lost the Kshatriya power. Kshatriya valour has to be coupled with the spiritual fire of the Brahmin. This is the spiritual mission of India.

The other point to remember is that since spiritual mission is to be the way of life in India, it must include all branches of secular knowledge, be it politics, economics, science, etc. We must not neglect any aspect of this secular knowledge.

At one place Swamiji says:

I have gone all over India on foot and have seen with my own eyes the ignorance, misery and squalor of our people. My whole soul is afire and I am burning with a fierce desire to change such evil conditions. Let no one talk of karma. If it was their karma to suffer, it is our karma to relieve the suffering. If you want to find God, serve Man. Toreach Narayana you must serve the daridranarayana — the starving millions of India.

This is the root from which has sprung up the great organisation — the Ramakrishna Mission.

In one of his letters he writes:

May I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls: and, above all my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.

Look at the identification of the people — ‘the poorest of the poor’. I give a political angle to it. In its true essence this is what communism and socialism mean. But it has been so much distorted by the human mind, by the lower nature of human beings! Now you give a spiritual touch to this idea and immediately it shoots up. There is one thing very important to understand is that there is no such human effort or endeavour that cannot be raised to its apex if only we know how to spiritualise that activity. To raise the poor from their abject poverty is a profoundly spiritual motive; it is not a political or economic motive or movement alone.

Another very important point which I would like to stress is that both Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo spoke of freedom and freedom alone which is the birthright of every human being. No human being can grow to his full potentiality unless he is given freedom.

Another significant point is though Swamiji was never involved overtly with any politics or political parties, his influence over politics was profound.

Sri Aurobindo, on the contrary, was in active politics from 1906 to 1910. He was a member of the Congress Party and actively participated in politics. Before 1906, he worked behind the scenes. Again after 1910, he started working behind the scenes, but then from a spiritual perspective.

There are five levels of freedom — political, economic, intellectual, cultural, moral and finally, spiritual. So far as the first level is concerned. Sri Aurobindo said that Indians must throw away the rule of the foreigners even if they be angels; Indians must be ruled by Indians. Vivekananda said the same thing in a more subtle language when he gave the message that we must stand on our own feet.

Next comes economic freedom. Here, Swamiji wanted India to be developed industrially also. On the ship while going to America to attend the Parliament of Religions, he advised Jamshedji Tata to set up industry in India as she needed it as much as the West.

Swamiji speaks of intellectual freedom. That is he speaks of man-making education. We should accept from all directions thoughts and ideas which would benefit us but not be swept off our roots. Swamiji says, never accept things easily. His life is a glowing testimony to that statement. For six years he fought Sri Ramakrishna. He loved and respected him greatly but all the same doubted his incredible divine visions. It was only after prolonged trials and verifications of his statements and immaculate character that he accepted him as an Avatara. Indeed, disbelief and atheism are often the first steps towards genuine spirituality. Once he accepted Sri Ramakrishna as an avatarapurusha, he gave himself over to him heart and soul.

Sri Aurobindo was an agnostic at first. While he had been staying at Baroda during his early days, people asked him if God existed and he

answered, 'So people say; I have no contact with him'.

One of my colleagues once said to the Mother at Pondicherry: Mother I think people who are religious or spiritual are greater than the scientists who are materialistic and do not believe in God. Mother answered: Not always. Some religious men may pretend to be so. But they may not have any spiritual realisation at all in all their lives, whereas a scientist is honest when he says that he does not believe in God and tries to do all things by himself. He may have at some point some spiritual realisation. He may find out the truth within himself.

What I am trying to say is that do not be easy believers. Both Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo realised the Truth after intense search; Swami Vivekananda searched for six long years and Sri Aurobindo from 1904 to 1908.

Sri Aurobindo said that India's inability to progress was due to the disease called 'thought-phobia', ie India lacked the ability to do some serious thinking. In other words, we must not accept anything without questioning, finding out the truth first. Swami Vivekananda also said the same thing. A superficial religion does not take you too far. Religion is only a starting-point. From there one has to move ahead step by step from lower truth to higher and ultimately the highest Truth.

Now at present the ethical and moral freedom is lacking. The whole political system has become corrupt. Everybody is disgusted. Ethical and moral freedom is a step which will enable India to draw on its immeasurable potency which is lying deep within. Every time India was in spiritual crisis, the sages had come to re-invigorate her. When India faced the onslaughts of Muslim aggressors, a host of saints such as Tukaram, Chaitanya, Mira Bai, Kabir, Guru Nanak and others came to save India's sanatana dharma based on the eternal spiritual truths realised by our sages which they handed down to us from ancient times. It is to be noted here that from 8th century onward, wherever the Muslims raided, the old culture was lost. It went to Egypt and the land of Pharaoh and pyramids became Muslim. It went to Persia, modern Iran and it was no longer the Persia of the old world. It became Muslim. It went to Iraq and Mesopotamia was lost. But India survived. Why? It was due to the spiritual wisdom that it acquired through the ages which runs through our very veins. The sages come and India becomes fresh once more spiritually.

In the 19th century Lord Macaulay said that India was on the brink of collapse. At that crucial juncture there appeared Sri Ramakrishna, Swami

Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra, Jagadish Chandra Bose. Rabindranath Tagore. All had spiritual yearnings. Rabindranath through poetry, Jagadish Chandra through science, and Bankim through literature had expressed that yearning. Sri Ramakrishna of course was a spiritual giant.

One thing to be noted here is that although we have amidst us genuine spiritual personalities, a powerful intellectual strength is also of great importance. America and England are powerful nations due to their great intellect in which we lag behind at present. We have to sharpen our intellect further and from intellect we have to graduate to spirituality. Then and then only will India find her true place in the world. But India must not under any condition decry spirituality and at the same time pose as a spiritual nation.

In 1906 when Sri Aurobindo came to Calcutta, he had a four-point programme — Swaraj, Swadesh, Boycott and National Education. Under the 'Swadesh' programme, Sri Aurobindo insisted that India must industrialise herself gradually. And as a first step she must have recourse to Boycott. The next important step he suggested was National Education which is to be under national control and have a national content. It is very unfortunate that India's education content at present is not sufficiently Indian. Swamiji also hoped that India would create a new social order and a new civilisation by combining our best spiritual traditions with the latest advancement of science and technology. If this is done India would be rich both materially and spiritually, Swamiji affirmed.

I narrate a personal anecdote here. In 1994, when the then Army Chief B. C. Joshi visited the Pondicherry Ashram, I told him that spirituality is the essence of India, and he agreed to it and said that he also believed it. Subsequently, when he went to America, he said that the essence of India was spirituality and the spirit of India is essentially spiritual. In 1995 when he passed away, the American Ambassador said that Joshi had only one phrase on his lips, that India's spirituality combined with American materialism will someday dominate the whole world.

Swami Vivekananda said :

I was asked by an English friend on the eve of my departure. "Swami how do you like now your motherland after four years' experience of the luxurious, glorious, powerful West? I could only answer, 'India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy; it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the Tirtha'".

And Sri Aurobindo said about Swami Vivekananda:

Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men, but the definite work he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India...

Sri Aurobindo

And now some words about Sri Aurobindo. He got married in 1901. But within a year or so he was writing to his wife:

My third madness is that while others took upon my country as an inert piece of matter, I look upon the country as the Mother. I adore her, I worship her as the Mother. What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother's breasts and started sucking her blood? Would he quietly sit down to his dinner and amuse himself with his wife and children? Or would he rush out to deliver his mother. I know I have the strength to deliver this race. It is not physical strength but the strength of knowledge. This feeling is not new in me. It is not of today. I was bom with it. It is very much in my marrow. God sent me to earth to accomplish this great mission.

This is the passion which every Indian patriot should have. If we put this passion before us, the present scenario would change. At this point let me remind you of the motto of the Indian Army: "The first and foremost is the security, welfare and the happiness of my country; second, security, welfare and happiness of my men; and third, the security, welfare and happiness of myself".

Sadly enough we practise the motto in the reverse order, that is security, welfare and happiness of myself coming first and the result of this is too glaring to be ignored. In 1904-05 Sri Aurobindo wrote.

The deeper we look, the more we shall be convinced that one thing wanting which we must try to acquire before all other is strength – strength physical, strength mental, strength moral, but above all strength spiritual. It is one inexhaustible and imperishable source

of all the others. If we have strength, everything else will be added to us easily and naturally. In the absence of strength we are like men in a dream who have hands but cannot see or strike, who have feet but cannot run.

So we see that the essence of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo is something of a solid calm, and not of excitement. For, in absolute peace and strength one works. And one has to struggle to develop that strength to work. Ostensibly, the task is not very easy.

Sri Aurobindo wrote a lovely passage in 1908. This was written when some people objected to his 'boycott' programme. He wrote more or less to this effect:

Love has a place in politics; but it is love of one's country, for one's countrymen, for the glory, greatness and happiness of the race — the divine ananda of self-immolation for one's fellows. Kshudiram is a perfect example of this. The ecstasy of relieving the suffering, the joy of feeling one's blood flow for country and freedom, the bliss of union in death with the father of the race, the feeling of almost physical delight in the path of the mother soil — the winds that blow from the Indian seas, of the rivers that spring from Indian hills and the hearing of Indian speech, music and poetry, in the families, sounds, sights and habits, dress, manners of our Indian life — this is the physical — [expression] of that love — the pride in our past, the pain in our present, the passion for the future or its truncated branches — this is my sorrow.

Today when I speak to hundreds of students I find they know about Singapore or America, but they do not know about India. Where has gone the pride in our past? It is time that all our children knew their country and be proud of her. Self-sacrifice, self-forgetting and an enduring service to the motherland are required today. And the sap which keeps it alive is the realisation of the Motherhood of God in the country, the perpetual contemplation, adoration and service to the mother. What is needed now is a band of spiritual workers. This is where comes the name of the Ramakrishna Mission the ideal of which, as far as I understand, is liberation of the bonded souls through service to humanity. We need an institution which under the guidance of highly spiritual men will train workers in every field — workers for self-defence, arbitration, sanitation, famine relief and so on. Winning of independence is comparatively an easy task; the keeping of it is less easy. The first demands tremendous effort in which all

the energy of the country is concentrated, while the second requires a united organised effort. When these two conditions are fulfilled nothing more is needed. All other things will inevitably follow.

Sri Aurobindo has spoken highly of the three words of the French Revolution — Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The West had taken those great words in a political sense. Sri Aurobindo gave a spiritual meaning to those words.

Indeed, our mission is to unravel to humanity the true source of human liberty, human equality and human brotherhood. When man is truly free in spirit all other freedoms are at his command, for free is the Lord who cannot be bound. When man knows this, he is liberated from delusion.

The first type of freedom is not merely external political freedom. Internal freedom is also extremely important. When man is liberated from delusion he perceives the divine equality of the world which fulfils itself through love and justice. This is equality, the second word of the French Revolution. And when he perceives this divine equality he is brother to the whole world, and in whatever position he is placed, he serves all men and women as his brothers and sisters by the law of love, by the law of justice. This is fraternity.

So, when the French had dreamed of moments of inspiration – Liberty, Equality and Fraternity — they gave these extremely external forms which is why they could not become successful as a whole. It is true, liberty came there to a certain extent. Russia also meant to bring about equality, and to some extent initially they achieved success. But it is only India which has always hammered on the brotherhood principle. When this principle becomes the basis of social speculations and political aspirations, then liberty, equality and fraternity will take their place in the structure of the society and then the satya yuga will return. This is the Asiatic reading of the spirit of democracy which India must rediscover for herself first before she can give it to the world.

I firmly believe that Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo should be the leaders of India in future. I also believe that India will achieve her true goal when she would incorporate into her political, economic, educational and cultural visions the concept of spirituality.

We have to dream about the kind of India we really want. Jawaharlal Nehru dreamed of a future India based on secularism. He was perhaps right in his own way. This dream was based on the concept that reason is the highest instrument which man has at his disposal. Therefore, industrial development and other such things were stressed, but spirituality was given no place.

Then there is the Gandhian model which has been hardly ever put into practice. Certain things of it nevertheless are very important. He believed

in equality as well as in rural development. But, for India, in order to realise her true identity she must spiritualise every aspect of her knowledge and life. Why? Because Mukti or true freedom has to come from within. We have achieved to a fair extent some external freedom, but inner freedom is still far away. For that Indians must develop themselves intellectually, culturally, ethically and ultimately spiritually.

Sri Aurobindo pointed out in 1918 that in all fields we are moving ahead reasonably well, whether it is culture, education, or economics, but the one most serious obstacle to the growth of India lies in the political field. That field, he said, has two outlets. One is Western parliamentary system and democracy. And the other is the furious East European, ie Russian movement that raged at that time. He felt that a serious dialogue had to be started so that the right path could be adopted, although the ultimate aim, he asserted, is to realise our spirituality. In order to do that, we must definitely create a political system based on the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo, after 1910, when he retired to Pondicherry, did not, however, give up politics — he wrote hundreds of pages on politics. Following the ideals of these two great men, Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, we can usher in the re-emergence of India.

The second point which Sri Aurobindo mentions is the creation of Pakistan. It is not that he had anything against Islam, but to believe that Hinduism and Islam are opposites and that the Hindus and the Muslims cannot live together is utterly false. Hinduism, he pointed out is so wide and inclusive that it incorporates and embraces within its fold all ideas. So he had totally opposed Hindu nationalism. He said it should be replaced by Indian nationalism — a nationalism which will include the Muslims, the Christians, the atheists, which will include all and which will move gradually to the heights of spirituality.

I remember a phrase which the Mother said: ‘The world is preparing for a big change. Will you help?’ And Swami Vivekananda said: Adjust the microcosm and the macrocosm will adjust itself. Sri Aurobindo also said the same thing: If you want to change the world, change yourself — start working upon yourself first. That is the essence of spirituality. The moment you have done that, it takes its own natural course. This truth is very much embedded in the ambience of India. We have to invoke this spirit not only in spiritual institutions, but also in the fields of politics, economics, education, and so on. Then the change is bound to come to India whether we want it or not, but it would do us immense good if we consciously moved in that direction.

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Sri Aurobindo And Problems Of Human Unity

Amaury de Riencourt

The fundamental problem of human unity appears insoluble under present conditions, given the nature of contemporary man. On the one hand, human unity appears to be a stark necessity for the survival of the human race since the world is rapidly becoming a “global village” in Marshall McLuhan’s words, thanks to the fantastic increase in the speed of global communications which is abolishing space and time, putting everyone of the fast-multiplying human beings in immediate contact with all the others. This revolutionary convergence of the human race upon itself, after thousands of years of scattered development of autonomous civilisations, often as remote from one another as if they were situated on different planets, presents us with the most difficult problem that man has ever had to face.

The problem is all the more acute in that this implosion has increased tensions between many human groups rather than decreased them. The search for national and cultural identity, now threatened by the de-personalisation caused by an anonymous industrial civilisation, is prompting many to look back wistfully at the past in an attempt to find roots and a sense of personal destiny that are being stripped away by this convergence itself. The very elements that could have provided links with which to consolidate human unity are being thrown overboard since they would compel contemporary men to outgrow themselves in the process of searching for a new identity: the belief in monotheism, for instance, is a perfect example. Under the spur of the new “Death of God” theology, Christians retain Christ but dismiss God altogether; Muslims can combine fanatical belief in the Prophet and virtual dismissal of Allah—Muhammad provides them with a separate identity, but Allah does not; most Israelis are either agnostics or outright atheists, but the first item in their education is a thorough knowledge of the Bible in Hebrew. All and one, they

emphasise what differentiates them from one another. Everywhere, minorities that have not been completely deprived of their sense of historical identification—in Cyprus, Ireland, the United States, Europe and other parts of the world—are rearing their heads and are increasingly emphasising what makes them different from the majorities. In other words, fast as mankind converges on itself, the centrifugal tendencies increase at the same bewildering speed.

But underneath the almost desperate search for separate identity by reaching far back into the past, there is an opposite trend propelling men toward a synthetic approach which the mere fact of human implosion renders indispensable. This synthesis, however, cannot remain a mere intellectual syncretism, an artificial construction of the mind; it has to become flesh: only a new type of man—Aurobindo’s superman—can fully embody it and provide the leadership required for progress toward human unity.

Synthesis was one of the key words of the cultural awakening that took place in Bengal in the nineteenth century—at the time, merely a synthesis between Hindu thought and tradition and the Judeo-Protestant Christianity that held sway in the leadership of Western civilisation. This synthesis did not quite work out as its nineteenth century proponents had hoped because Western society was still too stable and sure of itself. As it so happened, it is largely the Germans who began to work out a certain syncretism between Western and Eastern thought and a great deal of German philosophy bears the imprint of Indian culture. Even today, this remains true, inasmuch as the major syncretistic effort now bears on the relationship between traditional philosophic schools, East and West, and the philosophy of science. An uninterrupted tradition links Schopenhauer, Max Muller and Heinrich Zimmer with such outstanding physicists as Erwin Schrödinger whose speculations on Vedanta place him in the mainstream of that tradition. The latest is the notable physicist and philosopher of science, Professor von Weizsacker, Director of the Max Planck Institute in Starnberg, whose lengthy introduction to Gopi Krishna’s work, *The Yogi and the physicist* probably contributes more to this developing syncretism than any other previous work along the same lines.

However, as mentioned previously, syncretism can only prepare the intellectual groundwork; what is now required is the living synthesis, made far more possible today thanks to the fact that Western societies have lost their former stability and self-assurance, providing an opening wedge to the infiltration of a variety of non-Western influences—no longer on a merely intellectual plane but on a far more massive, popular and emotional one

involving large portions of the younger generations. In an underground, almost subliminal way, something like a crude synthesis is actually taking place, deep down in the psyche of contemporary man. The trend in the West, especially in the United States, is unmistakable; the growing disillusionment at the core of industrial civilisation, the rapidly accelerating rejection of what is now termed the Protestant-Puritan ethic, the refusal to countenance the dehumanising impact of technology which entails a new artificiality of life, the impersonality of the fast-increasing bureaucracies required to run the increasingly complex administrative establishments of modern States, the destruction of Nature's ecological balance and the increasing pollution thanks to which industrialised and urbanised man is in the process of drowning in his own garbage, all this impels man to search for a new way of life.

Imaginative intellectuals all look for the good and worthy life, but present us with Utopias that have no more chance of concrete realisation than Plato's in ancient times. But they do testify to the existence of a trend, even those like Marcuse who propound heretical forms of Marxism: they are all breaking away from the sceptical, urbane agnosticism and positivist anti-religious mould of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Without being quite conscious of it, they testify to the rebirth of some form of religiosity, however vague. They may be "inverted transcendentalists" or immanentists searching for sexual liberation and the concrete "resurrection of the body"; they are all concerned with the "absurdity" of present-day life, of contemporary man's "one-dimensionality", with a search for a new "life-style" in the post-industrial world. They search but they do not find.

What all this implies is that at the back of all these intellectual enquiries and suggestions there is a groundswell of dissatisfaction with present-day conditions which provides an emotional, as well as an intellectual, opening for the intrusion of non-Western elements and concepts and life-styles—first step toward a creative synthesis. This has already happened in the past; perhaps the most noteworthy example is that of the syncretistic movement that swept the Hellenistic world, before and after Christ, at the time when Rome was establishing its empire all around the Mediterranean; which ended in the Christian synthesis. The difference is that today this is happening on a much larger, planetary scale, not in a forcibly unified but limited empire such as the Roman one. Nevertheless, the breakdown of morals in the economically developed countries, the widening generation gap, the rise of terrorism and anarchy, the widespread use of drugs, the disintegration of the family and of traditional kinship ties due to the fantastic spread of urbanisation, everything points to a change of phase in history which might well be pointing to the end of history itself and usher in an

entirely new geological age—hopefully, the age of superman whose chief characteristic will be to embody in creative fashion the synthesis to which we referred earlier.

Probable outcome of the present disintegration of all traditional structures, this new man will be endowed with a sort of cosmic consciousness which manifests itself only dimly as yet, in a few scattered instances. He will be the joint product of all that present and future scientific knowledge will have to offer, but without in any way relying exclusively on the external facilities offered by technology and the remoulding of the environment as advocated by such behaviourists as B.F. Skinner, nor merely sinking into drug-induced raptures. He will become superman because he will work at it, strive for it with all his might and will-power, using scientific knowledge and technology as launching pads "for his take-off, not as props or substitutes. This cannot take place without a profound transformation of the unconscious mind, made perhaps easier by the penetrating researches made by such contemporary structural anthropologists as Claude Lévi-Strauss in his analysis of mythology's deep structures.

Sri Aurobindo, whose cosmic optimism embraced the whole of evolution from distant past to future, felt certain that the coming of superman was as sure as the coming of man before the appearance of mankind, and that his progress from mind to supermind would be as revolutionary as the progress of unconscious life to conscious mind. But he did more than proclaim this advent; as is traditional in India, he was also a mystic who experimented with himself and expounded a philosophy of transformation rather than intellectual information. In reply to a disciple's query, he once stated: "What you call thinking, I never do. I see or I don't see. That is all."¹ His total being was involved in the search for the processes whereby such a new type of man could arise—and undoubtedly felt himself to be the mystical-spearhead of evolution itself, as if thousands of years of spiritual quest in India and elsewhere—liberating the soul of the devotee who escaped into transcendental spheres but doing little for his fellow-man—were now going to be deflected toward the socialisation of spiritual knowledge and its extension to mankind at large, so that through a reshaping of matter, life and mind, an entirely new spiritualised way of life could prevail on this planet.

It is difficult not to see in Sri Aurobindo's evolutionism a striking parallel with the cosmic vision of the French anthropologist, P Teilhard de Chardin, a keen student of the human phenomenon who stressed the vast difference between the animal kingdom, open to a great variety of species and

dispersion, and the subsequent human race, so closed up on itself, structured and exclusive of all other forms of life—the cardinal difference being the birth of reflection in the human being who not only thinks, but knows that he thinks. From then on man could reflect the universe in his own mind, remember the past and foresee the future, and direct his own evolution—in one gigantic leap, Humanity outstripped mere Life, as the superman of the future will outstrip mere man. Just as man was not merely a new animal species but a new form of life, the future’s superman will embody an entirely new type of thought and being. Just as thoughtful, reflective man represented an “interiorisation” of the individual converging upon himself, the future’s superman will symbolise the convergence of mankind upon itself through technico-social means—a thickening film of humanity covering the planet’s surface which, having reached the limits of its spatial extension and diversification that had stretched, time-wise, through the Paleolithic, the Neolithic and historical times, is now reaching saturation point and will henceforth have to progress in another dimension, the deepening of its consciousness, a collective interiorisation of humanity as a whole, in order to counteract the centrifugal tendencies that threaten contemporary mankind. The leader in the process will have to be this new type of man.

In *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Sri Aurobindo clearly defined the future ideology in religious terms: “The fundamental idea is that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man and that the respect, the service, the progress of the human being and human life are the chief duty and chief aim of the human spirit.”(p.310) But, he warns, and questions, “whether a purely intellectual and sentimental religion of humanity will be sufficient to bring about so great a change in our psychology” since “... it does not get at the centre of man’s being. The intellect and the feelings are only instruments, of the being...”(p.313). It only remains to conclude, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, that “the goal can only be secured when founded upon a change of the inner human nature and inner way of living”, leading to a “larger inward life.”(p.314): “The unity of the human race...can only be secured and can only be made real if the religion of humanity, which is at present the highest active ideal of mankind, spiritualises itself and becomes the general inner law of human life.” (p.316) .

In other words, this new religious mode must not only be thought out intellectually but must be experienced and actually lived—obviously, in the beginning, by a small number of exceptional men drawn from all over the world, from every nationality and every living culture, multi-dimensional

men who will become the living embodiment of the great synthesis—synthesis between the most profound psychological insights provided by traditional religions and the most recent findings of psychoanalysis and biochemistry. In one of his most eloquent passages, Aurobindo emphasised that India “... must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal religion which is to harmonise all religions, science and philosophies and make mankind one soul.”²

It only remains to conclude that, in keeping with this historical destiny, it is essential that this harmonisation be carried out by breaking with hoary tradition and opening up to scientific investigation the mystical treasures inherited from the past, which are still so much part of the present in India, and should now be shared with mankind at large since they belong to the future of a united humanity.

References :

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2. Quoted in Karan Singh, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism*, p.85

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Towards A New Science Of Society: An Integral Approach

M.S. Srinivasan

One of the mega-trends of the present times is that an increasing number of people all over the world are seeking for an inner psychological and spiritual fulfilment in and through life and work. This trend, which is at present only an individual need in a small but growing number of people, may become a collective need of the race in the not-too-distant future. To manage this future need of the race in a creative way requires a radical change in social theory and practice. We need a new science of society for understanding, organising and harnessing this need for the higher evolution of the individual and the collectivity. This article presents a conceptual framework for an alternative approach to social science based on an integral approach to human development, drawing inspiration from the vision of Indian seers.

Limitations of the Present Approach

One of the domains of modern knowledge, which is still very much in its infancy, is the understanding of our collective life. As two eminent sociologists state, “Many sociologists believe they stand only at the outermost rim of this understanding”.¹ There is perhaps much progress in knowing the laws, process and patterns of the outer forms and appearances but very little understanding of the deeper psychological and spiritual forces that shape and drive the outer forms.

There are two reasons why modern social sciences could not make much headway towards this deeper understanding of human society. The first reason is a more or less dogmatic attachment of the modern scientific and secular mind to the traditional scientific methodology based exclusively on rational analysis and quantitative methods. The traditional scientific method has achieved tremendous results in understanding and harnessing the physical nature. This is because laws of matter, at the macro level, are

rigid, fixed, mechanical, repetitive, predictable and therefore amenable to rational analysis. But the laws of human life and mind, which shape the collective life of man, are much more flexible, plastic, non-mechanical and unpredictable. To understand the laws of life and mind and their consequences requires a more than rational intuition and an intuitive methodology of enquiry. This doesn't mean the traditional scientific method is entirely invalid in the realm of mind and life. The essence of the scientific method is unbiased and impartial observation, discerning the pattern behind the observed data and arriving at a hypothesis. This approach has a universal validity in every quest for knowledge and truth. But the instrument of analysis need not be confined to reason. It can be an intuitive analysis. For the laws of mind and life are not entirely rational. So any attempt to extend rational analysis to these deeper and inner dimensions of life is likely to fail beyond a certain point. And the methodology of research has to be more qualitative, subjective and interpretive than quantitative and empirical.² In assessing the quality of research much greater importance has to be given to the contribution of thought to the advancement of knowledge in terms of new insights, fresh synthesis and alternative ways of looking rather than on the analytical or empirical rigour.

The second limitation of modern social sciences is that its psychological base is modern psychology, which is itself an infant science groping on the fringes of the subconscious and subliminal realms of the human psyche and doesn't have the full understanding of the fathomless depths and mansions of the inner being of man. And our collective life is nothing but the outer expression of our inner being. So we cannot hope to have a deeper, fuller and integral understanding of our collective life without a similar understanding of our inner being. The ancient eastern psychology was much more advanced than that of the modern western type. The yogis and sages of the east explored extensively all the heights and depths of the human consciousness from its lowest subconscious regions to its deepest and the highest superconscious realms. As the well-known founder of Depth Psychology, Carl Jung, writing on Eastern Yoga points out: “Psychoanalysis itself and the lines of thought to which it gives rise—surely a distinctly western development—are only a beginner's attempt compared to what is an immemorial art in the East.”³ However, the ancient eastern psychology is predominantly individualistic with an emphasis on individual spiritual salvation. But for social sciences, apart from a comprehensive understanding of individual psychology, we need a similar understanding of collective psychology which means understanding of the laws and

process by which the inner being of man expresses itself in the outer collective life. Eastern psychology did not pay much attention to this domain of knowledge. However, in ancient Indian social philosophy there are some luminous hints, which can be explored further.

Back to Basics

However advanced or learned we are in our specialised domain of knowledge, sometimes we may have to get back to the basics, which means to the textbook, encyclopaedia and the forgotten wisdom of the past in order to spring forward to the future. This may appear elementary, puerile or regressive to an advanced student or researcher in the subject. But it gives a continuity of perception of the manifest actualities of the past and present, which may lead to an insight into the unmanifest possibilities of the future. So let us briefly examine some of the basic definitions of social sciences.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines social sciences as “the orderly investigation on the behaviour of man in society with the aim of cumulating a body of relevant theory” and “testing of theory against fact”. *Funk and Wagnall Encyclopaedia* provides a more comprehensive definition as the “Sciences concerned with the origins and development of human society and the institutions, relationship and ideas involved in social existence. Social sciences are sometimes defined as ‘Cultural Sciences’ and as those sciences which deal with the activities of the individual as a member of the social group.” *Encyclopaedia Americana* describes social sciences as “Those fields of learning and research that are primarily concerned with human relationship and those disciplines of knowledge that are characterised by their concern with man and his culture and his relationship with his environment.” Commenting further on the nature and scope of social sciences, *Americana* states, “This vast area of knowledge defies simple definition and the fields of study it encompasses cannot be easily categorised”. One of the core fields of social sciences is sociology. A standard textbook on the subject states:

“Sociology is one of the social sciences. Its long-term aim is to discover the basic structure of human society, to identify the main forces that hold groups together or weakens them and learn the conditions that transform social life. In this, sociology like any pure or basic sciences is a disciplined intellectual quest for the fundamental knowledge of the nature of things. Many sociologists believe they stand only at the outermost rim of this understanding”⁴

The scope and range of modern social sciences include disciplines like sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, history, jurisprudence, penology, social work, psychology, social psychology, geography, philosophy, ethics, education, and comparative religion. Overlapping the social sciences in their social implications are such studies as biology, medicine and linguistics.

To sum up, we may define social sciences as the study of the individual and collective life of man in their relationship with each other and with the surrounding environment. The aim of social sciences is to understand the basic laws and the underlying factors, which shape this complex web of human relationships that constitute the social organism. The pragmatic objective of social sciences is to apply this understanding for the progress, well-being and transformation of the human society. The scope and range of social sciences are so broad and varied that almost any human activity, except perhaps pure physical sciences like physics or chemistry can be included in it. This is because a human being is not an isolated Monad distinct and separate from the surrounding environment. Collectivity is the expression of its constituting individuals and the individual is a part of the collectivity, not in the sense he is an insignificant cell in the collective mass, but he is linked with others in a mutually interdependent and interacting unity. So, almost every human activity has an individual and collective dimension and therefore can be included within the broad ambit of social sciences.

Towards a Deeper Approach

The integral view accepts, in general, these modern perceptions on the meaning and scope of social sciences. But it will give a deeper and broader orientation to the subject. In this approach, the aim of social sciences is to search for the deepest, universal and integral truth and law or Dharma of human life and society as a whole and also in every activity of human life like, for example, education, business or politics. Let us now explain briefly the terms we have used here.

By “deepest” we mean not only the laws and process of the outer phenomenon of the society but also the deeper psychological and spiritual causes behind the outer social form. In other words, as we have already mentioned, to understand the laws and processes by which the inner psychological and spiritual forces within man and also in cosmic Nature express themselves in the outer life of humanity. By “Universal” we mean a “global” perspective, which perceives the universal laws of human society

and also their unique and particular expression in each activity of human life like economics or business. It also means what is called in modern thought as “systemic” view which sees each organ or activity of human society or life as part of a larger totality of life, in its relations with the whole and its relations with the rest of other organs or activities. Take, for example, the organ of economics. We have to understand the economic system not only in its inherent nature and laws, but also as part of the universal physical Nature from which it draws its material resources, the surrounding social environment from which it draws its human resources, the cultural environment from which it draws its values and ideals and the political system to which it has to submit. By the term “integral” we mean embracing all the dimensions of the individual and collective life of man: the inner realms of the mind, heart and soul and the outer material, economic, social and political life.

Is there some example of such a deep and broad approach to social theory and practice in the past from which we can draw helpful hints for further and future research? As we have hinted earlier, there is such a deeper approach in the ancient Indian social thought and practice, especially in the Vedic thought. This ancient Indian thought, especially its later versions, may not be perfect. But it provides an example of a psychological approach to social organisation and development. Let us now briefly examine the insights of this ancient Vedic wisdom on human society.

The Vedic Science of Society

In the Vedic vision, both the Individual and the Collectivity are equal expressions of the Divine Being. The outer collective life of man is the expression of the four fundamental psychological powers in Man, which we may call Mentor, Marshal, Merchant and the Worker. First is the intellectual, ethical and aesthetic being which seeks for knowledge, values and ideals, the power of the Mentor. The second is the will and vital force of the Marshal, which seeks for power, strength, mastery, conquest, achievement, expansion. The third is the powers of mutuality, coordination, organisation, and harmony, which seeks for harmonious relationship and an efficient, productive and practical adaptation with life, people and Nature, the power of the Merchant. The fourth is the faculty of the physical being with its urge for work and service and material execution or craftsmanship, the Worker. One of these powers may dominate or lead in the soul or

nature of the individual, determining his typical nature as Mentor or Marshal, Merchant or Worker.

In the outer collective life these fourfold psychological powers in man express themselves through their corresponding fourfold social organs: Culture, Polity, Economy and Labour. The Mentor through Culture and its activities like religion, ethics, education, scholarship, learning, philosophy and literature; the Marshal through Polity made of government, administration, leadership, laws and order and defence; the Merchant through the Economy made of trade, commerce and professions; the Worker through the labour force in the lower levels of the social hierarchy. In the Vedic conception these four psychological powers in man are in turn the diminished or partial expressions of the fourfold cosmic Powers of the Spirit. These four powers are called in the Indian spiritual tradition as Maheshwari, the power of Wisdom which conceives the broad principles and order of the world; Mahakali, the power of Strength which empowers, energises and enforces what the power of Wisdom conceives; Mahalakshmi, the power of Harmony which orchestrates the rhythm, relations, connectivities and synergies of things; Mahasaraswati, the power of Work which executes with minute attention to detail and deft craftsmanship what the other three direct. In a scientific and psychological perspective, these four powers may be viewed as four fundamental functions of the Creative Process at all the levels of manifest existence: Cosmic, Collective and Individual.⁵

In a schematic presentation of the Vedic social paradigm, there will be at the apex the Divine and His Fourfold Cosmic powers, which express themselves in the human psychology as the four human types and four psychological powers of the Mentor, Marshal, Merchant and Worker, which in turn manifest in the outer collective life as the four organs of the social body: Culture, Polity, Economy, Labour. The Vedic ideal for the individual is to organise and integrate the fourfold powers of the Mentor, Marshal, Merchant and Worker around the innermost spiritual centre of the individual. The Vedic social ideal has two aspects or dimensions. At the social level it is to make the four social organs work together in synergic harmony for the common good of the social body as a whole. At the spiritual level it is to make the human society into a conscious expression of the fourfold cosmic powers through their corresponding human instruments and social institutions.

Based on this broad spiritual and psychological vision of human society, the builders of the ancient Indian civilisation tried to create a social organisation founded on the following psychological principles:

1. The outer social organisation and hierarchy should be a conscious expression of the inner psychological organisation and hierarchy of powers and faculties within man.

2. The purpose of the human society is to provide an outer framework for the inner psychological and spiritual development of the individual towards the spiritual aim of life. To achieve this purpose the outer social occupation of the individual has to be in harmony with his or her inner psychological nature, temperament and capacity.

In Indian psychology, the consciousness of the Spirit or the Self beyond Mind is the highest level of the inner hierarchy in man. Next come the rational, ethical and aesthetic faculties of the Mentor and the will and vital force of the Marshal, more or less at the same level. Then come the faculties of the Merchant and at the lowest level, that of the Worker. If the outer social organisation has to reflect this inner hierarchy then those who are united with the consciousness of the Spirit, the Seer and the Sage have to provide the overarching vision, values and ideals to the society. The Mentor and the Marshal types, representing the highest intelligence and will of the community, under the higher guidance of the seer and the sage, will provide the top leadership to society. The Mentor with his mental and ethical power shapes the cultural life of the community. The Marshal with his vital energy and will, sitting in positions of power in Polity, will enforce the Vision and Thoughts of the Sage and the Mentor in the outer life. At the lower levels of the hierarchy, the Merchant will organise and manage the Economy, and the Worker will give material form to whatever that is conceived or created by the Mentor, Marshal or the Merchant.

Thus we can see, in the ancient Indian social thought, we have a social theory and practice based on the spiritual and psychological dimensions of human life. We are not suggesting that this Indian social paradigm can be applied as it is to the present or future society. It needs much modification and correction based on the social and political thoughts, experiments, experiences and needs of the modern age. But it provides a broad framework and throws some luminous hints, which can be developed further.

Integration of Philosophy, Ethics and Science

The other significant feature of ancient Indian thought which has a living relevance for the future of scientific thinking, especially for social sciences, is the integration of philosophy, ethics and science. The ancient Indian idea of science was embodied in the Indian canonical literature called Shastras. In ancient India every art and science or activity like painting, music, poetry, politics, religion, administration, war, enjoyment and even highly specialised activities like rearing horses or elephants was put under the yoke of Shastra. A Shastra, in its original conception, is a comprehensive book of knowledge made of three components. First is a philosophy which views the field of knowledge or activity in the light of a cosmic vision and the highest spiritual aims of life; second is an ethic which lays down the higher values and ideal which must govern the activity; and third is a science which elaborates principles, methods and techniques of practice.

An important point to be noted here is that ancient Indian science is not value neutral like the modern western sciences. The aim of Indian science is to discover the highest Dharma of life and each activity of life. The Indian concept of Dharma has a scientific as well as an ethical dimension. In a scientific sense Dharma is the universal and impersonal laws and principles of Nature. In Indian thought, Nature means not only physical and biological Nature as in modern science. Nature is the creative Energy of the Spirit and the source of all physical, vital, mental and spiritual energy in Man and in the Universe. So Nature means Cosmic Nature of which our human nature is a part. In the ethical sense Dharma means all the values, ideals and standards of conduct which are in sync with the laws of Nature, which help us to live and grow in harmony with the eternal and evolving laws of Nature at all the levels of our being — inner and outer, physical, psychological and spiritual — and therefore lead to the progressive and integral well-being and fulfilment of human life.

In this Indian perspective modern science of ecology and environment is an important part of Dharma because it helps us to understand and live in harmony with the dharma of physical Nature. But modern ecology is only one aspect of dharma. In a more integral approach there has to be a similar attempt in the other and higher dimensions of life like the mental, moral and spiritual.

This is the Indian vision of Science. Modern science, especially social and psychological sciences, which study human nature and life, will be

immensely benefited if it can broaden its horizons with this dharmic vision of science based on a deeper and greater ecology. We may add to this Indian vision one more factor: vision of the Future or still better, a historical perspective forward integrated into the future, which means a vision of the manifest potentialities of the past, present actualities and future possibilities viewed in an evolutionary perspective.

The word “science” is derived from a Latin word which means to “know” or comprehend. So a perfect science must strive to know life comprehensively and integrally in all its dimensions.

The Integral Aims

The integral approach accepts in principle the psychological and spiritual approach of Vedic seers and thinkers to social development. But it will endeavour to give a new form to it and correct some of the defects, which have crept into it in the later periods of Indian history. In this integral view, both the Individual and the Collectivity are in their innermost essence, expressions of the universal Consciousness of the Spirit. The objective of social development is to promote the evolution and development of the individual and the communal consciousness and facilitate its integral self-expression in the outer life.

But what is consciousness? There are many ways of defining the concept of consciousness. We have to adopt a concept which is appropriate to the subject we are studying. For example, for a student of psychology or yoga, the concept of consciousness as Awareness, and the Energy inherent in it, may perhaps lead to clarity and insight. But for social sciences, we may use a simpler definition as the inner being of the individual and the community with the soul or the spiritual centre beyond Mind as its deepest and innermost core. Consciousness includes the consciousness of our Soul or spiritual being which is the true self of the individual and the community; consciousness of our Mind which is the source of our thought, knowledge, values and ideals; consciousness of our vital being which is the source of our emotions, desires, passions, sensations and vital energy; and finally consciousness of our Body. The outer life of the community and its various organs like economy, society, polity or culture is the external expression of this inner being or consciousness of man.

By the term “development of consciousness” we mean the inner development or the development of the inner being of the individual and the collectivity. The path or process of this inner development is yoga. By the word “Yoga” we do not mean the physical asanas of hatha yoga or

meditation, which are the popular prototypes and images of this ancient Indian Science. In this approach, Yoga means a scientific and systematic application of an integral psychology for the inner development of the individual and the collectivity with a predominant emphasis on the development of the spiritual dimension in man.

In the ancient Indian thought, especially in the post-Vedic thought, society is only a framework of experience for the psychological and spiritual progress of the individual towards his spiritual salvation. But in the integral view, the aim of this inner development of the individual is not solely the personal spiritual deliverance of the individual. It is also a progressive flowering of the faculties, powers, and potentialities of the fourfold being of man made of his body, life, mind and soul. Thus, in this view, society is not merely a shadowy background for the lonely spiritual liberation of the individual. It is a field of experience for the progressive unfolding of the human potential at all the levels of human existence — physical, vital, mental and spiritual, — and their progressive self-expression in the outer life, which will ultimately transform the human society.

In the traditional Indian thought, the aim of social development is to provide a favourable and helpful outer social framework for the individual to ultimately escape from the society. But in the integral view the aim of social development is, as Sri Aurobindo points out, “perfection of the individual in a perfected society”⁶ which means an integral spiritual perfection of the individual, which when expressed itself in every activity of the outer life, will lead to a similar perfection of the society.

The other major defect of ancient Indian social thought is that it tends to restrict the perfection of the individual within the confines of her typical nature and social function as a Mentor or a Worker. But in the integral view every individual, whatever may be his/her typical nature or social function, has all the fourfold powers of the Mentor, Marshal, Merchant and Worker and the highest spiritual potentialities of his/her soul in him/her, and therefore capable of realising all these potentialities lying within him/her. So every individual irrespective of his/her nature, temperament, function or status, has to be given full freedom and opportunity to progressively realise his/her highest and integral potential and express it in his/her outer life. In this context of full development of the human potential, we agree entirely with the well-known founder of Grameen Bank and Nobel Laureate of Peace, Yunus Ahmad, when he says:

“To me in order to qualify as a social science, an academic discipline must create an analytical framework which will enable and encourage human beings to explore their unlimited potential, not start with the assumption that their capacity is given and limited and that their lifelong roles are fixed”⁷

This integral aim, for its complete realisation in human society, requires two factors. The first one, and the most important is a culture and an education which leads to a progressive internalisation of a set of ideals in the consciousness of the community. They form into a quintuple: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Progress and Full Development of the Human Potential. The first sets of ideals are the triune values of the French Revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity, which are the foundations of social sustainability. We may broaden the scope of fraternity to include not only humans but also all creation or the totality of Nature, which is the aim of modern environmental movement. The other ideal is the modern ideal of progress, which in the integral view includes both inner and outer progress. To achieve sustainable progress, the outer progress in the material, economic, ecological, social dimensions has to be a spontaneous outer expression or outflowing of the inner progress in the mental, moral, psychological and spiritual dimensions. The fifth is the Vedic ideal of integral development of the fo urfold human potential, organised around the spiritual self of individual.

When we say “internalising” of these ideals, we do not mean merely inculcating them in the thoughts and sentiment of the surface mentality by mental education, though this is necessary as a preparatory step. But in a psychological and spiritual perspective, “internalising” means making these ideals concrete, experiential realities in the consciousness of people, feeling them as concretely as we feel our body. For example, internalising fraternity means not merely having an idea or sentiment of fraternity in the mind. We have to proceed deeper and further and live in a consciousness of inner fraternity felt in the depth of our heart and soul, where we can feel all others as part of our own self. This deep internalisation of ideals can be achieved only through an education based on the principles of yoga. The second factor is a flexible, dynamic and evolving social organisation which facilitates the progressive outer actualisation of this inner realisation, in the material, economic, social and political life of the community, from within outwards.

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(M.S. Srinivasan is a Research Associate at Sri Aurobindo Institute for Research in Social Sciences, a unit of Sri Aurobindo Society, Puducherry)

Social Progress Through Symbolism And Individualism

Usharanjan Chakraborty

A.Symbolism

Ours is a study of social progress not from the outlook of anthropology but from the outlook of psychology. Society progresses through some psychological stages. They are ‘symbolic, typical, conventional, individualist, subjective and spiritual’.

From the beginning of the human race on earth, we find a dominant role of the symbol in human life. The customs and institutions of human society are governed by symbols. But what is this symbol and what does it represent? “The symbol is of something which man feels to be present behind himself and his life and his activities – the Divine, the Gods, the vast and deep unnameable, a hidden, living and mysterious nature of things. All his religious and social institutions, all the movements and phases of his life are to him symbols in which he seeks to express what he knows or guesses of the mystic influences that are behind his life and shape and govern or at least intervene in its movements”.¹

This symbolic spirit is dominant in the religions and social institutions. The marriage hymn in the Rig Veda reveals this truth. The human marriage is not simply human, but represents a divine character behind it. The “whole sense of the hymn turns about the successive marriages of Surya, daughter of the Sun, with different gods and the human marriage is quite a subordinate matter overshadowed and governed entirely by the divine and mystic figure and is spoken of in terms of that figure. Mark, however, that the divine marriage here is not, ... a decorative image or poetical ornamentation used to set off and embellish the human union; on the contrary, the human is an inferior figure and image of the divine”.²

The relationship between man and woman is also symbolised as a mark of Purusha-Prakriti relationship. Purusha and Prakriti are two divine principles. Man represents the Purusha and woman the Prakriti aspects.

While in the religious field Purusha is dominant, in social field man is dominant. And when the Prakriti aspect is dominant (as in the Tantra), in the social life the female is dominant. This was prevalent in the early period of human society.

Chaturvarna or the four orders, too, represents the symbolic cult. The society, in the Vedic period, consisted of four varnas. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra are the four varnas. Varnas and castes are not synonymous. While varnas represent flexibility, castes stand for rigidity. The Vedic period represented the flexible varna system. Varna was determined by quality. In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna says that he has created the four varnas on the foundation of quality and action. If a Kshatriya showed marks of a Brahmin in his character, he was regarded as a Brahmin. So birth in a family did not determine varna.

The concept of varna had its origin in the hymn of the Purushasukta of the Rig Veda. According to this sukta, the four varnas came out of the four parts of the body of Brahma. From Brahma’s mouth came the Brahmin, from arms the Kshatriya, from thigh the Vaishya and from the feet the Shudra. Brahmin represents the knowledge aspect of the Divine, Kshatriya the physical and strength aspect, the Vaishya agricultural growth and trade aspect and the Shudra the disinterested aspect of the Divine. The four varnas represent the four noble qualities and actions that help to sustain a healthy and prosperous social life. So varnas are symbols of social institutions. Divisions of social life, in fact, “answer to four cosmic principles, the Wisdom that conceives the order and principle of things, the Power that sanctions, upholds and enforces it, the Harmony that creates the arrangement of its parts, the Work that carries out what the rest direct”.³ Thus the symbolic age is characterised by religion and spirituality. The key phenomenal life is a symbol of the spiritual truth that lies behind it.

The symbolic stage passes over to a new stage known as the typical stage. In this stage, the role of symbol loses its importance and a new spirit of psychology and ethics develops. In this new age, “Religion becomes ...a mystic sanction for the ethical motive and discipline, Dharma; that becomes its chief social utility, and for the rest it takes a more and other-worldly turn. The idea of the direct expression of the divine Being or cosmic Principle in man ceases to dominate or be the leader and in the forefront; it recedes, stands in the background and finally disappears from the practice and in the end even from the theory of life”.⁴

The typical age is marked by the great social ideals. The ideal of social

honour was developed in this age. The four varnas enjoyed the honour as per their social status. The Brahmin is honoured for his piety, purity, pursuit of learning and knowledge, the Kshatriya for his courage, chivalry, strength and nobility of character, the Vaishya for his mercantile fidelity, sound production and honest trade and the Shudra for his faithful and disinterested service. But this principle of honour gradually degenerated because of qualitative deficiency. And through degeneration the typical age passed over to a new age.

This new age is the age of convention. “The conventional stage of human society is born when the external supports, the outward expressions of the spirit or the ideal, become more important than the ideal, the body or even the clothes more important than the person.”⁵ In this stage, form dominates over the spirit. Lifeless and meaningless custom takes hold of the society. Social honour becomes deep-rooted through birth and heredity and makes it fixed and rigid. A new thing in the name of tradition develops and in the hereditary tradition education is firmly fastened. A son of a Brahmin by virtue of his birth claims brahminic honour even if he lacks the brahminic quality. This is so in respect of the varnas too. The character of varna is transformed into the character of caste through inflexible rigidity and degeneration. The newly created caste system subdued the varna system and at last outcast it. In the social history, the conventional stage continues for a longer time, because it is characterised by some glaring results. It is a period marked with both good and bad results. “The conventional period of society has its golden age when the spirit and thought that inspired its forms are confined but yet living, not yet altogether walled in, not yet stifled to death and petrified by the growing hardness of the structure to the distant view of posterity by its precise order, symmetry, fine social architecture, the admirable subordination of its parts to a general and noble plan.”⁶

Because of the positive attainments, the conventional period occupies an importance in the social progress. Still this period has its own follies. “In these conventional periods of society there is much indeed that is really fine and sound and helpful to human progress, but still they are its copper age and not the true golden; they are the age when the truth we strive to arrive at is not realised, not accomplished, but the exiguity of it eked out or its full appearance imitated by an artistic form and what we have of the reality has begun to fossilise and is doomed to be lost in a hard mass of rule and order and convention”⁷. Instead of dynamising the social life, the

conventional period gradually makes the society stagnant. This is a sign that it has already lost its green life, vigour and strength. In place of catholicity there develops narrowness. Society enjoys no more any social freedom and social life becomes a prison-house where none can inhale free air. The degeneration is complete. The rotten age, through the degeneration, yields to the advent of a new age. This new age is the Age of Reason.

A. Individualism

The age of individualism and reason emerged as a result of the failures of the conventional age. The conventional age, in its later part, overlaid the truth, distorted, disfigured and lost sight of the truth and thereby lost its own life-vigour. It was reduced to a dead fossil. So it had to be replaced by a new power, a new spirit. The age of reason replaced it with a new life, a new vision. “The individualism of the new age is an attempt to get back from the conventionalism of belief and practice to some solid bed-rock, ... of real and tangible Truth. And it is necessarily individualistic, because all the old general standards have become bankrupt and can no longer give any inner help; it is therefore the individual, who has to become a discoverer, a pioneer, and to search out by his individual reason, intuition, idealism, desire, claim upon life or whatever other light he finds in himself the true law of the world and of his own being.”⁸

In India, an individualistic age had its beginning with the advent of Buddhism. But that was mystic in nature and not at all destructive. But the modern individualistic age had its beginning in Europe. This European individualism had its entry into India through an administration of English and other foreign forces and India felt a cultural change in her life. Through the expansion of English education, cultural influence of the western world was complete. Cultural conversion along with religious conversion shattered peaceful Indian life of the past. A cry for a new change in life was gradually rising in the minds of the younger generation. In Bengal, the “Young Bengal” group under the influence of Derozio raised their voice. The consequence was far-fetched. The younger group with new enlightenment raised its head in all spheres. That is why this period in Bengal is called the age of Renaissance. Gradually other parts of India followed suit. In fact that was a politico-cultural victory of the West over India.

“The individualistic age of Europe was in its beginning a revolt of reason, in its culmination a triumphal progress of physical Science. ... The dawn of civilisation is always a questioning, a denial”⁹. This new idea

stresses much upon reason. Hence it is also called a rationalistic age. Men of individualistic age confronted all religious and educational ideas of the past and challenged their authenticity. The challenge was so forceful that nothing against it could stand. Protests against Christian religion were heard. To meet this challenge Protestant Christianity emerged separating itself from Roman Catholicism. By this time atheism raised its head. As a result, in place of religion, a new thing in the name of secularism emerged. Secularism displaced religio-social value and created secularised social value. The whole western world came under the grip of secularism. Science gave it full support. Thus individualism became synonymous with secularism. Conventional religion, conventional socio-cultural educational principles were severely attacked and criticised. From this new wave India could not save herself. Even her most modern great scholars invited this new spirit. Kings were no more deputies of God. Kings gradually embraced the secular life. This created a conflict between the king and the bishops and in the ensuing battle, kings won over the bishops.

Theology thus lost its upper hand and secularism became the greater power. It destroyed all old values.

In the light of this newly emerged spirit even theology began to transform its old habits. To meet the demand of the new age, theology made necessary changes in its dogmas with the help of reason. Thus side by side with secularism, new rationalised religious interpretations came forward. Europe in its new phase was more influenced by Renaissance than by the Reformation movement. The Renaissance movement started with the Graeco-Roman mentality. It was more humanistic than mystic. The Age of Reason naturally lent its support to this movement. The result was the emergence of secularism. Alongside of the Renaissance movement, the Reformation movement also started based on the principle of reason.

Whatever may be said in support of reason, there is still a threat of dogmatic rationalism. According to dogmatic rationalism there can be nothing superseding reason. But there are domains which lie beyond the realm of reason. So to make reason acceptable to all, a necessity cropped up to make individual reason universal. Truth is universal and so acceptable to all. If reason is made universal then that universal reason will realise the universal Truth which will be acceptable to all. But where can we find such universal Truth? Here science came forward and assured that all scientific investigations were based on universal truths. And whatever is universally true must be individually true too. So let us start scientification of all fields of our social life. This resulted in the creation of a scientific

socialistic life. Science never permits any arbitrary reason. No individual reason is allowed to speak against the universal reason of science. So no social or religious study based on any individual reason has any worth before the universal reason. The universal reason alone became the sole judge of any truth.

This universalisation of individual truth through universal reason is both a sign of progress and regress. It is a sign of progress because it passed over from personalistic standpoint to a collectivistic standpoint. This collectivistic standpoint resulted in the creation of a collectivistic social order, later known as socialism in the field of politico-economic system. If it is a sign of progress, it is at the same time the sign of regress. The age of reason started its revolt against the conventional age with the help of individual reason. With the appearance of the collective reason it lost all its importance. Through individual reason individual freedom was ensured. In the political field this gave birth to democracy which ensured maintenance of individual freedom in all walks of life. But in the collective reason, individual reason failed to preserve its own importance. It was subdued by collective reason. The submission of individual freedom to collective freedom is a great loss for individual progress. The socialistic order absolutely curtailed all individual freedom and thereby all individual progress. This created a great clash between individuality and collectivity, otherwise known as democracy and socialism in the socio-political world. Socialism promised equality for all but no freedom. Democracy also announced equality but that was limited to individuals. Socialistic equality pervades over all sections of human beings, particularly among proletarians. While social progress demands a twofold advancement simultaneously, democracy fulfils one aspect and socialism the other. For democracy individual liberty is the main thing, for socialism equality is the primary factor. Both seem to forget that an integral progress of society is impossible without an equal share of liberty and equality. Thus both individual reason and collective reason, in spite of being progressive forces, have failed to give society an unchallenged security based upon eternal truth. So the demand for a new change is bound to crop up.

II

The present rationalistic age is an outcome of the psychological evolution of mankind. We have come across two phases of its development, one phase starting with individual reason, the other with collective reason. One is concerned with individual liberty while the other with equality.

They stand opposed to each other. The French Revolution announced a trinity of social progress – liberty, equality and fraternity. Individual reason followed the ideal of liberty, collective reason that of equality. The other ideal, that of fraternity is yet to be. Neither democracy nor socialism has spoken of it widely. Socialism advocates social equality and brotherhood of the proletariat class. But brotherhood cannot be confined to any particular class. Brotherhood in democracy is feebly pronounced. This is because the feeling of brotherhood is mainly an internal feeling, while liberty and equality have an external reference. This is why both democracy and socialism are secular in character. The feeling of brotherhood emerges from the inner reality of man. This inner reality is the soul. The soul in man is spiritual in nature, but democracy and socialism are unspiritual in nature. Without the concept of a spiritual soul, man is a machine without a driving force. And without soul, brotherhood is unaccomplished. Due to the absence of this essential element of brotherhood, liberty alone or equality alone cannot be the driving force of social progress. So the rationalistic age in its final phase is demanding a third alternative. To fulfil that demand, a new age, by the name of Anarchism, will be the next evolutionary stage of social progress. “If we may judge from the modern movement, the progress of the reason as a social renovator and creator, ... would be destined to pass through three successive stages which are the very logic of its growth, the first individualistic and increasingly democratic with liberty for its principle, the second socialistic, in the end perhaps a governmental communism with equality and the State for its principle, the third ... anarchistic in the higher sense of that much-abused word, either a loose voluntary cooperation or a free communalism with brotherhood or comradeship and not government for its principle. It is in the transition to its third and consummating stage, ... that the power and sufficiency of the reason will be tested; it will then be seen whether the reason can really be the master of our nature, solve the problems of our interrelated and conflicting egoisms and bring about within itself a perfect principle of society or must give way to a higher guide.”¹⁰

The individualistic age started with reason. That reason cannot be the reason of a ruling class because the ruling class will justify its own interest with reason; it cannot be the reason of a particular thinker or thinkers. Mass has no sound reason, so it must be the reason of every man of the society. This will create a common basis of agreement. Democracy took charge of free interchange of thought and will. In personal life everybody is fully aware of his personal will which he applies freely. But for a common

ground the reason of others counts much. So an interchange of reason is badly necessary for this will help create an atmosphere of social reason. That social reason will then be obligatory to all. “In this way by the practice of the free use of reason men can grow into rational beings and learn to live by common agreement a liberal, a vigorous, a natural and yet rationalised existence.”¹¹

In spite of such an attempt at a common rational ground, reason may fail to reach its objective. Because first, the mass has no idea of the real good. Hence premature rational agreement may lead to regress rather than to progress. Secondly, man by nature being an egoist, conscious only of his self-interest, may influence others or conflict with others and thereby distort the very significance of reason. Thirdly, as part of its process reason always encourages strife of parties, it is always a war of conflicting interests. And finally, democratic freedom stresses competition which results in an open-ended conflict.

But these defects can be overcome through the cultivation of proper rational and universal education. Rational and universal education means first “to teach men how to observe and know rightly the facts on which they have to form a judgment; secondly, to train them to think fruitfully and soundly; thirdly, to fit them to use their knowledge and their thought effectively for their own and the common good. Capacity of observation and knowledge, capacity of intelligence and judgment, capacity of action and high character are required for the citizenship of a rational order of society.”¹²

But the present education ignores these necessities. As a result degeneracy raises its head in democracy. For this reason, some of the modern minds consider democracy as a fiction.

But we need not ignore the positive contributions of democracy. It is for the first time that people got the chance of erecting an active life. This aroused a hope for better living in future. Secondly, some kind of knowledge along with intelligence has developed and with that developed knowledge conflicting issues get solved in most cases. Thirdly, although there is no absolute equality, yet equal educational facilities have been provided for all.

In spite of this, the question that embarrasses one is for what purpose will equal educational equipment and opportunity be used? Is it for a desire to accumulate wealth or to create a competitive system in order to build up big industries? Democracy permits competition which in turn creates inequality. Successful competitors will personally go ahead without looking

at the interest of all others. This creates at least two classes, the “haves” and the “have nots”. The “haves” constitute a privileged class and the “have nots” an unprivileged class. Between these two classes, interests stand at two opposite ends and therefore competition encourages a conflict between them without resolving the tangle. Seeking a way to get out of this tangle, democratic socialism stepped in in place of democratic individualism.

But socialism in its rigorous form cannot accept democracy of individuals. As it is a revolt against all forms of capitalism it has to do away with competition. In place of organised economic battle it introduced an organised order and peace. It overthrew the democratic basis of liberty and in its place introduced a perfect social equality. Along with equal opportunity for all there must be equality of status for all. “This equality again is impossible if personal, or at least inherited right in property is to exist, and therefore socialism abolishes ... the right of personal property as it is now understood and makes war on the hereditary principle. Who then is to possess the property? It can only be the community as a whole. And who is to administer it? Again the community as a whole.... Not the reasoning minds and wills of the individuals, but the collective reasoning mind and will of the community has to govern.”¹³

Democratic socialism has tried to minimise this rigorous stand of socialism by allowing a limited individual freedom within a collective order. But to a true socialist, even if a minimum freedom is allowed it will destroy the character of socialism altogether.

But socialism too suffers from many inconsistencies. There is the inconsistency between life’s facts and mind’s ideas. If both individualism and socialism are victims of inherent inconsistencies, they have to go. Human society has passed through these two “isms” for a considerable length of time. Now the time has come for a further change. Both individualism and socialism have to be superseded by a new one. The basis of that new one will be neither liberty alone nor equality alone but will be brotherhood which still remains unexperienced. And Anarchism will base itself on brotherhood. If “both equality and liberty disappear from the human scene, there is left only one member of the democratic trinity, brotherhood or, as it is now called, comradeship, that has some chance of survival as part of the social basis ... But comradeship without liberty and equality can be nothing more than the like association of all – individuals, functional classes, guilds, syndicates, soviets or any other units – in common service to the life of the nation under the absolute control of

the collectivist State. The only liberty left at the end would be the freedom to serve the community under the rigorous direction of the State authority; the only equality would be an association of all alike in a Spartan or Roman spirit of civic service with perhaps a like status, theoretically equal at least for all functions; the only brotherhood would be the sense of comradeship in devoted dedication to the organised social Self, the State.”¹⁴ In fact if any of the trinity of democracy is stripped of its godhead, democracy will lose its existence.

The natural outcome of socialism is totalitarianism. Russian Communism retained equality as an essential element of socialism, but that did not apply to the whole of humanity. That was meant for the proletariat class only. To communism, capitalism must be overthrown first, otherwise the application of communism will not be possible. Through the overthrow of the capitalist class, there will remain only one class, the proletariat class. And that single class will be treated as a classless society. In that classless society, the concept of equality will be shared by all. “Still its spirit is a rigorous totalitarianism on the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which amounts in fact to the dictatorship of the Communist party in the name or on behalf of the proletariat. Non-proletarian totalitarianism goes farther and discards democratic equality no less than democratic liberty; it preserves classes, – ...but as a means of social functioning. ... Rationalisation is no longer the turn; its place is taken by a revolutionary mysticism, which seems to be the present drive of the Time Spirit.”¹⁵

In the meantime, Russia has done away with communism. Even Fascist countries are no longer interested in Rationalism. If this trend continues further, then the rationalistic age will meet its final end.

III

Socialism treats human society as a collective being. Individualism treats individuals as free active beings. To both socialism and individualism, the human being is a mind-body complex and nothing more than that. In that respect, both treat human being as secular. But secular refers to a life that has no respect for the soul which is spiritual. So secularism and spiritualism stand opposed to each other. That is why neither individualism nor socialism could invite universal brotherhood as its basis. But the truth is that both an individual being and the social being have their own soul. As both have body, life, mind in common, so they have a common soul in them. This truth has been ignored because of their unspiritual character. The concept

of brotherhood is based on the concept of soul. The whole of mankind is a single unit because of the existence of the soul. The soul binds together all divergent elements and the feeling of a unity depends on the soul only. So the unity of mankind is inconceivable without soul. To build an integral social life, the soul must be its foundation.

The next progressive social force will be Anarchism. The basis of anarchism will be brotherhood. As brotherhood stands on the bedrock of soul, so anarchism will be endowed with a power of spirituality. But at its starting point, it will have an intellectual flavour. With the passing of time, this intellectual character will change into a spiritual character. "Intellectual anarchism relies on two powers in the human being of which the first is the enlightenment of his reason; the mind of man, enlightened, will claim freedom for itself, but will equally recognise the same right in others ... To ensure coordination and prevent clash and conflict in this constant contact another power is needed than the enlightened intellect. Anarchist thought finds this power in a natural human sympathy which ... can be relied upon to ensure natural cooperation: the appeal is to what the American poet calls the love of comrades, to the principle of fraternity, the third and most neglected term of the famous revolutionary formula. A free equality founded upon spontaneous co-operation, not on governmental force and social compulsion, is the highest anarchistic ideal."¹⁶

Such an anarchistic ideal will lead us either to a free cooperative communism, where all labour and property are meant for the benefit of all or to communalism, where the individual will offer his surplus labour and property to the society for the common good of all under a cooperative impulse. The extreme form of anarchism never compromises with a rigorous communism. A stateless communism is not workable and so unacceptable to the modern mind and the free communalism without any government force is also impractical. Then what is the way out? "A spiritual or spiritualised anarchism might appear to come nearer to the solution or at least touch something of it from afar ... The solution lies not in the reason but in the soul of man, in its spiritual tendencies. It is a spiritual, an inner freedom that can alone create a perfect human order. It is a spiritual, a greater than the rational enlightenment that can alone illumine the vital nature of man and impose harmony on its self-seekings, antagonisms and discords. A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution, no other can replace it."¹⁷

This brotherhood cannot be found either in vital emotion or in human reason. It will be found only in the human soul. "It is in the soul that it must find its roots; the love which is founded upon a deeper truth of our being, the brotherhood or, let us say, – ...the spiritual comradeship which is the expression of an inner realisation of oneness. For so only can egoism disappear and the true individualism of the unique godhead in each man found itself on the true communism of the equal godhead in the race; for the Spirit, the inmost self, the universal Godhead in every being is that whose very nature of diverse oneness it is to realise the perfection of its individual life and nature in the existence of all, in the universal life and nature."¹⁸

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- 6.Ibid. pp.8-9
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11. Ibid. pp.184-85
12. Ibid. p.186
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The Genesis Of Sri Aurobindo's Superman

Sandeep Joshi

“Man is a transitional being” – Sri Aurobindo averred when he envisioned the advent of a new species he called “superman”. It is generally not necessary to practise Yoga after you attain Self-realisation but both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother continued to do so in order to attain the next stage, which they called the “supramental transformation” (hence the epigram “*Sri Aurobindo's yoga begins where other Yogas end*”). Scholars have the habit of viewing such pronouncements through the lens of history; they conveniently assume that Sri Aurobindo's supramental evolution was an enhancement of Nietzsche's conception of the *Übermensch* or an attempt to assimilate Darwinian evolution into his spiritual philosophy. Sri Aurobindo himself once categorically rejected any connection between Darwinian evolution and supramental evolution: “The evolution I speak of is not the evolution of the Darwinian theory... Many centuries before Darwin Puranic and Tantric writers spoke very explicitly of an evolution of the soul's birth through the vegetable and animal to man”.¹ While such assurances may suffice to convince steadfast followers, it is possible to construct more elaborate and cogent arguments for wider comprehension. In this article, I would like to highlight the “prototype of the species”, a key idea that differentiates Sri Aurobindo's supramental evolution from that of other thinkers who have proposed similar ideas.

The discourse spawned by Darwin

In the 150 years since Darwin first proposed his theory of naturalistic evolution, compelling evidence of its remarkable accuracy continues to build across embryology, genetics and paleontology. Human embryos develop in phases that reflect our evolutionary history; first the embryo looks like an embryonic fish, then amphibian, then reptile, and finally mammals. Fossils of various species have been found precisely in those geological strata that reflect their rising complexity in the evolutionary tree; no fossil has been found where it wasn't predicted to exist. Our vestigial

organs are indicative of Nature's past experiments in other species. Hox genes and dead genes are indicators of the common genetic platform that Nature utilises to develop various species. Missing links between species have been found, one of the most notable being the *Tiktaalik* amphibian. The pattern of species distribution across the earth validates Darwin's theory. Remote islands lack mammals, amphibians, freshwater fish and reptiles; the species found on these islands are similar to the nearest mainland.²

As Darwin's theory has gained ground, various religions have sought to formulate a response to it. It would be an unnecessary detour here to chronicle the Muslim or Christian response to Darwin. Hinduism is generally regarded as more evolution-friendly because it has never admitted a gulf between animal and man (the theory of reincarnation). Furthermore, its ancient scriptures describe a cyclic cosmology that operates on far vaster time scales than the other mainstream religions. The Puranas speak of a nine-fold creation through which various forms such as *vanaspati* (plants), *urdva-srotas* (forms in which food is consumed upwards), *tiryak-srotas* (animals in whom food is consumed sideways) and *aryak-srotas* (humans in whom food is consumed downwards) manifest on earth.³ It is pertinent to stress that the Puranas refer only to the creation of different species and do not discuss anything akin to Darwinian evolution. There is also Kapila's theory of *Samkhya* which proposes the concept of *parinama* (transformation) through which consciousness becomes matter and produces individual entities. While no Hindu scriptures explicitly mention Darwinian-type evolution, all these arrows in the quiver of a modern sage provide enough ammunition to tackle and synthesise Darwin's theory. In his 2012 book “*Hindu perspectives on evolution*”, Mackenzie Brown has analysed the spectrum of responses offered by various Hindu philosophers. In the next passage, I shall briefly summarise his findings:

Madame Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society was amongst the first to suggest that the Hindu procession of Avatars in various animal and human forms was an allegorical presentation of Darwinian evolution. Keshub Sen of the Brahmo Samaj also offered the same argument. In sharp contrast, Dayananda Saraswati of the Arya Samaj may have misunderstood Darwin's theory and even denied it. In a lecture given in Roorkee, he questioned why monkeys no longer evolve into men if Darwin's theory is true. While Swami Vivekananda accepted Darwinian evolution, he sought to synthesise it into the Vedantic theory of spiritual involution and evolution. He attributed species transformation to the Hindu

notion of effect residing in the cause (satkarya-vada). In the notion of jati-antara-parinama mentioned in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra 4.2-3, he found evidence of the changing of one species into another ("the transformation into another form takes place through the in-filling of the innate nature"). In his commentary on the Yoga Sutras, he even speculated on the possibility of transforming the human body: "As soon as this body dies, we shall have to manufacture another. If we can do that, why cannot we do it just here and now, without getting out of the present body? The theory is perfectly correct. If it's possible that we live after death, and make other bodies, why is it impossible that we should have the power of making bodies here, without entirely dissolving this body, simply changing it continually?"⁴ Sri Aurobindo went beyond Swami Vivekananda in formulating the supramental evolution and the possibility of man's conscious participation in it. He was willing to admit microevolution (variation within a species) but was reluctant to accept macroevolution (change of species into one another) as proposed by Darwin.⁵ As he wrote: "All the facts show that a type can vary within its own specification of nature, but there is nothing to show that it can go beyond it. It has not yet been really established that ape-kind developed into man; for it would rather seem that a type resembling the ape, but always characteristic of itself and not of apehood, developed within its own tendencies of nature and became what we know as man, the present human being".⁶

The reluctance of all Indian sages and philosophers to unambiguously endorse Darwinian macroevolution is understandable. No self-respecting (and by that, I mean "higher self") sage who has had significant life-changing spiritual experiences (out of body, cosmic expansion, etc.) would be willing to accept that forms can fluidly morph into one another without the intervention of some "Higher Mind". Since ancient times, yogis have discovered and emphasised that Man is not limited to a physical body but is in fact constituted of five sheaths – *anandamaya*, *vijnanamaya*, *manomaya*, *pranamaya* and *annamaya*. While the physical (*annamaya*) sheath may display genetic similarities with other species, the higher sheaths in the human being are qualitatively different from those of other species. These higher sheaths are sculpted using the "prototype" to be discussed in the next section. It is this occult truth that gets obscured by Darwin's theory of evolution.

Mackenzie Brown has done a commendable job of analysing and presenting not just Sri Aurobindo's views on supramental evolution but also the views of other Indian philosophers and sages. He remains

convinced that Sri Aurobindo proposed his theory as a response to Darwinian evolution, and consequently, situates Sri Aurobindo in the Hindu religious response towards Darwin. The most facile way to refute such scholarly criticism regarding the supramental evolution is to take a cue from other scholars and deny that Sri Aurobindo was a Hindu for all but a few years of his life. More cogent arguments can, however, be developed. The problem with these scholars is that their interpretation of Sri Aurobindo is guided solely by his major writings such as *The Life Divine*, *Letters on Yoga*, and the *Essays on the Gita*. They ignore or are unaware of the Mother's elucidatory remarks as well as the diary notes in the *Record of Yoga* which may shed more light on the genesis of the supramental concept. The development of such arguments is the purpose of the next section.

The prototype of the species

The conventional argument in support of the supramental evolution is based on Sri Aurobindo's discovery of the Supermind, which occurred after Swami Vivekananda gave him a clue to the overhead planes during the former's incarceration in Alipur jail. In this essay, I would like to develop an alternative thread of argument based on the notion of the "prototype of the species". As much as possible, I shall present verbatim quotations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to limit the layer of misinterpretation that gets added in any secondary work.

Before she met Sri Aurobindo in 1914, the Mother had lived with occultists Max and Alma Théon in Algeria from 1906-1908. The three of them had conducted a detailed exploration of the occult worlds which exist "beyond" the physical world. During some of these sojourns, the Mother had seen a "prototype" in the border between the manifested worlds and the Formless regions above it. There are two conversations recorded in the 1960s where she relates these details to her disciple, Satprem. On 7th Nov, 1961, she said:

Well, one time I was there (Théon used to warn against going beyond this domain, because he said you wouldn't come back), but there I was, wanting to pass over to the other side, when – in a quite unexpected and astounding way – I found myself in the presence of the 'principle,' a principle of the human form. It didn't resemble man as we are used to seeing him, but it was an upright form, standing just on the border between the world of forms and the Formless, like a kind of standard. [By 'standard,' Mother means a sort of model or archetype.] At that time nobody had

ever spoken to me about it and Madame Théon had never seen it – no one had ever seen or said anything. But I felt I was on the verge of discovering a secret.

Afterwards, when I met Sri Aurobindo and talked to him about it, he told me, ‘It is surely the prototype of the supramental form.’⁷ I saw it several times again, later on, and this proved to be true.

The content of another conversation recorded on 12th Oct 1966 is quite similar:

12th Oct, 1966: When one went beyond and entered those regions, then there was ... it was the Supreme outside the creation, beyond the creation. That’s where I saw the representative form of the new creation (and that was before I ever heard anything about Sri Aurobindo and the Supermind), that’s where I saw the form that must succeed the human form, like the symbolic representation of the new creation. That was two or three years before I heard of Sri Aurobindo and met him. So when he told me about the supramental creation, I said to him (laughing), “But of course, I know, I saw it up there!”⁸

There is no record of Sri Aurobindo having similarly glimpsed the “supramental prototype” but according to the diary he kept of his occult experiments (now called “*Record of Yoga*”), it seems that in March of 1914, he was shown the vast evolutionary scale through which life evolves on Earth. According to the Hindu scriptures, the universe has been created and destroyed many times. Each such creation, which is called a *Kalpa* (Aeon), comprises fourteen *Manvantaras* (age of Manu) and in each *Manvantara*, life evolves through the descent of plant, animal and human prototypes from the higher occult worlds into the material world. It is not just one human race, but multiple types of humanoid races which progressively manifest. In the *Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo calls these prototypes as *Pashu*, *Vanara*, *Pishacha*, *Pramatha*, *Rakshasa*, *Asura*, *Deva*, *Sadhyadeva*, *Siddhadeva* and *Satyadeva*.

In one of his visions, Sri Aurobindo was given a glimpse of life in the first two *Manvantaras*:

A series of images and a number of intimations have been given yesterday in the *chitra-drishti* (visions) to illustrate the history of the first two *Manwantaras* & the vicissitudes through which the human idea has gone in the course of these unnumbered ages. It

is not at all surprising that there should be no relics of those vicissitudes in the strata of the present earth; for the present earth⁹ is not the soil of the planet as it was in the earliest *Manwantaras*.

According to another diary entry, he was shown a humanoid race which had existed in an earlier age:

22nd March, 1914:

3. Also in the clouds. Certain scenes of a pursuit in the early *Manwantaras* of a race of divinised *Pashus* by Barbarians. Also, animals & arms of other ages. (The latter are common).

The whole of 3 (*i.e. the vision above*), which is recorded elsewhere, was an instance expressly given of the way in which the Theosophists arrive at their results & shows both their sincerity & the possibilities and pitfalls of their method.¹⁰

Once, he was shown the animal prototypes which are formed in the higher worlds before the actual animal species manifests on Earth:

26 March, 1914:

Fantastic images of animals, a lion with an impossibly slender body, a cock face on a fourfooted animal, belonging to the idea-world of the Manus where types are evolved & varied before they are fixed in the sthula (gross physical world).¹¹

Based on such insights, Sri Aurobindo reached the following conclusion of how evolution proceeds on Earth:

Every race that thus overshoots its mark & goes a step farther than their immediate next race in evolution aids powerfully that evolution, but becomes unfit for survival & has to disappear. For this reason the Gandharva race of the *Pashus* disappeared & the *Asura* *Rakshasa* type reappeared, then took up something of the Gandharva & advanced one step towards the *Asura-Pashu* of the *Asura* type. By such overleapings & recoils human evolution has always advanced.¹²

I have provided a glimpse of the visions Sri Aurobindo had on the occult mechanism behind evolution. The entire text is too voluminous to reproduce here. If you are curious, you can read pages 1323-1335 of the *Record of Yoga* (CWSA vols. 10-11).

There are worlds upon worlds “above” our gross physical world, and these worlds shape the forces and forms that eventually manifest in the physical world. Before a species appears on the planet, its prototype becomes visible in these occult worlds. As the Mother explains above, she had seen the “supramental prototype” and that is what convinced her that a new species would someday emerge on earth. In an essay written in the *Karmayogin* journal sometime in 1909-1910, Sri Aurobindo had explained the occult mechanism that brings about the evolution of a new species:

The whole burden of our human progress has been an attempt to escape from the bondage to the body and the vital impulses. According to the scientific theory, the human being began as the animal, developed through the savage and consummated in the modern civilised man. The Indian theory is different. God created the world by developing the many out of the One and the material out of the spiritual. From the beginning, the objects which compose the physical world were arranged by Him in their causes, developed under the law of their being in the subtle or psychical world and then manifested in the gross or material world. From *kāraṇa* (causal) to *sūkṣma* (subtle), from *sūkṣma* to *sthūla* (gross physical), and back again, that is the formula. Once manifested in matter the world proceeds by laws which do not change, from age to age, by a regular succession, until it is all withdrawn back again into the source from which it came. The material goes back into the psychical and the psychical is involved in its cause or seed. It is again put out when the period of expansion recurs and runs its course on similar lines¹³ but with different details till the period of contraction is due.

Similarly, during a conversation with Ashram inmates, the Mother elucidated on this world of archetypes:

Question: What is “the heavenly archetype of the lotus”?

Mother: It means the primal idea of the lotus.

Each thing that is expressed physically was conceived somewhere before being realised materially.

There is an entire world which is the world of the fashioners, where all conceptions are made. And this world is very high,

much higher than all the worlds of the mind; and from there these formations, these creations, these types which have been conceived by the fashioners come down and are expressed in physical realisations. And there is always a great distance between the perfection of the idea and what is materialised. Very often the materialised things are like caricatures in comparison with the primal idea. This is what he calls the archetype. This takes place in worlds... not always the same ones, it depends on the things; but for many things in the physical, the primal ideas, these archetypes, were in what Sri Aurobindo calls the Overmind.

But there is a still higher domain than this where the origins are still purer, and if one reaches this, attains this, one finds the absolutely pure types of what is manifested upon earth. And then it is very interesting to compare, to see to what an extent earthly creation is a frightful distortion. And moreover, it is only when one can reach these regions and see the reality of things in their essence that one can work with knowledge to transform them here; otherwise on what can we take our stand to conceive a better world, more perfect, more beautiful than the existing one? It can't be on our imagination which is itself something very poor and very material. But if one can enter that consciousness, rise right up to these higher worlds of creation, then with this in one's consciousness one can work at making material things take their real form.¹⁴

Those who find this discussion evocative of Plato's *Theory of Forms* should not be surprised because Plato's remarks may have been based on his occult perception. Western philosophy tends to appropriate the rational side of Greek thought and ignores its mystical dimension thereby creating a lop-sided view of Greek philosophers.

The preceding discussion raises the question: since the prototype of the next species exists out there, it is guaranteed that there will be a new species maybe several centuries from now. If that is so, what was the need for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to engage in the supramental transformation? This kind of work is usually driven by Divine guidance (called *sankalpa* in Sanskrit). They acted because their conscious participation would augment the process, as we can gather from the following passage in *The Life Divine*. This passage is part of a new chapter which was written by Sri Aurobindo in 1940:

It is conceivable indeed that, without the descent, by a secret pressure from above, by a long evolution, our terrestrial Nature might succeed in entering into a close contact with the higher now superconscious planes and a formation of subliminal Overmind might take place behind the veil; as a result a slow emergence of the consciousness proper to these higher planes might awake on our surface. It is conceivable that in this way there might appear a race of mental beings thinking and acting not by the intellect or reasoning and reflecting intelligence, or not mainly by it, but by an intuitive mentality which would be the first step of an ascending change; this might be followed by an overmentalisation which would carry us to the borders beyond which lies the Supermind or divine Gnosis. But this process would inevitably be a long and toilsome endeavour of Nature. There is a possibility too that what would be achieved might only be an imperfect superior mentalisation; the new higher elements might strongly dominate the consciousness, but they would be still subjected to a modification of their action by the principle of an inferior mentality: there would be a greater expanded and illuminating knowledge, a cognition of a higher order; but it would still undergo a mixture subjecting it to the law of the Ignorance, as Mind undergoes limitation by the law of Life and Matter. For a real transformation there must be a direct and unveiled intervention from above; there would be necessary too a total submission and surrender of the lower consciousness, a cessation of its insistence, a will in it for its separate law of action to be completely annulled by transformation and lose all rights over our being. *If these two conditions can be achieved even now by a conscious call and will in the spirit and a participation of our whole manifested and inner being in its change and elevation, the evolution, the transformation can take place by a comparatively swift conscious change; the supramental Consciousness-Force from above and the evolving Consciousness-Force from behind the veil acting on the awakened awareness and will of the mental human being would accomplish by their united power the momentous transition. There would be no farther need of a slow evolution counting many millenniums for each step, the halting and difficult evolution operated by Nature in the past in the unconscious creatures of the Ignorance.*¹⁵

Other occultists on the prototype

The fact that a “prototype” of every species exists has also been affirmed by some other occultists. These views are presented here as additional support to supplement the arguments above. Madame H.P. Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society, states in the *Secret Doctrine* that the astral prototype of man preceded his physical appearance. After the physical form appeared, it became subject to the processes of differentiation (i.e. Darwinian evolution.) In a footnote in her work, the *Secret Doctrine*, she wrote:

This will be pooh-poohed, because it will not be understood by our modern men of science; but every Occultist and theosophist will easily realise the process. There *can be no objective* form on Earth (nor in the Universe either), without its astral prototype being first formed in Space. From Phidias down to the humblest workman in the ceramic art — a sculptor has had to create first of all a model in his mind, then sketch it in one and two dimensional lines, and then only can he reproduce it in a three dimensional or objective figure. And if human mind is a living demonstration of such successive stages in the process of evolution — how can it be otherwise when Nature’s Mind and creative powers are concerned?¹⁶

Carlos Castaneda seems to have had an occult vision of the human prototype, as per the text in his book *“Fire from Within”*. Castaneda refers to the prototype as the “mould of man”. His teacher Don Juan told him that mystics who see the prototype often mistake it for God. Doubts have been raised about Castaneda’s erratic conduct later in life, but for the purposes of this essay, it is assumed that his guided occult exploration under Don Juan was authentic and error-free.

As I gazed into the light with all the passion I was capable of, the light seemed to condense and I saw a man. A shiny man that exuded charisma, love, understanding, sincerity, truth. A man that was the sum total of all that is good. The fervour I felt on seeing that man was well beyond anything I had ever felt in my life. I did fall on my knees. I wanted to worship God personified, but don Juan intervened and whacked me on my left upper chest, close to my clavicle, and I lost sight of God.... He gave me a detailed explanation of what the mould of man

was. He did not talk about it in terms of the Eagle's emanations, but in terms of a pattern of energy that serves to stamp the qualities of humanness on an amorphous blob of biological matter. At least, I understood it that way, especially after he further described the mould of man using a mechanical analogy. He said that it was like a gigantic die that stamps out human beings endlessly as if they were coming to it on a mass production conveyor belt. He vividly mimed the process by bringing the palms of his hands together with great force, as if the die moulded a human being each time its two halves were clapped. He also said that every species has a mould of its own, and every individual of every species moulded by the process shows characteristics particular to its own kind....

He began then an extremely disturbing elucidation about the mould of man. He said that the old seers as well as the mystics of our world have one thing in common – they have been able to see the mould of man but not understand what it is. Mystics, throughout the centuries, have given us moving accounts of their experiences. But these accounts, however beautiful, are flawed by the gross and despairing mistake of believing the mould of man to be an omnipotent, omniscient creator; and so is the interpretation of the old seers, who called the mould of man a friendly spirit, a protector of man....

For the mould of man cannot under any circumstances help us by intervening in our behalf, or punish our wrongdoings, or reward us in any way. We are simply the product of its stamp; we are its impression. The mould of man is exactly what its name tells us it is, a pattern, a form, a cast that groups together a particular bunch of fibrelike elements, which we call man.¹⁷

Biological perspective

Advances in biological understanding raise obvious questions as to how the occult prototype influences or interferes with the visible biological aspect. For example, what happens to the prototype when a species becomes extinct? I don't know but it is possible that the prototype continues to exist until the dissolution of the universe. One could also wonder how the prototype is affected or changed when a new species is created, either in the laboratory or in the field due to reproductive isolation (the biological term is "speciation"). There is natural versus artificial, and biological versus

morphological speciation. In the absence of any original occult insight into these matters, it's best to let this question float for now.

In the context of this discussion, it is worth noting that about a hundred years ago, Sri Aurobindo had envisioned that one day man would be able to modify plants and animals. In a commentary on the *Isha Upanishad* written in during the 1913-1914 period, he wrote:

Modern man has not yet succeeded in discovering or using the laws of Life, but there is no reason to suppose that he will not one day make that discovery also. The day must inevitably come when he will be able even to originate no less than to modify freely both plant life & animal life in matter & govern them for his purposes as he now originates mechanisms of material force and modifies & governs its currents, combinations and separate workings so as to abridge distance, to invade the air, to economise the expenditure of his own life-energies or to serve a hundred other purposes of human construction, destruction or development.¹⁸

Conclusion

To conclude, Sri Aurobindo's idea of the superman was derived neither from Darwin nor Nietzsche, but from the occult visions that he and the Mother had experienced. They were not thinkers who proposed some exciting and novel theory but occultists who were preparing for a different kind of evolution. They were aware of the existence of the supramental prototype that heralds the advent of a new species and thereafter undertook the work of supramental transformation to prepare for its descent.

We end up with some verses from *Savitri*:

I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
Forerunners of a divine multitude,
Out of the paths of the morning star they came
Into the little room of mortal life.
I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
The great creators with wide brows of calm,
The massive barrier-breakers of the world

And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
 The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
 The messengers of the Incommunicable,
 The architects of immortality.
 Into the fallen human sphere they came,
 Faces that wore the Immortal's glory still,
 Voices that communed still with the thoughts of God,
 Bodies made beautiful by the spirit's light,
 Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,
 Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy,
 Approaching eyes of a diviner man,
 Lips chanting an unknown anthem of the soul,
 Feet echoing in the corridors of Time.
 High priests of wisdom, sweetness, might and bliss,
 Discoverers of beauty's sunlit ways
 And swimmers of Love's laughing fiery floods
 And dancers within rapture's golden doors,
 Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth
 And justify the light on Nature's face.

(Book III, Canto IV, 4th. Rev.ed, 1993, pp.343-44)

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The Psychic Being

Debashish Banerji

Psychic being is a core term in the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Simply put, it is the individualised Divine within each human being. The Mother has called it “the psychological centre of our existence.” Sri Aurobindo has written of it as “the innermost being” in us. It is the inner “person” and the basis of personhood in each individual. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have referred to it as the soul personality. The notion of a soul or a soul personality is not unique to Sri Aurobindo. Others have spoken or written about it in its various aspects. But in the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, it assumes a critically important and central position and is treated in its integral dimension as the individualised being and power in evolution, bestowing “meaning” to the cosmic existence.

We may see that this notion of an inner self is approached differently in different religious or spiritual philosophies and practices. In Buddhism, for example, the notion of an essential Self is scrupulously denied. Buddhists speak of ‘*anatman*’. There is no essence to the human being; at the centre of the human there is a not-Self. This not-Self affirms a primordial non-Being or an infinite Unmanifest behind a conditioned appearance of cosmos, an erasure of all possible finite or ontic approaches. Either we enter into an indefinable existence or into a non-existence. In Shankara’s *Kevaladvaita* (Exclusive Non-Dualism), there is the notion of an atman or individual self, which is a self-conception of Paramatman, or Supreme Self, itself an appearance of Brahman. The sense of individuality here is an illusory projection and can disappear with the knowledge of its Origin, Brahman, just as a drop loses its separate identity when it knows of itself as a spatially and temporally bounded formation of the ocean. One may think of an Infinite Self that conceptualises itself infinitely. This implies an infinite self-multiplication. Each of these would be the atmans or jivatmans

of the supreme Paramatman. If we conceive of such a self-multiplication spatially, i.e. in terms of extension, then each of these would be identical copies of the Supreme Self. As atman, this would be the same Being in all beings. Individuality of character, or qualitative differentiation would then be seen only as aberrations of nature. Nature, as a mutable complex of qualities, covers or clothes this identical Soul in all beings, providing an appearance of differentiation. These attributes of nature would be an external composition, made of the five elements (*panchabhutani*) on which the reflection of the individual but identical Self would fall, and in so falling would convey a consciousness of qualitative uniqueness. Individual characteristics from this point of view would be aberrations or temporary phenomena, arising from a mistaken identity. This mis-identification of the reflection of the self-multiplied but identical Soul in Nature is seen in this view as the ego (*ahamkara*). Arriving at an understanding of this misunderstanding through an analysis of the constituents of nature or a reductive pursuit of the Self, one would realise the One self in/as oneself and in/as all selves, in other words, the one same Self-existence in/as all things.

But this gives no reality to qualitative difference in the individual, all qualitative difference is seen to be external to the Self. But if instead of Self, Brahman were to conceive of itself as Person and to multiply the infinite qualitative possibilities of this Person through infinite self-conceptions, we would find a matrix of qualities that can present itself in different combinations, essentially the same but qualitatively different. This self-multiplication of an infinite Person for the purposes of play (*lila*) is what devotional schools of theistic worship in India affirm. Brahman as Person in this case is called Purushottama and its qualitatively different self-conceptions are individual souls (*purusha*) whose essence would be marked by quality and hence personhood. Such a conception of soul prevails in schools such as those devoted to Krishna, Kali, Shiva, or for that matter, Christ in mystic Christianity. These can be thought of as dualistic schools, because they affirm a qualitative difference between individuals as finite combinations of qualities (though potentially or latently infinite) and the Divine as the conscious infinite matrix of qualities (*anantaguna*). Here the souls exist for the enjoyment of the play of the Divine’s infinite qualities, a dynamic role. Thus, this approach affirms individual uniqueness, but only in relation to the Divine’s infinity, as an eternal part or portion, *amśah sanātānah*, as the Gita says. This eternal portion will

always be partial, since it will manifest always only a portion of the qualitative infinity of the Divine; never the absoluteness of the Divine. Yet it will thereby give reality to individual difference, or qualitative uniqueness, as a modality of relationship with the Supreme Being.

From this dualistic perspective, all individuals are primarily related to the Supreme Being. Thus in this approach the notion of soul takes on a richness as person and tends towards the philosophical and/or theological affirmation of an anthropic principle. One may see this for example in mystic or esoteric Christianity, where man is supposed to have been made in the image of God, and this ideal image of God/man is the soul within, seen as the inner Christ. This soul is thus the immanent purusha, not merely the Same in all beings, but the perpetually Different, That which can modulate its infinity into qualitative uniqueness in each individual. That's why this idea of soul allows for infinite possibilities of relationship with the Supreme Being.

Sameness and difference, eternal spatial extension of the identical, and perpetual temporal recurrence of the qualitatively never-same, both, as we have seen, refer to some aspect of the soul, soul as Self or soul as Person. But there are other aspects of soul existence that are not exhausted by these and are necessary to the cosmic and transcendental dimensions of existence. If indeed there is only one existence, then a dualistic philosophy cannot encompass it. How can it be that there are souls that are eternally separate and have reality only in relationship to a Supreme Being? There must be an experience or status of being in which these infinite souls realise themselves not merely as portions of the One but as the entire infinite One. This is the central truth of Vedanta affirming Existence as integral in all its aspects, everywhere the only existence there is.

This is a conundrum that mediates between the relative and the absolute, between the finite and the infinite, between the ontic and the ontological. Can we affirm the eternal reality of the soul person (*nitya amśah sanā tanah*) but also know it as the absolute Person/Being (*ekam evaadwitiyam brahman*)? This is an aporia which we must defer to the transcendental status of experience, a status in which dualism and monism co-exist as soul experience without reducing each other. Closer to us yet uncommon, may be another aspect of soul experience, its cosmic aspect. If each of us is an isolated monad individualised purely in relation to the Supreme Being, then what accounts for the universality of things? What relates us to each other as the self-multiplication of the Identical which is the Never-Same?

What also relates us to Nature in time, what is the relationship of this individual to that which changes in cosmic nature, a being-in-cosmos (*lokasamgrahah*) that is a becoming, an individuation?

These paradoxes can only be bridged if we understand the immanent Divine, the soul personality or psychic being as itself containing transcendental, cosmic and individual dimensions of being and becoming. There is a dimension to the psychic being which is transcendental, an identity of the non-dual One beyond all qualities (*nirguna*) which has multiplied itself in all possible instances; there is another dimension which is that of cosmic being, a latent matrix of infinite quality (*anantaguna*), an all-existence also self-multiplied in each instance; and there is a dimension of individual immanence, the uniqueness of the soul personality as a qualitative differentiation of the transcendental and cosmic being put forward for the play (*lila*) in space and time. Such a co-existence of dimensions makes possible a play of unity-in-difference, a pluralism which is supported by a monism. The experiential possibilities of such a soul existence would include the delight of relationship with the Divine Person and non-dual identity with the Divine Being. It would even be possible to have both these experiences simultaneously, in a trance of unthinkable identity-in-difference (*achintya bhedabheda*). But whereas these dimensions of soul existence can be thought of spatially, in static terms of eternity, and temporally, as play of meaningless delight; one may think also of this co-existence of dimensions in evolutionary terms. The play of qualitative difference could then be informed with teleological meaning, each individual soul experience a unique trajectory towards universality (the realisation of the cosmic qualitative matrix) and transcendence (the realisation of transcendental identity). Such a temporality would grant meaning to the individual as part of a cosmic and transcendental evolutionary becoming. This evolutionary dimension is Sri Aurobindo's additional contribution to the understanding of the soul as dynamic personality and essence, or psychic being and psychic entity individualising a cosmic and transcendental becoming.

Thus, extending the traditional ideas of soul, Sri Aurobindo's conception of the psychic being provides an integral view of soul existence. Sri Aurobindo's own experience of the psychic being, passed through the transcendental and cosmic dimensions to arrive at the immanence of the Divine in all beings and things. His spiritual journey took a trajectory that successively passed through the transcendental experiences of the non-dualistic schools, such as the Nirvana of the Buddhists or the moksha of

the Adwaitins, and the cosmic experience affirmed in Tantra of a qualitative Energy (Shakti) at work in Nature, to arrive finally at an affirmation of the divine Person as soul within all beings. With these experiences, Sri Aurobindo could affirm three dimensions of divine existence – the Divine as exclusive Supreme Absolute, a Transcendental Existence; the Divine as all-containing and all-forming qualitative Energy in movement and becoming, a Cosmic Existence; and the Divine as seed form or embryo planted within every individual instance, an Immanent Existence. The transcendence of God may be called the height dimension, the cosmic reality of God in being and becoming may be called the width dimension, while the immanence of God in every possibility of individual existence as its essence may be called its depth dimension. This depth dimension individualises within itself the other two dimensions, making possible a dynamic evolutionary play of integrality. This is an affirmation of integrality in space (dimensional co-existence) and time (evolution), fulfilling the conditions of the famous stanzas on integrality (*purna*) found in the Upanishads: integrality is that of which it can be affirmed that it is fully present, in its unity and its infinity, in every part of itself, every part of it is Itself.

In our present soul experience, we may speak of a spatial co-existence of the transcendental, universal and individual dimensions, but given our stage in cosmic becoming (a mental stage), in a waking condition we may realise only the truth of relation with the Divine. The other potentia of cosmic identity and transcendental non-duality can be experienced in states of trance, as also the transcendental state of unthinkable unity-in-difference. However, the temporal dimension of such a soul existence could envisage an evolution of soul experience to transform our stage in cosmic becoming. Through a progressive expansion of qualitative uniqueness, one may arrive at identity with the cosmic being and thereby universalise one's nature. Further, one may enter into relation with the Power of Becoming (Shakti) so as to open the doors to a waking identity with the transcendental Brahman, such that the individual and cosmic poises of existence are not erased but experienced as integral aspects of this transcendence. Such an integral poise of transcendent consciousness is what Sri Aurobindo discovered beyond the three dimensions of spiritual experience described above, and named Supermind. An evolutionary temporality could lead to this integral dimension of spiritual existence. Sri Aurobindo describes the supramental realisation in terms of the three dimensions of spiritual existence, as a triple status of Being. In this triple status, the three co-existing self-

appearances of the Divine Consciousness, transcendental, universal and individual, are simultaneously and continuously maintained and experienced by/as an act of Consciousness. The supramental Divine is at once transcendently Infinite, containing an infinity of ever-unmanifest content from which it can draw more and more newness into manifestation. It is at the same time a self-extension of infinite quality composing the cosmos with all its possibilities of being, consciousness and experience. It thus becomes the ground of its own self-manifestation. It also enters into each of its qualitatively unique individual possibilities as a name and form of itself. The integral potential of the psychic being evolving into the supramental realisation completes the hermeneutic circle of experience and is represented in occult symbolism as the serpent biting its own tail.

The integral maintenance of the three dimensions of the Supramental reality and the evolutionary play of its realisation by the psychic being is carried out by the Divine Consciousness. This calling forth of the possibilities of manifestation from the (always) infinitely unmanifest potential of Being can be seen as an operation of duality within Being, the self-remembrance of that which is intimately known, because self-evident. The infinite One knows itself wordlessly but has to mobilise its Consciousness to represent itself. This self-division is the primary act of Love leading to a graded and phased manifestation of the degrees of Consciousness with their discrete populations of names and forms. Consciousness as the self-knowledge of Supermind operates on Being to represent it in cosmos and individuals. Such an operation actualises the souls as qualitative possibilities of Being. The souls are those individual immanent habitations of the Supreme Spirit (Ishwara) whereby it enters into an evolutionary play of Becoming with its Consciousness (Shakti). Called by Shakti into vessels prepared by it out of its own Substance (*para prakritir jiva bhuta*), Being comes to reside in these names and forms as centres of its own existence, reversing its stance from the One in whom the All and the Each were latent to the Each in whom the All and the One are latent. These many Each, therefore, represent the immanence of Being in the habitations of Consciousness, maintained in/as an act of Love. The soul, thus, is not merely Being as Self self-multiplied in each instance but the inextricable encasement of Being in qualitative Consciousness, each Person a unique relation of Ishwara-Shakti, a continuous evolving relationship between the Supreme Being and the Supreme Consciousness. It is the Shakti that gives qualitative specificity to each soul in its evolving cosmic dimension, while it is Ishwara who inhabits this evolving qualitative

entity with the latent identity of integral Being. This is why each of our existences is, at its innermost core, an aspect of the Supreme Shakti, the Creative Consciousness that has made the vessels in which the Infinite and Integral Being can know itself innumerable as/in an act of love. Since we are a qualitative portion of the matrix of qualities which has extended us uniquely, this Creative Consciousness is to us the Divine Mother, also integrally present in us and inextricably united with Ishwara, the Transcendent Person. It is so that we are, in our deepest selves, a house of love, and a reciprocal word, an evolving movement of love from the Divine Mother to the Supreme Spirit and from the Supreme Spirit to the Divine Mother. This becomes the deepest meaning and message of the soul in us.

Thus psychic being is an instantiation of the Transcendent in the cosmos, given form and quality by Consciousness for the purposes of an evolutionary self-exploration basing a play of self-delight. The meaning (if any) of this play is therefore to be found in the Idea (if any) governing the movement of the cosmos. We have so far spoken of this Idea as an evolution of Knowledge (self-exploration) and Love (self-delight). But our cosmos is marked by three other forms of evolution which are even more primordial and characteristic of our existence – these are the evolutions of Consciousness, Power and Individuality. We have noted that the cosmos is a re-presentation of Being by an act of Consciousness. Such a representation may be mediated by Idea. Being a representation of Reality by Reality, such mediating Ideas cannot be of the nature of mental Ideas, which map speculative fictions based on Ignorance, but Truth shaping itself into forms of Reality based on a “seeing will.” Sri Aurobindo distinguishes such Ideas by calling them Real-Ideas and by identifying the Knowledge-Will of Consciousness responsible for such creative cosmic Ideas as arising in Supermind. As touched on in the last paragraph, a founding characteristic of our cosmos is its systemic appearance of graded and phased Consciousness. A variety of philosophers have noted the discrete grades (or degrees and forms) of Consciousness manifested in our cosmos, from the relative Inconscience of Matter through forms of pre-mental or submental Life consciousness, as in the species of microbes, plants, insects, reptiles and varieties of animals, to what seems a full-blown Mental consciousness in human beings, possessor of a conscious intelligence capable of “pure” ideation, language and the exercise of a systemic Reason to generalise cosmic laws and utilise them through an evolving technology (power). This graded manifestation of Consciousness is also seen to be phased, that is, one which presents a successive temporal

sequence in its appearance in the cosmos. The Real-Idea behind such a cosmos can be seen to be systemic, in that it begins from a “ground-zero” of Inconscience (Matter) from which a latency of Consciousness struggles to appear in forms of greater and greater capacity. Charles Darwin, who intuited this fact in terms only of physical functionality (survival of the fittest), ignored the development of Consciousness in cosmic evolution. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother point out that mental consciousness, as it appears in the human being, is presently the most advanced manifestation of the gradations of Consciousness, but this is neither the fullest manifestation of Mental Consciousness, nor anywhere near the fullness of the pure Consciousness of Being or its Real-Idea (Supermind), which are not limited gradations, but of which all gradations and their instances are self-limitations and self-formations.

We can also see the struggle which is needed for new degrees and forms of consciousness to normalise themselves in the cosmos. Acknowledgment of this struggle in the form of natural selection was built by Darwin into his theory of evolution. But again, this did not take into account the severe odds against which life forms representing new gradations of consciousness have had to struggle to establish themselves enduringly. This exercise of the power of consciousness bases itself in the freedom given to the Inconscience to maintain itself as the foundation from which Consciousness must rise and endure in our cosmos. At the level of individual life forms, this results in the inertial drag of Matter, what may be called the will-to-unconsciousness, an aspect of which Sigmund Freud recognised as *thanatos*, the death-wish, acting throughout the episode of life and resulting ultimately in death. Devices for evading death and reproducing one’s species have been the means to prolonging a species’ existence in the cosmos. With the human being, we find other forms of persistence, for example technologies of recording, which leave a material memory trace of consciousness. We can see the exercise of Power in the attempts to overcome the challenge of unconsciousness. It is this that Friedrich Nietzsche captured in his intuition of the will-to-power as the most primordial force in the cosmos. This points to the evolution of Power as part of the cosmic condition.

Finally, and perhaps most primordially, we find the evolution of individuality, the emergence of the Person. In the lower gradations of consciousness, existence and evolution occur in the herd, the individual seems to have merely statistical significance. But the higher the gradation of consciousness, the more uneven the variation of individuality. The

evolution of consciousness, knowledge, power and love that seemed to occur at the generic or species level, now displaces itself more and more onto individual agency. But it is only with human appearance that the cosmic evolution turns properly individual. The degree and modality of mental self-consciousness common to human experience allows for an expansion of subjectivity which can internalise cosmic and transcendental goals of existence. The possibilities of nature offered by Shakti in its evolutionary disclosure at the human level call into manifestation a formation of soul which is individualised enough to represent Purusha in its psychic possibilities of experience and action. This is why Sri Aurobindo and the Mother refer to the soul personality at the human level as the psychic being. The cosmic and transcendental possibilities of soul existence emerge out of their latency and become possibilities of experience at this stage. It also becomes possible to envision the evolution of individuality proceeding along with the cosmic evolution and even perhaps, leading it at every stage. This is how one may understand avatarhood (incarnation) in the Hindu mythos – the succession of divine individualities that further the cosmic evolution from grade to grade of consciousness. We are also in a position to envision that each soul has always existed co-evally with the evolution of cosmos, attempting to master the limitations of nature offered to it at each grade and aspiring for a better vessel of nature to express its latent possibilities. Thus the soul is the ever-reincarnating immanence of the Divine in seed or embryo form within us, assuming the powers of nature given to it by Shakti but furthering individual agency towards the Cosmic and Transcendental Individual, Purusha, in each instance of a species. From this point of view, the psychic being is not only the individualised centre of Divinity in each of us, but that persistent and eternal centre, which outlasts life and death and presents us with a temporal eternity, co-eval with cosmic history and individualising in each of us its memory.

Thus the soul evolves from life to life starting from a primordial seed state, and developing increasing specificity as a soul personality. Referring to our earlier discussion of the self-multiplication of Spirit, we may now specify further the dynamics of the evolution of soul. The self-multiplied Divine Self, forming the essential blueprint of each individual becoming, transcendent outside Time and Space, is known as the *jivatman*. Entering into the life-stream at the immanent centre of an individual existence in space and time, it is the *antaratman*, the pure latency of cosmic and transcendental existence. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother refer to this integral immanence within any individualised existence as the psychic entity. This

psychic entity, modulating itself to the instrumental gradations and qualities of consciousness provided to the individual (*jiva*) by nature (Shakti), prepares a soul personality or psychic being (*chaitya purusha*). The psychic being evolves from life to life, participating individually in the cosmic evolution and growing in the fullness of its qualitative body towards identification with the Cosmic Being (*viswa purusha* or in Sri Aurobindo's terminology, Overmind Purusha) and further, the Supramental Being (*vijnanamaya Purusha*). The qualitative specificity of the psychic being is recognised in the Indian tradition in the ideas of swabhava and swadharma, the first its aspect of being and the second its aspect of becoming. In human existence, psychic being takes on the triple modalities of consciousness characterising human nature, mind, life and body, developing thereby a psychic mentality, a psychic vitality and a psychic physicality. As it evolves, it integrates around itself the powers of the nature, body, life and mind making these conscious, and transforming them into vessels of the divine consciousness. This process is called by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, psychicisation or the psychic transformation.

In *Savitri* this profound and complex philosophy of integrality operating in the psychic being becomes manifest both in the lives of Aswapati and Savitri. We find from the very beginning that Savitri, who is seen as a Shakti avatar, is told that the key to the accomplishment of her destiny, is to discover her soul. For this discovery she delves into her inner depths, encountering the different layers or gradations of her individual consciousness and recognising these also to be planes of universal consciousness. Through the journey of this inward plunge, she arrives at the deepest core of her being, her soul. There she discovers the meaning and purpose of existence, both her own as well as that of the cosmos, the two inextricably tied. She realises that the psychic being embodies the dimension of meaning at both individual and cosmic levels. Savitri's discovery of the soul reveals to her its individual, cosmic and transcendental dimensions. Arriving at its transcendental source, she discovers her own Origin and invoking this in her outer nature, experiences it emerging from its latency and transforming her nature by installing itself in her mystic centres or chakras.

In the case of Aswapati, the process proceeds in the opposite direction. Instead of plunging within, Aswapati rises into realms of consciousness above the human mind, cosmic mind ranges which, though they tease with great Ideas and explanatory schemes, yield finally to a supreme Agnosticism, where all seems to be a dream of the Mental Self. Reality

here becomes a blank, featureless sense of the Alone in which all manifestation is only a figure of possibility or a dream. Threatened with ultimate meaninglessness, yet aspiring for a sense of purpose, he is drawn inward, by a secret call of consciousness, and plunges to the psychic world, or the world-soul as Sri Aurobindo calls it in *Savitri*. Here he realises the meaning of the innermost being of the individual, the immanence of God; he also realises the temporal eternity of each of these souls that go to sleep in the psychic world between lives, assimilating the experiences of nature and preparing themselves for another plunge in which they will develop greater mastery leading towards the divinisation of nature in the individual.

Thus we find that in *Savitri*, the psychic being plays a critically important role. It assumes a central role in Savitri's own life as the source of the Power with which she, as a Shakti Avatar, will confront Death. It also plays a central role in the life of Aswapati whose search for individual and cosmic meaning is fulfilled by it, initiating his further journey towards a Transcendental Intervention so as to unveil this meaning in the cosmos. In both cases, the psychic also opens them to the cosmic existence. They uncover not only the qualitative differentiation of the individualised psychic being, but its roots in the psychic entity manifesting the cosmic relationship between the Ishwara and the Shakti. Finally, in both their cases, they see that the psychic being and the psychic entity, or the individualised soul personality and its cosmic support, are a projection of the Transcendental Creative Consciousness or Divine Mother, always in union with the Supramental Being or Person (*Purushottama*). In *Savitri*, this aspect of the Supramental Mother is privileged over all else as that Golden Bridge uniting the Transcendental, Universal and Individual existences and capable of abolishing separation, suffering and death from individual (and eventually cosmic) experience.

Hence we find in *Savitri*, the fullness of Sri Aurobindo's treatment of soul existence, the soul as the immanent Divine in all beings, soul as the innermost Person within human beings always in relation to the cosmic and transcendental aspects of the Divine, soul as an evolutionary being representing a temporal eternity and persisting from life to life for the transformation of nature; soul as a being representing the cosmic relationship between the Ishwara and the Shakti and ultimately soul as a projection of the united Transcendent and Supramental Being and Shakti, Purushottama and Para Prakriti. We find too, that it is the supreme status of soul as projection of the Supramental Shakti that is shown to be ultimately

transformative in Savitri – this is what Savitri herself is an embodiment of, a ray of the Sun, something that finds its integrality only when it finds its identity with Her and is absorbed in her triple status of the Supermind. All this is brought out in *Savitri* as the aspects of the psychic being introduced by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to grant meaning to cosmic and individual existence in terms of the transformation of this cosmic ignorance into its divine truth of the play of God on earth.

II

Bk. VII, Canto V, '*The Finding of the Soul*' deals with Savitri's soul-discovery. The passage introduces the idea of the psychic being as a projection of the Divine Mother. In Savitri's case, this is true in a more profound sense than in other humans because she is an incarnation of the Divine Mother. But this is a truth also in a universal sense, because it is this divine Creative Consciousness at play with Transcendental Being that prepares the houses of nature out of its own qualitative body, so that the Supreme Being may enter these in its self-multiplied form as innumerable selves. Thus this individualised self is not merely a conscious being but also a conscious nature. It is a power of Consciousness, and in that sense, a self-becoming of the Divine Mother, *para prakritir jiva bhuta*. Sri Aurobindo introduces the psychic being to us here in this form.

The canto begins in the image of a temple and develops the cosmic aspect of the soul's existence. Savitri finds herself identified with the goddess forms of this cosmic existence. Passing through this layer, she emerges into the transcendent aspect of the soul's existence. This is accomplished through a rupture, a leap into another consciousness. The poem then describes the transcendent origin of Savitri, her supramental source, of which she is the materialised embodiment:

Observer of the silent steps of the hours,
Eternity upheld the minute's acts
And the passing scenes of the Everlasting's play.
In the mystery of its selecting will,
In the Divine Comedy a participant,
The Spirit's conscious representative,
God's delegate in our humanity,
Comrade of the universe, the Transcendent's ray,
She had come into the mortal body's room
To play at ball with Time and Circumstance.

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

The cosmos is the play, the lila of the Supramental Shakti. The Supermind brings the spaceless, timeless, causeless Transcendental Being into a manifestation of space, time and causality. This is why its action is characterised as being one which has entered the universe “to play at ball with Time and Circumstance.”

All she could front with the strong spirit’s peace. (Ibid)

All events of the cosmos in all their qualities and all their possibilities of affect, good and bad, dangerous, terrible and delightful, are the moods of the Divine Mother at play in many masks. These masks have their own relative experiences of qualitative consciousness, the experiences of nature or prakriti, but She is the experiencer behind the experiencer, upholding the play with her smile of equal delight and peace, a delight secretly present in all experiences, giving strength and power and joy to the becoming.

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

Though she is immune from this manifestation, it is she who wears the masks of the play. The “mask-consciousness” has its own sense of “self” borrowed from the psychic being. This is the ego, which we take to be ourselves. The ego experiences life in terms of the dualities of pleasure and pain, but the true self within has its own experience of the same phenomena, and upholds everything with her peace and her strength. Bridging the separation created between her Transcendental Self as the united Purusha-Shakti and the forms of relative consciousness (ego) arising out of the self-forgetting of God, the Divine Mother enters into them, experiencing the experiences of nature in each individual, the pang, the thrill, the toil, the victory, the suffering, the ecstasy, yet it holds its cosmic and transcendental freedom as part of its experience. Though subject to the dualities of nature, this gives it the ability to face all odds and realise its freedom through its responses. But since its divine reserves initially find

little correspondence in the relative ignorance of nature, it takes time for this presence within to grow in consciousness, universality and power to dominate nature. Like Prakriti (Nature), which has reversed its state of absolute Consciousness (*cit-shakti*) to take on the appearance of Inconscience in/as Matter, Purusha reverses its condition of infinite self-extension to become an atomic soul-spark within each nature entity. In each case, the fullness of consciousness is held in latency. This forms the foundation, in terms of the What (Nature) and the Who (Person) of the evolving cosmos. Here, the evolution of Nature initially supports the evolution of Person, but gradually, the positions are reversed, with the evolution of Person guiding and leading the evolution of Nature in beings with a greater development of individuality. For this reason, the initial appearance of the psychic being within the individual possesses a miniscule appearance, like an atomic self, a microcosm within the macrocosm of nature. Sri Aurobindo describes this in this passage in terms of the entry of the Transcendental Divine Mother into the vessels or masks of Nature arising out of the graded consciousness of the Ignorance:

She puts forth a small portion of herself,
A being no bigger than the thumb of man
Into a hidden region of the heart (Ibid)

We find this notion also in the Vedas where it speaks of the self of all things residing in the cavern of the heart as ‘a being no bigger than the thumb of man’. In other words, the psychic being is in initially God as the Divine Person subject to the “sacrificed” condition of Nature, experiencing with it its painful experiences of ignorance, falsehood, suffering and death, yet unstained and unwounded by these experiences. We can see that this is also the esoteric symbolism of Christ on the cross. The cross and the crown of thorns represent the subjection of soul to the Ignorance and Falsehood of cosmic nature. This is a double sacrifice, the sacrifice of Prakriti and of Purusha. The experiences of Nature are the stigmata that the psychic being bears on itself, yet remains essentially unwounded and immortal. That’s why it persists from life to life, growing in strength progressively so as to transform the experiences and the conditions of Nature.

Through this she sends us her glory and her powers,
Pushes to wisdom’s heights, through misery’s gulfs;
She gives us strength to do our daily task

And sympathy that partakes of others' grief
 And the little strength we have to help our race,
 We who must fill the universe
 Acting itself out in a slight human shape
 And on our shoulders carry the struggling world. (Ibid,p.527)

This is that which bears in human nature the burden of destiny and the unity of all beings. In its evolution, it gives strength to the nature to endure and brings to it a power of transcendence and transformation. It brings into manifestation its latent cosmic unity, at first through the powers of sympathy and empathy and later, as a sense of cosmic destiny. It brings these powers of itself into our lives, so that nature may manifest or express divinity, ultimately revealing itself in the image of the Divine Mother both in Person and Cosmos. This is why, as mentioned earlier, psychic being represents the anthropic principle both cosmically and individually. Of course, the anthropic principle has been understood in a variety of ways. In modern cosmology, it is spoken of in two versions, the weak and strong varieties. The weak variety holds that the constants and forces of the universe are such that human existence becomes a possibility. The strong variety turns these cosmic conditions into necessities pre-guided by the anterior inevitability of human appearance. The second form therefore, contains mystical assumptions and lends itself to the theory of Intelligent Design. Seen from the viewpoint of psychic evolution, however, the anthropic principle may have yet other meanings. It may mean that the cosmos is made to the measure of man, or in other words, that man can completely comprehend cosmos, since the fullness of the human Subject finds its capacities of knowledge and experience equal to the cosmos as its object. Of course, one will recognise this proposition as the Renaissance idea of “man, the measure of all things,” that heralds the entry into the Modern Age. The problematic nature of this idea has been much discussed in our time, due to its interpretation of Man as the wielder of technology for the violent exploitation of Nature. But properly understood, this is the affirmation of the Immanence of the Divine Person evolving its full capacities in Nature. Anthropos, the human being, in this sense, is, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, not a finished “type,” but a “transitional being” moving towards an undefined image of cosmic identity and beyond that, of creative transcendence.

This is in us the godhead small and marred;
 In this human portion of divinity
 She seats the greatness of the Soul in Time
 To uplift from light to light, from power to power,
 Till on a heavenly peak it stands, a king. (Ibid)

Sri Aurobindo spells out in a nutshell the evolutionary journey of the soul, growing increasingly conscious and powerful over Nature by taking on the constituents of Nature into itself and infusing consciousness into these through identity. Though initially stumbling through the ignorance, the psychic being has a truth instinct which grows stronger in the nature through the discipline of purification and receptivity. Ultimately it becomes the master of itself in the human body, the house of man become now the house of God. This self-mastery is declared in the image of the king.

In body weak, in its heart an invincible might,
 It climbs stumbling, held up by an unseen hand,
 A toiling spirit in a mortal shape. (Ibid)

The portrayal of the psychic being and its journey in the case of Savitri follows a movement from the discovery of the individualised soul to its cosmic and transcendental aspects. Following Savitri's self-discovery, this passage generalises the soul's discovery and evolution. In this part of the passage, Sri Aurobindo refers to the movement from the individual soul to its cosmic aspect, standing immortal outside the sequence of rebirths.

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. (Ibid)

The ‘they’ here refers to the individual and cosmic aspects of Savitri's soul. Through this passage Sri Aurobindo brings out the union of the individual aspect of Savitri's soul with the cosmic aspect. In Upanishadic terminology, these are the two birds, one sitting aloof above and the other flitting from branch to branch, eating of the fruits. In the terminology of the Gita, these are the two purushas, *kshara* or mutable and *akshara* or

immutable. One is usually thought of as immanent and the other as transcendent, but there are different stations and degrees of transcendence; at the level of the soul within, there is a cosmic latency, which is a transcendence, the *antaratman* or cosmic self within. This is the cosmic aspect of what Sri Aurobindo has termed the psychic entity. Thus, the “they” could also be described as the psychic being and the psychic entity.

The remainder of the canto following this passage deals with the last movement of the evolution of Savitri’s psychic existence. The psychic moves now from its cosmic latency to unite with its transcendental origin. The psychic being is a portion of the Divine Transcendental Mother and now, through a supreme invocation, this transcendental aspect descends and effects a transformation of the nature by entering into the mystic centres or chakras and psychicising them.

But now the half-opened lotus bud of her heart
 Had bloomed and stood disclosed to the earthly ray;
 In an image shone revealed her secret soul.
 There was no wall severing the soul and mind,
 No mystic fence guarding from the claims of life.
 In its deep lotus home her being sat
 As if on concentration’s marble seat,
 Calling the mighty Mother of the worlds
 To make this earthly tenement her house.
 As in a flash from a supernal light,
 A living image of the original Power,
 A face, a form came down into her heart
 And made of it its temple and pure abode.
 But when its feet had touched the quivering bloom,
 A mighty movement rocked the inner space
 As if a world were shaken and found its soul:
 Out of the Inconscient’s soulless mindless night
 A flaming Serpent rose released from sleep.
 It rose billowing its coils and stood erect
 And climbing mightily, stormily on its way
 It touched her centres with its flaming mouth;
 As if a fiery kiss had broken their sleep,
 They bloomed and laughed surcharged with light and bliss.
 Then at the crown it joined the Eternal’s space.

(Ibid, pp.527-28)

We will see the importance of this passage in our later consideration of the Triple Transformation. This is the first of the three necessary transformations, the psychic transformation of the nature. This passage ends with the unity and identity of the individual portion with its divine origin.

We see a similar treatment given to the discovery of the soul in the case of Aswapati, though the process and dynamics of this discovery are quite different. We find this in Book.II, Canto XIV, ‘*The World Soul.*’ Here Aswapati having risen to a great height of mental consciousness, lost all sense of meaning but is drawn into the depths of another realm, that of the World Soul. Here, not only is every individual existence dynamically eternal in time, but both individual and cosmic existence are seen to be full of meaning. Aswapati sees here souls in sleep between lives. In this existence between two wakings, they assimilate the experiences of the past life so that the psychic being becomes familiar with and develops power over the forces and qualities of nature it has encountered.

Immersed in voiceless internatal trance
 The beings that once wore forms on earth sat there
 In shining chambers of spiritual sleep.
 Passed were the pillar-posts of birth and death,
 Passed was their little scene of symbol deeds.
 Passed were the heavens and hells of their long road;
 They had returned into the world’s deep soul.
 All now was gathered into pregnant rest:
 Person and nature suffered a slumber change.
 In trance they gathered back their bygone selves,
 In a background memory’s foreseeing muse
 Prophetic of new personality
 Arranged the map of their coming destiny’s course:
 Heirs of their past, their future’s discoverers,
 Electors of their own self-chosen lot,
 They waited for the adventure of new life. (Ibid, p.293)

Finding himself in a world where souls hibernate, Aswapati realises that the psychic being between lives assimilates the experiences of the past and develops its own conscious powers over nature, thereby projecting itself into the future. Sri Aurobindo uses the phrase “prophetic of new personality” to refer to the creative necessity guiding the soul’s choice to

take on a new nature and new challenges, choosing its life circumstances and arranging its own destiny to take its next step towards manifesting a divine life. Aswapati realises that the soul entity is a portion of the Divine Mother that is eternal, *amśah sanātanah*.

A Person persistent through the lapse of the worlds,
Although the same for ever in many shapes
By the outward mind unrecognisable,
Assuming names unknown in unknown climes
Imprints through Time upon the earth's worn page
A growing figure of its secret self,
And learns by experience what the spirit knew,
Till it can see its truth alive and God. (Ibid)

This 'persistent person' who is the same for ever in many shapes is the psychic entity or *antaratman*. This *antaratman* develops its expressive strength through its immersion in nature's experiences, in the process building for itself a personality, a growing figure of its substance in the moulds of Nature. This personality evolves towards mastery of its own nature and towards the expression of universality and transcendence. It "learns by experience" in an application of its innate spiritual knowledge, gathering strength till it manifests its "truth alive and God." This is the psychic being, the growing figure of qualitative differentiation projected by the self-multiplied Sameness of the Self who is the one being persistent between lives. Aswapati, who was faced with meaninglessness, confronts the dimension of meaning in this knowledge of the journey and evolution of the psychic being:

Once more they must face the problem-game of birth,
The soul's experiment of joy and grief
And thought and impulse lighting the blind act,
And venture on the roads of circumstance,
Through inner movements and external scenes
Travelling to self across the forms of things.
Into creation's centre he had come. (Ibid, pp.293-94)

Just as the psychic being is the psychological centre of human existence, the realm of the world soul where Aswapati found himself is the

psychological centre of the cosmos. This is what gives meaning to creation. From here the process of evolution makes its initial movement and repeats itself recurrently through lives.

The spirit wandering from state to state
Finds here the silence of its starting-point
In the formless force and still fixity
And brooding passion of the world of Soul.
All that is made and once again unmade,
The calm persistent vision of the One
Inevitably re-makes, it lives anew:
Forces and lives and beings and ideas
Are taken into the stillness for a while;
There they remould their purpose and their drift,
Recast their nature and re-form their shape.
Ever they change and changing ever grow,
And passing through a fruitful stage of death
And after long reconstituting sleep
Resume their place in the process of the Gods
Until their work in cosmic Time is done. (Ibid)

The dimension of cosmic meaning furthers itself through the journey of souls that arise and subsist in the world soul. Aswapati's experiences, mirroring Sri Aurobindo's own, proceed through impersonal planes of being. In contrast, Savitri's experiences, mirroring the Mother's, move through the depth dimension of a personal interiority. These are facts of the spiritual biography of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Sri Aurobindo's spiritual journey began with the self-erasing experience of nirvana and only much later came to include the experience of the immanent Divine. On the other hand, the Mother's first spiritual realisation was that of the Divine within; later, she undertook a systematic training in identifying with the cosmic occult planes of consciousness and the Transcendental levels beyond it. But as with the Mother, Savitri's contact with her own inner realities reveals at once to her their immanence in the cosmic planes. Thus, in the case of both Aswapati and Savitri, they encounter the dimension of meaning in contact with psychic existence. In keeping with an increasing latency of cosmic and transcendental realities, in both cases Sri Aurobindo describes these encounters with meaning in terms of symbols.

Savitri, for example, sees the entire history of the earth written out in secret symbolic form. The meaning of the play of cosmic evolution is glyphed through these symbols. We saw earlier how Savitri's experience in this regard is carried in Book VII, Canto V, "*The Finding of the Soul*":

Across the threshold's sleep she entered in
And found herself amid great figures of gods
Conscious in stone and living without breath,
Watching with fixed regard the soul of man,
Executive figures of the cosmic self,
World symbols of immutable potency.
On the walls covered with significant shapes
Looked at her the life-scene of man and beast
And the high meaning of the life of gods,
The power and necessity of these numberless worlds,
And faces of beings and stretches of world-space
Spoke the succinct and inexhaustible
Hieratic message of the climbing planes.
In their immensitude signing infinity
They were the extension of the self of God
And housed, impassively receiving all,
His figures and his small and mighty acts
And his passion and his birth and life and death
And his return to immortality.
To the abiding and eternal is their climb,
To the pure existence everywhere the same,
To the sheer consciousness and the absolute force
And the unimaginable and formless bliss,
To the mirth in Time and the timeless mystery
Of the triune being who is all and one
And yet is no one but himself apart. (Ibid, p.524)

We are introduced to the dimension of meaning here through a symbolic expression of "the power and necessity of these numberless worlds." Here Savitri discovers that it is the One Being at play in infinite forms evolving from a fragmented Inconscience to the reconstitution in Consciousness of an innumerable Unity in dynamic manifestation. That gives sense to the cosmos and its creatures as a play of the One.

As discussed earlier, though the psychic being resides deep within us it

is a portion of the Cosmic Being and a self-projection of the Transcendental Being. Thus, in approaching the psychic being, there is a fullness or integrality of experience that can bring us the experience of universal and transcendental consciousness. It is this integrality of psychic existence that both Aswapati and Savitri experience. From an identification with the individualised psychic being, Savitri experiences the soul as the bridge between unity and infinity and eternity and time. This is the aporetic or paradoxical luminous Being in whom the Many are seen as the One and the static becomes dynamic. The static existence of archetypal forces, who are also gods, are seen to enact an infinitely variable recurrence of possibilities. Human beings enact in their lives the deep structures of the gods, through their psychic embodiment as portions of these beings. These structures trace the evolution of the soul and hence, are teleological. Savitri realises herself to be all these beings and their enactments, pervaded by the sense of the One who has put on all lives as his masks. At the origin (and in reverse, the destined heights) of this symbolic journey, she finds herself in union with this Divine Person, the illimitably puissant dynamic image of the Two-in-One, Ishwara and Shakti in innumerable divine names and roles:

She felt herself made one with all she saw.
A sealed identity within her woke;
She knew herself the Beloved of the Supreme:
These Gods and Goddesses were he and she:
The Mother was she of Beauty and Delight,
The Word in Brahma's vast creating clasp,
The World-Puissance on almighty Shiva's lap,—
The Master and the Mother of all lives
Watching the worlds their twin regard had made,
And Krishna and Radha for ever entwined in bliss,
The Adorer and Adored self-lost and one. (Ibid, p.525)

Beyond this, she encounters a Being who cannot be described, thus arriving at the transcendent Origin of all cosmic existence.

In the last chamber on a golden seat
One sat whose shape no vision could define;
Only one felt the world's unattainable fount,
A Power of which she was a straying a force,

An invisible Beauty, goal of the world's desire,
 A Sun of which all knowledge is a beam,
 A Greatness without whom no life could be.
 Thence all departed into silent self,
 And all became formless and pure and bare.
 Then through a tunnel dug in the last rock
 She came out where there shone a deathless sun.
 A house was there all made of flame and light
 And crossing a wall of doorless fire
 There she suddenly met her secret soul.

A being stood immortal in transience,
 Deathless dallying with momentary things,
 In whose wide eyes of tranquil happiness
 Which pity and sorrow could not abrogate
 Infinity turned its gaze on finite shapes: (Ibid, pp.525-26)

This Transcendent Being is indescribable, yet Sri Aurobindo presents Her as the Power (*Shakti*), greatness (*Mahima*), Beauty (*Saundarya*) and Sun (*Surya*) from which Savitri has come and into which she is absorbed. Through this divine transcendent Person, Savitri meets her own Supreme Soul as the avatar or embodiment of Supramental Shakti.

A similar journey of symbolic significance is experienced by Aswapati as part of the psychic existence of the World Soul in Book II, Canto XIV. Like Savitri, Aswapati becomes aware here of the pervasive sense of the Divine Being. Aswapati's liminal attunement to the dimension of meaning is presaged by an altered experience of time, space and identity:

He of the eternal moment grew aware;
 His knowledge stripped bare of the garbs of sense
 Knew by identity without thought or word;
 His being saw itself without its veils,
 Life's line fell from the spirit's infinity. (Ibid, p.294)

In this condition, Aswapati experiences his soul travelling through a symbol landscape similar to that experienced by Savitri. The unfoldment of Time is conterminous with the static images of the cosmic gods and their mythical deeds.

Along a road of pure interior light,
 Alone between tremendous Presences,
 Under the watching eyes of nameless Gods,
 His soul passed on, a single conscious power,
 Towards the end which ever begins again,
 Approaching through a stillness dumb and calm
 To the source of all things human and divine.

(Ibid, pp.294-95)

Aswapati becomes aware of a telos, a journey with a destination. He feels himself moving towards the origin of all manifestation, the paradoxical home where eternity and time meet, where the images of eternity are self-multiplied as a recurrence, "the end which ever begins again."

There he beheld in their mighty union's poise
 The figure of the deathless Two-in-One,
 A single being in two bodies clasped,
 A diarchy of two united souls,
 Seated absorbed in deep creative joy;
 Their trance of bliss sustained the mobile world.

(Ibid, p.295)

As with Savitri, at the transcendent Origin of the cosmos, Aswapati comes across the united Two-in-One. The entire cosmic manifestation is based on the relational play of the Infinite Being mobilising its Consciousness to represent itself as manifestation. Thus, at the fount of the cosmos is the image of this One as the Two, the Infinite One that has become two independent infinities. Because the One is infinite, it can know itself by identity but cannot represent its own infinite boundaries except as a process of perpetual Becoming, infinity calling to infinity to manifest its infinite possibilities. That is the primal act of Love from which all cosmic manifestation springs. In attempting to move beyond this act of Origin, we may ask the question of Why this movement towards self-representation would arise at all. If the One is truly and radically Infinite, it cannot have any Need. Hence, the Upanishads have declared causeless creative Delight to be the source of this movement. There is something causeless to the creative urge, even within the universe, an urge which takes its root in the Delight-consciousness of the Transcendent. In the Upanishadic formula of the Brahman, it is a causeless movement of Ananda (Delight) that originates the relational movement of Sat (Being) and Chit (Consciousness). Love is the first manifestation of Ananda initiating the relation between

the principles of Sat and Chit. This is the manifestation of Delight at the root of all Becoming.

Again it is the one indescribable Being and Person behind this duality that brings them into existence.

Behind them in a morning dusk One stood
Who brought them forth from the Unknowable.
Ever disguised she awaits the seeking spirit;
Watcher on the supreme unreachable peaks,
Guide of the traveller of the unseen paths,
She guards the austere approach to the Alone.
At the beginning of each far-spread plane
Pervading with her power the cosmic suns
She reigns, inspirer of its multiple works
And thinker of the symbol of its scene.
Above them all she stands supporting all,
The sole omnipotent Goddess ever-veiled
Of whom the world is the inscrutable mask;
The ages are the footfalls of her tread,
Their happenings the figure of her thoughts,
And all creation is her endless act. (Ibid)

It is this unthinkable Form that pervades the cosmos, modulating Herself to its different forms of consciousness. It is She who has multiplied and differentiated Herself in all things and actions. The Person form of the Ananda consciousness (the *Anandamaya Purusha*) is usually seen as Krishna, but Sri Aurobindo describes here instead the female Shakti of Transcendent Being. In the Kena Upanishad, pursuing the mysterious and indefinable Brahman, the gods climb from plane to plane till arriving at the peak, they meet a Divine Feminine Power, Uma. She is shown in this Upanishad as the first and last Form, whose points beyond to the Brahman. This is how the Shakti at the origin of the manifestation, the One without a second, Uma or Aditi, is met by the psychic being of Aswapati at the peak of its transcendental experience. The reason for this feminine self-disclosure of the Transcendental Being must be seen as being due to Aswapti's seeking for a Power of Transformation. It is this Shakti that returns to Aswapati later at the Supramental heights and it is She who embodies Herself as his daughter, Savitri.

His spirit was made a vessel of her force;
Mute in the fathomless passion of his will
He outstretched to her his folded hands of prayer.
Then in a sovereign answer to his heart
A gesture came as of worlds thrown away,
And from her raiment's lustrous mystery raised
One arm half-parted the eternal veil.
A light appeared still and imperishable. (Ibid)

Passing beyond the cosmic manifestation and into the Transcendental Unmanifest, Aswapati enters into trance. He passes from the state of subliminal experience or *swapna* into the Real-Idea of *suśupti*.

Attracted to the large and luminous depths
Of the ravishing enigma of her eyes,
He saw the mystic outline of a face.
Overwhelmed by her implacable light and bliss,
An atom of her illimitable self
Mastered by the honey and lightning of her power,
Tossed towards the shores of her ocean-ecstasy,
Drunk with a deep golden spiritual wine,
He cast from the rent stillness of his soul
A cry of adoration and desire
And the surrender of his boundless mind
And the self-giving of his silent heart.
He fell down at her feet unconscious, prone. (Ibid,p.296)

Thus the psychic journey ends in the experience of the Transcendental Being, indicating thereby the origin of the psychic being and its power of transformation.

Om In Savitri And The World

Pravir Malik

When one thinks of OM it is usually as a mantra to be recited for some personal spiritual gain. Here, however, we explore OM as a dynamic movement as it manifests in the world. In order to gain insight into this manifestation we will first focus on Sri Aurobindo's incredible poem, *Savitri*, which the Mother has succinctly summarised "Savitri – as the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision". The study of OM in *Savitri* will reveal how it is a ubiquitous mantra that not only manifests as matter, but also as progressive movement in the world. For example, it will be found that the journey of a seed becoming a flower is in fact a simple manifestation of OM. In this journey three phases are traversed. At first the seed appears dormant and has precise boundaries observable with the eye. This is akin to a physical beginning – the A aspect of AUM. Then it enters into a phase of vitality – the U aspect of AUM – characterised by movement. Tendrils reach out. The play of energies is accelerated. The tendrils move toward the sun, the roots from the seed move deeper into the earth. There is more give and take – gases and water and nutrients enter into the seed-tendrill structure, and other compounds are simultaneously released. At the third stage, a flower emerges, and then the meaning, the mental-element or M aspect of AUM, of the seed becomes clear. The flower has prescribed the AUM journey and OM has manifested. This journey could have been forestalled, it could have ended at the U aspect, and the essence of adventure may have succumbed to any one of a set of external forces. But where a flower stands, this journey has been completed. And that is a successful invocation to the truth behind things, and a victory, however small in a tremendous journey between opposites.

So let us turn our attention to *Savitri* and for OM in it.

Looking for OM in Savitri

If one looks for instances of OM, certainly three passages immediately come out. The first is from *The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds*, after

Aswapati has ascended the series of world, and is drawing close to the World-Soul. An answer to his seeking comes, as a wordless call. Let us look at this passage where the great mantra is assisting the soul in its journey to the World Soul [*The World Soul* (Canto XIV, pp. 289-90):

This is perhaps the more familiar experience of OM, of that

As one drawn to his lost spiritual home

It led to rapture back the truant heart.

(*Savitri*, 4th rev.ed, 1993, pp. 289-90)

the outward aspect of manifestation into some depth within. And in the poem itself, this canto appears in *The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds*, where Ashwapati, having broken free from all personal and cosmic bonds, is seeking to solve the riddle of life, and is continually ascending to get to the dynamic key that will solve it all. Before reaching the key though – the very form of the Divine Mother herself, he is assisted by OM to penetrate into the World Soul. And then as if to describe all the sounds of OM, here is a description in the next few lines of the very same canto—

The immortal cry ravished the captive ear,

On the far anthem of a pilgrim sea."(Ibid)

So here OM is the sound of an immortal cry, a whisper circling round the soul, a lonely flute, a cricket's rash and fiery single note, a jingling laugh of anklet bells, the tinkling pace of a long caravan, a vast forest's hymn, a temple gong, a bee-croon, and the far anthem of a pilgrim sea. These are common sounds and give a hint that many, many sounds, perhaps even all sounds are therefore derivations of OM itself. So even here, in active life, if one learned to listen in a certain way, one could conceivably come closer to the World-Soul in the midst of the dynamic play of things. So when Mother commented to a young disciple at the time, Mona Sarkar, drawing a link between the sonority of the rhythm of the words in *Savitri* and OM, she said

"Each verse of *Savitri* is like a revealed Mantra which surpasses all that man possessed by way of knowledge, and I repeat this, the words are expressed and arranged in such a way that the sonority of the rhythm leads you to the origin of sound, which is OM".

So, not only is there this more obvious mantra that leads one to the World Soul, but also the very arrangement of words in *Savitri* leads to the origin of sound, OM. It is interesting to note that there is a yoga called *Surat-Shabd* yoga – the yoga of Sight and Sound, in which the theory and practice of the sounds aspect is exactly what is described in the above canto. Further, in the sight aspect, one of the visions that arises in the practice of that yoga is succinctly captured in the very same canto in a few lines preceding the sound description of OM:

A covert answer to his seeking came,
And from the heart there surged a wordless call (Ibid, p.289)

To the same disciple, Mona Sarkar, the Mother related the following:

“He has crammed the whole universe in a single book. It is a marvellous work, magnificent and of an incomparable perfection.”

And if we listen further to The Mother’s description of *Savitri* to Mona Sarkar, here is also what she has said–

“It may then be said that *Savitri* is a revelation, it is a meditation, it is a quest of the Infinite, the Eternal. If it is read with this aspiration for Immortality, the reading itself will serve as a guide to Immortality. To read *Savitri* is indeed to practise Yoga, spiritual concentration; one can find there all that is needed to realise the Divine. Each step of Yoga is noted here, including the secret of all other Yogas. Surely, if one sincerely follows what is revealed here in each line one will reach finally the transformation of the Supramental Yoga. It is truly the infallible guide who never abandons you; its support is always there for him who wants to follow the path.”

And then there is another aspect of OM that is revealed in the Canto “*Adoration of the Divine Mother*”(p.310). In this canto a common goal of yoga, that of escaping from “birth and death and work and fate” and “leaping into a glad divine abyss”, is questioned and something far more dynamic and fruitful appears in its place. It is in this context that OM is revealed:

Only the everlasting No has neared
And who has seen the body of the King? (Ibid, p.310)

So, in the same context as the Lover’s everlasting Yes, Truth at the mystic fount of Life, and lifting up the veil of light to see the body of the King, OM appears. It is the great symbol and assenting word. But symbol of what, and assenting to what? The meaning of the ‘assenting’ aspect of OM must derive its sense from the context in which it appears – assenting therefore to that which is perhaps implied by the Lover’s everlasting Yes, and the body of the King. That sense of the symbol becomes much clearer in *The Book of the Everlasting Day*. This description is related to that of a transformed Death. *Savitri* traverses some extraordinary felicitous worlds, and comes to the sources of these worlds—

As one drowned in a sea of splendour and bliss,
And blinded her heart to the beauty of the suns. (Ibid, p.678)

So, this is the same Death described as the ancient disputant with Earth and Love, which in the shadow of *Savitri*’s flaming heart is at the centre of the dire debate.

At the sombre centre of the dire debate,
That saw grief’s timeless depths but not life’s goal.
(Ibid, p.10)

And this same Death is here described with an incredible link to OM -

In him the fourfold Being bore its crown
In the inexhaustible meaning of a word. (Ibid, p.680)

So the first part of the fourfold being –

In him the architect of the visible world,
Expressed himself with Matter for his speech (Ibid)

Descriptors include architect of the visible worlds, art & artist, thinker of things seen, matter for his speech, which seems to refer to the visible world– that which is physical. And the second part of the fourfold being –

In him shadows his form the Golden Child
 He is the leader on the inner roads; (Ibid, p.681)
 Traveller and hewer of the unseen paths,
 The conqueror of the kingdoms of the soul. (Ibid)

Descriptors include discoverer, leader, traveller, hewer, carrier, conqueror—all these point to an adventurer archetype or seed of vital worlds.
 The third—

A third spirit stood behind, their hidden cause,
 He is the Wisdom that comes not by thought (Ibid)

Descriptors include hidden cause, superconscience, creator of things, all light, all-wise – that refer to a seed of knowingness, related to the mental worlds.
 The fourth—

Above was the brooding bliss of the Infinite
 Its immobile silence absolute and alone. (Ibid, p.682)

OM in Mandukya Upanishad

Now, in the Mandukya Upanishad is a 12-verse elaboration of the fourfold being that also relates it to OM (pp.289 – 291, The Upanishads, Sri Aurobindo) Generally, making a connection between OM and the fourfold being just described, the first two verses as translated by Sri Aurobindo...

1. OM is this imperishable Word, OM is the Universe, and this is the exposition of OM. The past, the present and the future, all that was, all that is, all that will be, is OM. Likewise all else that may exist beyond the bounds of Time, that too is OM.
2. All this Universe is the Eternal Brahman, this Self is the Eternal, and the Self is fourfold.

The next verse elaborates the nature of the first...

3. He whose place is the wakefulness, who is wise of the outward, who has seven limbs, to whom there are nineteen doors, who feels and enjoys gross objects, Vaishwanara, the Universal Male, He is the first. And the next verse of the second...
4. He whose place is the dream, who is wise of the inward, who has seven limbs, to whom there are nineteen doors, who feels and enjoys subtle objects, Taijasa, the Inhabitant in Luminous Mind, He is the second.

And then the third...

5. When one sleeps and yearns not with any desire, nor sees any dream, that is the perfect slumber. He whose place is the perfect slumber, who is become Oneness, who is wisdom gathered into itself, who is made of mere delight, who enjoys delight unrelated, to whom conscious mind is the door, Prajna, the Lord of Wisdom, He is the third.
6. This is the Almighty, this is the Omniscient, this is the Inner Soul, this is the Womb of the Universe, this is the Birth and Destruction of creatures.

And then the fourth...

7. He who is neither inward-wise, nor outward-wise, nor wisdom self-gathered, nor possessed of wisdom, He who is unseen and incommunicable, unseizable, featureless, unthinkable, and unnameable, Whose essentiality is awareness of the Self in its single existence, in Whom all phenomena dissolve, Who is Calm, Who is Good, Who is the One than Whom there is no other, Him they deem the fourth: He is the Self, He is the object of Knowledge.

And then the relationship between OM and the fourfold being spelt out...

8. Now this the Self, as to the imperishable Word, is OM: and as to the letters, His parts are the letters and His parts, namely A U M.

The A of AUM...

9. The Waker, Vaishwanara, the Universal Male, He is A, the first letter, because of Initiality and Pervasiveness; he that knows Him for such pervades and attains all his desires: he becomes the source and first.

The U of AUM...

10. The Dreamer, Taijasa, the Inhabitant in Luminous Mind, He is U, the second letter, because of Advance and Centrality: he that knows Him for such, advances the bounds of his knowledge and rises above difference: nor of his seed is any born that knows not the Eternal.

The M of AUM...

11. The Sleeper, Prajna, the Lord of Wisdom, he is M, the third letter, because of Measure and Finality: he that knows Him for such measures with himself the Universe and becomes the departure into the Eternal.

And OM

12. Letterless is the fourth, the Incommunicable, the end of phenomena, the Good, the One than Whom there is no other: thus is OM.
He that knows is the Self and enters by his self into the Self, he that knows, he that knows.

Symmetries in Savitri

That is well and good, but what does this all mean at a more practical terrestrial level? To explore this I draw on symmetry in *Savitri*. I'll say, the impression that I have of *Savitri* is that of a diamond. There are parallel or symmetrical faces that are part of its overall structure and when these are contemplated or meditated upon it is as though an even more intense light shines out. In fact, to me, to understand *Savitri*, one can draw on this symmetry.

Let me give some examples of this symmetry.

For instance, there is a symmetry between Ashwapathy's yoga and travel, and Savitri's yoga and travel. They both move through physical, vital, mental worlds. Then one reaches the World Soul, while the other Her own soul. One then creates a world – a new creation – in the upper realms that is a seed for all things to come on the material realm, while the other sows a seed in “Death's tremendous hour”, conquers Death in the inner realms, which will allow the other seed to arrive at fruition. The one then has audience with the Divine Mother and gets from her a boon, while the other has audience with the Supreme Lord and gets from him a series of boons. Delving a little deeper, in *The Vision and the Boon*, Ashwapathy has finally ascended to the highest point and is now in dialogue with the Divine Mother. It has of course been an incredible journey where always he has had to travel beyond all possible attractions, to arrive at the One power that can alone help him in the dilemma he has taken responsibility for – that of allowing humanity to finally become free of the age-old and repeating constraints that have to date restricted it. She tells Ashwapathy – you have won a place here.

What thou has won is thine, but ask no more.
Or lighten the burden of the senseless globe? (Ibid,p.335)

Awake not the immeasurable descent,
Helping the world with thy great lonely days. (Ibid)

But in spite of this Ashwapati instead asks the Divine Mother to send a portion of herself to earth, so that the decisive change can finally occur. If we consider the nature of this interaction, we see that Aswapati has to assume an active role in which he is fully aware of the complexities of creation and what it will take to move ahead. He is not telling the Mother – you do what is best. He is consciously laying before her the problem of existence and is proposing a solution. He is asking the Divine Mother to do something concrete, which he lays out in no uncertain terms. He has taken responsibility for Life, and is beginning to act as the Lord of Life.

Similarly, in the Everlasting Day, following a gruelling journey starting with an invocation to Durga, traversing through Death's realms, debating with Death, and then finally imposing her will and conquering Death, Savitri ascends to the realms of Everlasting Day, where she has audience with the Lord. In the outer realms of these extraordinary worlds, here she first meets Death, the crown of the fourfold being, and then the voice of the Supreme arises. The voice explains many things and then tells Savitri – you know the world plan. You know that situation is unchangeable – man is too weak, and so on. Why don't you ascend to your home and be where you belong. Now, this is quite similar to the situation where Ashwapati was asked to leave alone, helping the world with great lonely days. The Lord offers her entry into the highest realms four times, and each time Savitri instead asks the lord for something more. When she had confronted Death, Death had given her boons. She accepts them, if Death must give them, but was not to be dissuaded from her primary task. Now, she has an interchange with the Lord, and each time he says the gates of this my highest world are open to you – step in, and let this whole matter be settled. Instead she always asks for something for earth and the inhabitants of earth.

“Thy peace, O Lord, a boon within to keep
Thy calm, O Lord, that bears thy hands of joy”. (Ibid, p.696)

“Thy oneness, Lord, in many approaching hearts, ...
My sweet infinity of thy numberless souls”. (Ibid)

“Thy energy, Lord, to seize on woman and man
And gather them into a mother's arms”. (Ibid)

“Thy embrace which rends the living knot of pain
Thy sweetness give to me for earth and men”. (Ibid)

She wants Satyavan and her to descend back on to the earth – the jewelled hilt and the exultant blade – to be used in battle in the world. This seems symmetrical – in one Ashwapathy ascends, conquering life and all its pulls, and he asks the Divine Mother to put forth a portion of herself to help the manifestation. In the other, *Savitri* ascends, conquering death, and asks to be put back into earthly life with Satyavan, the ascending soul of the Supreme.

But even as we look quickly across *Savitri* we see many other symmetries. For example, in Book 1, Canto IV, *The Secret Knowledge*, the secret of He and She is revealed.

Then again, in Book 7, *The Book of Yoga*, when Savitri is traversing the inner worlds, and on route to arriving at her secret soul, she comes across her three Madonnas and their warped voices in the world.

Here also a symmetry is revealed.

Then is the figure of the triple mystic cross.

Insights into OM

So coming back to the fourfold being, what is its relation to terrestrial existence? The descriptions themselves reveal the relationship, and simply speaking, the Physical, which is what we can touch and see and feel, and what we first experience when we use our senses seems to be some kind of reflection or precipitation of Virat or Vaishwanara. The Vital, attendant with the sense of energy and adventure, seems to be a symmetrical face or reflection of Hiranyagarbha or Taijasa. The Mental, filled with thought and idea and closer to knowledge, seems to be some reflection of the hidden cause or Prajna. So in this manner of interpreting, the physical, the vital, the mental are themselves part of OM, and when we experience the worlds in that order, with the physical at the base, with the vital stacked on it, with the mental stacked on it, this is the expression of OM.

And when we consider the 200+ page description of Book 2 in *Savitri*, *The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds*, we see that in effect that symmetry again seems to be playing itself out, describing in detail the physical, vital, mental worlds and beyond, which in this manner of seeing is nothing other than OM.

And when you consider this journey that Ashwapati made, from the depths of matter to the source and origin of all, it is as if in his very actions going through physical, vital, mental worlds, he is actively participating in describing OM, and in so doing he invokes the Supreme Mother. Mother has said–

“With the help of OM one can realise the Divine. OM has a transforming power. OM represents the Divine... If anything goes wrong, repeat OM, all will go well. OM is the signature of the Lord.”

And then again, in the Yoga of Savitri, that similar active invocation takes place when Savitri traverses the physical, vital, mental worlds to get closer to and ultimately unites with her secret soul. So in my perception there are a few things at least that are apparent–

First, there is a tight relationship between the worlds in the cosmos and the fourfold being – almost a one-to-one mapping if you will, that directly relates the physical, the vital, the mental with different parts of OM.

Second, this means that from a practical perspective everything we relate to and experience is made up of OM. Now we may get stuck in one part or another of the parts of OM, but when we actively move through the parts so that that which is physical, yields to that which is vital, yields to that which is mental, we are vibrating with OM, and therefore invoking the supreme. In other words, when we dynamically alter our psychology as per the physical-vital-mental shift so that our relationship with things change, we are manifesting OM.

Third, in arriving at fruition of their respective tapasyas, Ashwapati and Savitri both made an invocation to the Supreme through actually actively traversing that which is OM. Viewed from this perspective there is perhaps an interpretation of Mother’s mantra “OM NAMO BHAGAVATE” that ties this great mantra tightly to the poem *Savitri*. In this interpretation OM is the invocation to the Supreme when first Aswapati and then Savitri move through the physical, vital, mental worlds. NAMO is the absolute surrender that allows Aswapati and then Savitri to come face-to-face with the Divine Mother and the Supreme Lord themselves. BHAGAVATE is what the manifestation must become through the creative power of the Supreme, and that is enumerated when first the Divine Mother and then the Supreme Lord speak in the cantos *The Vision and the Boon*, and the Everlasting Day.

Further Implications of OM from Some Other Cantos

Then there are other amazing things that dawn.

First, when one considers come of the beginning cantos of Book 2 – *The World Stair* and then *The Kingdom of Subtle Matter*, a more concrete sense for the very DNA of matter, and how OM is intricately tied into it becomes apparent. Consider, the description from *The World Stair* to which Ashwapati has arrived as he begins his travel through the worlds—

Planted on earth it holds in it all realms
It is within, below, without, above. (Ibid, p.98)

So this pattern of the universe, consisting of physical, vital, mental worlds stacked upon each other exists on different scales, and it

Links the body's death with immortality's call:
It labours towards a superconscious Light.(Ibid)

So we see that structure of OM is everywhere constantly acting upon us.

But even more, our very matter is made from this extraordinary stuff. Here are some lines from *The Kingdom of Subtle Matter* that shed light on what earth's denser Matter is made from:

"A world of lovelier forms lies near to ours
Our finished ends anticipated live. (Ibid, p.105)
Figures are there undreamed by mortal mind:
And mingling make the high and low worlds one. (Ibid)

So it seems that the range of worlds, or the outer and inner parts of OM combine there to create the subtle matter.

And to confirm this sense,

This medium serves a greater Consciousness:
Its sense fathers our body's reflexes. (Ibid,p.106)
A heaven of creative truths above,
Out of its fall our denser Matter came. (Ibid, p.107)

Hence, not only is OM acting on us all the time from the pattern that exists everywhere, but also our very matter is made from the subtle matter which is itself created from OM. So not only are all the worlds arranged to reflect the image of OM, and not only does the invocation of the Supreme occur when OM happens, but also our very matter, the stuff that we are made from is OM. And here is the question: what is the effect of this incredible mantra constantly whispered and penetrating into the very heart of matter itself?

Action of Mantra – Micro and Macro

I want to first indicate the power of mantra through a passage in *Savitri* itself.

In Book 4 – *The Book of Birth and Quest* – describing Savitri's early days on earth, we have the canto *The Call to the Quest* (p.375), we have an indication in *Savitri* itself of the nature and action of mantra:

Here Ashwapati talks to Savitri about her world work. This is what happens

This word was seed of all the things to be
An equal greatness in her life was sown. (Ibid, p.375)

So then the question is, what happens when there is the incredible mantra seeded in the very DNA of matter? What results with this active?

Manifestation of OM

It must be that what we are going to see is OM manifesting in many, many different places.

Let me look at a gradation in difficulty of manifesting. It is clear that in some area there should be no problem for this power to manifest easily. On the other hand, Mother has said that business and politics will be the last to transform. So if we see it happening there that says something. So consider on the "simpler" side—

For instance, at the micro-level, consider the example of a seed becoming a flower. One may think of the seed as being the physical beginning – the A aspect of AUM. It appears dormant and has precise boundaries observable with the eye. The phase of vitality – the U aspect of AUM– is characterised by movement. Tendrils reach out. The play of energies is accelerated. The tendrils move toward the sun, the roots from the seed move deeper into the earth. There is more give and take – gases and water and nutrients enter into the seed-tendril structure, and other compounds are simultaneously released.

At the culmination of this, a flower emerges, and then the meaning, the mental-element or M aspect of AUM, of the seed becomes clear. The flower has prescribed the AUM journey. This journey could have been forestalled, it could have ended at the U aspect, and the essence of adventure may have succumbed to any one of a set of external forces. But where a flower stands this journey has been completed. And that is a successful invocation to the truth behind things, and a victory, however small in a tremendous journey between opposites.

Or at a more macro-perspective, consider the earth-sun dance. As the sun first breaks across the horizon, light is shed upon the constructs on the earth, and in that light there is an awareness of the boundary that defines each construct. Having awoken from slumber each form, as it were, becomes aware of what it is – there is an awakening to the physical structure – the A aspect of AUM – that defines it. As the sun rises, the form becomes active, and in that activity, what it is and what it stands for becomes clearer. The activity expresses its vitality – the U aspect of AUM – and in that vitality there is interaction, and experimentation, and the vast play of one life form with another. As the sun descends, so as to speak, and countless stars emerge in the sky, it is as though the myopia that had bounded our focused actions through the day is removed, and we begin to see the stage of our day from many more perspectives. The phase of vitality has yielded to a phase of mentality – the M aspect of AUM, where a relative increase in introspection, reflection, and consideration of many more points of view comes into focus. This journey, of course, happens day after day, and is a macro-invocation to the Supreme, constantly reflecting in matter the meaning of it all.

But even beyond these “facts” of nature, even circumstance, event, people, organisation, myriad ways are going to embody this seed of OM, so that in each of these we are going to see a shift from a physical orientation to a vital orientation to a mental orientation. And the essential thing that is happening here is that the consciousness is linking to something vaster, truer, more integral, beyond the bounds of itself, and in the act of doing so yoga is spreading abroad, and the Supreme is being invoked more pervasively. And looking at it from the point of view of the double autobiographical aspect of Savitri this perhaps has to be the case since the essential equilibrium between Inconscience-Consciousness, Death-Immortality, Pain-Delight has been altered through their decisive works.

So let us broaden our look and see where else OM is manifesting.

We can begin with our understanding of the structure of space.

At one end, the more physical end, the A-aspect of AUM, is the work of Mandelbrot, who coined the term fractal, and who formulated the Mandelbrot Set, which has been termed by Arthur C. Clarke, as “the thumb-print of God” because of the possibility of a vast array of objects, plants, and animals, as being potential offshoots and images of the underlying Mandelbrot Set. The Mandelbrot Set looks like a turtle of sorts, and is a representation of space at the physical level. This in itself is interesting since ancient Indian texts refer to creation as sitting on the back of a turtle. But then the logical next question is, what could possibly give this pervasive spherical-like structure the stability that allows all the shapes we see around us to persist?

This takes us to a deeper level in the gradation, and to the work of Nassim Hamein whose use of fractals describes the very structure of space. Hamein leverages off the most stable geometrical structures known, and abundantly used and popularised by Buckminster Fuller in his own comprehensive work, the tetrahedron and the octahedron. Hamein proposes a unified theory connecting atomic-level structure with stellar and larger-level structure where the tetrahedron, octahedron and a 64-tetrahedron grid emerge, as it were, from the density of vacuum, to form dynamic structures that possess equilibrium at the micro and the macro level.

The octahedron, comprised of 8 tetrahedrons pointing inward, is balanced by the star-tetrahedron comprised of 8 tetrahedrons pointing outward, and symbolise the basic polarity inherent in any unit of space. The 64-tetrahedron grid provides the dynamic structure with which the energy streaming out of a singularity or mini black-hole in the vacuum ‘clothes’ itself. Rotational movement, caused by the bending of space-time in the vicinity, gives a boundary to the rotating grid, that then appears as the spherical-like structures of Mandelbrot’s Set. Space-time torque, the result of the rotating object, streams back in to the black hole, and a sustainable source of energy results. As Hamein suggests, by introducing torque and coriolis forces into Einstein’s Field Equations, he has been able to apply these at the macro and micro level, thereby unifying the physics of structure and dynamics at the micro and the macro levels. This seems more akin to the vital level or U-aspect of AUM.

But then, the next logical question is where does all the possibility and tremendous scheme of things inherent in the vacuum come from? This leads us right into *Savitri* and I quote a few lines from this 24,000 line poem:

At first was laid a strange anomalous base
Upon earth's new-born soil God's tread was heard.
(Ibid, pp.100-1)

In a manner of seeing is the M-aspect of AUM. So here we see AUM being traversed in the progressive understanding of the structure of space.

Now let us look at various examples in more complex behaviourally-based entities.

At the individual level, each time thought, for instance, intervenes to arrest an egoistic, self-referencing emotion such as anger, in fact OM has occurred, because the easy and even short-sighted vital response has transmuted into a less short-sighted and generally speaking more balanced response. The U-aspect has yielded to the M-aspect, and AUM has been traversed.

At the individual level there are hundreds of such movements that occur in the being of a single person, and that can be the starting point of manifesting OM by shifting these habitual movements, regardless of their origin. In the book *The Mother*, by Sri Aurobindo these are succinctly summarised:

At the physical level—

“rejection of the physical nature's stupidity, doubt, disbelief, obscurity, pettiness, laziness, unwillingness to change, tamas, so that the true stability of Light, Power, Ananda may establish itself in a body growing always more divine;”

At the vital level—

“rejection of the vital nature's desires, demands, cravings, sensations, passions, selfishness, pride, arrogance, lust, greed, jealousy, envy, hostility to the Truth, so that the true power and joy may pour from above into a calm, large, strong and consecrated vital being”

At the mental level—

“rejection of the movements of the lower nature – rejection of the mind's ideas, opinions, preferences, habits, constructions, so that the true knowledge may find free room in a silent mind.”

But let us shift gears to see shifts at the macro level area of the economy:

Broadly speaking, the global economy too has traversed three stages. These are the agricultural economy, the industrial economy, and more

recently, the digital economy. Let us examine this more closely. The agricultural economy is primarily focused on a more physical asset – the land. Its very modus operandi has tended to be physical in nature. That is, it is all about working physically, with physical implements, to rearrange or exploit earth-based physical assets. It is all about operating with “what the eye can see”. Hence, we may conclude that the focus on agriculture is really a focus on the physical phase of the global economy fractal. More recently, over the last century, focus has shifted to industry. This focus is all about working with large flows. Its very purpose is to create large flows. Hence, there is the flow of cash leveraged to bring about flow of product. In the bargain telecommunications flows, people flows, resource flows – and this also includes energy and metal extraction, energy and metal processing and distribution, other flows of trading, flows of financial instruments of all kinds to further bring about the essential flow of product have been accelerated. In other words, the focus has been all about the “play of energies”, which is characteristic of the vital phase. We can conclude, then, that the industrial phase is synonymous with the vital phase, and that by engaging in this kind of industry the global economy has essentially traversed a vital phase. Currently, we have entered into the digital economy. The late 1990s saw the birth of the Internet era. It was idealism of sharing information, of transcending traditional silos that gave birth to the Internet. Subsequently there were a number of radical ideas, relatively speaking, that gave birth to entire new companies. Bring a virtual library and bookshop with millions of titles into one's living room, for instance. Conduct all financial transactions on your computer, for instance. The focus of this phase of the economy was much more on ideas. In other words, the focus has been on the mental phase. The global economy, hence, appears to have gone through the physical, vital, and mental phases automatically. Now the interesting thing is that it is not that someone decided that now a majority of business activity will transition from one emphasis to another. There is a level of self-organisation here that as the term suggests, happened of itself. It is not that the mental phase appeared first, followed by the physical, and the vital. The phases appeared in the same physical-vital-mental or AUM sequence.

But just pausing for a minute – is this progressive? When one considers that in fact the movement is occurring within a larger physical-vital-mental arc, we can see that AUM is pushing the boundaries within a larger AUM. It is happening on a different scale. So the overarching phase of the world economy is vital, and within that we are pushing the boundary to cross

over into the mental. But consider what is happening at a smaller scale, in the Digital Economy itself. It is interesting to note that broadly speaking, even the digital economy has been characterised by three distinct phases. When it first came into being, entities indulged in what we can in retrospect call brochure-ware. That is, they simply took what they had available in existing media or brochures and replicated that onto web-pages. In other words they took what ‘the eye could see’ and put it onto the new ‘media’ as is. Fundamentally, the business model remained the same, it continued with the status quo. In other words brochure-ware exemplified the physical phase. Then, some more adventurous entities experimented with the second phase of the digital economy, which we can call e-Commerce. In this phase, selected business processes were transferred onto the Internet. The most common being the customer-ordering and customer-fulfilment processes. That is, selected business flows, aimed at increasing selected financial results, were mapped onto the Internet. This is none other than a vital dynamic. Hence, e-Commerce can be thought of as the vital phase of the digital economy. Some entities went even a step further, and invented or reinvented or reconfigured themselves to highlight fundamental Internet-based characteristics as the basis of their business models. Hence, such characteristics as global ubiquity, 24 by 7 presence, dis-aggregation whereby entities can focus on what they do best and partner with select entities that have core competencies in other areas, amongst other characteristics, became the basis for reinventing the business model. Such re-conception is none other than a mental-level dynamic. The Re-conceptualisation can be thought of as the mental phase of the digital economy.

So even here the AUM aspects are indicated in that order – so we have AUM once again.

Let us consider an area to do with the advancement of practical science:

Biomimicry is concerned with design of product and process through emulating nature. In some respects this is centuries old and some of the wisest most sustainable man-made designs through the centuries have been a result of mimicking nature. In recent decades however, it is interesting to note that this very field has itself gone through three active phases. In the first phase there has been an imitation of the form and function of nature. That is, form and function, the outer physical aspect of nature has been mimicked. An example is as in the Velcro strip which imitates the form and function of a plant in nature. This approach to product and process design is clearly at the physical phase. Biomimicry then began to emulate

process as opposed to form. That is, the focus shifted to the way nature manufactures product. The emphasis is not on the why, but more on the what. Hence, for example, nature’s approach to manufacturing insulin was emulated by an understanding of the process by which this happens. The same agents and the same process as occur in nature were then emulated at manufacturing scale. This imitation of process, without getting into the how and the why, without fully understanding the larger system question of how product manufactured in this fashion might interact with other cells in the body, or without a comprehensive understanding of what is really happening at the level of the cell, is a vital as opposed to a mental process. Hence, this phase of biomimicry can be thought of as the vital phase. In the third phase emphasis of biomimicry has shifted much more to a whole systems view. Hence, designs such as closed-loop life-cycles, cradle-to-cradle design, and the notion that waste equals food, that are based on a far more holistic understanding of nature’s operations, have begun to become archetypes for the creation of human product designs and manufacturing processes. This is clearly at the mental level in that deeper and more elaborate system design is understood and then becomes the basis for not just replicating, as in the physical and vital phases, but of the formulation of design principles that are then leveraged in the creation of product and process that have hitherto never appeared in nature. Hence, we find the same physical-vital-mental sequence repeated in the specialised field of biomimicry.

Consider the business world, for instance. A business organisation operating at a physical level would primarily believe that the world is fixed. Key ideas about what is possible in the marketplace would be dictated by the notion that “what the eye can see” is what is possible. Hence, corporate strategy, corporate possibility, would be a function of the fixed nature of things. Whatever had made the corporation successful in the past is what will make it successful in the future. If a corporation has failed in the past, it simply would need to emulate another that had been successful in the fixed world, to itself become successful. One can see that such an organisation will likely be subject to a lot of harassment as it works its way through markets. The U-aspect of ‘Vital’ orientation on the under hand, would refer to the notion of a variable world, in which assertion of energy is going to determine successful outcome. Nothing is fixed in this orientation: success is a function of asserting the corporation through financial means. The boundaries of the world, in this kind of orientation,

are much more fluid. Processes, strategies, products, do not need to remain essentially the same, as in the physical orientation. Anything can change so long as financial success and stakeholder success, defined in terms of financial impact, is upheld. It will be possible to go into new markets, new geographies, new products, with new people and new processes if need be, in order to ensure that the all-important financial return is assured. This kind of operation is going to use up a lot of energy, often in a very selfish way. Another orientation would be more 'Mental', which would refer to a world driven by thought and idea. The primary impetus for driving a corporation would not even be financial returns, under this outlook, but idea and ideal. Needless to say, this kind of world would potentially be the most variable. Not even the constraint on ensuring financial returns would necessarily impede it. Hence, such a corporation would potentially much more easily change product, process, market, geography, if the idea that drove it demanded that kind of action in return.

Study has indicated that an organisation that is able to make the shift from the physical to the vital to the mental orientation is likely to be more successful. But why should this be surprising given that in so doing it is in fact traversing the AUM trajectory?

Shifting gears, consider one of the most highlighted areas of today – that of energy. Here too, the energy industry is displaying movement through the same three phases. For decades the focus of energy availability has been primarily through extraction. That is, the primary source of our energy has been carbon-based through oil and gas extracted from the earth. Let us understand this orientation in a little more detail. In this orientation the world is viewed as fixed: our source of energy is oil and gas, and these have always provided our energy needs, and will always provide our energy needs. Such notions as the imminence of peak oil, that states that petroleum production will decline at the point where the rate of global petroleum extraction reaches a maximum, are imaginary or no cause for worry because if it exists, it exists in the indefinite future. Further, a carbon-based energy world is what our world is, and nothing can change that now or in the future. In the worst case, if we run out of points of extraction under our existing control, we will extend that control into other areas and regions of the world, or perhaps even into other worlds if need be. This is a purely physical orientation to life, in which the notion of what has been is what will continue to be. In the face of an increasing acceptance of peak oil and the increasing reality of climate change – a direct result of our

obstinate insistence on a way of being that has outlived its utility– there has been a growing shift to maximise existing flows of extracted energy. That is, without fundamentally altering the source, we are gravitating toward a mind-set of allowing the extracted energy to remain in existence for longer, through changing the way it flows and the way it is used. That is, we have begun altering devices and the way energy flow takes place through pipes, so as to prolong existing flow. This orientation on prolonging or maximising existing flows is none other than the vital orientation. This story does not end here, however. The most progressive amongst the actors have taken a leap into alternative non carbon-based energies. There is out-of-the-box thinking on how energies from other sources can be made practically available and utilisable. There is out-of-the-box thinking on what a non carbon-based economy may look like. This kind of out-of-the-box thinking is representative of the mental dynamic and marks the early transition into the mental-phase of the energy industry fractal.

So here too we are seeing AUM in action.

Let us first consider the journey of relatively recent global politics. Here too we see a shift from the physical to the vital to the mental phase. Note, however, that like the journey or fractal for the global economy, the active and overarching phase is currently at the vital level, and within that we have traversed the fractal within a fractal, through the physical-vital-mental sub-phases. Hence, in the earlier 20th century, politics was marked by physical prowess and threat. World War I and World War II epitomised this physical orientation in that politics was largely about a display of physical powers – armies, weapons – and involved threat to physical boundaries by virtue of physical armies. Balance between global powers was a result of such displays of physical powers. This was the physical phase of the global political fractal. Post World War II, politics was not so much about the actual physical powers possessed by a country, but by the fear-factor involved were the physical powers to be unleashed. Fear, hence, was the motivating lever. In the Cold War, it was the threat and fear of possible nuclear attack that maintained the balance between global powers. The confrontation was not physical, it was based on emotion and therefore based on self-referencing flows. This is a vital dynamic. Hence, for practical purposes politics shifted to a primarily vital phase. It is to be noted that for the actors involved, such dynamics offered higher degrees of freedom, in that there was no actual loss of physical assets, and no actual loss of life, to yet maintain actual power in global affairs. In more recent times the

balance of global power has become far more complicated and has become dependent on development of technology and other corporate prowess. Through products and services of different kinds a country's culture and way of being can be implanted in another part of the world, and its influence be tangibly felt, without even lifting a finger so as speak. This is a far more mental orientation to global power. Through a clever idea a whole new way of being can exercise its influence in another part of the world. The promise of local or national business development can cause local governments to yield to other governments. In such a manner global power is maintained. This orientation to maintaining global power allows its actors an even higher degree of freedom, in that development and the exercise of novel ideas, as opposed to physical assets or vital ploys and masquerades can alter the global balance of power.

Here too we see the manifestation of AUM.

Let us look at another manifestation of global power and politics, in the setting of global exchange rates. At the start of this exchange rate fractal the method for setting global currency rates was purely physical. The amount of gold— a concrete and practically timeless physical asset, a country had, determined the strength of a country's currency. This is a purely physical orientation. At some point there was a more sophisticated strategic approach that was thought out. The relative vivacity and effective strength of a country's activities in the global arena, measured through demand and supply of a country's currency, being used to determine its currency rate. This is a mental orientation and of course offers actors involved much higher degrees of freedom in that creativity and unleashing of a country's powers can literally overnight alter the demand for its assets. In reality we are today at some kind of middle-ground between the planned ideal and the gold standards of the past. Hence today, currency rates are for practical purposes set by the balance of power. This is the vital play. Even though it should really be the real-time creativity of a country that determines the demand for its assets, the negotiation between presidents with side-deals of all sorts is much more effective in doing so at the moment. Nonetheless, the trajectory is the same. We have the physical-level gold-standards of the past, the vital-level negotiations and side-deals of the present, and the mental-level real-time creativity of a country of the future.

So once again we see a manifestation of AUM.

Conclusion

So when we step back from all this, we see that this incredible mantra AUM is the seed of all that we see manifesting around us. No matter what the situation may look like now, we know that nothing can withstand this incredible power, this creative word, that causes all circumstance to precipitate in a certain way.

This is truly the power that surmounts all obstacles.

Tagore And Sri Aurobindo: How They Met In Their Vision

Supriyo Bhattacharya

(1)

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I shan't be gone long.—You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother. It's so young
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I shan't be gone long.—You come too.

(*'The Pasture'*, Robert Frost)

“Tagore has been a wayfarer towards the same goal as ours in his own way”, wrote Sri Aurobindo in a letter to Dilip kumar Roy, when the latter wrote to the former that “Tagore had recently....recanted his faith in the Divine, having been overwhelmed by the modern craze for Humanity with a big H”. Sri Aurobindo asked Dilip “almost with a motherly solicitude” not to criticise Tagore adversely, because he did not think that “we should hastily conclude that Tagore’s passing over to the opposite camp is a certitude.” “He is sensitive”, Sri Aurobindo went on, “and perhaps a little affected by the positive, robustious, slogan-fed practicality of the day— he has passed through Italy and Persia and was feted there. But I don’t see how he can turn his back on all the ideas of a lifetime.”(*Sri Aurobindo Came To Me*, Dilip Kumar Roy, Jaico Publishing.) Having said this, Sri Aurobindo wrote the significant sentence with which we have begun this essay, that is, Tagore had been in his own way a wayfarer towards the same goal that Sri Aurobindo had set himself.

Now, we may ask: why did Sri Aurobindo see Tagore as a wayfarer towards his own goal? We know that Sri Aurobindo wanted the dawn of a “new consciousness”, which he called “Truth-Consciousness” or “Supra-mental Consciousness”. This consciousness, according to Sri Aurobindo’s realisation, in its descent upon the earthly life will radically transform human consciousness now cabined and cribbed by the narrow limits of reason, ego and animality. In a word, he wanted the advent of a new race called “Superman” free from the grip of ignorance and falsehood; that race will usher in a divinised life and human unity on a global scale. The question is: did Tagore too want and attempt in his own way, to achieve this, though he did not use the same language as Sri Aurobindo?

(2)

Well, the question does not lend itself to an easy solution. On the contrary, it becomes a little perplexing in the light – or rather darkness — of Tagore’s own words written in a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy in June 1934. Tagore wrote: “I have no pretensions about my own spiritual realisations. In fact, I am a connoisseur— I wish only to appreciate the Rasa, the flavour in all spheres — be it Nature or mental and spiritual domain. To taste that flavour and express It — that is I think, my task.” (*Tirthankar*, Dilip Kumar Roy; Tr. mine). Again, in September 1936, Tagore wrote in the same vein: “Believe it or not, I never imagine myself to be a sadhak. I know for certain that I have no capacity for spiritual sadhana and I never let others form any wrong idea about this. Whatever I experience in my life is a poet’s experience. Above that there are planes of experience, but my direct knowledge does not reach there. My mind moves within the field of appearance and finds joy.”(Ibid; tr. mine)

We see here Tagore is putting his emphasis on his “poetic” temperament; on the fact that he is a ‘connoisseur’ and is interested only in giving ‘expression’; and also, “the field of appearance” is his mind’s habitual realm. He does not profess that he is a yogi or sadhak (in the sense of Sri Aurobindo), much less an adept in spiritual knowledge. But, granting that Tagore is a poet, not a Yogi, the question may now be raised: what is the true nature of a great poetic mind? Does it move only within the limit of the finite (or the “appearance”) or take off from the base of the finite (or the appearance) to the realm of the infinite (or the reality) behind it? Does it not come back with a message from the infinite realm to express it within the dimension of the finite or the world of appearance to make the ‘appearance’ full of suggestions and meaning? After all, what is the difference between a commoner and a poet? The commoner too dwells in the

world of appearance, but never fathoms the significance of it all, unless and until a poet like Tagore wakes him up to the ‘meaning in each curve and line’, the reality investing the world of facts with a wealth of significance. And who else than a great poet (the Yogi does it another way) can break through the veil of mere appearance to get a vision of the true significance of it all? He not only looks, but he sees. And did not Tagore himself say – “I dive down into the ocean of forms, to find the perfect pearl of the formless”?

The point applies all the more to Tagore, his humility notwithstanding. When he speaks of himself to others, as he does to Dilip, he is a born aristocrat with the gift of humility, but, as he has himself said, the real truth of himself had found expression only in his poetry. It is in his poetry that we recognise him to be a traveller in quest of the infinite, a messenger of the beyond, and a friend and a lover who brings back the harvest from his sojourn there to fill everything here with meaning and beauty. In his seminal work “*The Future Poetry*”, Sri Aurobindo saw in Tagore “A glint of the greater era of man’s living, something that seems to be in promise.” Who is that ‘Tagore’ — one who is merely a “connoisseur” whose mind moves only in the field of “appearance”? Turning a few more pages in *The Future Poetry*, we find Sri Aurobindo laying his finger on this secret: “The poetry of Tagore owes its sudden and universal success to this advantage that he gives us more of this discovery and fusion for which the mind of our age is in quest than any other creative writer of the time. His work is a constant music of the overpassing of the borders, a chant-filled realm in which the subtle sounds and light of the truth of the spirit give new meanings to the finer subtleties of life.” (Ch on “The Breath of Greater Life”, *The Future Poetry*)

This brings us to a fundamental point: when Tagore speaks of his “experiences” as the experiences of a “poet”, we have to ponder: what is the nature of this poetic temper and where — on what plane of inspiration — is it stationed? A poet’s inspiration may come from the “life-plane” or “vital plane”; it may come from the “mental plane”, or “higher mind”, “intuitive mind”, “illuminated mind”, “overmind” and so on, to use the language of Sri Aurobindo; it may come from the “physical consciousness”; or it may come from the plane of the “spirit” or “soul” or the “psychic plane”. When a poet accepts this life and the world and the truths of his own life, mind and body, but invests them with a larger significance based on the soul’s vision or insight, then his journey becomes different from that of another poet stationed on, say, mental or vital or physical plane of

inspiration. And if that poet (here it is Tagore) speaks of himself as one having little or no aptitude for spiritual knowledge or practices (as he says in the letter we have quoted), or as one deficient in spiritual realisations or experiences, (as he hints in the same letter), then we may do little better than looking at the poet in silent wonder — he appears to be that character in Molière’s famous drama, who is surprised to learn that he has been talking “prose” all the time when his teacher proposes one day to teach him “poetry”!

In point of fact, Tagore, in the heart of hearts, knows and understands it all. And he, himself a true poet, bore an eloquent testimony to the truth of the matter many a time when he narrated the wonderful experiences of his life either in his works or in talks. Here, these do not bear repeating. But for the sake of our analysis here, it is as well that we distil the essence of his realisations from his own words. A sample of this are the following words from a lecture given by the poet on his seventieth birthday at the Senate Hall, Calcutta University in December 1931:

“In the soul of beauty is a truth that is full of charm, bliss and mystery, and yet is beyond our reach; still it has an ineffable kinship with our own soul. Our awareness of it is deep and sweet and shining. Our inner being begins to grow, to quicken, to deepen in hue. Our being becomes one with it in colour and fragrance and sentiment — herein is a blossoming of love.”

“The poet’s work is to rouse the human soul to this dawning of awareness, and awaken it from indifference. He is considered a great poet who has made the human mind embrace things that are eternal, great, possessed of freedom, pervasive, profound.”

“Many are the strings upon the veena of veenapani, some of gold, some copper, some steel. Each tune that dwells in the throat of the Cosmos, some light, some heavy, tunes of joy, and enjoyment, all are played on her veena. In a poet’s verse too is an endless variety of song. That every melody should ring with notes loud and high is not what I wish to say. And yet with each there should be a hint of the constant and eternal, of that sense of renunciation that purifies passionate attachment, and makes it viile and vigorous. In the poetry of Bhartrihari we see that the man given to the world of enjoyment has found his own song, but at the same time in the depths of his verse there sits the man of renunciation with his one-stringed instrument.”

[“*Atmaparichay*” (“*Of Myself*”)—translated by D.Joardar and Joe Winter; Published by Visva-Bharati, Kolkata, 2009].

So, here is the self-revelation of a true poet in his own words. Now, we may come to the other point: he says, as we have already quoted from his letter, that his mind finds joy, moving in the world of “appearance”. Well, this statement too may attest to his humility, but it is not the whole truth about him. To see the whole truth, one may again listen to these words uttered in the same lecture:

“Every day at dawn I have stood in silence at the edge of the dark night only to comprehend the message in the words, *yatte rupam kalyanatamam tatte pashyami*. “You I behold in your form most generous and pure.” I have wanted to touch in my contemplation the great Being who is the principle of unity among the kinship of all beings, whose delight, manifest in countless forms, ceaselessly fills my soul with gladness in so many ways. My soul cries out, *kohyevanyat kah pranyat yadesha akasha anando na syat*. ‘Who will exhale and inhale if there is no joy in the sky?My heart and soul have responded to the unarticulated message, the unstruck note that swirls about creation and resonates from Time that has no beginning towards Time that has no end. I have felt as if I have heard this message for many ages.”(Ibid)

A couple of years later, that is, in 1933, Tagore was more explicit. He was giving then the Kamala Lectures (entitled *Manusher Dharma*) at Calcutta University. There he stated in clear terms that the whole truth of Man lies not in the finite alone, it has also an infinite aspect. He used a beautiful simile to drive the point home:

“This earth is full of gross matter. Far above this is the atmosphere. Through that invisible plane, come light and colour on the earth and its life-force flows. The cloud gathers on that plane and raindrops fall; the stimulus from that plane informs the earth with a supremely mysterious beauty; from that very plane comes whatever is the best on earth, its grace and life. In that atmosphere above, the window of the earth remains open, through which, from the world of stars, comes the messenger who, crossing the dark space, brings every night the luminous message of kinship. One may say this very extended atmosphere is the soul of the surplus part of the earth, just as the whole Man is said to be “*Tripadasyaamritam*”—that is, his one part is visible, the remain-

ing three parts lie in a transcendent plane of the eternal.”(*Manusher Dharma*, tr. mine)

Having said this, the poet seeks refuge in the Upanishads:

“The Upanishads say, Truth can be known only if one has an integral knowledge of Being and Becoming. Being, that is unmanifest in the infinite, Becoming that is manifest in space and time. The finite and the infinite together render the truth of Man complete. The infinite in Man is to be manifested in the finite — in the sphere of life and society. Infinite truth has to be given concrete shape.”(Ibid, tr. mine)

The life of the poet was a concrete manifestation of this truth. That was why, at the age of eighty, he could say with a clear vision:

“In extreme familiarity we miss the poetry, for it exists beyond form and sound, where the creator’s other half is to be found, the half that is not imprisoned in matterMy days have gone by in all kinds of work, my mind has pursued attractions on every side. I have known the ways of the world and have had to submit to them. I have not been so obsessed as to allow my unbridled fancies to distort my view of them. But through all my interaction with the world my mind has found union in the area where creation goes beyond creation. In this union my life has found its fulfilment.” [*Atmaparichaya* (“Of Myself”), *op.cit.*]

If this is the true Rabindranath, then why did he give such an incomplete or superficial picture of himself in the letter to Dilip Roy, which we have quoted at the beginning of this essay? That letter evidently gave the impression that he was a misfit in the spiritual field of experience, for the world of mere appearance was his habitual realm and his only vacation was to be a ‘poet’, that is, to give expression, in the language of poetry, to the joy of experiences in that realm. If this is true, then what Sri Aurobindo said of him (we have already quoted this) cannot be true. But this is not true and this is clear from the words of Tagore that we have quoted from his lectures. Then, why did he write these words to Dilip, giving the impression that his mission is different from that of Sri Aurobindo?

Well, we believe, this happened because of three possible factors. First, Tagore, while writing those letters to Dilip (on Sri Aurobindo), had be-

come most humble about himself owing to his great reverence for the yogic stature of Sri Aurobindo. He said in another letter to Dilip Kumar that he had “an unalloyed reverence for Sri Aurobindo”. This he had always cherished and whenever he recalled that, he was always gracefully humble about himself; this is true not only in connection with Sri Aurobindo, but also whenever he met great men of the world. And we may also recall his beautiful essay on Sri Aurobindo, where he narrated his meeting with Sri Aurobindo on 29 May 1928 at Pondicherry and accepted in all humility his greatness, agreeing to wait for the “word” from Sri Aurobindo .

Second, at the time of writing that letter to Dilip, Tagore seems to have been, temporarily though, influenced by a partial or incomplete view of yogic sadhana. Usually, there is a tendency on the part of yogis in course of their sadhana to tear themselves away from the everyday world and get buried deep in askesis and contemplation and their tradition might have induced Tagore to believe that he himself had no turn for spirituality and so had been deficient in the capacity for spiritual realisation. Besides this, Tagore never embraced any philosophy that teaches Man to fly away from this worldly life because it thinks that the Truth of God has no use for His creation. But, when Tagore met Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry, he was deeply impressed — nay, overwhelmed — for he said in his brilliant essay on Sri Aurobindo: “at the very first sight I could realise that he (Sri Aurobindo) had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and through his long process of realisation had accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. His face was radiant with an inner light and his serene presence made it evident to me that his soul was not crippled and cramped to the measure of some tyrannical doctrine which takes delight in inflicting wounds upon life. I felt that the utterance of the ancient Hindu Rishi spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. I said to him, ‘You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice, Harken to me.’ ”

It may well be that for Tagore the tremendous impression that this visit left on his mind had faded out somewhat with the passage of time and his mind was perhaps overcast with the impress of contemporary ideas.

Third, the reason for those superficial words in that letter lay in the poet’s very inner world. Its secret lay very deep indeed. The brilliant lecture that he gave at the age of eighty lends a clue when with touching candour he admits:

“One day when I was a boy, the light of the morning sun ventured down what path of its rising I know not, and of a sudden illustrated all human relationship before me in the radiance of the soul. Although before very long the light was to vanish in the squalor of everyday life, still I hoped that one day before retiring from this world I would witness the whole of humanity illuminated by the light of that one soul. But at the summit of my inner awakening the path of that light’s flow was obscured by fog and mist.”[*Atmaparichaya* (“Of Myself”), op.cit]

(3)

Keeping all this in view, we may now judge the validity of Sri Aurobindo’s assertion that Tagore was a “wayfarer towards the same goal” as his. First, let us look into this question from the standpoint of Sri Aurobindo.

Even in his pre-Pondicherry days Sri Aurobindo recognised in Tagore a fellow-traveller in the soul’s journey when Tagore paid his glowing tribute to him in the unforgettable poem “*Namaskar*” (“I bow to Thee”). Even amidst the dust and heat of the Swadeshi days, Tagore said in the poem, “On seeing you, I hear the song of the unfettered joy of the soul” and thus could spot the yogi in Sri Aurobindo, “An incognito of the imperishable”; and Sri Aurobindo, then the disguised yogi, could spot the mystic streak in the poet, for the language of the poem was the language of the soul.

That was only the beginning. Sometime later Sri Aurobindo came to discover the secret of Tagore in connection with Tagore’s poem “*Dukhabhisar*”(the first line runs: “where is the light, O where is the light”; see “*Rabijibani*” by Prashanta Pal), published in the Bengali Monthly “*Suprabhat*”(Srvan1316 B.S) edited by Kumudini Mitra. Sri Aurobindo saw the glint of the true Rabindranath even in this small poem (or song) for it drew a deep and penetrating commentary on Tagore’s genius from the pen of Sri Aurobindo in the pages of the “*Karmayogin*”(sometime between 1909 and 1910). In this very writing, Sri Aurobindo hailed Tagore as “our greatest lyric poet” much earlier than the announcement of the Noble Prize for Tagore. “.....the poignant sweetness, passion and spiritual depth and mystery of a poem like this”, wrote Sri Aurobindo, “the haunting cadences subtle with a subtlety which is not of technique but of the soul, and the honey-laden felicity of expression, these are the essential Rabindranath and cannot be imitated, because they are the things of the spirit and one must have the same sweetness and depth of soul before one can hope to catch any of these desirable qualities.He (Tagore) has

given the old sweet spirit of emotional and passionate religion (of Vaishnava poetry) an expression of more delicate and complex richness voiceful of subtler and more penetratingly spiritual shades of feeling than the deep-hearted but simply early age of Bengal could know.”

Thus, all this goes to show the inner affinity of the two great minds, though one is a “Yogi” and the other is a “poet”. Both aspired for the same truth but in their own way — the mode of self-discovery and self-expression are different. The yogi withdraws in the centre and from there lights up the periphery with meaning, while in the case of the poet the passionate acceptance of the periphery pushes him to the centre to find its secret there. Both harboured a deep reverence for the value of earthly life and existence, but both could discern the far-off promise of another life — life freed from the grip of inconscience and ignorance and hence all dross, impurity and falsehoods. In a word a “divinisation” of life, according to Sri Aurobindo; for Tagore, a life full of beauty and harmony. “Divinisation of life does not mean”, wrote Sri Aurobindo, “the abandonment of life, but it means a greater art of life.” And that art consists, Tagore would add, not in “*Vairagya Sadhan*”, that is, mere renunciation of life and flight from this world, but “enjoying freedom amidst a thousand bonds.” Both laid stress on the eternal spirit of Man, not only as a means of entering into a realm of Nirvana, but as a puissant source and means of the “transformation” of life. That is, to change the words of Tagore, dive down into the ocean of the formless, to find the perfect pearl of the form. Sri Aurobindo noticed this similarity of vision and endeavour between him and Tagore when from the cave of Tapasya in Pondicherry he gave the world his illuminating commentary on world poetry and the directions in which it was moving and has to move in future. From December 1917 to July 1920 in thirty-two instalments those brilliant chapters were written in the pages of the “*Arya*” at Pondicherry under the title “*The Future Poetry*” (with revisions done later on). Tagore came up in those pages off and on, illustrating the theme that Sri Aurobindo was working out. What was the theme? Well, Sri Aurobindo puts it thus: the spirit gives us not only a “greater light of truth and vision”, but also the “breath of a greater living”; for the spirit is not only “the self of our consciousness and knowledge”, but “the larger self of life”. To find “our self” and the “self of things” is not to go through a “rarefied ether of thought into Nirvana”, but to discover the “whole greatest power of our complete existence”. Now, Sri Aurobindo believes, both the future of man and the future of poetry have the “double seeking of this twofold power, the truth of things and the insistence of life.” Sri

Aurobindo cites the work of Whitman, A.E., Yeats and Carpenter, which bears the stamp of this significant trend. But it is the poetry of Tagore, Sri Aurobindo emphasises, that “gives us more of this discovery and fusion for which the mind of our age is in quest than any other creative writer of the time.” Tagore’s work, Sri Aurobindo goes on, is “a constant music of the overpassing of the borders, a chant-filled realm in which the subtle sounds and lights of the truth of the spirit give new meanings to the finer subtleties of life”. (*The Future Poetry*) And a little further on Sri Aurobindo puts the final seal when he says that the work of poets like Tagore has been to create “a new and deeper manner of seeing life”, and to build “bridges of visioned light and rhythm between the infinite and the eternal and the mind and soul and life of man.”(ibid)

Not only this, however. In another chapter, Sri Aurobindo goes on to present a deeper analysis and significance of Tagore’s work and that brings out the similarity of the vision and work of the two giants more sharply. Sri Aurobindo shows that at present the human mind is occupied in “passing the border of two kingdoms”. It is emerging out of a period of “active and mostly materialistic intellectualism” towards a “primary intuitive seeking”. There is therefore an uncertain groping in many directions. There is “Vitalistic intuitivism” sometimes taking a more subjective, sometimes a more objective form that “lingers amid dubious lights on the border and cannot get through its own rather thick and often violent lustres and colours to finer spiritual vision.”

There is, then, an “emotional and sensational psychical intuitivism” half emerging from and half entangled in the “vitalistic motive” that has often a “strange beauty and brilliance”, sometimes “stained with morbid hues”, sometimes “floating in a vague mist”, sometimes “strained to an exaggeration of half vital, half psychic motive” and this is a common tendency.

Then, there is a “purer and more delicate psychic intuition with a spiritual issue”. This was brought by a few Irish poets into English literature. Sri Aurobindo does not forget Whitman and his successors: their poetry has been that of life “broadened, raised and illumined by a strong intellectual intuition of the self of man and the large soul of humanity.”

Finally, Sri Aurobindo comes to Tagore. “At the subtlest elevation of all that has yet been reached,” concludes Sri Aurobindo, “stands or rather wings and floats in a high intermediate region the poetry of Tagore, not in the complete spiritual light, but amid an air shot with its seeking and glimpses, a sight and cadence found in a psycho-spiritual heaven of subtle

and delicate soul-experience transmuting the earth-tones by the touch of its radiance.”(*The Future Poetry*).

(4)

We now come to the end of our journey — or maybe the journey can begin at this point. For now we may judge the validity of Sri Aurobindo’s assertion from Tagore’s own view point. This has been already hinted at, but now is the time to clinch the point by citing instances where Tagore has been more explicit. To do so, we select a few highlights of Sri Aurobindo’s vision and place side by side Tagore’s words which come very near to these.

First, as we have already mentioned, Sri Aurobindo wanted a “life divine” on this very earth, for he saw life as a gift from heaven, a great gift at that, for it is the field of “progressive manifestation of the spirit.” He discovered it as real and true as God Himself, loved it, accepted it only to “transform” it with what he called the “supramental” or “Truth-Consciousness”. “It is a terrestrial realisation that I seek, not a flight to distant summits,” said he. Tagore is a fellow-traveller with him in this respect, though, according to Sri Aurobindo, “the exact stage of advance and putting of the steps” for Tagore “are minor matters”. Now, listen to what Tagore said on his seventieth birthday: “I have loved this world ... I have bowed to the Great one—I have longed for freedom in surrendering myself to the Perfect Being. I have believed that the truth of humanity is in the Great and Perfect one who is “ever immanent in every human heart”, *sada jananam hridaye sannivistah*..... From the limits of the single-minded literary pursuit I had been accustomed to from childhood, I ventured beyond at a certain point in time, to bring the offering of my work and the gift of my renunciation to that Great and Perfect One.I am come to the great pilgrimage of this world. Here at the profound centre of the history of all lands, all nations and all ages is God-in-Man, at whose altar I have sat quietly and devoted myself to the arduous task of ridding my being of pride and ego and a habit of petty discrimination. It is a task that is not ended.”[*Atmaparichay (Of Myself)*]

Second, Sri Aurobindo did not want an individual liberation or “siddhi”, but wanted through his Sadhana to bring a larger light, a greater power here on earth so that the earth-consciousness may gradually open itself to the new light and no longer remain the petty, ignorant and impotent thing it now is. Of course, it does not change at one fell swoop, but as the aspiration and opening grow, the change in consciousness takes shape as the light presses from above. And so, what is essential is not renunciation of

life and the world and the fellow human beings, but renunciation of ego and the ignorance and the falsehoods that separate man from man, and a constant opening to and aspiration for the Truth and carrying on every activity in the world with a gesture of offering to the Supreme.

Now, let us hear how Tagore concurs with this:

“As long as there is suffering and sorrow, want and humiliation in this human world, no single man can get liberation. If a single lamp makes a little dent into the darkness, the night does not vanish as a consequence. Only when the entire darkness disappears can the night end. That is why the Great who have longed for the freedom of Man have sent out the message: “I will come from age to age”, “*Sambhamami yuge yuge*” (*Manusher Dharma*, tr.mine)

So, we see, like Sri Aurobindo, Tagore lays his finger on the crux of the problem and also its solution, though Tagore does not speak about any ‘new’ consciousness like the “Supramental”. Nowhere in his writings is there any mention of such consciousness. He does not seem to be mentally aware of any such thing, but that is not the point. One may not be mentally aware of a higher Consciousness, yet may be a good instrument of that Consciousness. That is, we suppose, what happened in the case of Tagore (judging by the import of his words we have quoted in the earlier sections). This becomes more probable when we see Sri Aurobindo writing to Dilip Kumar Roy these very significant words: “I know with absolute certitude that the Supramental is a truth and that its advent is in the nature of things inevitable. Our question is as to the when and the how.This is however certain that a number of souls have been sent to see that it shall be now.”

Third, Sri Aurobindo did not stop short at emphasising individual self-realisation, but he saw our life as a field of the gradual unfolding or evolution of consciousness. Self-realisation is a decisive attainment, a crucial point of take-off from where the evolution of the individual’s consciousness takes a more assured and conscious step forward. The question that we may now pose is: did Tagore accept this idea of evolution? Well, we believe he did. To cite just one instance. In one lecture we find Tagore saying: “In the great sphere of the Nebula where stars or planets are being created, a star may sometimes be seen; that clearly is an intimation of the ardour of the sacrificial fire of creation in the great heart of the Nebula. In

the same way we see the great men in the heart of human history. Seeing them we get to realise that the evolutionary nisus is working in the heart of human being. That evolution is for the purpose of manifestation of Bhuma, the infinite. The individual man is constantly striving to shed its covering of ego to realise itself in *Viswamanava*, the Universal Man. In fact, the entire earth-consciousness is seeking to evolve into the truth of that great Man". (*Manusher Dharma*, tr. mine.)

A little further on in the course of the same lecture, Tagore came closer to Sri Aurobindo, with the application of a beautiful simile:

"The student, after days of persistent endeavour, learnt alphabets, spelling, grammar, scribbled many incomplete, meaningless things on a number of sheets, utilised many materials and discarded quite a lot — at long last came the moment when he wrote his first poem; at that very moment the first meaning of the mass of materials that were devoid of sentences, flashed forth in that composition after so many days of labour. In the great evolution of the world, we saw the first meaning in the beginning of life, then in animal, next in Man. From the external plane the doors of freedom began to open one by one in the planes of the inner being. When the process reached the phase of humanity, the veil lifted and we had a vision of the individual in his truth of the infinite. We saw the truth of mysterious union or relatedness, the ultimate unity. Man could assert: those who know the Truth they *sarvamebabishanti* — they enter into the heart of everyone."(*Manusher Dharma*, tr.mine)

Four, Sri Aurobindo declared: "Man is a transitional being"— that is, Man is a intermediate term in the march of evolution; transcending him, 'Superman' is destined to appear in the course of evolution. It will be a race with a consciousness above the human, the features of which cannot be spelt out right now. Man is evolving towards that destiny in his "adventure of consciousness". Did Tagore have a vision, of whatever sort, of the future of Man in that direction? Yes, he did. For he says,

"The ideal of humanity is realised at one point; at another point it is in process of being realisedthe greater part of the whole Man is still unmanifest. One is always looking forward to manifesting Him in future. The whole Man is coming. His chariot is

running, but He has not yet arrived. The party of the Bridegroom is coming and waiting age after age, the sound of music is coming from the Bridegroom's car from afar. To bring Him nearer and nearer, the messengers have been traversing a path difficult of access."(ibid)

(5)

One point, however, is left in doubt. At the end of the lectures from which we have quoted so far, Tagore strikes perhaps a different note which may not agree with Sri Aurobindo's scheme of things. The poet says: "My intelligence is human intelligence, my heart is a human heart, my imagination is human imagination. However much we may refine it, purify it, it cannot outgrow its human nature. What we call Science is Science testified by human intelligence; what we call the joy born of Brahmic consciousness, is also joy felt in the medium of human consciousness. He whom we realise with this intelligence and joy, is the Bhuma, the infinite, but it is humanised Bhuma.If the freedom of Man is attained by wiping out Man, then why did we become Man?" (*Manusher Dharma*, tr. mine)

It seems that the poet has got stuck. On the one hand, he sees the march of evolution and sees the necessity for a greater destiny of Man; on the other, he refuses to go further by his attachment to the human mode of expression and realisation of the spirit. The confusion arises because of his temporary failure to note two facts of fundamental importance emphasised by Sri Aurobindo: First, Man is not the master of his spiritual evolution, though he is the conscious agent. It is the will of the secret "Consciousness-Force" that has been guiding the process of evolution and after immemorial ages of preparation, shaped the human form for the realisation and manifestation of the spirit. If this is true, then Man by himself cannot cry a halt to the process of further evolution.

Did Tagore not know this himself? We believe he certainly did, as these words he once wrote in his brilliant essay "*Pagal*" (The Mad Spirit) published many years ago in the famous journal "*Bangadarshan*"(once founded and edited by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee) amply testify:

"There is a mad spirit within creation: whatever is unthinkable or unexpected he ushers in without rhyme or reason the god of restraining laws is trying to convert the paths of all worldly motions into circles, and this mad spirit is busy leading them to astray to make spirals. This mad one in his caprice has evolved birds in

the family of reptiles and man in the family of apes. There is a strenuous effort in the world at large to maintain what has been and what it is; this mad one is upsetting this order and paving the way for what it is not. He has no flute in his hand, the song of harmony is not his, the horn blares out, the rituals set by tradition wither away, and from nowhere an unprecedented state comes and commands its place..... O Shambhu, You make the current of life throb on and on with the excitement of the unexpected, only to give expression to power in its newer and newer dance and play, and to creation in its newer and newer forms.” (tr. by D.Joardar and Joe Winter)

A poet’s babble? Well, that cannot be, for the history of the earth is ample testimony to this profound utterance. He puts it more philosophically in his mature wisdom in the very lectures from which we have been quoting:

“Individual mind resides in the universal mind, but the latter is not the sum of individual minds. If that were so, then that which is could have been ultimate and that which can be cannot find any room. But, that which has not been, that which can be, has greater power, greater claim in Man’s history. The urge for that has become irresistible and is pushing back the limits of the existing stage of human civilisation”. (*Manusher Dharma*, tr.mine)

Second, Tagore is saying that our intelligence, imagination and heart are all ‘human’; however much we may refine or purify it, it cannot exceed the ‘humanness’; and what we call science is arrived at by ‘human’ intelligence; and what we call ‘Brahmananda’(bliss or Ananda of Brahman) is realised through the medium of human consciousness; so that too is human. Therefore, according to Tagore, there cannot be anything like “Superman” exceeding humanity. But, here Tagore seems to lose sight of one important point: Tagore’s point is that the realisation of the Reality or Truth (or Brahman) takes place through the medium of our human consciousness; so this realisation has the stamp of ‘humanness’; well, that is true as far as it goes. The point is, after our realisation of the spirit, comes the stage of its manifestation. That manifestation does not leave the human instrument or its ‘humanness’ unchanged; it undergoes a certain significant change. And it can undergo a gradual process of “radical change” on all planes and parts of the being when the supreme creative power and knowledge and will of the Sachchidananda, self-existing as an overhead

plane of consciousness (called “Supermind”, or “Divine Gnosis” by Sri Aurobindo), is realised and brought down to transform the normal level of consciousness. That is because, as Sri Aurobindo explains:

“The Supermind is in its very essence a truth-consciousness, a consciousness always free from the Ignorance which is the foundation of our present natural or evolutionary existence and from which nature in us is trying to arrive at self-knowledge and world-knowledge and a right consciousness and the right use of our existence in the universe. The Supermind, because it is a truth-consciousness, has this knowledge inherent in it and this power of true existence;.....this is because its very nature is knowledge; it has not to acquire knowledge but possesses it in its own right;..... As its knowledge is always true, so too its will is always true; it does not fumble in its handling of things or stumble in its paces. In the Supermind feeling and emotion do not depart from their truth, make no slips or mistakes, do not swerve from the right and the real, cannot misuse beauty and delight or twist away from a divine rectitude.Supermind is the grade of existence beyond mind, life and Matter, and as mind, life and Matter have manifested on the earth, so too must Supermind in the inevitable course of things manifest in the world of Matter. In fact, a Supermind is already here but it is involved, concealed behind this manifest mind, life and Matter and not yet acting overtly or in its own power: if it acts, it is through these inferior powers and modified by their characters and so not yet recognisable. It is only by the approach and arrival of the descending Supermind that it can be liberated upon earth and reveal itself in the action of our material, vital and mental parts so that these lower powers can become portions of a total divinised activity of our whole being.”(Supermind and The Life Divine)

That is the destiny awaiting Man, as seen by Sri Aurobindo. The problem with us, as it was with Tagore, is that riding on the crest of our human achievements we remain bound to our notion of humanity. Tagore has said: “Man is not imperfect, he is incomplete.”(*The Religion of Man*). Granted, Sri Aurobindo would say, but he would go further and add: “the imperfection of Man is not the last word of Nature, but his perfection too is not the last peak of the Spirit”. (*The Life Divine*)

(6)

In today's world torn by strife and disharmony we have to hark back to the global vision of both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. Tagore delivered his Hibbert lectures at Oxford and named them *The Religion of Man* and Sri Aurobindo wrote in the pages of the *Arya* some brilliant chapters called *The Ideal of Human Unity* where in the concluding chapter he wrote about "The Religion of Humanity". Like Sri Aurobindo, Tagore too warned about the dangers of "collective egoism" as manifested in the narrow and arrogant spirit of nationalism, as his lectures in Japan go to show. Sri Aurobindo delved deeper into the problem of human unity with a detailed historical analysis in his *The Ideal of Human Unity*, but he emphasised that human unity must be realised, but it cannot be guaranteed by any outward means or organisations or any attempt towards mere cooperation, but it has to be grounded in a deeper brotherhood, that is, "an inner realisation of oneness" which alone can provide a calmer more durable motive force. Tagore did not go into much historical detail, but from his deep awareness of history and the march of contemporary events, he could come to the same conclusion of Sri Aurobindo with his intuitive vision. Thus, an International Centre of Education in the name of Sri Aurobindo was founded by the Mother, collaborator of Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry, and something of the same vision took shape in 'Visvabharati' at Shantiniketan by the courageous endeavour of Tagore where the East and the West joined hands and worked in harmony. Today the words of warning given by Tagore in his address at Milan assume a huge relevance when the idea of "clash of civilisations" (made current by Samuel Huntington) is floating around in the air and blocking the next leap of awareness of the supreme necessity of human unity. We can do no better than turn to Tagore and listen to him once again:

"I have great faith in humanity. Like the sun it can be clouded but never extinguished. I admit that at this time when the human races have met together as never before, the baser elements appear predominant. The powerful are exulting at the number of their victims. They take the name of science to cultivate the school boy superstition that they have certain physical signs indicating their eternal right to rule..... Theirs is the cry of a past that is already exhausted, a past that has thrived upon the exclusive spirit of national individualism which will no longer be able to keep the balance in its perpetual disharmony with its surround-

ings. Only those races will prosper who, for the sake of their own perfection and permanent safety, are ready to cultivate the spiritual magnanimity of mind that enables the soul of man to be realised in the heart of all races. For men to come near to one another and yet to continue to ignore the claims of humanity is a sure process of suicide. We are waiting for the time when the spirit of the age will be incarnated in a complete human truth and meeting of men will be translated into the Unity of Man."

(The Voice of Humanity, *Selected English writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Vol. 3, ed. by Sisir Kumar Das; Sahitya Akademi)

Penal Labour, Mystical Longings And International Vision: The Paul Richard Story

Sachidananda Mohanty

Fin de Siècle Western spiritual travel to India often comes with various forms of political radicalism. The temporal-spiritual divide that the Western colonial imagination assiduously cultivated among natives is frequently subverted by figures like Sister Nivedita and Annie Besant who strove for self-rule and pan-Asian identity. Some others like James H Cousins, C.F Andrews and W.W. Pearson, now largely forgotten figures, tried to bridge the colonial divides in cultural terms.¹ As post-colonial critic Leela Gandhi has underlined, mixed pairs of Westerns and Indians overcame the East-West divisions across gender, racial and political lines.

The enigma and shock of arrival in the ‘mysterious’ and ‘exotic’ East often meant for the Western cultural traveller a *rite-de-passage*, leading at times to profound psychic disorientation or *volte face*. The new arrival often precipitated and brought to fore underlying differences among spiritual partners.

What for instance happened when Paul and Mirra Richard came to Pondicherry in 1914 and met the Indian freedom fighter turned mystic Aurobindo Ghose, (Sri Aurobindo), following Richard’s earlier political visit to Pondicherry in 1910 to campaign for Paul Bluyson who got elected to the French Assembly from Pondicherry?

Abandoned by history and critics given to Manichean formulations, the Paul Richard story remains to be rewritten. Richard’s own troubled lives, marriages, relationships and incessant travel across continents no doubt contribute to much of the mystique, folklore and fiction that built around him. It also makes him a somewhat tragic figure.

I shall concentrate on the politics and culture that governed the life of Paul Richard: the discourse over penal labour, mystical longing, human passions and international vision. My narrative will be partly grounded in Pondicherry in South India. Its French colonial presence serves as more than a backdrop to the story. But there are other locales in other nations and continents such as North Africa, French Guyana and Japan that will be brought in.

Paul Richard lived troubled lives whose complexity does not make for an easy and coherent reading. And yet, through his travel across the world, and the friendship he sought and cherished, he unmasked the Western archaeology of Knowledge. He explored what Homi Bhabha calls the ‘paradigms of Western Modernity’ and revealed the disjunction between this modernity and the ‘colonial space’.

In April 1910, pursued by the British Police in the famous Karmayogin case, after the Alipore Trial, following an *Adesh* or spiritual command, Aurobindo Ghose turned his back on British India; left for the French ruled Chandanagore and arrived at the sleepy town of Pondicherry on board, the SS Duplex. While five leading citizens of Pondicherry certified good conduct for the political refugee to facilitate his stay in the town, it did not deter the overzealous British intelligence to try and deport Aurobindo to British India, or alternatively to some other French colonies like Algeria.

Years later, Richard would recall that his brother-in-law Matteo Alfassa (Mirra’s brother) who served as the Governor of Congo in Brazzaville (11 January 1913—19 May 1926) and the French Colonial Desk in the foreign office in Paris, and was rewarded the *Legion d’honneur*, “received a letter from the British government requesting execution of an order of extradition against Aurobindo who was still a fugitive in Pondicherry. My brother-in-law of course knew about my close association with Aurobindo, and when I asked him what he had done with the order of extradition requested by the Foreign Minister he winked at me and said, ‘I left it lying in my drawer.’” Later I heard that the British authorities in India were baffled by the silence of the French in response to their request.”(Richard,1987: 60).

II

It is hard to sum up the life and work of Paul Richard. He lived at once on many planes: emotional, religious, mystical, occult and political. He has not left behind a full fledged autobiography. Always on the move, his memoirs entitled *Without Passport: The Life and Work of Paul Richard* was

written in 1954. Edited by his son, then a sociologist in America in New York, Michel Paul Richard, it was published in 1987, and spans the period between 1874 and 1920.

Richard lived till his nineties and passed away in 1967 at the age of 93. And yet, his narrative dictated by Consuelo Sides in New York in 1954, goes up to only 1920 and was published by Peter Lang, thanks to the efforts of his son and encouragement by the Indian critic Claude Alvarez, in 1987.

Back in 1976, Alvarez was completing his doctoral dissertation in Netherlands on technology and Third World development. He visited Michel in America and saw Richard's papers in a drawer. In a letter to Michel dated 29 November, 1975, Alvarez wrote: 'I am trying to reconstruct the development of Aurobindo's ideas (an intellectual biography) and here Paul Richard is a crucial contributor' (Richard, 1987: Introduction IX).

In a telephone conversation with me in 2009, Alvarez, then based in Goa, told me of his brief meeting with Michel Paul Richard and said that by the late seventies of the last century, he had lost interest in the project he was interested in then. He added that he would not hold on to his earlier unfavourable views on Sri Aurobindo. 'I was younger then', he said, 'I am now able to appreciate the philosophy much better, especially The Mother's concept of education which is quite radical and futuristic'

The story of Paul Richard, as outlined in his 1954 memoirs, follows, for the most part, a chronological order and focuses basically on the surface events of his life. There are rare glimpses, as Michel, the editor says, into the working of his mind or psyche. And yet, the details themselves remain quite fascinating. Aided by editorial notes, the narrative comes right up to 1967, the year Richard died in New York.

In the preface to the personal narrative dated 1954, Paul Richard makes the following declaration:

Reluctantly I begin this narrative. Though I shall, within two months, enter my eightieth year, I still feel too young to reminisce about the details of my personal life. To live truly is to live by faith. How can one have any faith in the past? We do not ask a tree to return to its first shoot. To live, one must continue to grow, and the future is still my goal.

To look back is somewhat frightening. My life was made up of beautiful things and people: a loving mother, sisters, wives, companions and friends, as well as beloved children. There were

many roads to travel, and all led to wonderful places, adventures, opportunities. But the severed parts of my life are painful to contemplate, and there are many regrets. Life is darkness as well as light, a glorious and dreadful gift. (Richard: page, unnumbered)

Clearly, 'future' seems to be the self- chosen goal. But how does this future relate to the past? After all, as he avers, the past seems to be frightening and traumatic. Not surprisingly, Richard's narrative does not go beyond 1920 when he parts from Mirra.

Childhood and Education:

Without Passport offers an autobiographical sketch: childhood in a beautiful village called Marsillargues, the 'field of Mars' in southern France, Richard who came from a caring background, being the only brother of four girls; ministry in the Church of Ales, the centre of Huguenot tradition. He evinced interest in modern poetry rather than in classics, reading 'irrelevant' book such as *The Conquest of Bread* by Prince Kropotkin. His leadership led to the 'formation' of the first Labour Party in the province (p.9). He served in the cavalry and spent four years in Tunisia, North Africa 'assigned to the 4th Regiment of Spahis in Tunis.' Off duty hours were spent in 'religious contemplation, poetry writing and preparation for my re-examination in philosophy.' At the age of 22, he began as a seminarian at the University of Toulouse in Montauban.

Devil's Island: Penal Colony in French Guyana

Richard had a major engagement with the French penal system when at the Law School, a group of ex-convicts from the penal colony in French Guyana asked him to visit and report the atrocities there. His experience at the capital city of Cayenne as well as at the Salvation Island and Devil's Island in French Guyana convinced him of the unspeakable horror of the French criminal justice system.² As he recalled poignantly later: "Guyana is not fit for colonisation; it has been said that the man who cultivates the earth is digging his own grave. Every year France sent thousands of new convicts, yet the population never increased, that is why they called it 'the dry guillotine'" (p.36)

Those that got freed called *libérées* were condemned to spend an equal number of years in the hell hole. Those who spent eight years were condemned to live there forever. They lived in shacks, fought swarms of mosquitoes, quicksand, deadly piranhas, tropical diseases and caught

butterflies to eke out a living. Homosexual abuse was rampant. Beyond the Maroni river lay Dutch Guyana, and beyond still, the alluring, but impossible prospect of Venezuela. Few nations would welcome the libérées, barring Belgium, and there was no transport to that country, no money to pay the fare.

In the Devil's Island, he visited the hut occupied by Captain Dreyfus who was falsely accused of treason and lived a battered life on the island. He was freed thanks to the campaigns by Emile Zola. On his return journey, at Trinidad, Richard encountered British colonialism in the form of Indian indentured labour. The British system, he mused sardonically, was based on 'successful realism' whereas that of the French, whether at Martinique and New Caledonia, was 'pseudo-humanitarian.'

Returning to France, Richard wrote a series of articles in the French Press drawing attention of liberal opinion to the criminal justice system at the Dry Guillotine. Thanks to his campaign, the French government 'agreed to provide Behanzin, the African emperor with an annual pension and to relocate him in a more suitable country' than Martinique (p.46). It would take many years before the Salvation Army under the leadership of Charles Pean were to ensure that all the convicts were repatriated to France and the penal colony in Devil's Island in French Guyana was closed in 1951. Pean who led a mission in 1928, admits in his book that it was Paul Richard who blew the lid on atrocities committed in Devil's Island. (Pean,1953).

The tale of Devil's Island is a story of treachery and betrayal by successive French regimes, including the Vichy government during World War II that went back on its promise and deported the Captain of the Salvation Army and his family to a concentration camp. As Michel Paul Richard, the editor, concludes: 'Devil's Island, like Dachau, is a monument to man's inhumanity to man. What has been written about it, starting with Paul Richard's report in 1905 and ending with Charles Pean's final report, provide the foundation for Sociology of horror. And perhaps, also, sociology of hope...' (p.118).

One of the most fruitful friendships across political barriers that Paul Richard forged was with Aurobindo Ghose (Sri Aurobindo). The two met for the first time in 1910, the meeting arranged most probably by a sympathetic townsman called Zir Naidu. By that time both Paul and Mirra Morriset, separated from their respective spouses, were deeply interested in an occult movement led by Max and Thelma Théon in Tlemcen, Algeria. (Nahar,1984) There were spiritual groups in Paris as well. One such group

brought out spiritual journal called *Revue Cosmique* whose 1907 issue carries the address: 40 Rue Beaujon. The logo used for this journal has a striking similarity with the symbol associated with Sri Aurobindo in the later days.

In France, Richards met Charles Richer, founder of the Society for Metapsychic Research (p.50). Their new circle of friends included painters Georges Picard and John Hollenberg. It was with Mirra's active support and inspiration that Richard wrote the first book, *The Living Ether* and the second one called *Les Dieux*.

In 1912, Paul Richard met Abdul Baha, the leader of the Bahai faith, at a friend's place. Richard saw in Baha's life the distinction between institutionalised religions and a wider spirituality.

III

To Pondicherry with Mirra:

On their way to Pondicherry in 1914, the Richards met the celebrated Buddhist preacher Angarika Dharmapala in Colombo, and later reaching the French colony met Sri Aurobindo. The meeting had a profound effect on all concerned. Mirra has recorded this experience in her *Prayers and Meditations*.

In April of 1914 Sri Aurobindo wrote to Motilal Roy, a disciple, very approvingly of the Richards:

He (Richard) and Madame Richard are rare examples of European yogins who have not been led away by theosophical and other aberrations. I have been in material and spiritual correspondence with them for the last four years. (Sri Aurobindo, 2006: 195)

The meeting with Sri Aurobindo resulted in the starting of the philosophical journal *Arya* to be brought out in English and French simultaneously. Sri Aurobindo's work, serialised in the journal, later appeared in book form: *The Life Divine*, *The Human Cycle*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and so on. Richard's contributions included *The Eternal Wisdom*, *The Origin and Wherefore of the World*. The Richards financed the journal. (p.68). The role of Paul Richard in *Arya* is testified by Sri Aurobindo and a number of his biographers like Rishabhchandra.

Paul's collaboration with Sri Aurobindo advanced the world vision they and Mirra shared. It upheld their faith in the spiritual evolution of Man. On

15 August 1914, the Journal was launched from 7 Rue Duplex. Its aim was two-fold: first to develop a systematic study of the 'highest problems of existence' and secondly, to create the 'formation of a vast synthesis of knowledge harmonising the diverse traditions of humanity occidental as well as oriental'. It desired to publish 'synthetic studies in speculative philosophy', translations and commentaries of ancient texts', 'Studies in Comparative Religion and 'Practical Methods of Inner Culture and Development'. (Rishabchand, 1981; rpt. 2001:383)

In the *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo, for the first time in the Pondicherry phase, collaborated in intellectual terms with some one like Paul Richard. The bilingual journal was conceived jointly with the active support and participation of Mirra. This by itself is a significant fact.

Meanwhile, World War I broke out; the French edition of *Arya* had to be suspended. In Richard's words, 'I transferred to Aurobindo the formal ownership of the magazine, although Mira and I continued to be listed as co-editors as long as the magazine survived.

Sri Aurobindo on Paul Richard:

Sri Aurobindo's assessment of Paul Richard is also conveyed in his letters to Motilal Roy. In his letter dated April 14, earlier quoted, this is what he wrote about the candidature of Richard:

Richard is not only a personal friend of mine and a brother in the yoga, but he wishes, like myself and in his own way works for the general innovation of the world by which the present European civilisation shall be replaced by a spiritual civilisation. In that change the resurrection of the Asiatic races and especially of India is an essential point... if Richard were to become the deputy for French India, that would practically mean the same thing as myself being the deputy for French India. (Sri Aurobindo:2006:195)

As it happened, Paul lost the election. Soon after that the Richards left for France although they were keen to return early to India. An opportunity soon presented itself.

As Paul recalled years later, 'one evening when I returned home, I told Mirra that the Suez Canal had been closed as a result of the German submarine warfare. Without any hesitation she replied: 'That is the sign that we must go to Japan'(p.79) Along with a travelling companion Dorothy, a follower of Abdul Baha, in London they boarded the Japanese steamer

Kamamaru. They travelled via the Cape of Good Hope, Singapore, Hong Kong and finally reached Japan.

In Japan, they met Rabindranath Tagore, James Cousins (Chatterjee, 1994:36) and others like Samuel Fleisher, the publisher-editor of a daily newspaper called *The Japan Adventurer*. Tagore wrote the preface to Paul's book *To the Nations*. The latter also met Mitsuru Toyama, Head of the dreaded Black Dragon Society whose real goal, Richard says, 'was Asian Unity and freedom and a renaissance of spiritual values.'³(p.89) By the end of the War in 1918, Richard was working on the editorial board of Okawa's new magazine *The Asian Review*.

In one sense, the Richards seem to be passing time in Japan, waiting for the War to be over. Mirra appears to be taking the key decisions. At another, however, travel here seems to forge friendships whose colonial dimensions were not sufficiently explored or assessed by Richard himself. His disapproval of the non-vegetarian Tagore, for instance, would constitute one of the many interesting aspects of the politics of friendship.

Internationalism and Pan Asian Unity:

Paul's collaboration with Japanese internationalists proved to be a fruitful chapter of his life. Mirra was a constant source of aid and inspiration. She had from the very beginning a better command over the English language and culturally far more accomplished. A declaration of racial equality was put together by their associates and was sent to President, Woodrow Wilson at the Peace Conference in Paris. Regrettably, this declaration was rejected and the rise of a pan Asian Movement led by Japan was aborted.

In Japan, Paul Richard addressed a number of Universities and fora (Address in Tokyo on 26 April 1919; Baron Goto's Magazine *Shinjidai*, Tokyo in December 1918; Annual Festival of the Do Temple in Tokyo; Tokyo June 1917; Waseda University, Tokyo 3 May, 1919) and spoke about the importance of the rise of Asia, one of the great dreams of Sri Aurobindo spelt out in his independence day message of 1947 (Sri Aurobindo, 2006: 478-480).

Translated into English, by Aurobindo Ghose, under the title *The Dawn Over Asia*, these addresses were published by Ganesh and Co., Madras in 1920 through the good offices of poet James Cousins who was a Visiting Professor at Kyoto University in Japan and was a friend of the Richards.

In this volume, Richard spoke movingly about the beginning of a new epoch in human history based on new spiritual foundations. While such tributes were genuine, they also show the manner in which the Western

spiritual traveller was turning to the East for the salvation of a materialistic West under the shadow of a destructive war.

In the prefatory note Richard wrote: 'These addresses were originally delivered in Japan and interpreted from my French into Japanese. I am indebted with deep gratitude to my great Brother, Sri Aurobindo Ghose, for their present English translation.' The note was dated October 1920, Pondicherry. In his address to the 'Students' Asiatic Union' on 3 May 1919 at Waseda University in Tokyo, Richard hailed Sri Aurobindo as 'the hero of tomorrow'. (Richard, 1920:81-82)

The appendix to this volume contained the document '*League for the Equality of Races*' (Richard, 1920: 89-97) that would wait, in a different form, for the San Francisco Conference which paved way for the United Nations Organisations.(UNO), after the cataclysmic World War II.

IV

Post Pondicherry:

It was in Pondicherry that Richard developed differences with Mirra regarding the acceptance of Sri Aurobindo, and as a result parted from her. He travelled to Adyar in Madras. (Kodandarama Rao,1969; rpt.2007)

He lived for two years in the Himalays, met Gandhi in the Ahmedabad session of the Congress in 1922, toured Sindh and Kathiawad, took a boat in Bombay, sailed to Basra, and visited Baghdad. He then crossed the Syrian desert in Haifa in Palestine and stayed for a month in the room of the Persian prophet Abdul Baha. Spending some time in Cairo, he reached France via Greece and Italy. (Upadhyaya,1951)

In 1929 Richard came to the United States on a lecture tour. On 15 May 1929 he married Linda (Ethel) Todd in New York. It was a marriage of convenience and helped him settle in the United States. With Linda's help, he published his book *The Scourge of Christ* in an English edition by Alfred Knopf in 1929. The marriage was short lived. Subsequently, 1931 he met and married Virginia Stromberg, an American woman of Swedish origin, thirty years his junior. This relationship lasted in various forms including a separation. As Michel says: 'In 1963, when he was eighty-nine, my mother took him back to her apartment in Brooklyn.' (p.109)

Richard detested passports and felt dismayed that legal barriers prevented the free flow of ideas and people across nations. That is why perhaps, his memoirs are aptly titled *Without Passport*.

Despite his many contributions to the ideal of brotherhood among men and women, and his crusading spirit for a one world free from the scourge

of war and religious strife, Paul Richard failed to receive the recognition he avidly sought for in life. He suffered from many fatal flaws. Deeply restless at heart with contradictory impulses, given to self-centred, impulsive behaviour, Richard lost as many friends and causes as he championed and espoused.

Parting from Mirra and Sri Aurobindo was the greatest blow Paul suffered. For, it was Mirra, who, above all, made a crucial difference to his life and helped him blossom. In a moment of deep remorse, nine years after he left Pondicherry, he recanted his decision to leave Sri Aurobindo, in a conversation with Dilip Kumar Roy in Nice, France in 1929 (Roy, 1950:327).

A man of mixed abilities, drawn to contraries, Paul Richard would be remembered as an internationalist and utopian thinker. In his introduction to Paul's first book *To the Nations*, published in America, Tagore celebrated the work of Richard. (Tagore,1919; rpt. American edition, 1921).

Paul Richard's life was chequered and full of vicissitudes. He shared a passionate world vision based on justice, brotherhood and equality. Few of his generation had the good fortune to meet the personalities that he did: Mirra Alfassa, Max Théon, Abdul Baha, Alexandra David Néel, James Cousins, W.W Pearson, C.F. Andrews, Angarika Dharmapal, Annie Besant, Sri Aurobindo, J.Krishnamurty, Mitsuru Toyama, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Pitirim Sorokin and others who strode the world scene.

The friendships that Paul Richard forged across continents, across political and racial barriers, were extraordinary in his own times. Aristocratic and plebian at the same time, he was at home in many circles. Deeply distrustful of organised religions, he sought out the kernel of spiritual truth underlying all faith. He was a great believer in modern science as well. It was a synthesis between science and spirituality, he thought, that could usher in the new age. And he carried out scientific experiments especially in Physics.

It must be admitted though this view of Richard, somewhat idealised, largely seen through the eyes of his admirers including his son Michel, must be balanced with the perspective of others like Mirra,⁴ who saw fatal flaws in his personality. On balance, we may be able to avoid the twin dangers of idealisation or denunciation and come to some provisional judgments.

Critique of the Western Enlightenment:

Paul Richard was an early critic of the Western Enlightenment. He forged alliances with those that felt bypassed by the dominant modernities. He made a close study of the Western, and especially the French colonial system. He exposed the dissonance between the avowed commitment of the French to Justice and the Rule of Law and the cruel policies they followed, Janus faced, in the overseas territories. He drew attention to the penal system based on the idea of revenge.

Richard underlined a new and radical conception of citizenship and sovereignty that knew no national frontiers or political barriers. At a time when ethno-centrism ruled the roost, Richard championed voices that were marginalised and dispossessed. He argued that revenge could not be the answer to social deviation. He went beyond the allegiance to organised religions and embraced the deeper affinity of the heart that binds mankind everywhere. Based on deeper realisations, his mentor, Sri Aurobindo would underline a new world vision based on freedom and equality based on spiritual foundations.

Paul Richard's fascinating narratives bring in colliding worlds and world views in dramatic terms: the urge for utopia and the reality of penal labour, the desire for Peace and the ever present scourge of war. Above all, it shows the manner in which the spiritual traveller to the East negotiated inevitably with issues of ideology and politics.

(This essay with minor changes first appeared in the India International Centre Quarterly, New Delhi, July 2012 issue. Due credits to the Editors of this journal; sincere thanks to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for the use of some of the photographs in this article; responsibility for the interpretation is entirely mine.)

Notes:

¹ See, for instance, my article : 'Rethinking Cosmopolitan Modernity: Rabindranath Tagore on Nationalism and Internationalism' in *Journal of Contemporary Thought* No.34 Winter 2011, Special Number: 'Punctuated Renewals: Rabindranath Tagore in the 21st Century'. pp.73-87 for a discussion of some of these important but now forgotten figures who promoted East-West dialogue in the first decades of the 20th Century.

² For contemporary accounts by survivors of this penal colony, see, among others, the works of the following: Belbenoit, René, 1940. *Hell on Trial*. Translated from the original French Manuscript by Preston Rambo. E.P.Dutton and Co. Reprint by Blue Ribbon Books, New York, 1941; Belbenoit, Rene.1938.Dry Guillotine: *Fifteen Years among the Living Dead*. Reprint: Berkley, 1975.Reprint: Bantam Books, 1971; Seaton, George John. *Isle of the Damned: Twenty Years in the Penal Colony of French Guyana*. Farrar, Strauss and Young, 1951. Charriere, Henry. *Papillion*

Reprint: Hart Davis Mac gibbon Ltd.1970.

For the Indian dimension of the penal experience, see, among others, the recently published: *The Tale of My Exile: Twelve Years in the Andamans*, Ed.Sachidananda Mohanty, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2011.

³ This view point has to be contrasted with the fascist character of the Black Dragon Society. Although attracted to the fabled aestheticism of the Japanese, Mirra does not appear to be blind to the growing militarism of Japan. See Sri Aurobindo's letter to a correspondent about Subhas Bose's affinity towards the Japanese during World War II: 'For if they [the Japanese] had got in, it would have been almost impossible to get them out. The Mother knows the Japanese nation well, and was positive about that', *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Himself and the Ashram*. Vol.35. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 2011.

⁴ See *The Mother's Agenda*, and also the prayer dated, 'Oiwake: September 3, 1919' in *Prayers and Meditations*, by The Mother,. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.1948; rpt.2005. Original *Prières et Méditations de la Mère*, in French, 1932.

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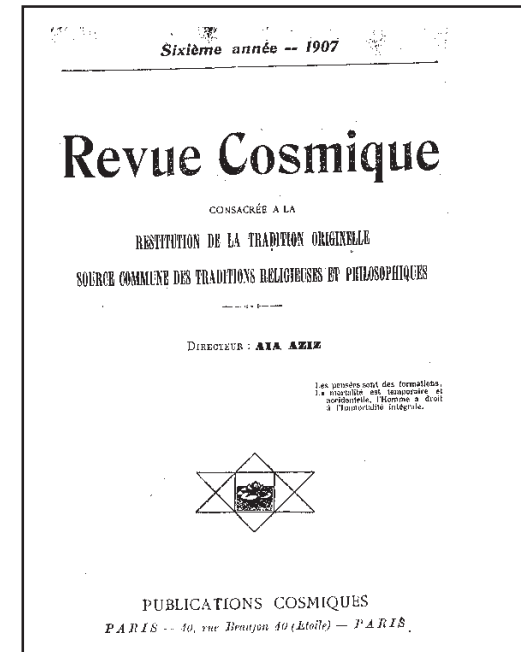
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The Devil's Island, French Guyana



James Cousins – a sketch by the Mother



Kyoto, Japan, 1919.

Professor Arabinda Basu: A Tribute

Shraddhavan



Many people around the world will be saddened to learn of the passing of Professor Arabinda Basu who, almost 96, left us on Tuesday July 3rd around 7.15 pm, from the Ashram Nursing Home where he had been under treatment for a couple of weeks. Arindam-da – as he was known to many – was named after Sri Aurobindo at his uncle's request, and came under the influence of the Master as a college student in the early 1930s. During the 1940s he was regularly visiting the Ashram for Darshan, and he received the encouragement of Sri Aurobindo for his academic career. In the 1950s he was invited to become Professor of Comparative Religion at the University of Durham in the U.K. There he was in touch with the first small group of Sri Aurobindo's followers, brought together by A.B. Purani – our friends Joy Calvert, Edith Schnapper, Morwenna Donnelly, Dick Batstone, Stella Littlewood (mother of our Martin Littlewood of AVI UK) and others. After returning from England in 1968 he settled in the Ashram for good. His sweet refined nature and scrupulous scholarship made him one of the best loved sharers of Sri Aurobindo's vision and teachings, and he was often invited to give lectures around India and abroad. He was a close friend of Nirodbaran, and the two of them used to come to Matrimandir and to Savitri Bhavan together. Arindam-da has given some wonderful talks at Savitri Bhavan, the latest in April 2009 when he shared his memories of Sri Aurobindo. Over the past three years he was becoming increasingly frail. Those who knew him will remember him with gratitude and affection, and his presence as a link with the earlier days of the Ashram will be sadly missed.

(Courtesy : Overman Foundation website, dt 9 July, 2012)

Notes On Authors

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

Amaury de Riencourt (1918-2005) belonged to a prominent aristocratic French family. He was a specialist on South Asia, USA, India, Tibet and China. In 1947, he spent five months in Tibet and wrote about "this independent nation". In 1958, on cancelling his trip to Tibet, Jawaharlal Nehru told Amaury that if Zhou Enlai visited Tibet, he would be in a greater danger than Nehru. He became a recluse spending his last years in an enchanting house overlooking Lake Geneva. Some of his leading works are:

Le Toit du monde : Tibet et Asie, translated from English by René Jouan, 1955, Éditions France-Empire.

L'œil de Śiva : la convergence du mysticisme oriental et de la science occidentale (Eye of Shiva : Converging Eastern Mysticism and Western Science), translated from English by Jacques Guiod, Interéditions, 1980, (ISBN 2729607358 et 9782729607357)

L'Âme de l'Inde (Soul of India), translated from English by Claude B. Levenson, 1985, Julliard/L'âge d'homme, (ISBN 2260004253 et 9782260004257)

Lost World - Tibet, Key to Asia, Victor Gollancz, London, 1950

Supriyo Bhattacharya is presently Associate Professor, Dept. of Economics, University of Kalyani, West Bengal. He has been on its teaching Faculty since 1984. He was former Guest-Lecturer in the Dept. of PG Business Studies in the Dept. of Commerce, Univ. of Calcutta for over two decades since 1981. He also served as a Lecturer in the Dept. of Economics at Belur Vidyamandir, Belur, Howrah, from 1983-84. He is engaged in studies on Sri Aurobindo and Tagore and has been connected with research work in various projects associated with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy in Calcutta and at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. A recipient of "Sri Aurobindo Puroshkar" from Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata, he was elected Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in June 2007. He has been the Editor of "*Srinwantu*" (a Bengali and English journal devoted to the cause of propagation of the ideas of Sri Aurobindo and Mother) published from Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata. He regularly gives talks and writes on different aspects of Sri Aurobindo's vision and other areas (including "Bauls of Bengal" and other spiritual areas) in different fora in and outside West Bengal.

Address : Praity, H.B. Town, 1st Road, (Opposite Mother Dairy), 3rd Floor, P.O.: Sodepore, North 24 Pgs., Kolkata -700110. Tel. (033) 2565-0102

Index To Authors And Articles In Śraddha, August 2011 – April 2012

Authors

Ajai R Singh	Aug.'11, p.62
Ananda Reddy	Nov.'11, p.97; Feb.'12, p.22
Anirvan, Srimat	Feb.'12, p.17; Apr.'12, p.17
Anurag Banerjee	Apr.'12, p.85
Barindra Kumar Ghose	Apr.'12, p.11
Daniel Grings	Feb.'12, p.99
Dasharathi Sengupta	Aug.'11, p.15
Debashish Banerji	Nov.'11, p.23; Feb.'12, p.60; Apr.'12, p.44
Deepali Gupta	Apr.'12, p.93
Donald Goergen	Apr.'12, p.62
Georges van Vrekhem	Aug.'11, p.131; Nov.'11, p.107
Hilary Anderson	Feb.'12, p.37
Kalpana Bidwaikar	Feb.'12, p.19
Kireet Joshi	Nov.'11, p.9; Feb.'12, p.118
Kittu Reddy	Aug.'11, p.50; Nov.'11, p.78
Larry Seidlitz	Feb.'12, p.134
Makarand Paranjape	Aug.'11, p.42
Martha SG Orton	Nov.'11, p.40
Matthijs Cornelissen	Apr.'12, p.76
Monica Gupta	Aug.'11, p.104
Nancy A Barton-Norton	Nov.'11, p.124
Neeltje Hupperts	Aug.'11, p.92
Paul Richard	Aug.'11, p.12
Pradhan, RC	Feb.'12, p.86
Prema Nandakumar	Aug.'11, p.122; Nov.'11, p.14; Feb.'12, p.48; Apr.'12, p.34
Radharaman Chakrabarti	Aug.'11, p.34
Richard Hartz	Nov.'11, p.61; Apr.'12, p.80
Sachidananda Mohanty	Aug.'11, p.110
Sampada Savardekar	Nov.'11, p.87

Sandeep Joshi	Nov.'11, p.47
Shakuntala A. Singh	Aug.'11, p.62
Shraddhavan	Feb.'12, p.151
Sri Aurobindo	Aug.'11, p.7; Nov.'11, p.7; Feb.'12, p.7; Apr.'12, p.9
Srinivasan, MS	Aug.'11, p.77
Suneet Verma	Apr.'12, p.102
Tapan Banerjee	Apr.'12, p.110
Vijai, L	Feb.'12, p.126
Vladimir Iatsenko	Apr.'12, p.13

Articles

Ancient Indian wisdom and contemporary challenges (Kireet Joshi) – Feb.'12, p.118
Aurobindo Ghosh (Paul Richard) – Aug.'11, p.12
Being Human and the Copernican principle (Georges van Vrekhem) – Nov.'11, p.107
Development of Sri Aurobindo's thought, The (Georges van Vrekhem) – Aug.'11, p.131
Dialogue between Thomas Aquinas and Sri Aurobindo (Donald Goergen) – Apr.'12, p.62
Dynamics of Indian culture, The (Radharaman Chakrabarti) – Aug.'11, p.34
Emerging concerns and procedures related to education and values: the vision of Sri Aurobindo (Neeltje Huppel) – Aug.'11, p.92
Entanglement of chaotic unity: the global age and the Auroville experiment, An (Richard Hartz) – Apr.'12, p.80
Fate and the problem of suffering (Debashish Banerji) – Apr.'12, p.44
Foundations of social sustainability, The (Srinivasan, MS) – Aug.'11, p.77
Gitanuvachan, Pt.I (Anirvan, Srimat) – Apr.'12, p.17
How to research consciousness? Suggestions for Indian psychology (Matthijs Cornelissen) – Apr.'12, p.76
Human Aspiration, The (Debashish Banerji) – Feb.'12, p.60
Humanity at the crossroads: does Sri Aurobindo offer an alternative? (Shakuntala & Ajai R Singh) – Aug.'11, p.62
Huta, 'The offered one' (Shraddhavan) – Feb.'12, p.151
Identity and difference: some reflections on Sri Aurobindo's socio-political views (Aparna Banerjee) – Aug.'11, p.27
Inayat Khan and the mystic nada (Nancy A Barton-Norton) – Nov.'11, p.124
Indian democracy, Pt.I (Kittu Reddy) – Aug.'11, p.50
Individualism, a precursor to a subjective age (Deepali Gupta) – Apr.'12, p.93
Intuition and the limits to reason: a cross-cultural study (Richard Hartz) – Nov.'11, p.61

"Is India civilised"? by Sri Aurobindo (Makarand Paranjape) – Aug.'11, p.42
Language: a means of spiritual realisation (Ananda Reddy) – Nov.'11, p.97
Mother, The (Barindra Kumar Ghose) – Apr.'12, p.11
Mother, The (Sri Aurobindo) – Feb.'12, p.7
Our ideal (Sri Aurobindo) – Aug.'11, p.7
Path, The (Sri Aurobindo) – Apr.'12, p.9
Present situation and the need to change the political system, The (Kittu Reddy) – Nov.'11, p.78
Primer of Gita, A (Daniel Grings) – Feb.'12, p.99
Prophet of nationalism and his call (Dasharathi Sengupta) – Aug.'11, p.15
Purpose of the Mother's embodiment upon earth (Kalpana Bidwaikar) – Feb.'12, p.19
Rasa theory, Bhakti and psychic enfoldment: a psychologist's perspective (Suneet Verma) – Apr.'12, p.102
Realising Sri Aurobindo's ideal law of social development: possibilities and challenges for Psychology as a discipline of study (Monica Gupta) – Aug.'11, p.104
Revisiting the Vedas in the light of the yogic experience of Sri Aurobindo (Vijai, L) – Feb.'12, p.126
Sarasvati and her Vedic symbolism (Sampada Savardekar) – Nov.'11, p.87
Savitri, Bk.1, Canto I, The Symbol dawn, Pt.2 (Debashish Banerji) – Nov.'11, p.23
Some thoughts on the Vedic godheads (Vladimir Iatsenko) – Apr.'12, p.13
Spiritual activism, spiritual passivity and integral yoga (Larry Seidlitz) – Feb.'12, p.134
Spirituality and the prison life: Sri Aurobindo and Barindra Kumar Ghose (Sachidananda Mohanty) – Aug.'11, p.110
Spiritual principles of management (Ananda Reddy) – Feb.'12, 22
Sri Aurobindo's concept of education and the Mother's contribution to it (Anurag Banerjee) – Apr.'12, p.85
Sri Aurobindo's metaphysics of the Supermind: on how to make sense of the transcendence of mind (Pradhan, RC) – Feb.'12, p.86
Sri Aurobindo's perspective on reality (Martha SG Orton) – Nov.'11, p.40
Sri Aurobindo's perspective on the four major powers of the Devi in integral yoga and East-West psychology (Hilary Anderson) – Feb.'12, p.37
Sri Aurobindo's teaching and method of yoga (Sri Aurobindo) – Nov.'11, p.7
Syncretism in Sri Aurobindo's thought (Sandeep Joshi) – Nov.'11, p.47
Two master conceptions of the Gita: Purushottama and Para-Prakriti (Kireet Joshi) – Nov.'11, p.9
Unity in diversity (Tapan Banerjee) – Apr.'12, p.110
Vande Mataram (Anirvan, Srimat) – Feb.'12, p.17
Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata in Sri Aurobindo's Savitri (Prema Nandakumar) – Aug.'11, p.122.; Nov.'11, p.14; Feb.'12, p.48; Apr.'12, p.34