

Śraddhā श्रद्धा

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(Vol.4 No.2)

24 November 2012



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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.
Savitri, 4th. rev.ed, 1993, Bk.II, CantoXIV, p.295

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Editorial

Mother once termed Sri Aurobindo's yoga, the supramental yoga, as a work of 'a unique earth-transformation'. Most people, however, view this as quite nebulous, too forbidding or impractical. The fact is that it is nothing of the sort. On the contrary, we shall see it is not only quite scientific and natural but also in a way very simple. Let us hear what Nolini Kanta Gupta, the 'spirit-born son' of Sri Aurobindo, has to say on this in his own inimitable, lucid style.

'Sri Aurobindo's yoga is in the direct line of Nature's own yoga. Nature has a yoga which she follows unfailingly and inevitably – for it is her innermost law of being. Yoga means, in essence, a change or transformation of consciousness, a heightening and broadening of consciousness which is effected by communion or union or identification with a higher and vaster consciousness.

This process of a developing consciousness in Nature is precisely what is known as Evolution. It is the bringing out and fixing of a higher and higher principle of consciousness, hitherto involved and concealed behind the veil, in the earth consciousness as a dynamic factor in Nature's manifest working. Thus, the first stage of evolution is the status of inconscient Matter, of the lifeless physical elements; the second stage is that of the semi-conscious life in the plant, the third that of the conscious life in the animal, and finally the fourth stage, where we stand at present, is that of the embodied self-conscious life in man'. (*Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, 1989, 3rd ed.pbk, p.8)

It would be irrational and illogical to suppose that 'the course of evolution has ... come to a stop. The next stage, Sri Aurobindo says, which nature envisages and is labouring to bring out and establish is the life now superconscious to us, embodied in a still higher type of created being, that of the superman or god-man. The principle of consciousness which will determine the nature and build of this new being is a spiritual principle beyond the mental principle which man now incarnates: it may be called the Supermind or Gnosis' (Ibid) which, in Sri Aurobindo's words, is in effect the 'Wisdom-Power-Light-Bliss of God by which the Divine knows and upholds and governs and enjoys the universe'. (*Essays Human And Divine*, 1994, p.384). This 'supramental yoga is at once an ascent and a descent of the Godhead into the embodied nature. The ascent demands a one-centred all-gathering aspiration of soul and mind and life and

body upward, the descent a call of the whole being towards the infinite and eternal Divine'. However, 'Man cannot by his own effort make himself more than man, but he can call down the divine Truth and its power to work in him. A descent of the Divine Nature can alone divinise the human receptacle. Self-surrender to a supreme transmuting Power is the key-word of the yoga. ... The first word of the supramental yoga is surrender; its last word also is surrender'. (Ibid, pp.382-83, 385) But what kind of a surrender and what are the conditions? 'A total surrender, an exclusive self-opening to the divine influence, a constant and integral choice of the Truth and rejection of the falsehood, these are the only conditions made. But these must be fulfilled entirely, without reserve, without any evasion or pretence, simply and sincerely down to the most physical consciousness and its workings' (Ibid, p.391) for 'Supernature ... is in every way our aim in Yoga'. (Ibid, p.120)

What are the initial first steps that one takes for this work of 'unique earth-transformation?' The Mother in her usual, clear, simple and direct way lays down some intensely practical guidelines.

'When in your heart and thought you will make no difference between Sri Aurobindo and me, when to think of Sri Aurobindo will be to think of me and to think of me will mean to think of Sri Aurobindo inevitably, when to see one will mean inevitably to see the other, like *one and the same Person*, — then you will know that you begin to open to the supramental force and consciousness. (CWM, vol.13, p.33, 4 March, 1958)

When matter for the present issue of **Sraddha** had been finalised, we received news from Auroville of the passing away of Georges van Vrekhem on 31 August following a cardiac arrest. Georges was ailing and had been a heart patient for over 20 years. A voracious reader and a prolific writer, Georges was a true Aurobindonian to the core, a devoted child of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and one of the few exegetes of their teachings. Among his many publications, the two that stand out most are *Beyond Man, the life and work of Sri Aurobindo* and *The Mother*, which, according to the late Amal Kiran, can be considered as two of the best books that have been written on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. He was a close personal friend and I will miss him sorely as would the entire Aurobindonian community in the Ashram, Auroville and indeed worldwide.

We are grateful to Carel B Thieme, editor of *Auroville Today*, for giving us access to the obituary appearing in its Sep'12 issue, no.278 to be reproduced in this issue. Our special thanks to Oxford University Press, New York, for permitting us to reprint the paper by Garfield and Nalini Bhusan, which forms a chapter in the book *Indian philosophy in English from Renaissance to Independence*, published by them. We are indebted to *Mother India* for its

permission to reprint Amal Kiran's editorial appearing in its Nov.1951 number entitled *The Last Embodied Darshan* and also to the Clear Ray Trust which has the sole copyright for all books by Amal Kiran, as this writing is one of the concluding articles in his book *India and the World-Scene*. We acknowledge with thanks Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust's permission to reprint extracts from Sri Aurobindo's book *Essays Human and Divine*, the Mother's *Collected Works*, vol.13, *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, vol.3, and the photograph of Sri Aurobindo taken from the Ashram catalogue of photos. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgement and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

Finally, a few omissions in the last number for which we offer our sincere regrets. A few words were inadvertently left out of the Mother's Invocation to Sri Aurobindo inscribed on the Samadhi.

In the first line maître should have been Maître. In the next line tant should have been followed by the words fait pour nous, Toi qui as tant. In the penultimate line, n'oublions should have been n'oublions. Our grateful thanks to Ravi of *Mother India* for pointing out these errors. We also apologise for missing out on the name of Sm. Kalyani Bose, who translated Anirvan's *Gitanuvachan*, Pts 3&4 from the original Bengali.

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श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñānaṁ

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Cover : *Country of the Mind* by Giles Herdman

The Law of the Way

Sri Aurobindo

First be sure of the call and of thy soul's answer. For if the call is not true, not the touch of God's powers or the voice of his messengers, but the lure of thy ego, the end of thy endeavour will be a poor spiritual fiasco or else a deep disaster.

And if not the soul's fervour, but only the mind's assent or interest replies to the divine summons or only the lower life's desire clutches at some side attraction of the fruits of Yoga-power or Yoga-pleasure or only a transient emotion leaps like an unsteady flame moved by the intensity of the Voice or its sweetness or grandeur, then too there can be little surety for thee in the difficult path of Yoga. The outer instruments of mortal man have no force to carry him through the severe ardours of this spiritual journey and Titanic inner battle or to meet its terrible or obstinate ordeals or nerve him to face and overcome its subtle and formidable dangers. Only his spirit's august and steadfast will and the quenchless fire of his soul's invincible ardour are sufficient for this difficult transformation and this high improbable endeavour.

Imagine not the way is easy; the way is long, arduous, dangerous, difficult. At every step is an ambush, at every turn a pitfall. A thousand seen or unseen enemies will start up against thee, terrible in subtlety against thy ignorance, formidable in power against thy weakness. And when with pain thou hast destroyed them, other thousands will surge up to take their place. Hell will vomit its hordes to oppose thee and enring and wound and menace; Heaven will meet thee with its pitiless tests and its cold luminous denials. Thou shalt find thyself alone in thy anguish, the demons furious in thy path, the Gods unwilling above thee. Ancient and powerful, cruel, unvanquished and close and innumerable are the dark and dreadful Powers that profit by the reign of Night and Ignorance and would have no change and are hostile. Aloof, slow to arrive, far-off and few and brief in their visits are the Bright Ones who are willing or permitted to succour. Each step forward is a battle. There are precipitous descents, there are unending ascensions and ever higher peaks upon peaks to conquer. Each plateau climbed is but a stage on the way and reveals endless heights beyond it.

Each victory thou thinkest the last triumphant struggle proves to be but the prelude to a hundred fierce and perilous battles ... But thou sayest God's hand will be with me and the Divine Mother near with her gracious smile of succour? And thou knowest not then that God's grace is more difficult to have or to keep than the nectar of the Immortals or Kuvera's priceless treasures? Ask of His chosen and they will tell thee how often the Eternal has covered his face from them, how often he has withdrawn from them behind his mysterious veil and they have found themselves alone in the grip of Hell, solitary in the horror of the darkness, naked and defenceless in the anguish of the battle. And if his presence is felt behind the veil, yet is it like the winter sun behind clouds and saves not from the rain and snow and the calamitous storm and the harsh wind and the bitter cold and the grey of a sorrowful atmosphere and the dun weary dullness. Doubtless the help is there even when it seems to be withdrawn, but still is there the appearance of total night with no sun to come and no star of hope to pierce the blackness. Beautiful is the face of the Divine Mother, but she too can be hard and terrible. Nay, then, is immortality a plaything to be given lightly to a child or the divine life a prize without effort or the crown for a weakling? Strive rightly and thou shalt have; trust and thy trust shall in the end be justified; but the dread Law of the Way is there and none can abrogate it.

(Reproduced from Sri Aurobindo's book *Essays Divine and Human* published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1994 with the kind permission of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust)

Sri Aurobindo: The Recluse Of Pondicherry

(As I Understand Him.)

Barindra Kumar Ghose

To write and express what Sri Aurobindo and his present spiritual mission stand for is a presumption on my part, because it cannot truly be done except by himself. What we can do is to give a mental idea and outline of the truth which he represents. To use ordinary and accepted phraseology in doing it will be misleading. Like the other religious and spiritual giants of India he has hardly any mission to preach. He has rather a Truth to unfold and manifest, he sits there silent in his plentitude and glory actually living that truth so that seekers may come, realise and attain.

In order to understand him we must first divest our mind of all the customary chain of ideas and association which our political obsessions bring. The political Aurobindo whom we knew has ceased to exist. Call after call from his country went forth to him to join the battle of independence waging in India for her political liberation. The first Rishi of Bande Mataram, the first expounder of the ideal of complete independence, the first true prophet of Nationalism and passive resistance was fondly expected to come forward with his newly accumulated power and put his hand to the wheel of Swaraj. Devadas Gandhi, Lala Lajpat Rai and Deshbandhu went one after another to draw him out of his seclusion and failed. The great world-poet Rabindranath went to seek and receive from him the true message of India to the west and to humanity, and came away baffled. We may as well expect the silent sunlit peaks of the Himalayas to be vocal. We may as well dream of the Sun-god coming down and condescending to act as a magnified electric arc for our gaudy bazar of cheap commodities of life.

Even now wherever one goes the only question one has to answer is, “Will Aurobindo come back?” In spite of Sri Aurobindo’s continued silence and complete dissociation from active politics this fond hope and delusion of his return seem to persist in the minds of his countrymen. Some of them who have a strong political obsession to the exclusion of everything else nurse a grievance

against him for not taking up politics again. Obsession is obsession — blind and unreasoning. For them my answer is that Sri Aurobindo — your political leader — is dead and gone or at least has changed out of recognition. He will never come back, not in the sense you fondly persist in expecting.

RE-VALUATION

There has come in all his outlook of life such a complete orientation that the very basis of life has been shifted and for him all the standards and values of things have, as a result, undergone a thorough and profound change. Human growth always means that. When you really grow, you grow out of the old into the new. The growth is either gradual and perceptible or swift and incalculable as the case may be. So far as ordinary vital and physical man is concerned his mental and intellectual growth comes very slowly and its stages are perceptible to our comprehension. The horizon and the perspective of life remaining the same, there comes a resetting of values and a comparative widening of outlook.

But the case of greater personalities is quite different. There the change is so swift and comprehensive that the stages overlap each other and are rushed through in their intensive pace and there is a sense of being swung out of one’s orbit. For such as us it is next to impossible to grasp and realise what it means to be lifted so to say, out of ourselves, and begin to re-live life from a completely new plane of consciousness. A rebirth like that comes only in the life of rare personalities like Buddha or Ramkrishna when centuries of deeper human evolutions are crowded together, re-lived and transcended in the brief span of a few years. Naturally they become the centre of a new civilisation, the seed of a new culture.

It is not strange then that the country does not know the present Sri Aurobindo of poised calm and inner illumination, standing apparently aloof from all that is signified our outer existence and ardent national aspirations. It is not strange either when they in their ignorance fail to comprehend this poise of severe detachment and mistake it for the callous apathy of a sannyasin to things mundane. Desire-driven as we are, having no clear vision and a true sense of proportion of things we naturally misjudge him. Our baffled desires cry aloud against anything which does not lend itself to their fulfilment. We begin to dislike what does not serve our purpose, and dub it either useless or selfish.

A cobbler when asked what was the best thing in the world said, “Nothing like leather.” A child-mind wrapped up in his doll does not comprehend the soul-lifting beauty of the dawn or the call of snowy peaks against a dark sky. Because the sublime language of the dawn and the peaks do not fit into that child’s world

of petty joys and restless desires, it cannot be said that the dawn and the rest of it are redundant and meaningless. That is real wisdom which can rise to a great height and from there know the right place of each and every thing in the scheme of life and their interrelation.

To understand Sri Aurobindo of supreme detachment and perfectly self-poised dynamism, you must try and understand how such higher power really acts. Shallow people only call activity that which is in restless movement to the physical eye. They do not understand power in static state and the apparently quiet and far-reaching effect of its silent urge. Only in the world of matter and its superficial activity are quick and intense developments seen, because there you are faced with force energised or in manifestation. Behind matter, in the realm of power there is hardly any movement manifest to the naked physical eye, an active dynamo surcharged with power is more silent and quieter than a huge pile of machinery driven by its electrical energy and intensely active in a whirr of hundred wheels, belts and shafts.

If that is so in the material plane of physical energy how much more so is it in the subtler plane of the spirit? You cannot see great cosmic energy, and yet its panorama of infinite play is seen everywhere in nature. You cannot visualise the silent and yet mighty pull of the sun and the earth and yet it is also there. It keeps an incalculable number of heavenly bodies in swift and ordered movement. You cannot feel the impalpable life-urge in the spring and yet it quickly clothes entire nature in a green mantle of foliage and multicoloured flowers. You cannot see the sea of thoughts and emotions in the mind of a Lenin or a Rabindranath and yet it helps to mould the human world anew.

Power is not always visible. In its deeper and subtler planes it is less and less manifest and yet more and more potent, cosmic and creative. In that sense, energy let loose and in the process of being spent up is weak both in potency and in volume. There is such a thing as an intensity of weakness which often looks very much like power. Our restless desire-driven being is death in motion, and the self-poised calm yogi is, in comparison, life held in reserve. In order to understand how Sri Aurobindo and his like act you must yourself be quiet and psychically conscious.

INDIA'S AWAKENING

India is waking up from her age-long sleep and along with the process of awakening the Truth which she stands for is unfolding petal by petal. That Truth is multiple and many-faced like a thousand-petalled lotus. Her spirituality, her art, her poetry, the wonderful change that is being wrought in her politics, all

these are some of the facts of her deeper reality — her soul. Whatever you do you cannot efface a single aspect of this many-sided Truth, because the integral soul of India is working out her complete unfolding, producing her harmoniously co-ordinated symphony of life. Being obsessed by one aspect you may try to smother the others, but you will only succeed perhaps in changing their forms and bring about a new orientation in the process of manifestation. Stop them you cannot.

In order to understand India you must not only understand Rammohan, Bankim Chandra, Vivekananda, Rabindranath, Abanindra, Nandalal, Tilak, Deshbandhu and Mahatma Gandhi but you must ultimately try and understand Sri Aurobindo. The soul of India which gave the Vedas and the Upanishads to the world, which gave Shankaracharya, Buddha, Sri Chaitanya to humanity has become all the richer and more complex in the centuries that have rolled by. It has grown both in height, width, richness and multiplicity. If you fail to understand Sri Aurobindo you miss the key to India's Truth of Life from which her culture proceeds. If you try to understand him in the terms of your own limitations and prejudices you miss no less the great message of the world-mother about to be delivered to Humanity.

(The above article which first appeared in *The Statesman*, 29 August 1933, has been reproduced here with thanks and acknowledgement to Overman Foundation)

The Last Embodied “Darshan”

Amal Kiran



November 24 has come again — one of the darshan days on which Sri Aurobindo used to appear before a pilgrim-public of hundreds passing in turn and receiving the benediction of his calm yet piercing gaze. Last year it was the final occasion on which, side by side with the Mother, he was seen in the body. After that, the public saw him only as he lay in state eleven days later, with his imperial eyes shut upon the world to which he had brought the vision of a new life victorious over the age long ills of humanity.

The final living darshan is etched unforgettably on the minds of all disciples. For it was a sovereign act of grace. Sri Aurobindo was known by many to have been seriously affected on a sudden with some bodily disorder. The disease was, of course, symbolic of a process to which he had given his sanction as part of the spiritual fight waged by him against the powers that had held physical

man under their sway. But it was no mock difficulty assumed in the course of a demonstration of divine power. When a spiritual genius is bent on transforming completely the condition of man on earth, he does not play-act: he takes up in dead earnest and in concrete actuality the whole range of human problems — mental, vital, physical. So the renal disorder accepted and suffered by Sri Aurobindo was genuinely acute and fraught with the most dangerous possibilities. To deal with them perfect rest was required. But Sri Aurobindo, both in order to answer the need of his followers and in order to dispel whatever defeatism might invade those who did not know what was happening behind the scenes, sat as on every darshan day — tranquil and august, with the Mother radiantly smiling beside him.

No sign did he show of the grave trouble through which he was passing. But there was one difference on this day from the usual darshan. As time went on, word travelled round that people should hurry. They were requested not to linger at all in the Master's presence. They had to move fast before him, have but a brief instant of his regard so as not to prolong the period of his continuous sitting posture. Two or three times the doors of the darshan room were closed for a short interval. There was, however, no shirking of the task of letting every disciple and visitor meet those benedictory eyes.

Those who went in early for the darshan were lucky enough to have the customary standing-time. The present writer cannot be sufficiently grateful for the good fortune of having been among them. As he slowly went up the stairs in a queue, breathing the holy atmosphere that is especially intense during the darshan days and feeling with every step upward an increasing sense of what he can only call the luminous universality of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the all-embracing power and love of a limitless spiritual Being that had put forth two individual focuses, as it were, of Its eternal Truth-Consciousness, he could not remember that for a week or so before this occasion Sri Aurobindo had been rumoured to be going through a severe physical crisis. And as he reached the top of the stairway and, from the outer end of the darshan-hall, caught sight of the Mother and the Master seated as if in a timeless sculpture of serene compassion, the day joined all those wonderful days in the past when he had stood or knelt before his spiritual parents and had realised in concentrated richness the new-birth they had given him from the moment when, twenty-three years ago, he had been accepted in the Ashram. The normality, so to speak, of the super-normal seemed all the more unbroken.

There, as ever, was Sri Aurobindo, with his majestic countenance the colour of pale gold, his thin silvery beard and his mane of long white hair. One elbow resting on the arm of his seat, one hand placed upon his thigh, the whole body a

picture of powerful ease, he sat gazing out as if towards glorious horizons for humanity that humanity itself could not yet vision from its grope at the foot of the Aurobindonian Himalaya. Imperturbable he looked, while the Mother was, as usual, most graciously attentive to every shade of the passing moment. With her expression of sweet intimacy she was taking away whatever strain the incoming people might feel on approaching the Master on such rare occasions in the year.

Even as the writer drew near, nothing uncommon was visible to hint in any distressing way the strange event that was to occur in less than a fortnight. But one uncommonness marked the occasion to render peculiarly blissful this last darshan. The Mother leaned towards Sri Aurobindo and softly mentioned the name of him who was offering his salutation. Immediately Sri Aurobindo began to smile. It was a smile of supreme kindness, whose meaning was understood only later when he had left his body. On a back-look it seemed to have held a royal appreciation of all the little toils done with the pen in his dear name and also a vast beneficence assuring help for all future to one who had been in the habit of depending almost helplessly on him for inspiration.

The inner assistance has not ceased to be felt. Always the touch from within is ready as before and a wide store of thought and word is inwardly perceived to be waiting above the mind as if in Sri Aurobindo's masterful hands, to come down at his sanction as in the years when the call used to go to his embodied Light in a room in the Ashram. That smile shines out through the veil of so-called death. And like it the whole Aurobindonian power is at work, and today's darshan will be charged with it as on the day we last saw him beside the Mother.

November 24 is known as the Day of Victory, for, on it, Sri Aurobindo had the experience which promised complete fulfilment of his vision. It is significant that the last living darshan he granted was precisely on this day and in spite of grave obstacles. He declared through the occasion that his life was victorious, no matter what the appearance soon after. And the declaration was even verbal and explicit, for the sentence culled from his writings and published as a message on that day ran: "The Supramental is a truth, and its advent is, in the very nature of things, inevitable."

(This was Amal Kiran's editorial in the November 1951 issue of *Mother India*, and is one of the concluding articles in the book *India and the World-Scene*. The sole copyright for all books by Amal Kiran rests with the Clear Ray Trust.)

Gitanuvachan – Parts 5 & 6

Srimat Anirvan

Question:

In the 2nd sloka of 5th Chapter, we get, 'Karma Yoga is preferable to Karma Sannyasa'. Why did the Lord say that? Was Arjuna's dejection or the feeling of detachment or inclination for sannyasa a general trend in the then society? But we find a glimpse of an exact opposite kind of mental state in Isopanishad, where the injunction is to live a healthy life for hundred years.

Answer:

There is a historical foundation for the conflict between Karma Yoga and Karma Sannyasa Yoga. Karma Sannyasa or the doctrine of Non-Action (Ch.II, sl.47; Ch.VI, sl.1) is followed by the school of Munis (Muni Dharma) and Karma Yoga by the Rishis (Rishi Dharma). Both Munis and Rishis were Aryas. But the Munis were non-Vedic and the Rishis were followers of the Vedas. In spite of being critical about the ways of Vedas (Ch.II, sls. 42-46), the Gita basically follows the path of the Vedas (Ch. XV, sl.15). Therefore, even after accepting the limited utility of Karma Sannyasa, the Gita has put stress on the Karma Yoga. Sri Krishna has already accounted for that as follows:

- (1) No one can sustain even for a moment without working, even if one does not want to
- (2) Prakriti would make him work (Ch.III, sl.5).
- (3) Without work life will not continue (Ch.III, sl.8).
- (4) Action is to be performed for the collective good of the society, (*lokasamgraha*) just as the Lord Himself does or the royal Rishis like king Janaka had done earlier (Ch.III, sl. 23-26).
- (5) That Karma is the cause of bondage is a wrong notion, because action performed as a yajna can never be the cause of bondage (Ch.III, cl.9), rather it is a way to liberation.

(6) In support of that, he has explicitly said towards the end, 'The urge for Karma is coming from the all-pervading Being' (Ch. XVIII, sl. 46).

In addition, he has also mentioned, that no one can attain the state of ultimate

immobility by just giving up action. All actions have flaws; yet, a man can reach the state of blissful immobility by performing action in an unattached way. (Ch.III, sl.4; Ch XVIII, sl.48 ,49). A hint of this conflict between Karma Sannyasa and Karma Yoga can be found even in Rik Samhita.

One of the main centres where the theory of Karma Sannyasa flourished was in Keekat or present Bihar. There the teachings of Gautama Buddha and some Jain Tirthankars were predominant. They were more in accordance with the Munis than the Rishis. The root of the conflict between the followers of Sankhya philosophy supported by the Brahma Sutra and by Vedanta is based upon the difference of opinion between the two paths of the Munis and the Rishis. Sri Krishna wanted to unify the two. His instruction is, “Do not give up action, but act as a non-doer, without expectation for results and considering all action as my work”. This is Karma Yoga, proclaiming the singular superiority of the Gita.

Question:

In the 5th sloka of the 5th Chapter it is said, “Whichever state can be attained by Samkhya is attainable by Yoga too.” How can the followers of Samkhya and the followers of Yoga reach the same state? Isn’t Kapila’s Samkhya philosophy being referred to here? How can the viewpoint of theist Patanjali and the atheist theory of Samkhya have the same goal? How can “Samkhya and Yoga are the same” be possible?

Answer:

The Gita has not used the words ‘Samkhya’ and ‘Yoga’ in the traditional sense of the terms. The prevalent theory that the philosophy of Samkhya is atheist and that of Yoga is monistic, is applicable in Samkhya Sutra and Yoga Sutra. There we get the logical presentation of the Sutras. There are, along with logic, a lot of debating, refuting views, intellectual fencing (especially in Samkhya), which do not fit in either with the demand nor with the experience of a devotee. The Samkhya and Yoga, that Gita has referred to, have been backed by both Sruti and Smriti. It is a kind of superfluous attribution that because there is the reference to God in Yoga, therefore it is a theistic philosophy. Yoga Sutra is a scripture that can be universally applied. Since God is universally accepted in all methods of worship, Patanjali had to make a place for him while giving a scientific description of sadhana. But it is also to be noted that his God is the Purusha, expressible only by Omkara (*Om*), He can be perceived only beyond duality. Patanjali has never mentioned him as the Creator. According to him, it is not known whether creation of the whole universe is a part of his Karma, but surely being a guru is his Eternal Karma.

Sri Krishna has explicitly said at the very beginning what he meant by Samkhya

and Yoga by referring to them as Samkhya Buddhi and Yoga Buddhi. Knowledge of an Imperishable Reality, ‘by which everything is covered’ (*Yena sarvam idam tatam* Ch.II, sl.17 & Ch.XVIII, sl.46) is Samkhya Buddhi. As a result of understanding, this one becomes serene and tranquil (Ch.II, sls.30/31), goes beyond duality, becomes firmly established in that Reality without regard for gain or loss and sorrow or pleasure and attains one’s own self. (Ch.II,sl.45). That is Yoga Buddhi. Having Yoga Buddhi is to be stationed in that Samkhya Buddhi and work with detachment, being always present there (Ch.II, sl.48). One established in Samkhya is established in Equality. To apply this equality in life is Buddhi Yoga (Ch.II, sls. 47-50). As the ultimate end of Samkhya is to rest in the Immutable, all-pervading Reality, so the ultimate end of Yoga is to be established in a state of Silence beyond the cycles of birth and death.(Ch.II, sl.51).

(Note: In short, the knowledge of the Ultimate and all-pervading Reality is Samkhya Buddhi and to manifest That in everyday thought and action is Yoga Buddhi).

The word Samkhya means Knowledge in its totality and it is complete in and perfected by Yoga. One can acquire Samkhya Buddhi in samadhi attained in solitude but its firmness is tested in its application in awakened state. That is the samadhi of the *Sthithaprajna* (Ch.II, sl.54), in whom Samkhya and Yoga have been merged into one. Sri Krishna is effectuating the fierce events of Kurukshetra, with the support of the heroism derived from the Samadhi of a *Sthitaprajna*.

Question:

“*Swabhavastu Pravartate*” — (It is nature that leads to activity). What is the inner meaning of this (Ch.V, sl.14)? The Lord creates neither the relation between cause and effect, nor the sense of doer, nor the action. The impressions carried from previous births, born out of ignorance from time immemorial, under the divine rule, create the sense of doer. Even while understanding the meaning of it, the confusion still remains. ‘By nature’, what am I to understand by that? Who creates nature, Jiva or Iswara? The Lord is beyond all. If that be so, what is his action? What do we get by analysing nature? If the mastery lies with nature, then what is the necessity of accepting divine lordship? Please explain the mystery of this sloka in detail.

Answer:

The expression, ‘*Swabhavastu Pravartate*’ is in accordance with Samkhya. The Purusha in Samkhya is not a creator. He ‘does not create’. Nobody creates. Creation continues by itself. According to Samkhya terminology, that is a part of the eternal evolution of Prakriti. The outcome of individual nature is a product

of that too. An organised play of the three gunas is going on eternally. This might result in bondage as well as in liberation. Each Jiva follows the path according to its individual and egoistic nature. This is the working of his nature. From that come out the senses of a doer, of action and of the resultant enjoyment of action.

But the Lord, or the all-pervading yet independent Purusha, who resides as *Pravu* (Ch. V, sl.14) or as *Bibhu* (Ch.V, sl.15), in the heart of a Jiva, is not affected by the enjoyment of the Jiva. When the Jiva realises that unaffected Purusha, he also transforms into Him or becomes one with Him. There remains no more any connection with the activities of nature. Whatever has to happen is happening. He is watching as a seer.

To attain this unattached state of the Purusha is the first step of *vijnana*. Note that the Gita has not used the term 'Iswara' or Lord here. As a matter of fact, the Iswara, residing in the cave of heart drives the whole universe of created beings mechanically with the help of his Maya (Ch. XVIII, sl. 61). In that case, then, are there two Lords? No, that is not what it is. The Lord is One and only One, but there are two aspects of him. As Iswara, he does or gets done everything and yet as the unattached Purusha, he does nothing (cf. Ch.IV, sl.13), there the Lord is non-doer even after doing everything). Both these aspects can dwell in him simultaneously, even though they are self-contradictory. Similarly, when we act stationed in Yoga, we 'do not act while acting' and again 'act while not acting'. Thus we become '*Kritshnakarmakrit*' – doer of action in its totality (Ch.IV, sl.18).

This condition cannot be conceived unless one reaches the *vijnanabhumi*, beyond Mind. Mind is ever confused. Either it is a doer (and at that time not a non-doer) or a non-doer (and at that time not a doer). How can one be both a doer and a non-doer simultaneously is beyond its perception. But should the same theory be applied to the Lord?

Say, I am a doer and you are a non-doer. There are a lot of doers and non-doers in the society. But they are all in the Lord. Therefore through them the Lord is simultaneously doer and non-doer. But can we conceive that with the mind?

Now, action is in universe and non-action is beyond universe. The Law of Cause and Consequence in Nature is only within the boundary of creation. But the Master is not limited by the Nature. The universe rests only on a fragmentation of his Totality (Ch.X, sl. 42). In the language of the Vedas, one-fourth of him contains the manifested universe and the rest three-fourths hold the eternal effulgence, where there is neither doing, nor work, nor any result of work. And the most astounding part of the truth is that this Supreme Way of the Lord is

also deeply imbedded in here too. Rather we can say that because he is completely Void in his *Swarupa*, that is why the one-fourth part of him is overflowing with the ecstasy of creation into that effulgent Void. This is the mystery of creation, mystery of life and mystery of sadhana.

Now I can answer your question. Like good and evil, all contradictory terms are expressions of the duality of mind. In the philosophy of One or Adwaita, there is no such word as good or evil. There is only vibration of Power. This vibration came down to the world of duality according to the Divine Will. Therefore the propensity of all activities is coming from him. Strangely enough, as the light of divine freedom falls on the consciousness of Jiva, the Jiva thinks "I am God". We name this thinking 'egoism'. As long as human nature is under the control of lower nature, the Jiva thinking 'I am the doer' selects the mode of action according to the urge of the lower nature. As a result, he suffers both for apparent good and/or evil. Suffering leads to his urge for freedom from suffering. Then he searches for God.

I have already mentioned that there are two aspects of the divine working. He is a doer as well as a non-doer. Jiva can embrace either or both of these aspects. Either he can be a complete non-doer like the Lord (this is the Samkhya Buddhi of the Gita), or he might as well be the doer in spite of being a non-doer, and that, too, is like the Lord (this is the Yoga Buddhi). The Gita has mentioned that he can attain liberation in both.

Now we can say that the workings of individual nature, following the principle of non-action, lead to the evolution of Nature. This is continued from time immemorial – just like the rotation of the wheel of an 'escalator' (word used by Sri Aurobindo). The wheel is rotating eternally. You might be caught into that or you might not, if you are at the centre of the wheel (*Chakranavi*). Again, you can be the master of the wheel too (*Chakravarty*), but that comes much later. When you are caught, you would feel as if the rotation of the wheel and working of the nature are taking places because of you. This is half-truth; apparently, the working of nature does ensue from you as per your necessity but in a subtler sense, and that is also according to Divine Will.

You can accept the importance of Nature or of the eternal evolution of Prakriti and easily take the Lord out of the equation. In that case you are just an unattached observer of Prakriti. This too can lead to liberation. But this does not include one of the ultimate gratifications of sadhana, that comes in the next stage when we see that he is the One turning on the machine of Prakriti and I keep on working as his instrument. Then on the one hand I am 'doing' and on the other, because He is making me do, I am 'not doing'.

Question:

What is the significance of the expression, ‘see equally’ in the ‘wise men see all equally’ (Ch.V, sl.18)? The wise men look at a Brahmin who is an adept in learning and humility, a person born in the lowest caste, a cow, an elephant or a dog with equal eye. ‘Those who are steadfast in equality’. ‘The equal Brahman is beyond all faults’. Equality has been highly commended (Ch.V, sls.18-19) in the Gita. What is the way or what kind of sadhana is needed to achieve and to maintain equality? Isn’t the feeling of equality the same as Brahmic feeling? Can a sadhaka attain equality without attaining *Akash-Bhavna*?

Answer:

Equal perception has very lucidly been explained in (Ch. VI, sl.29) the Gita. One who himself being united with the Self, sees the self in all and all in the Self, has the vision of equality. To see all in the Self and self in all is the same as seeing all in Him and Him in all. This has been mentioned in the next sloka and a detailed description of the sadhana that leads to the vision of Self has been illustrated in the few slokas on equality (Ch.VI, sl 24-28). The bottom line is that you have to fix the mind in Self and should not think of anything else. This way, once you reach the tranquillity, the ultimate ecstasy born out of Brahmic touch will automatically be attained. And there will bloom lotuses of Light in the Cosmic Void. When the yogi comes back on earth from that state, he sees equality everywhere. He will see everyone and everything like multi-coloured bubbles in the ocean of Self. A Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog or a person of the lowest caste — all will be like the shimmering surf in the overflowing ocean of ecstasy in the tranquil heart of a yogi. There will be no discrimination like the Brahmin is higher, whereas the Chandala and his dog are lower; or the wealth of cow of a Brahmin is greater than that of elephants of a Kshatriya.

But he would never create confusion among ignorant people by bringing equality in behaviour. Dharma does not mean that the equality in perception should lead to equality in behaviour. Equality in perception is the quality of the Purusha and the quality of Prakriti is to promote the appropriate discriminative conduct, so that the Purusha can evolve in all. When that happens, even a Chandala will transform to a twice-born, but the second birth will take place as a result of following his swabhava and swadharma. Otherwise, there will be a chaotic situation due to intermixture of dharma.

Question:

When we read (Ch.V, sl.22), we feel that all enjoyment due to the contact of senses with the sense objects gives birth to suffering. This contact is but natural. What, then, is the way to withdraw mind? ‘One, who is able to endure the upsurge of desire and anger’ (Ch.V, sl.23) what does this mean? Does endurance

imply not to act under any impulse or passion?

Answer:

The answer to your question is just before and after that particular sloka. There are two kinds of contact — one outer which has been referred to as perception through senses (*Matrasparsha*) (Ch.II, sl.14) and the other is called the Brahmic contact (*Brahmasparsha*) (Ch.VI, sl.28). In both, there is a connection between senses and sense objects. As a result of that, in our mind controlled by ‘nature’, there arise attachment and aversion which has been termed in Gita as ‘*vyavasthita*’, meaning pre-determined or mechanical. Nature has already decided what kind of sense contacts would create happiness and what would create unhappiness. The Gita asks us not to be controlled by this arrangement of nature (Ch.III, sl.34), meaning not to be affected by attachment or aversion. For that, cultivation of forbearance is mandatory. Patience or forbearance has been mentioned earlier too in reference to perception by senses (Ch.II, sl.14), where it is clearly indicated that perceptions come and go, one should not be involved with them.

But remember, it is very hard to acquire patience. It is almost impossible until the mind goes inward. The followers of Samkhya philosophy say that patience proves that there is such a Person inside us, who is beyond happiness and grief. And that is the Atman. Therefore, if we can remain unattached, even when the objects hit our senses, we can be firmly established in our Self or Atman by yoga. The Upanishad calls this state, ‘meeting with Knowledge-Self or Jnana Atman’. As the experience deepens, the sense of expansion of Self comes automatically. Then the mind, established in Self (Atman) gets established in Brahman. It ceases to be termed as mind and the Atman, established in Brahman, becomes known as *Mahan Atman* or Great Atman by Upanishad, and enjoys the eternal ecstasy in itself. The touch of sense objects arouses the touch of Brahman. To quote the Vaishnavas, ‘Wherever the sight falls, only Krishna appears’. ‘This is bad, that is enjoyable; happiness lies here, sadness there’ — this kind of duality ceases to exist. But that does not mean that the senses stop working. Radiance appears inside giving birth to a kind of contentment or happiness that inundates, overwhelms and saturates the entire outer being (Ch.V, Sl.24). The sense of duality of happiness and grief is born out of desire and anger, which again are expressions of *rajas* (Ch.III, sl. 37), that covers the sense of vastness and increases the sense of narrowness. Therefore just as to attain the ecstasy of Vastness (*Bhumananda*) or Brahmic contact we have to acquire patience in our outer self, similarly we need to control the urge of desire and anger in our inner self. This way, the mind starts getting inward and gradually merges with Atman and finally we attain Brahman.

Question:

What is the significance of the expression, ‘*Abhito Brahma Nirvana*’ (Ch.V, sl.26) — merging in Brahman here and hereafter. What is the way of being detached from desire and anger? Does detachment mean not to attach the mind with passion? But does it not depend upon discipline? Is it true that work of the Lord is to create passion and the duty of Jiva is to be free from that? How can Jiva battle with the Will of the Lord?

Answer:

Brahma Nirvana has been mentioned twice in the Gita. Once, in sl. 72 of Chapter II, it is mentioned as the goal at the end of life. Here, though, the Gita mentioning it for the second time emphasises on Nirvana in Brahman while being in Brahman (*Brahmi Sthiti*) at the same time. The ultimate object is to be established in Brahman in life and Nirvana in the same after death. Nirvana in Brahman and Being in Brahman are interwoven. This is the unique teaching of the Gita. It is not the only Truth that everything merges into Brahman, it is equally true that everything comes out of That too (*Prabhava Pralayastatha*). But the Immutable remains Immutable, even when everything sprouts out of him. A little later, he says, ‘Nirvana is the abode of Ultimate Peace but that too abides in Me’ (Ch.VI, sl.15).

What is the state of Brahma Nirvana? That has been mentioned just a little earlier. That is ‘the feeling of inner happiness, inner comfort, inner radiance’. Happiness is a state of mind — a delight derived from the touch of the Vast one attains due to harmonised propensities (Ch.VI, sl.28). Comfort or *aarama* belongs to the Pranic (vital) area and it means having a sense of all-pervasive equality attained when one goes beyond Matter and is absorbed in *bhava*. In the Upanishad, Brahman has been attributed with *Akasha* as body, Truth as Atman, comfort as *Prana* and *ananda* as Mind. This is a beautiful description of a soul in Brahma Nirvana while in *Brahmi Sthiti* (stationed in Brahman).

Desire is a play of Brahma Shakti. When Purusha is weak or under the power of Shakti, desire turns into passion, which is hard to control. This is what happens when Purusha is controlled by Nature. But the desire in Brahman, the Master — in the words of the Vedas — is the original seed in Mind — the source of all creation.

(cf. The seed of the Spirit’s blind and huge desire
From which the tree of cosmos was conceived
Savitri, Bk.1, Canto III)

To differentiate this from the lower desire, the Upanishad has named the higher one as Will. Kama as desire is craving of the weaklings and Will is the

mighty potentiality of the Creator. Kama enters from outside and makes the mind restless; it might or might not have the power to obtain the desired object, whereas Will generates from inside and blossoms like flowers in a plant.

Therefore, there is Will in Brahman, but not desire in the ordinary sense of the term. When the lower desire is obstructed, it gives rise to anger (Ch.II, sl.62) that is hard to control. But to one, who is connected to the Vast, power brings harmony, not discordance. Harmony creates *prasad* or Bliss, *aarama* or Ease, and *sukh* or Delight. At this stage, there is no lower desire but its aim – enjoyment – is easily available. Actually, at that point, the object of desire is only a pretext. The sensuous contact of any object transforms itself into contact with the Vast. That gives the feeling that the floodgates of Brahma Nirvana are opened from all sides (*Abhitah*) and consciousness has submerged into That.

Needless to mention that reaching this state of being requires prolonged practice. It is the Lord who creates velocity and it is he only who shows the way to tranquillity. This play is going on since the beginning of time and will continue till eternity. Therefore, it is not a struggle anyway. As there are problems, so are there solutions.

Question:

The 29th sloka of Chapter Five mentions about ‘Enjoyer of *Yajna* and *Tapas*’. What does that mean? After addressing him as ‘the greatest Lord of all beings’, there is again an epithet, ‘Friend of all beings’. Has there not been a hint of a combination of sweetness and Lordship? Is it not the object of the speaker to elaborate the fact that the only way to attain peace is to know God both as the Supreme Lord and the dearest friend? Heart’s cravings for him are not satisfied with knowing him only in his powers. Is it not a must to have him closest to the heart too?

Answer:

Yajna or Sacrifice and *tapas* or penance are two very ancient ways of sadhana. The former was practised by the Rishis and the latter by the Munis. The doctrine of gods or *devavad* is at the root of *yajna*. The Mimamsa has pointed out that *yajna* means the sacrifice of material objects for the gods, and at the root of *tapas* is the doctrine of Atman or *atmavad*. One of the fundamental sections of Patanjali’s *Kriya Yoga* also deals with a method of *tapas*.

The doctrine of gods or *devavad* eventually culminated into the doctrine of Brahman and the doctrine of Atman or *atmavad* into the doctrine of Samkhya. Again, for a householder the prescribed practice was *yajna* and for a hermit it was *tapas*. The Upanishad has hinted that at an advanced stage all practices transform from outer to inner and has given suggestions to that effect too.

Actually all religious practices, in a broader sense, can be termed either as

yajna or as *tapas*. Nowadays, *yajna* has changed its name to worship or puja and *tapas* to yoga. A combined practice can also be performed.

Any sadhana is work in some form or other. Whatever I do, I do for him. Whatever I offer in *yajna*, is an offer to the Lord of all yajnas; whatever asceticism I follow, my aim is to reach him through penance. The *ananda* or happiness that comes out of my sadhana, I offer to him with the thought that my right is only to the action and not in the result. He is the sole Enjoyer of all results and the ultimate goal of my sadhana. He has explicitly asked, 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever *yajna* you perform, whatever you give, whatever penance you observe, offer everything to me'. Hence all my actions, all my thoughts and my feelings – my whole being is for him and for his enjoyment only.

This should be the feeling for him in the course of the sadhana. This feeling matures in Knowledge – a Knowledge of his Reality. And what is that Reality? As He is the Lord of the Universe, so is he the closest friend of individuals. As he is the *lokeswar* in different planes, so is he the dearest One to every creature. His Omnipotence is expressed in Lordship and Love as the indweller of each heart. As Rabindranath said:

“Though the King of kings, my Lord
Yet you're ever awake and ever alert.
To beguile me you move around
And don alluring attire to win my heart.”

There is no dispute between sweetness and majesty. Even Narada has said that unless there is an initial concept of majesty or greatness, absolute surrender might not be possible. Gradually majesty melts in the depth of love. But that does not mean it extinguishes. It simply changes form. Then “I am proud with the pride of belonging to thee.” The explicit meaning? Thou art the Enjoyer of both my outer and inner worship. Thou art the Supreme Lord in my Universe, the sole Master of my heart.

Question:

The concept of a Yogi and a Sannyasi underlined in the first sloka of the Sixth Chapter is not in accordance with the traditional meaning of the two terms. It is understood that Gita considers the one who works without expecting the results, both as a yogi and a sannyasi and not the one who does no action nor does offer oblation to the fire. What are the significances of the terms *niragni* (one who does not offer oblation to fire) and *akriya* (one who does no action at all)?

Answer:

Among the Aryas, followers of the 'doctrine of gods' were called Rishis and the followers of the 'doctrine of Atman' were called Munis. The description of the system of Yoga we find in the philosophy of Patanjali, was primarily conceived by the Munis. Even in the Rik Samita we find references of Munis. These followers of 'no-god' doctrine never supported the Vedic rites. Even from Jaydeva, we have heard about Sakyamuni (Gautama Buddha) disparaging the rites of *yajna*. The Gita has mentioned them as 'non-workers' (*akriya*) here. Because they used to preach '*kim kriten*' or 'what do you gain by working,' so their country came to be known as '*Keekat*'. The Vedas have mentioned that too. Sometimes they took up sannyas and roamed around the country as mendicant monks. Then they were called '*maskari*' which has the same meaning as '*ma kuru*' or 'don't do anything.' We get references of them from Panini as well.

At times, the theist Aryas or Rishis who followed the doctrine of gods also took up Sannyas. The Rik Samhita has called them '*yati*'. Yajurveda, primarily a Karmaveda has decried these *yatis*. The *yatis*, when they took up Sannyasa, left home after withdrawing the celestial fires within the Atman, saying '*Atmani Agnim Samadhaya*' (Of course this was a symbolic rite). After that there would be no further custom of performing any rites by kindling fire on their altars any more. These *yatis* were called '*niragni*'. Even today there are many sannyasis who do not touch fire, not even for cooking.

At the end, the significance of the terms '*akriya*' and '*niragni*' become the same – giving up of all the ritualistic activities. These customs evolved due to excessive stress on the doctrine of non-action (Ch.III, sl. 4) of that time. The Gita, as she is against the interpretation of Veda which speaks of excessive rites, so is against the doctrine of non-action.

Sri Krishna says that the general performers of Vedic rites have a deep attachment for results in the form of wealth and enjoyment. Their Buddhi is not guiding them towards Knowledge. On the other hand, it is similarly erroneous to give up outer work or advise people to do so. By giving up outer work, a person might very well call himself a sannyasi or a yogi but in reality he is neither, unless he understands that the crux of the matter is not to give up work but desire. To reach the goal of a true sannyasi or a yogi, one has to renounce not the work itself but the desire for the fruit of the work. Whatever is your true Karma or the dutiful work, you have to continue doing that. If everyone gives up work then the society will crumble down (Ch.III, sl.24). The real sannyasi or yogi is he, who does his duty without any expectation for the fruit of the action, not one who follows the path of total inaction (*niragni* or *akriya*).

Somewhere else, the Lord has said that the bondage of Karma falls off easily from one without attachment or aversion (Ch.V, sl.3). It is not true that the path of sannyasa is despicable, that is a way towards liberation too. But according to Gita, Karma Yoga has certain distinctions over Karma Sannyasa (Ch.V, sl.2). Again, the seers think that giving up of any work initiated by desire is the real sannyasa.

Question:

What is the significance in saying ‘work is the means for ‘*aarurukshu*’ (one who wishes to advance) and ‘restraint is the means for the ‘*yogaruda*’ (one who is established in yoga)? Is it true that to attain the ultimate knowledge through meditation, a complete renunciation of work is absolutely necessary?

Answer:

The aspirant, who is about to enter the path or to be established in Yoga is ‘*aarurukshu*’. To think that he has to give up all work to enter in yoga would be a gross mistake. It has already been indicated that yoga does not mean a state of inaction. On the other hand, it symbolises an inner state of non-dualism born from action performed without any expectation for results. Rather, action is the primary means to reach the state of tranquillity. ‘Nobody’, says the Lord, ‘can attain the state of non-action, without doing some action to start with’ (Ch.III, sl. 4).

As work is the primary means of sadhana for an aspirant, so also is restraint the chief accomplishment for a realised yogi. The characteristics of restraint have been expounded in the slokas following immediately and meaning not inaction but not to be involved in action. It is neither having craving for the fulfilment of senses nor to cherish the desire to enjoy the sense objects, and over and above to give up all resolutions driven by desire. ‘I have no desire of my own; I am working as his instrument, not to fulfil my personal motive’—this feeling works at the root of detachment that culminates in sannyasa.

That the culmination of meditation is in samadhi is in Patnjali’s yoga as well. But the samadhi of the *Sthitaprajna*, mentioned in the Gita is not an inert (*jada*) samadhi but a samadhi of awareness, which does not occur only while only sitting in a particular posture and at a particular place and time but includes all movements everywhere and all the time.

Hence inaction is not mandatory to reach the ultimate goal of meditation.

Question:

The Gita has called him ‘united’ (*yukta*), who is at peace with himself by attaining both outer and inner knowledge, is detached and has conquered the senses. What is the technique or way to obtain equal feelings towards a piece of sod, stone or gold? How can there be an equal vision towards a sage and a sinner (Ch.VI, sls.8/9)?

Answer:

There is a hint given to the sequence of sadhana and siddhi in these two slokas. The sequence should be in ascending order. To be ‘united’ (with the Divine), the first thing needed is to conquer the senses. That is possible only when one is detached – detached but always aware and established in a higher and steadfast existence within oneself, like always being mentally in-between the eyebrows. Of course, this too only for beginners. When you are above all yet a ‘*sakshi*’ or a witness of all, you attain knowledge. If you are involved with each and all, you neither know nor understand anyone or anything. This is only possible when you are detached like *tatastha* (standing on the bank and watch the river flow) or *kutastha* (perched on a high peak and observing everything below). As knowledge gives an actual conception about the object, so also it gives a clear and firm perception regarding the true identity of the knower. Once the reality of the outer world is understood, attachment to anything ceases to exist. Absence of attachment makes way for the advent of inner contentment – a tranquil contentment of Atman. When this matures, we call that *vijnana*. Thus when a yogi attains all three, namely, (1) mastery over senses, (2) detachment and separation from the outer world and (3) Knowledge or *vijnana*, he becomes a *yukta* (united with the Divine) and *yogaruda* (established in the yoga).

It is not true that the ‘*yogaruda*’ of the Gita is always sitting in the ivory tower. He comes down to the lower planes too and acts as an equal with the rest of us. The striking example is Sri Krishna, the Lord of the Yoga. But it is his equality that keeps him separated from the ordinary people even when he is in the midst of them. He does not have the sense of duality in the form of aversion to a piece of sod and stone and attachment to gold. He holds everything in its proper place, looks at them with an unbiased equal view and treats them accordingly. If you are not attached, it is not very hard to develop this kind of equal attitude towards outer objects. Coming to think of it, one, who is satisfied with himself in the *vijnanabhumi*, why should he have any attachment towards outer objects?

Yet, there might be some traces of prior impressions (*samskara*). The iron shackle may not bind, but the golden chain might. It is harder to have equal feelings for human beings than to have equal attitude towards objects. We are bound to others in a thousand knots. To undo these knots is much harder than to accept equally the outer objects. Do we look at everyone equally? For some we have attachment, for some aversion and again for some indifference. It comes naturally. But that does not happen with a yogi. The most difficult test is to look equally at a saint and a sinner, for here come the hindrances from the

subtle sense of moral and religious beliefs. A wanton woman used to come to visit Ma Sarada. Having heard that, one day Sri Ramakrishna asked Sri Ma ‘why do you let her come to you?’ The Holy Mother replied, ‘you can judge, but I am the Mother. Won’t I let her come only because she is what she is?’ I hope the meaning of the sloka will be crystal clear to you now.

Question:

The Gita has indicated to fix the vision in-between the eyebrows or at the end of the nose. Doesn’t the vision fall at the tip of the nose automatically with half closed eyes? Is it good to maintain this vision at all times? To fix the gaze in-between the eyes or having upturned eyes is meant for the last moments, isn’t it?

Answer:

‘End of the nose’ may have a double meaning – the upper end as well as the lower end. While meditating on the heart or the navel centre, the gaze has to go downward. Similarly, while meditating on the spot between the eyebrows the gaze has to go upward. To attain tranquillity, both are widely accepted. Moreover, the ability to focus on a particular spot may vary from person to person. It is very relative. The object of focusing on a particular spot is to take the mind inward. Otherwise, just sending the vision upward does not have any effect. There are a few spiritually charged areas in human body. The Gita and the Upanishads have put stress on three of them – the heart, in-between the eyebrows and the top of the head. Initially, with effort and imaginary vision, mind has to be carried in those areas. Afterwards, those areas become a natural abode of the mind. As a result, consciousness in areas below that particular spiritual spot becomes vague and dull. After coming back from Amarnath, Swami Vivekananda used to say, ‘It appears, Lord Siva is permanently stationed on the top of the head. He refuses to come down.’ But that does not mean Swamiji was always keeping his vision upturned. One has to turn the vision and along with it the mind upward in order to channelise the flow of consciousness upstream.

It is imperative for the consciousness to flow upward at the time of death in order to attain the Ultimate. It has been advised to go from the heart to the spot between the eyebrows and thence to the top of the head. But all that is possible if we practise being in the higher areas during lifetime.

Question:

How do you interpret, ‘*Buddhigrahya atindriyam*’ (beyond senses, only conceived by intellect)? Since Buddhi or Intelligence is over mind, is that why Buddhi has been termed as beyond senses? To be established in the Self which is perceived only by Buddhi and is beyond senses, one has to follow Karma

Yoga with perfect awareness. Is not that the injunction of Gita?

Answer:

Gita has included even mind among the senses by saying, ‘Six senses, including mind’ (Ch.XV, sl.17). Hence, when you say beyond senses, that should automatically mean beyond mind too. The Upanishad says that beyond mind is *vijnana*. From the *vijnanabhumi*, it is easy to reach Universal Knowledge. Mind deals with specific knowledge, which comes via senses. When we see a man, we see only that particular man and store him in our memory completely depending on certain specific information derived through senses. But the general knowledge that develops regarding manhood or humanity by seeing a number of men does not pertain to the information regarding a particular man at all. This is universal knowledge, born out of Buddhi. This is called *vijnana*. *Vijnana* is beyond mind, therefore beyond senses. In the example cited, the tendency of *vijnana* is towards the object and has been applied outwardly. But if this tendency could be turned inward, if I can gain a transcendental knowledge about myself, then I can perceive Atman with Atman (not with mind or senses). The delight derived out of that is incomparable. In addition, there is never a fall. So the vision of Reality remains unchangeable.

The conscious *Kriya Yoga* is definitely a well-acclaimed method for that.

Question:

‘Keeping the mind firmly fixed in Atman, even the slightest thought should be discarded’ (Ch.VI,sl.25) There has to be a degree of achievement of this method. Have the stages of single pointed (*ekagra*) and completely stopped (*niruddha*) mind being discussed here? ‘Even the slightest thought should be discarded’ – is it to be attained by effort or without effort?

Answer:

The method is through Yoga – Samkhya or Jnana Yoga. The symptoms and sequences have been clearly explained before and after this particular sloka. Yoga is such a stable state that even profound sorrow does not disturb the mind. But remember, mind at that point is NOT inert. I do very well understand sorrow as well as the cause of sorrow but they are coming and going like waves on an ocean. There is no agitation on a deep sea. The connection with sorrow, meaning sorrow as well as the cause of sorrow, has separated from me like the skin of a dried betel-nut. This state has been termed as one of ‘absence of union with sorrow’. And this is called Yoga (Ch.VI, sl.23).

The foremost attitude needed to reach this state is to be without the least apathy or dejection. Whining like ‘Alas! Nothing is happening and nothing is going to happen to me!’ is inertia, a state of *tamas*. This has to be completely rejected. The path is like a razor’s edge. But I will and I must reach my goal

traversing along this razor's edge. There has to be a strong tenacity like that (Ch.VI, sl.23).

Next comes giving up of desire will. The divine Will is Truth-Consciousness and the effort to fulfil my personal needs is born out of desire will. 'I am not doing anything. Whatever is being done, you are getting that done by me' – a dependence on the Lord like that slowly eradicates all personal motivation. We have to be firmly rooted in the thought, 'Let your will be victorious in my life'.

Next is the sadhana of restraint (*samyama*). Mind is always running after attachment towards the outer world. The sadhana to control this movement and turn the mind inwards is called practice of restraint. It is something like instead of adding to, gradually withdrawing fuel from the fire, so that eventually it extinguishes completely.

The inducement of senses, like fuel to the fire, draws the mind outward. There has to be a complete transformation in the relationship between mind and the senses. The mind will no longer be under control of the senses. It will be vice versa. This can be made possible if we can make Buddhi, which is beyond mind, shine brighter and brighter. This Buddhi is primarily established in *sattwa*, the highest quality. Its salient characteristic is the power to discriminate – to differentiate between inclination and detachment, non-action and action, fear and fearlessness, bondage and liberation (Ch.XVII, sl.30) A steady intelligence would guide like, 'I do not want to do anything being led by my desire or an impulse. That would create involvement for me.' This can also be termed as purified Buddhi (Ch.XVIII, sl.51).

This Buddhi should be reinforced by steadfastness or control. Steadfastness in its *sattwic* form always controls senses, desire and mind (Ch. XVIII, sl.33). Work would naturally start with senses and with each sense is associated some kind of involvement with pleasure and pain. One should not fall a prey to that involvement (Ch.III, sl.34). 'I am using the senses not for lower vital and mental satisfactions, or to appease their whims, but for the gratification of Atman'. If we can develop this feeling, we do not have to run after the sense objects like puppets driven by a cord held by a puppeteer. This grace of Being (being stationed beyond likes and dislike) is the natural outcome of Yoga. With *sattwic* predominance, it becomes steadfast (Ch. XVIII, sl.33).

Enthusiasm, certitude, control of senses, restraint, higher intelligence and steadfastness – these are the outer parts of yoga. Its inner parts consist of serenity and bliss in the depth of consciousness. This can be achieved by concentrating on certain given objects. Sri Ramakrishna commented that he used to do that on the flame of a lamp. The Gita says the very same thing, 'The steady flame of a lamp in a place that is sheltered from the gust of wind is the

correct analogy for the firmness in the mind of a Yogi' (Ch.VI, sl.14). The other attribution is that of clear bright sky – always to think that there is an *akash* like that in my heart. The Upanishad has also mentioned that. Patanjali suggested meditation on a 'heart void of attachment to sense objects', which means to meditate on the purity of the great souls who completely conquered all desires. By constantly doing so, the consciousness about Self beyond mind, which is always there in the depth of my being will surface just as the sand banks rise above the water of the river once the monsoon water subsides. Then one experiences the tranquillity of the deep ocean, even though there might be waves on the surface. By habits acquired from previous births, even if the waves try to disturb the tranquillity, that can be fought back with the recollection of Self. Gradually, the tranquillity of the depth would spread over the surface too. There would be no more waves on the ocean. Even the terrible upheaval of Kurukshetra would appear as light sprays carried by a summer breeze.

This goes for application. Once the practice is firmly established, all disturbances of mind automatically calm down while sitting for meditation. In that serene mind appears the ultimate ecstasy of Brahmic touch (Ch.VI, Sl.27&28). As a result, when we awake from meditation, we see Atman or Him in all and all in Atman or Him (Ch.VI, sls.9-31).

Question:

'Whoever sees Me everywhere and all in Me' (Ch.VI, sl.30). What is the mystic significance of this sloka? What is the sequence of vision? Is there a difference between the vision of a Deity (*vigraha*) and that of the *bhava* of the Immutable Being? Can you please simplify the analysis of the sequence of feelings as the mind gets subtler to subtler.

Answer:

First comes the vision of Self and then comes the vision of the Lord. Here the Gita has given clue to this sequence. The object of the first Six Chapters is Self-Knowledge. To start with, when I know myself in totality, it would be easier for me to know him too. Otherwise, my Lord will just be an imagination of my impure mind.

You will understand the sequence from what I said just now. First of all, as a result of prolonged practice of restraint, mind-consciousness merges with the inner consciousness and one is established in Self. At that point the feeling is like, there is only 'I' and nothing else anywhere. Of course, this 'I' is not the ego represented by name and form but a perception of Self; according to Sri Ramakrishna, a perception of 'mature I'. This perception has two phases. At first, the consciousness gets concentrated as a dot (*bindu*) and we get the perception of *Jnana Atman* or Knowledge Self. Once this is established, the

dot would, as if, expand into the solar system and we get the perception of *Mahan Atman* or Vast Self. The latter is the effortless and natural outcome of the former. There is another phase even after this. The light of the sun would gradually get dimmer and dimmer. There will be neither light nor darkness, neither day nor night, only pure Existence. This is the state of *Shanto Atman* or serene Self.

To submerge again and again into this *Jnana Atman*, *Mahan Atman* and *Shanto Atman* and come up with their ecstatic fragrance strengthens the serenity of mind (Ch.VI, sl. 27). No turmoil of outer world would disturb the inner peace any more. The outer *akash* and the inner *akash* have become one now. I see the whole world on the backdrop of that *akash* like watching a movie on a screen. There is neither attachment nor aversion. Every object is observed with undisturbed tranquillity. This is being described as ‘equality of vision everywhere’ (Ch.VI, sl.29). This is to see all in the Atman.

When this vision gets deeper, the inner vision opens up. Then not only do I see the pictures moving on the screen, but can see why they are moving and who is making them move as well. I realise that the Atman in me is the Seer, the Enjoyer, as well as the Master and Supreme Lord (Ch.XIII, sl.23) of everything. It is He who is in all. This is to see the Atman in all.

This Atman, this inner Being in all, is verily the Supreme Being, the Iswara or Purushottama or Bhagawan Sri Krishna (Ch. XV, sls.17/18).

Question:

(*Yo Mam pashyati sarvatra, sarvam cha Mayi pashyati*) One who sees Me everywhere and everything in Me, I am not lost to him nor is he to Me (Ch.VI, sl. 30). How to conceive the significance of ‘Me’ or ‘in Me’? How are we to understand ‘being lost from Him’ or ‘He being lost’?

Answer:

See all in Him and Him in all. First is to see in Him and then to see ONLY Him. We find such utterances in the Upanishad as well. First to see all beings in Atman, next to see Atman in all beings and eventually to realise that Atman has verily become all beings. As long as vision rushes outward, we see neither the Atman nor Him. Hence it is absolutely imperative to see the Self or Him within by diverting the vision inward. As a result of absorption, all propensities will merge in Him. This is the state of samadhi. As the perception deepens, it spreads even over the awaking state beyond samadhi. At that point we see everything pervaded by Him – ‘*Tena savamidam Tatam*’. Everything is floating and sinking in Him like bubble-foam-waves on an ocean. At the inmost depth of our being we know that He has become all. Whatever I see, I see only Him. He is not hidden from me even for a moment. This is what is meant by ‘I am not lost, I am not hidden.’

It is not only my seeing Him, He is seeing me too. My vision is an outcome of his and only with the light of his vision do I see Him. It is like a baby opening its eyes under the loving eyes of its mother to be bathed in the overwhelming flow of her love. After that there are no more reverse movements. He is looking at me and I am looking at Him. He looks at me first and in that radiance of his vision I see Him. First of all, I have to be his, only then He becomes mine. The result? Complete eradication of difference between Him and me. Of course the last part of the Supreme Vision is implied here.

The next step is to know the Lord the same way as I have known the Self outside and inside of all. Of course, once you realise the Self, it comes by itself. Then I see the Cosmic Self initiating all beings, including myself, move round and round on a carousel and I cannot help but calling Him my Lord and Master. Self-knowledge thus transcends to divine knowledge. But this aspect of divinity is attained through knowledge or pure *jnana*. According to Sri Ramakrishna we have to know Him, ‘Not there, but here.’ He is my inner being too, my nearest of the near and dearest of the dear – my Self itself. Thus ripens knowledge and emerges devotion. After that we see all in Him like waves in the ocean and Him in all like ocean in each wave.

There is a sequence or an ascending pattern in the vision of Self, vision of Brahman, and vision of Deity or manifested divinity (Ch. IX, sl.11), The succeeding vision is the result of the preceding one. First I know myself; with that purified knowledge and through perception I know the Lord as the inmost cosmic Soul. When this knowledge condenses, the knowledge of the Deity becomes pure and flawless. Otherwise, getting over-excited with the form of the Deity without knowing his supreme lordship in its Reality is the same as ignorant disrespect and neglect of the highest (Ch.IX, sl. 11).

(Note: Evidently, this answer and the previous one are interrelated).

Question:

What do discipline and detachment (*abhyasa* and *vairagya*, Ch.VI,sl.35) mean? What are they in actuality?

Answer:

These terms used in the Gita can also be found in the Raj Yoga of Patanjali. According to Patanjali, ‘Control of that (mind) by discipline and detachment’, is the general practice for Yoga.

Discipline is mentioned as the effort to remain firmly stationed in one’s own being and can be achieved by enthusiastic and constant practice for a long time. As a matter of fact, our whole life is nothing but the result of practice. By continuous lying, lying becomes a practice. But that definitely will not lead to yoga. Discipline, backed by detachment is conducive to yoga.

The primary condition of yoga is to go inward, with mind being stably stationed in the Self. But by nature, mind rushes outward; attachment towards outer objects pulls the mind continuously out. The only way to disregard this pull is by giving up desire for sense objects. That way one can attain detachment.

Objects are of two kinds – tangible and intangible. Patanjali calls one seen and the other heard. The seen objects are perceptible to senses. Mind is one of the senses too. Therefore mental objects are also under the same category. Man wants enjoyment of senses, fame and power, all kinds of mental satisfaction, etc. All these are ‘seen’ objects and are available here. But he wants to stretch all material enjoyments to hereafter and for that imagine heaven and life after, so that he can enjoy all the earthly materials there too. These are imaginary or ‘heard’ or related to intangibles. Nobody has seen heaven, only heard of it. So he performs various religious rites hankering after heavenly pleasure. In order to follow the path of detachment, the thirst for both seen and heard has to be given up. Only one thing has to be asked for; to attain and remain in the Self; and nothing else. For that it is imperative to go beyond the gunas of Nature. This, of course, is the supreme and last step towards detachment.

The fundamental quality of detachment is renunciation or giving up of thirst for sense-objects. This can be used as a way to control the frivolity of mind. Sense-objects are outside of me and part of lower material nature. Lower nature is fickle and changing every moment. Running after that would cause fickleness of mind too. The less we run after the material objects of lower nature, the more the mind attains serenity. Hence the Lord Krishna says, ‘For one who has no control over mind, Yoga is very hard to achieve (Ch.VI, sl. 36).

Question:

What is the significance of ‘goes beyond Sabda Brahman’ (Ch.VI, sl.44)? Hasn’t the Gita accepted the doctrine of reincarnation in using the term, ‘belonging to the previous body’ (ChVI, sl.43)?

Answer:

Mimamsa has mentioned two aspects of Brahman – *Para Brahman* and *Sabda Brahman*. The quality of *Para Brahman* has already been described in Gita as, ‘*Akshara Brahma Paramam*’ (Ch.VIII, sl.3). The immutable Reality as the foundation of the universe is *Para Brahman* and the cluster of sounds that expresses it is *Sabda Brahman* – that is Veda. The essence of Veda is *Pranab* or *Om*, which is called *Sabda Brahman* too. Gita has accepted the *Sabda Brahman* and said ‘*Om* is the mono-syllabled Brahman’. Further, the Lord added, ‘Whoever utters this following Me in his thought, at the time of departing from the physical body and proceed farther, verily reaches the highest goal’ (Ch.VIII, sl.13). Again He has said, ‘Brahman has three units – *Om*, *Tat*,

and *Sat*... The followers of Brahman start their performances of sacrifice, offering and penance by uttering *Om* (Ch. XVII, sls.23/24). This *Sabda Brahman* is a step towards *Para Brahman*. But the Veda has shown ways to wealth and enjoyment too. By and large, people are more inclined towards that and create an uproar saying, ‘There is nothing other than that (wealth and enjoyment) (Ch.II, sls. 42/43). Sri Krishna says that this aspect of Veda or *Sabda Brahman* is ‘subjected to three gunas’ – meaning no one can go beyond by following this philosophy. One cannot go beyond dualities, be established in Eternal Existence, or be without desire for gaining and retaining (*yoga kshema*) or knower of the Self (Ch.II, sl.45) by following this aspect of the Veda. In that case what good is that aspect of Veda (Ch.II, sl. 46)? ‘Only I and nobody else know the Veda that can show the way to come to Me’ (Ch.XV, sl.15).

I hope this aspect of Veda or *Sabda Brahman* is clear to you now. The *Sabda Brahman* that the yogi ‘goes beyond’, is the doctrine of Veda followed by the people desiring wealth and enjoyment.

Another name for *Sabda Brahman* is *Shruti*. On another occasion, Sri Krishna has asked us to go even beyond that too. ‘When your intellect would overcome the whirlpool of delusion you would lose interest both about things to be heard and things already heard’ (*Srotavyasya shrutasya cha*) (Ch.II, sl. 52). The underlying meaning here is there will be no more excitement about, ‘this I have heard and that I must hear’, because you have already attained the state void of delusion by only listening about Me and all doubts born of ignorance have been totally uprooted’ (cf. Ch.XVIII, sl.72). This way too a yogi can go beyond *Sabda Brahman*.

Why only in Gita, in all schools of philosophy in India, excepting Charvak’s doctrine, reincarnation is accepted. But our knowledge about its reality is still very hazy.

Question:

Why has a yogi been given higher position than an ascetic, a *jnani* or a worker (Ch.VI, sls. 43-47)? ‘People, who worship Me with *Sraddha*’ – who has been indicated by Me’ here? Is there any difference between the reality of the highest Iswara and Purushottama? There must be some reason behind the usage of the term ‘*yuktatama*’ (highest among yogis)?

Answer:

According to Patanjali, *tapas* or asceticism is an external limb of yoga, a part of discipline. One cannot become a yogi by asceticism only. Because it is an external discipline, *tapas* has all sattwic, rajasic and tamasic propensities and qualities (Ch.XVII, sls.18/19). Out of these, only the physical, verbal and mental sattwic *tapas* is an important means of sadhana. Yet that is a means

only, not the goal. Knowledge or *jnana* matures in yoga. Whichever way you interpret *jnana*, it is the same knowledge that dawns in mind when one goes beyond the manifested world. And when one remains steadfast in that, even in action, one becomes a yogi. Lord Krishna has mentioned at the beginning and also added later that Yoga Buddhi is the active manifestation of Samkhya Buddhi. In addition, He has mentioned that not only does the bondage of Karma decline by that, but even the slightest practice of Yoga Buddhi saves us from great fear (Ch.II, sls.39/40). Therefore, it is not enough to be a *jnani* by mere knowledge. Only when we can manifest that knowledge in life, in other words, become a yogi, then comes the fulfilment of knowledge.

It is not hard to understand that a yogi is higher than a man of action. Nobody can exist even for a moment without doing some kind of work. The gunas of Prakriti make everyone work even without any personal effort on the part of the worker (Ch.III, sl.5). Does that mean all of them, though doing Karma, are Yogis? Are they working being established in yoga? Therefore, a yogi is of course higher in rank than a worker.

But the culmination of all is in devotion. I am working for Him, doing penance for Him, doing the sadhana of knowledge with heart to have Him. Karma, *tapas*, *jnana* all aim at Him – this is Bhakti Yoga – the greatest of all yogas – the ultimate end of all yogas. So the yogi, who being a yogi – and all the eighteen chapters of Gita expound eighteen kinds of Yoga – worships Him from the depth of his heart, that absolutely surrendered soul is the Highest among the Yogis. [Cf. ‘His is the divine birth in the supreme Nature, integral in being, completed in will, absolute in love, perfected in knowledge. (Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, The Synthesis of Devotion and Knowledge)].

In Gita Me always denotes Purushottama. Verily He is Brahman, He is Paramatman (Ch.XV, sl. 17).

Question:

Gita is ‘*Adwait Amritavarshini*’ (she showers the nectar of Adwaita) and ‘*Swayam Padmanavasya Mukhapadmavinisrita*’ (coming out of the voice of the Lord Himself). Does not Bhagavat too narrate about the same Divinity? Does Bhagavat shower the nectar of Adwaita too? Is there any difference between the Adwaita preached as well as the supreme Divinity described in Gita and in Bhagavat?

Answer:

The Teacher in Gita is God Himself. There is but one God. This many-faced multitude is also He. As the essence of the Upanishadic realisation is ‘All this is verily Brahman’, similarly, ‘All this is Vasudeva’ is the essence of the dharma of the devotees. Both are statements born out of realisation of the Adwaita.

Only He is there and no Universe – this kind of Non-Dual realisation comes on the way upward, when you go beyond the world. Again, when you come back to this world, bringing Adwaita along with you, you see all in Him, see all as Him, then you say all is Brahman; all is Vasudeva. This is a doctrine of Adwaita too. The perfection of the Immutable Adwaita lies in this manifested Adwaita. Our argumentative intelligence creates separation between the two. But there is no duality in God, or in the Gita. There is the complete and comprehensive *Adwaitavad* in Gita. Her highest utterance is ‘*Vasudeva Sarvam*’.

This is one aspect of the Bhagavat dharma – the aspect of Knowledge. The other aspect has blossomed in the Bhagavatam. That is the aspect of love, of ananda, of enjoyment. When you have the Lord as Arjuna had, as a man, being one with Him in samadhi and a surrendered agent in waking state, you get Gita. And when you have Him sacrificing manhood, as a woman, as Sree Radha had, by being enjoyed by Him, you get Bhagavatam. The knowledge of Gita and love of Bhagavatam – both are to be manifested in life, in action, in Kurukshetra. Work has to be done in Kurukshetra but the work has to have a base in knowledge and in devotion. That is like being with God in daylight. But Vrindavan is saturated with the sweetness of love. There to be with Him, for Him and in Him to the heart’s fullest desire as a gopi, in the fragrance filled moonlit night, is like fulfilling the ultimate desire.

Both combined complete the Bhagavat dharma. And the condensed form of that completeness as the goal is Sri Krishna. You are his Higher Nature (*Para Prakriti*), as Arjuna in Kurukshetra and as gopi in Vrindavan.

I offer you my vision. Now you can see as per yours.

Question:

There appears to have some difference between devotion propounded in Gita and the one in Bhagavatam. Could you please analyse that?

Answer:

In addition to the Bhakti propounded in the Gita, Bhagavatam has Prema Bhakti. And there is no conflict between the two; one is just natural culmination of the other. Tranquillity, servitude, companionship – up to this much is the introductory part of bhakti. Affection and love are the conclusion. The former is in Gita, not the later. Bhagavatam has all. The affection and love of gopi compelled the Lord to incarnate, to take birth. His infancy and adolescence are not in Vaikuntha, his eternal abode. But in the Bhagavatam we find the description of his eternal as well as his playful Reality as an infant and adolescent. The idea, though, has been taken from the Veda.

One who wants to remain a sadhaka would say that without knowledge and renunciation true devotion cannot evolve. Very true. How can one come even

near to devotion as long as worldly attachment and delusion persist? That would be nothing but momentous hypocrisy. But one who has a stronger inclination for siddha, would say, 'I don't understand all that. I love you. Because I love you, everything other than that you are just like poison (renunciation); I know what sweetness exists in you; further I know what I am to you and what you are to me (knowledge)'.

Question:

Please analyse the sequence of sadhana of Bhagavat dharma following the system described in both Gita and Bhagavatam.

Answer:

There are three phases of sadhana – Karma, Jnana and Bhakti. Life, as well as sadhana starts with Karma. When Karma is controlled by dharma, then only it becomes an aid to sadhana. This is according to the Path of prescribed discipline (*vidhi marg*). And this is approved by Smriti. But there is the expectation of fruits of the work. If that expectation can be given up ordinary Karma becomes Karma Yoga. Hence go on working by offering the results to Lord Krishna. At that point, there might not be desire for the fruit of action, but the sense of 'do's and don'ts' can still be there. The first condition of a worker without any desire is to work with the sense of a non-doer. That creates a void within. As a result, at one end there is the dawning of knowledge (because knowledge is born of the discriminative feeling of being above the turmoil, a sense of being the witness), on the other, there is no more the bondage of imposed 'do's and don'ts'. This is the condition of renunciation of personal dharma. From that ensues the feeling of being a mere instrument.' I am just a puppet and He is the Puppeteer' – this gives birth to love for Him. Then the condition of devotion mingles with knowledge. The work is going on like a machine. Inside is the deep serenity born of knowledge and in the horizon is the roseate hue of divine courtship.

Gradually, the roseate hue spreads over and colours the entire heart. The ego sense starts to transform. The seat of 'I' is usurped by 'You'. Only You are there. There is no more consciousness whether I am there or not. The work still continues but changes to service. Work is not mechanical any more, it is vibrant with feeling. This is the stage of devotion without knowledge.

The rasa that bhakti brings in heart changes the entire being. I find a new 'I' that is yours. The first stage is devotion of servitude – the first step of *Prema Bhakti*. Then You are Vast and I am less than an atom. In devotion of companionship, You and I are equal. In devotion of affection, You are small, I am big – I become big in love. All these conditions are nourishments of prema. Eventually, it is love of a Beloved – which is the synthesis of all feelings and

emotions. This is the love of the gopis. I am no more a man – I am your *Para Prakriti*.

End of Part I (The First Six Chapters)

(Translated from the original Bengali by Kalyani Bose, a long time devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother now residing in New Jersey, USA)

Avatar

Debashish Banerji

In his philosophical writings, such as *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo describes the process of evolution in terms of a double movement – involution and evolution, ascent and descent, Aspiration and Grace. It is a process whereby the consciousness of a lack emerges in the cosmos, leading to a “call” to some hidden or transcendental plenitude. There is then a response from this “wholeness” which is in the nature of an Intervention, introducing the elements which overcome the perceived lack through the appearance of new properties. In our reading of *Savitri*, we have seen how such a process is central to its narrative. But what we need to distinguish in *Savitri* is that this aspect of an intervention is not merely the intervention of a principle, it is the intervention of a Person and an embodiment. Savitri, the protagonist of the epic, is herself that embodiment. This is clear in the story line as Sri Aurobindo develops it. Aswapati, representing the human aspiration, becomes aware of insufficiency, reaches the Divine Mother and asks her to incarnate. Savitri is the Grace of the Divine Mother incarnated here to bring about the transformation of the conditions of the human existence. This aspect of an embodied intervention of divine consciousness, carrying something beyond what the conditions of this creation presently allow, is the essence of the Avatar.

Savitri, the epic, is, therefore, a unique text in Sri Aurobindo’s corpus, because it represents his philosophy of evolution in terms of embodiment. The avatar is central to this representation by embodiment. We find in fact, that all the major figures of the epic are embodiments of divine principles, hence avatars or embodied divine beings. We can assert this not only of Savitri, but of Aswapati and even perhaps of Satyavan. Each of them represents some power of a higher consciousness that has to deal with a central limitation of the earthly condition.

The notion of the avatar takes its root in the fundamental fact of involution and evolution. Involution and evolution of consciousness is that which lies behind the entire scale and scope of Time to our manifestation. If we look at this, we

see that involution and evolution are not two different things. They are two ways of perceiving the same integral reality. It is the self-conception of the Supreme Spirit, of Being, as an objectification of itself – a conception that is carried out through the power of Consciousness (Maya) – that becomes the Inconscient. This appearance of itself to itself as an Inconscience, as an Object, is one in which it is present in latent form as Subject. In other words, the powers of Spirit hide or are asleep in Matter. Another way of saying this would be to assert that the substantiality of Matter is involved in Spirit. It is this self-conceived duality of Spirit/Matter that becomes the basis of the evolution of the powers of consciousness.

Instead of thinking of this involution/evolution in philosophical terms through principles such as Spirit and Matter, we may think of it in Personal terms as the Sacrifice of Purusha. The Self-conscious integral Person, Purusha, perceives Himself as unconscious, surface only and disintegrated, particulate. The unconscious (or rather, of latent consciousness) particles of this dismembered Person, which may be called beings, now exert their consciousness to evolve through aggregation, emergence of holistic properties and enhanced realisations of consciousness, towards the reconstitution of the integral Person, realised both individually and in unison by each being. This evolutionary process is literally a re-membering, by invoking through aspiration the repeated and progressive Intervention of that which has been dis-membered. Each cosmic time-quantum can be thought of, in this way, as constituted personally by the double movement of embodied aspiration and an intervention. By “constituted personally” what I mean is that each such moment is given its reality by an act of consciousness, however rudimentary, emanating from a particle of embodied consciousness, hence a “being,” something with the stirrings of personality. The response to such an embodied aspiration is an act of intervention, by an embodied agent, effecting a transcendental will. Hence, even in general terms, evolution may be seen as “constituted personally.” However, the succession of time-quanta are occasionally marked by radical steps, where the carriers of aspiration and Grace dramatise a cosmic moment through their embodied lives. The beings who are such carriers may leave their mark in human history or may remain anonymous, but they represent the gods in their lives, maybe even the Supreme Being, and are hence, avatars in a special sense. *Savitri* is a story about such avatars.

We may ask why it is necessary for an evolution to need any kind of Intervention after the original foundation of involution and evolution has been established. If we think of an involution at the origin of the creation, then why is it not that the powers of consciousness evolve naturally from it? We have earlier seen how this fact of involution and evolution is a time structure. It is not a

static event. If we think of it as an event, it has to coexist paradoxically in eternity and with eternity. The coexistence of a temporal event with a beginning, a middle and an end against the backdrop of eternity or against the reality of eternity is a paradox that we can understand only if we can think of it as an appearance through recurrence of this structure. The structure of coming to birth and of dying is an eternal recurrence of Being in the image of Time. Time is that which contains or carries in itself the recurrence of this image. Therefore, we may say that the structure of involution/evolution is the Real-Idea marking the ontology of this cosmos as Becoming and thus defining its temporality. Thus, the powers of evolution depend on the recurrence of this image from moment to moment, so that at every “moment” or time-quantum, there is an aspiration in Nature and there is something New born in it through the intervention of a special Grace. That which is Infinite is taking perpetual birth in Time and its birth in Time is accomplished through the eternal recurrence of an aspiration and a Grace. This is the image of the involution/evolution. The results of this can be seen all around us in Nature.

We have seen how in nature there are progressive births of different and new principles of consciousness. These principles of consciousness are immanent to an objectified self-perception of Spirit. If we think of Nature and her symbols, we see this idea repeated in her time and again. *Savitri* begins, for example, with the Symbol Dawn, where Sri Aurobindo introduces the idea of an eternal succession of dawns. In discussing this canto, we saw how it represents the general time-structure of a recurrent birth-death-rebirth cycle, in which, also, there are interruptions or special interventions—unprecedented Dawns. In personal terms in the epic, the birth of Savitri and the death of Satyavan, are the counterparts that create a motif of recurrence – Savitri is “new born” as the Divine Shakti and Satyavan is “reborn” by her Intervention – leading to immortality. We can also see this image more commonly in Nature in her repeated symbols. We see it in the image of the tree that is prefigured in the seed, which in turn is produced by the tree. The tree disappears in the seed and then reappears from the seed, just like the day disappears in the night and reappears from the night or life that disappears in death but reappears in a new birth. Yet, in its isolated reality, we could never predict that the seed could produce a tree or a part could produce the whole from which it came. Indeed if we were to plant the seed, the tree would not automatically emerge from it. It is only with nourishment from the soil and the energy of the sunlight – sunlight as the symbol of Grace – that the sapling emerges from the seed and reveals what was latent or hidden within it. This is a natural image of the recurrent symbol of aspiration and grace, involution and evolution.

If we look at Nature, we find radical shifts, or discontinuities of consciousness in its temporal manifestations – Life emerges from Matter, Mind emerges in Life. These are gradations of consciousness that have evolved in Nature. But these emergences of discontinuous gradations are the result of this concealed process of evolution. That which was involved in Nature stirred with an aspiration and this aspiration called down a higher principle to manifest what was asleep in it. Stated like this, the process sounds smooth, continuous; but in reality it is seldom thus, it is almost always marked by struggle, what are called “birth pangs.” We may ask why this emergence involves a struggle, why there is to it a resistance. It is because, by the nature of the Time-structure of the Sacrifice of Purusha, its archetypal structure of involution/evolution, the Inconscient is granted independent reality, and represents a face or appearance of Spirit, the Spirit as Object. It thus carries within itself a sense of Immortality, something which wishes to remain so forever. This ontology of Inconscience which claims its right to Immortality, borrowed from Spirit, is represented by a will-to-Inconscience. Theologically, this can be called Falsehood, and ontologically, Thanatos, the Will-to-Death. Thus the powers of Falsehood and Death are present everywhere in the creation. Every aspiration for the emergence of the higher powers of consciousness coexists with its nemesis, the Wills to dominate and submerge this aspiration. By itself, neither is privileged in the cosmos. As a result, for the latency of Spirit to progressively emerge, a power of fertilisation is needed from time to time, some intervention from That which is transcendent to the cosmos and can enter into its processes to carry the aspiration within it to its fulfilment.

We see around us many kinds of human beings. Some of these have a greater aspiration than others. By and large, humans contain within themselves a modicum of aspiration. Most people are satisfied with a little desire, a little creature comfort, some compromise between their egoistic lives and some idealism. But some seem burdened with a greater idealism than others. These beings are not satisfied with petty compromises. Their lives are a willing sacrifice to high ideals. We can think of these beings as embodiments of these higher godheads in the race of humanity, what Sri Aurobindo calls a Vibhuti, powers of manifestation of the Divine.

If Vibhutis represent a driven commitment to lofty ideals, there are those rarer beings who embody cosmic and transcendental principles. These are the Avatars. The Avatar is an embodiment. A few world religions have given prominence to this notion of an incarnated Divine born on earth to manifest the powers of divinity here. For example, in the Indian scriptures called the Puranas, this notion is attributed to the godhead Vishnu, who is known as the Preserver.

Similarly, we find the idea of incarnation in Christianity where Christ is considered the Son of God, who is also the Son of Man – in other words, a divine principle that has incarnated as a human being. At the same time, Christ affirms that he and his Father in heaven are one – in other words, he is an incarnation of the divine consciousness. A similar, though less common, idea also exists in India in the notion of the Shakti avatar. But this idea is less prevalent, one may say, more veiled in the traditions of Indian theology.

If we look at these various notions of the avatar in world religions, we find that they express different aspects of the idea of an embodied divine intervention. In the case of the Hindu God Vishnu, he is known as the Preserver and is considered a fountainhead of avatars. We may ask what it is that he preserves. It is the principle of evolution that he preserves. He preserves it in the idea of interventions overcoming the Will to Inconscience which often poses insuperable odds to the fragile birth and progress of consciousness in an Unconscious world. It is particularly at crisis points in the earth's evolution, when there are stirrings of new possibilities of consciousness, that the powers of Falsehood become most active attempting to dislocate the trajectory of evolution. According to the Hindu idea, Vishnu incarnates at such times to preserve the evolutionary possibility. This role of Vishnu is made explicit in the Bhagavad Gita through the words of the avatar, Krishna. Explaining his interventionist role, Krishna says to Arjuna: "In every age, whenever there is the ascendancy of the powers of Falsehood on earth, I incarnate to overcome the demonic element and to hold together the world by re-establishing the divine order of evolution." The idea of "holding together the world," what is referred to in the Gita as *lokasaṁgraha*, implies the secret power of unity present in the Becoming and at work to reconstitute through evolution the Conscious Harmony of the Purusha or Divine Person whose Sacrifice is this cosmos. It is he who has "passed through the portals of a Death" so as to be reborn in a new way to Life Everlasting and it is He who intervenes in every time-unit to birth ever more of Himself. This intervention is the saviour force that allows consciousness to evolve in an unconscious and hostile world, that will not allow it be smothered or annihilated by the Thanatos which haunts every particle of the cosmos, dragging it through Ignorance towards the Inconscient.

If we look at the way in which the avatars of Vishnu have been described in the Hindu Puranas, we see that there is another aspect to the notion of preservation in it. This is the preservation of the cosmic aspiration in terms of stages of evolution. This is expressed in a symbolic form in the succession of the avatars of Vishnu. Each represents a symbolic stage in the evolution of consciousness. We see, for example, the first avatar as a Fish, representing life

in its early ocean manifestations, in the watery element, the life of crustaceans and fish. In term of geologic eras, we know that fish and other marine animals appeared in the Paleozoic Era (250-540 million years ago), some of the earliest living things and the earliest vertebrates. Though some proto-fish like vertebrates appeared during the Cambrian explosion some 500 million years ago, fish as we know them proliferated more properly in the Devonian Era, about 400 million years ago. It is interesting to note that the aniconic icon of Vishnu, worshipped as his material embodiment, are Ammonite fossils, which also emerged in the Devonian Era. This era ended around 375 million years ago in one of the five major extinction events in the earth's biological history. The story of the Fish (*Matsya*) avatar ends with a great deluge, not unlike Noah's Flood, but the Fish represents an intervention which survives this destruction and ensures the preservation of continuing evolution. Interestingly, the leading geological theories for mass extinction at this time suggest changes in sea level and ocean anoxia.

The second avatar is a Tortoise (*Kurma*), a reptile amphibian representing the migration from water to land and the colonisation of the earth element. Turtles and tortoises are perhaps the oldest reptile group and proto-turtles emerged about 220 million years ago, during the era succeeding the Paleozoic, the Mesozoic Era (70-250 million years ago). The story of the *Kurma* Avatar involved the Churning of the Ocean by the gods and the demons, with the aim of obtaining the pitcher of Immortality (*Amrita*). This churning initially resulted in poisonous fumes covering the sky and making it unbearable on earth. Then Shiva in his mercy swallowed the poison but held it by his yogic power in his throat, resulting in a blue mark and giving him the name *Neelakantha*, the blue-throated one. In geologic terms, the Mesozoic Era ended with another major extinction event, the Cretaceous-Paleogene Extinction Effect, which occurred about 65.5 million years ago. This event is likely to have been caused by a massive asteroid impact near the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, throwing up dust clouds that would darken the sky for years and triggering other geologic events such as earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions. Hot gases released would return to earth as acid rain. This event is supposed to have wiped out most plant life and large animals, including most of earth's dinosaurs. Interestingly, the geologic signature of this event is known as the K-Pg boundary, a thin band of unusual sedimentation visible wherever rocks of this age are exposed. Across the earth this thin band runs, carrying a high-density streak of whitish iridium in a layer of dark clay. The iridium layer is considered evidence of an asteroid impact event, since iridium is very rare on earth but present in large quantities in asteroids.

The third avatar is a boar, a placental mammal that appears in the Oligocene

period of the Cenozoic Era, the era following the Mesozoic and lasting from 65 million years ago to the present. This is thus the most recent geologic era and is biologically marked by the ascendance of mammals after the extinction of dinosaurs and other massive predators at the end of the Mesozoic. Like the fish and the tortoise/turtle which have survived till the present, evolving morphologically but retaining the physiology of their origin through major extinction events, and thus expressing a high power of preservation, so too the boar, marking at the same time a distinct step towards the human. It shows us the blueprint for the kind of physiology that persist to express the line of further evolution. Of course, Darwinian evolution is concerned only with physiological and morphological adaptation, but the lineage of Hindu avatars also represents an evolution of Consciousness.

From the boar avatar the scheme of avatars moves to symbolic appearances of the human. In the evolutionary classification of animals, the branch that includes the boar divides into one which has the primates. This is the line which will further subdivide to produce the hominids and finally the humans. In the Puranic classification, the transition from the boar moves into symbolic figures. At first, we have an intermediate being between animal and man, the lion-man, *Narasimha*, a “missing link” in the transition of evolutionary Consciousness from the Vital Mind to the Mind proper. *Narasimha* marks symbolically this zoomorphic transition from animal life to the human consciousness. Following this there are the beginnings of the individualisation of Consciousness in human beings, the proper emergence of what may be called a Person. The first of these human avatars is the dwarf avatar, *Vamana*. *Vamana* represents a quintessential blueprint of the human, a human micro-pattern. Following this are three rungs of human avatars. The first is Vital Man, a mental-vital divinity, Rama of the Axe or *Parashurama*. Then there comes the Ethical Man, a properly mental form of human perfection, an ideal of the standards of conduct for the common regulations of social life. This is *Rama*, who battles with the Rakshasa, Ravana to win back his wife and queen, Sita. Finally, we find the emergence of a type of divine superman, the perfection of the human type in *Krishna*. Here the latent occult powers of consciousness, intelligence, spirituality, and emotion that can be called divine, find fulfilment in a human being. *Krishna*, as an evolutionary being, demonstrates a future possibility for humankind.

Krishna is followed in the mainstream Puranic succession by the *Buddha*. The *Buddha* represents a transition out of the human into an Unmanifest Infinity, a disappearance out of Nature. Following the Upanishads, we may say that there are three realms of Knowledge – the realms of the Known, the Unknown and the Unknowable. What is known to us of ourselves and of our world through

the operation of our senses and our intelligence is the realm of the Known. The realm of the Unknown presents to us all the occult realities that we may enter into through our rarer experience or if we cultivate the operations of our senses turned inwards. It also includes the knowledge of the Cosmic Being to which we may arrive through spiritual identification (*Samadhi*). But beyond the realm of the Unknown is the realm of the Unknowable. This is because Reality being radically infinite, there is always an infinity which is and will remain unmanifest. This is the illimitable Transcendent from which the avatars come. What the *Buddha* represents is the transition from the realm of the Known and the Unknown to the realm of the Unknowable. That is what the Nirvana shows us, that we can transcend this cosmos. Beyond the *Buddha*, the Vishnu Purana posits a 10th avatar by the name of *Kalki*. This is an avatar of the future who will come from the Unmanifest with the power of Truth to manifest a new kind of Consciousness and Species on earth.

These are the avatars according to the Hindu conception. We find here that a plenitude of divine powers is available to the avatar. He becomes an example, bringing new and miraculous laws into Nature’s possibilities, which help it to overcome critical crisis points in its evolution. Thus the avatar becomes a location for the transition to a higher consciousness. But heroic though these Hindu avatars may be, we find that they express such superhumanity that they bear little kinship to us. We can adore or admire them, but we are hard put to identify with them. On the other hand, the Christian idea of the avatar, Christ as an avatar, draws us close through his helplessness. After all, the avatar is an embodiment; he takes a human body. Even if he enters the human condition with divine powers at easy recall, yet by dint of the human birth he has assumed the limitations of human experience and, therefore, must experience in identity the problems of the human condition.

This is an aspect of avatarhood not expressed explicitly in the Hindu Puranas. But it is this that becomes the central idea of Christ as an avatar. What does it mean for the Divine to take a human body and live a human life? At least one legitimate answer to this may be that the Divine could live the human experience and through this identification leave a potential for the transformation of the human condition. With Christ, we find that he suffers the ignoble human experiences of pain, betrayal, deprivation and death but thereby affirms at each step both his humanity and his divinity, emerging victorious over the powers of Ignorance, Falsehood and eventually Death in the Resurrection. This aspect of avatarhood cannot be overlooked.

Finally, we see that both the Puranic and Christian views of the avatar field only male representatives. Subordinated, and only hinted at as possibility, is the

idea of a female avatar, the Shakti Avatar. This has hardly been developed in any of the world religions, though it is present in seed form in the Indian Tantras.

Sri Aurobindo portrays all these kinds of avatars in *Savitri*. *Savitri* includes beautiful passages that show us the avatarhood of the Divine as a carrier of the human aspiration, and as a power of Intervention in our world. This is illustrated in the life and expression of Aswapati. The epic also includes moving passages of great power conveying the isolation and pain of the avatar leading a human life. This is seen in the lonely burden that Aswapati and Savitri must bear, and the suffering of the vast and free divine consciousness they carry, needing to cabin itself, like a genie in a bottle within the prison of the limitations and misunderstandings of the human condition. This painful and unshared adjustment is brought out in *Savitri* in terms of an amplified closeness and intimacy with analogous forms of human suffering.

These aspects also open hidden doors on the lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which “were not lived on the surface for men to see.” Embodying the cosmic Aspiration in themselves and readying themselves to be vehicles of the Intervention, Sri Aurobindo represents the inner lives of himself and the Mother in the forms of these beings. It is the experience of a higher consciousness, its immixture with the human consciousness and its transition to a condition victorious over the limitations of humanity that their lives and their teachings also represent.

Finally we need to consider the Shakti Avatar. The life of Christ may be seen as an excellent symbolic representation of the Vedic holocaust of Purusha. Early in our consideration, we had touched on the holocaust of Purusha as the fragmentation of the indivisible unity of Being into its infinite independent possibilities and its Involution in its opposite, an Inconscience. This self-conception of Spirit as an involution, an objectification, is experienced as an entrapment in Matter. It is this sense of loss, an oblivion of Consciousness, that is referred to as the holocaust of the Purusha. This is because the integral plenitude of Being is not merely an impersonal consciousness but equally a Person. The fragmentation of Purusha splits Being into beings seeking the wholeness of Being, Person into particles seeking to become persons, persons seeking to reconstitute Person. In the Christian symbol, Christ is the Divine Person who accepts to sacrifice himself, involving his infinite consciousness in its opposite, Death. In the trans-substantiation, his body is symbolically distributed as bread, his blood as wine. This partaking of the Eucharist multiplies the divine Person in each of its particles/participants, moving towards the collective reconstitution of the resurrected Divine Body (*corps glorieux*).

But if we see the fragmentation of Person as a holocaust, we see too

accompanying it, the involution of Consciousness in its opposite, the Inconscient. If the first is designated the holocaust of Purusha, Conscious Being and Person, the other is the holocaust of Prakriti, the sacrifice of Conscious Substance. This is what establishes the ground zero of cosmic evolution. Just as Conscious Being fragmented into innumerable conscious beings, or persons, has multiplied itself into infinite possibilities of self-experience, so too the ground of this experience, its encasement in qualitative substance, evolving through gradations of Consciousness from Matter to Mind and beyond, represents the holocaust of the Divine Mother, Prakriti or Nature. Nature as container, quality and force, provides vehicles for the particles of the dismembered Person, the souls. Nature that gives bodies to us all, not only physical bodies but vital bodies, mental bodies, psychic bodies, qualitative bodies of different modes of consciousness, and establishes the relations between forces and the processes within these bodies – this is the power of Consciousness as Prakriti, also known in terms of its dynamic agency as Shakti. Just as Purusha is reborn in each soul and re-experiences its Sacrifice in each life, and is reborn as the Purusha avatar in its integral fullness in each evolutionary stage, experiencing and overcoming in being the limits of the soul at that stage; so is Shakti reborn in each body that is assumed by Purusha, and so can Shakti be reborn as Shakti avatar in its integral fullness in each evolutionary stage, experiencing and overcoming processually the limits of the Nature at that stage.

The idea of the Shakti Avatar is even more powerful from the viewpoint of transformation than that of the avatarhood of Purusha. This is because Shakti is the power that works in the processes of nature’s creation and thus holds the power of transformation. Though the Purusha avatar can bring new possibilities of being and consciousness to the earth, he establishes these, even in himself, through his Shakti; and it is Shakti that, identifying with the processes of Nature can transform them to generalise these new possibilities. Just as the holocaust of Purusha is repeated at each evolutionary stage in the incarnation of Purusha, the holocaust of Prakriti becomes manifest as the incarnation of Shakti. She is the latent divine consciousness within the processes of Matter and Nature and she can manifest the qualitative body and the functioning which creatively express the divine being. This is what *Savitri* represents. In this sense, *Savitri* mirrors the role of Sri Aurobindo’s companion and collaborator, the Divine Mother as Sri Aurobindo describes it. In Sri Aurobindo’s writings on the Mother, he says that She incarnates as the Shakti Avatar for the purpose of becoming the effective power of transformation within the processes of Nature. It is this that can make it possible for a higher consciousness not merely to descend and be embodied in special beings, the avatars and *vibhutis*, but to be established in

the processes of Nature as a universal possibility. That is also the power of Savitri as a Shakti Avatar and this is the central message of the epic *Savitri*. It is about the future possibility of a transformed earth effected through the embodiment of the divine feminine principle brought down by Aswapati the Purusha avatar who represents the human aspiration.

II

Sri Aurobindo introduces Aswapati in Book I, Canto III, and from the beginning the aspect of Aswapati's avatarhood is brought to our attention. We see Aswapati as somebody who is instrumental in effecting the divine intervention which is the birth of Savitri. The building blocks for this are already present in the traditional story, as told in the Mahabharata. There, Aswapati is a king without an heir who performs an exacting ritual to propitiate the Sun God, Savitara, so that he may have a son. But instead of a son he is given the boon of a daughter. Here, in Sri Aurobindo's retelling, all these aspects are portrayed as symbols. Here, too, Aswapati is a king but kingship is treated as mastery over nature; hence, Aswapati is portrayed as a yogi-king. Elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo has written about rulership in terms of the mastery of one's nature through yoga. Such a person is called *swarat*, self-ruler. But this self-rule may be extended through universalisation, so that one can control the forces of universal nature. Such a person becomes an emperor, *samrat*. Both of these are to be understood primarily in their inner sense. They are goals and results of the fulfilment of yoga in human beings. Again, relocating this sense to think in terms of the Divine Person, Purusha, by innate self-mastery He is the *swarat*, and by self-extension, he is the *samrat* of all the creation.

Aswapati here, as an avatar of Purusha, is intrinsically *swarat* and *samrat*; but assuming the helplessness of human lives, he puts himself through the processes of yoga to regain these powers. This is why the Canto in which he is introduced is called *The Yoga of the King*. Not only is he a master of himself but he also embodies the cosmic aspiration of Nature. He holds in himself, as world master, the responsibility for the inner gifts of Nature, and in this sense, his most precious possession is the Aspiration of Nature. Therefore the passage begins

A world's desire compelled her mortal birth (*Savitri*, 4th rev.ed, 1993, p.22)

Aswapati is referred to throughout this passage, which goes on to describe him. He carries in himself "the world's desire" - i.e. the aspiration of Nature; his will is the forerunner, the carrier of the world's aspiration gazing into the future and invoking the things that need to come. It is no longer a personal will

but an impersonal and cosmic one. It is this embodied cosmic Will alone that can have the power to invoke the Grace of the Transcendent. It is thus that he can be thought of as an incarnation of Vishnu, the Preserver of the evolutionary aspiration and of the evolution of consciousness.

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

Here we find mention of 'the immemorial quest', that is, the aspiration of Nature seeking its own divinity. Aswapati is described as the forerunner of that quest. The phrase "one in the front" echoes also the Vedic sacrificial ritual, in which Fire or Agni, the earthly embodiment of the transcendental solar godhead, is known as "*purohitam*" the priest, who stands "in the front" (*purah*) to invoke the descent of new powers from the Transcendental.

But the next lines flesh out this idea in its profundity. To all of Nature's growth, history and manifestation there is active the play of involution and evolution that we considered. This play is enacted not only through impersonal cosmic principles but through beings and persons. It is the Conscious Being, the Divine Person or Purusha who is manifesting himself here, who has himself become all beings and persons. And therefore his play is enacted in Nature through beings and persons. One may say, this kind of expression privileges Theism over Monism, Pluralism or other non-theistic descriptions of Reality. For Sri Aurobindo, following the Vedas and Upanishads, Reality is impersonal and personal at the same time – it is a Person, and hence Theistic, and it is radically Infinite, hence impersonal, Monistic and Pluralistic at once. The "mysterious play in which the Unknown pursues himself through forms..." can be understood in all of these ways. But the constitution of the Integral Person out of the fragmentation of the Undivided Person is the central drift of "the play" and the avatars and *vibhutis* enact this play from scale to scale of the evolving "quest."

In the world, each individual is a unique self-replication of the Supreme Person, but the Supreme Person may also embody himself directly as an individual; this is the avatar. Aswapati is such an embodiment; this makes him the hero of this play, its protagonist, the Person in whom all other persons are present, enacting

the mystery of the Divine embodiment. It is he who is present, though veiled, in all things and works towards his self-unfoldment. He alone carries an aspiration equal in magnitude and intensity to effect the transcendental intervention on behalf of the cosmic creation. This is not an intervention of Himself but of his Shakti or Power, creating conditions for greater revelations of the Supreme Godhead. His avatarhood is an ambassador to and an invoker of the avatarhood of Shakti.

Sri Aurobindo makes this clear in the line:

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

In the original story, Aswapati invokes the Sun God, but in Sri Aurobindo's telling, it is the Shakti of the solar Purusha, whom he invokes, seeking Her Descent, because he knows that She is the Creatrix and the one who can transform the conditions of Nature in the manifestation. It is this transformation of Nature by the Shakti avatar and the union of conscious being and conscious energy, Purusha and Shakti, that can take the cosmos to the next rung of its evolution.

The passage continues to describe the avatar's powers in Aswapati:

His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres
Into our province of ephemeral sight,
A colonist from immortality. (Ibid)

It is again made clear that Aswapati has entered the earthly domain of mortality from another domain, that of Immortality. In essence, of course, all beings are that, we are all "colonists from immortality." All beings here are the Eternal and Indivisible Being subjecting Himself to a conception of spatial and temporal fragmentation – separate beings subject to births, growths and deaths. The Upanishad designates all human beings as *amrtasya putrah*, children of immortality. 'Hearken unto me, thou children of Immortality' is the call of the Upanishads: *Srinantu visve amrtasya putrah*. This is an image of the essence of human consciousness, but when applied to Aswapati it refers to an Incarnation of the Immortal Purusha. This is a being who is not subject to the repeating cycles of Nature, he has come self-born from the Shadowless Domain and has brought its consciousness with him. Thus Aswapati is not subject, in the same way, to the dense veil of Ignorance which is cast upon all beings in the cosmos by Prakriti. He wears this veil as all beings in the cosmos must, but his divinity is available to him just behind the veil in this earthly nature and its processes.

A pointing beam on earth's uncertain roads,
His birth held up a symbol and a sign (Ibid)

The words 'a symbol and a sign' have an esoteric significance. The symbol of involution and evolution, of ascent and descent is Sri Aurobindo's symbol. It is two intersecting triangles, one ascending and one descending, as in the Judaic Seal of Solomon. At the centre, is the Square of Manifestation and within it, the lotus of the Avatar, representing the flowering of Divine Consciousness in the seven modalities (waves) of Nature. Seen with this esoteric symbolism, the birth of Aswapati holds up in itself Sri Aurobindo's symbol – a recondite way of establishing the identity of Aswapati and Sri Aurobindo. The unveiled mystery of involution and evolution that progresses dynamically in each life is represented by this symbol. The law of personal becoming, *swadharma*, the movement of life, *gati*, is one that proceeds from moment to moment through calling to the divine principle and receiving the intervention of the divine Grace manifesting creatively and unpredictably. Thus the meaning of this symbol may be summarised as the birth of the Divine in the moments of Time. It is this principle in a human body that is the very life principle of Aswapati.

His human self like a translucent cloak
Covered the All-Wise who leads the unseeing world, (Ibid)

These lines bring forth explicitly the thin disguise of natural Ignorance that is worn by the avatar. Behind it one senses the Preserver, the great Vishnu, the wise, all-seeing lord who sees the true shape of things and can direct them, carrying them towards their fulfilment, when to everyone else, all is dark.

At this point, Sri Aurobindo shifts from a Vedic and Puranic introduction of Aswapati as an avatar to introduce him in terms of the Christian mythos. Not only is he the thinly veiled divine being, with omniscience within his access, but he has also chosen to be human, to experience the mortal and ignorant condition of suffering and to bring a higher consciousness into it through the embodied experience. This is the Christian notion of the Son of God who has come to pay the debt, the debt of God to man and earth. It says

Affiliated to cosmic Space and Time
And paying here God's debt to earth and man
A greater sonship was his divine right. (Ibid)

Again, in a way, we are all "sons of God." In fact, Sri Aurobindo says so

explicitly in the very first Canto of *Savitri* (“We are sons of God and must be even as He”), but in the case of Aswapati, he says “a greater sonship was his divine right.” This is because Aswapati, like Christ in Christian theology, is the Divine being born in the image of the Son, while we are the sons of Man growing into the image of the Divine.

Although consenting to mortal ignorance,
His knowledge shared the Light ineffable. (Ibid)

These lines reinforce the acceptance of the human condition of ignorance and mortality as a choice of the Divine. As discussed earlier, just behind the veil of ignorance, the avatar has access to an Identity with all things and the knowledge born of that identity. In the Gita Sri Krishna says to Arjuna:

Arjuna, both you and I have had many births. I remember all of them, whereas you, defeater of foes, do not.

Although I am birthless and by nature eternal, and although I am the Lord of all beings, yet I am established in my own Nature and come to birth by my own Maya. (Gita IV: 5-6).

Whereas all beings are divine in essence, human souls are subject to the Ignorance. The power of self-dividing Maya casts a veil between soul and nature, so that we lose contact with the eternal and undivided Self within, which knows itself in Being and in its becomings (births). But the avatar does not enter life through the portals of a forgetting. He chooses his nature as a mask of Ignorance and enters life through his own power. This does not mean, however, that his experience of the Ignorance is any less real or painful. On the contrary, it may be more so, due to the knowledge of living through the Falsehood one has consented to, while retaining consciousness of Truth in the inner being. Of course, this is the condition also of the yogi who is established in Brahman while in life (*jivan mukta*). But such a being has awoken to this reality through practice of yoga, while the avatar has it as his innate nature.

A strength of the original Permanence
Entangled in the moment and its flow,
He kept the vision of the Vasts behind: (Ibid)

This is a continuation of the same idea. Aswapati has entered into the dynamics of Nature and its confused welter of forces. He accepts to participate

in its struggle, supporting or opposing one force or another, but has an unerring insight based on his intrinsic unity with all things (‘the vision of the Vasts’).

A power was in him from the Unknowable. (Ibid)

That which is unmanifest, the radical infinity of God, the Transcendence which has not yet taken form or manifestation, is present in him. That is what makes him an avatar, because he can open doors on that which is yet beyond the cosmos, not yet accepted as its law.

An archivist of the symbols of the Beyond,
A treasurer of superhuman dreams,
He bore the stamp of mighty memories
And shed their grandiose ray on human life. (Ibid)

These are the primordial aspirations of Nature. The march of Divinity out of Inconscience into the fullness of its Consciousness through all its stages is the “memories” by which God is being born progressively yet retrospectively in this manifestation. This entire succession lives within Aswapati, is present in his Presence.

His days were a long growth to the Supreme. (Ibid)

The experience of time introduced in the last few lines leads naturally to this one. The philosopher Henri Bergson has referred to this as “duration,” a time-quantum, the flow of becoming intuited as a unity. Here behind all discontinuities and reversals, there is the experience of a continuous expansion towards divinity.

A skyward being nourishing its roots
On sustenance from occult spiritual founts
Climbed through white rays to meet an unseen Sun.
His soul lived as eternity’s delegate, (Ibid, pp.22-23)

After a bold image of the yoga of Aswapati, where his inner access to the divine consciousness is shown to be the cause of rapid spiritual development, we find a reference once more to the “greater sonship.” He is the delegate of eternity in time.

His mind was like a fire assailing heaven,
His will a hunter in the trails of light.
An ocean impulse lifted every breath.;
Each action left the footprints of a god, (Ibid, p.23)

Aswapati is described here as a superhuman cosmic being. The great mystic Ramakrishna has introduced the idea of the *Ishwarkoti*, a person who belongs to the domain of undivided Consciousness and who can climb up and down the ladder of Being at will. Sri Aurobindo's Aswapati is clearly of this kind.

The little plot of our mortality
Touched by this tenant from the heights became
A playground of the living Infinite. (Ibid, p.23)

Aswapati's presence and action lead to a transformation in his environment. His very birth causes the energy of the earth to take on a divine quality and character. All around him the law of the unveiled play of Delight begins to manifest. This is consonant with yogic descriptions of avataric births and lives. We are told, for example, that when the Buddha took his first steps, the earth opened up and seven lotuses blossomed. Undoubtedly, this is mythology and hagiography, but it expresses an inner visionary reality at the same time – the lotuses indicate the mystic centres or chakras of the earth. Their blossoming at the touch of the Buddha's feet stands for the expression of latent divine powers in Nature. That which the avatar comes to achieve begins manifesting in the inner atmosphere of the earth by his very presence. In one of his writings, Sri Aurobindo mentions that there are people who, without doing anything, just by their presence, can catalyse the change of an age. The Mother has said about Sri Aurobindo that when she first met him, she saw immediately behind him and above him the supramental worlds that he wanted to manifest on earth. She was compelled to ask him, "Will these worlds manifest here?" He is supposed to have answered affirmatively, and immediately after, she saw those worlds descending to the earth with her subtle sight. The avatar comes with this power. But at the same time, the possibility could remain a promise achieved only in astral space unless the Shakti helps to universalise and materialise it.

We now turn to a second passage which elaborates deeply the aspect of avatarhood which we find in the Christ, the sacrificed Purusha. Though he brings the promise of a greater life, and though he comes to redeem the earth, it is not only glory and divinity that the avatar brings. The avatars have accepted subjection to the law of suffering and mortality here and can find themselves

suffering ever more intensely than those with limited consciousness, the Falsehood on earth because of their heightened Truth consciousness.

The most clear exposition of this aspect of the suffering of the Avatar is brought out in Book VI, Canto II '*The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain*'. Here Narad, the demi-god, explains to Aswapati and his wife, the queen of Madra, about the human condition of mortality and suffering. Knowledgeable about the embodied divinity of persons like Aswapati and Savitri, his descriptions turn towards these rare personalities, "the world redeemers," who come from greater heights to save or transform the world. It is as if, unlike other humans, their souls are not compelled by Nature's law of *karma* to live human lives, but accept this condition of their own freedom, to bring a greater law of delight and harmony to this suffering world. But, Narad says, though they come to liberate, they are imprisoned by the laws they would replace or transform. Indeed, so it must be because without this subjection, they would not experience and hence know by identity, the meaning of earthly existence; and earthlings on their part would find them completely remote and alien. Narad says:

He who would save the race must share its pain: (Ibid, p.445)

It is one thing to save oneself, to go to the mountain-top, to live in the forest, to enter a cave and to draw one's spirit away from the proclivities of nature, to find the *purusha* and use it to put a stop to the movements of consciousness, *citta-vritti-nirodha*. It is quite another to seek to change the universal condition of Nature. Those who want the latter cannot live immune from the forces of Nature, they must experience them in their fullness.

This he shall know who obeys the grandiose urge. (Ibid)

Those who espouse such a world-affirming aspiration are meted their experiences by the "ordainer of the path" as Sri Aurobindo calls the guide of spiritual destiny elsewhere in the epic. Sri Aurobindo came to recognise such a granter of circumstances in his own life. He refers to this being in his diaries, the *Record of Yoga* as the "Master of the Yoga." The hardships and suffering of the human condition will come to such beings without their seeking for it.

The Great who came to save this suffering world
And rescue out of Time's shadow and the Law,
Must pass beneath the yoke of grief and pain;
They are caught by the Wheel that they had hoped to break, (Ibid)

Here is the wheel of *samsara*, the rounds of ignorance recurring from life to life. Narad indicates that the beings who come to save are free of this condition and wish to transform it here; yet, when they enter the human condition, they become subject to it, sacrificed to that condition.

On their shoulders they must bear man's load of fate. (Ibid)

From this point the imagery moves suggestively to explore the aspect of Christ's avatarhood. In this line, we catch a glimpse of Christ carrying his cross on the way to his crucifixion.

Heaven's riches they bring, their sufferings count the price
Or they pay the gift of knowledge with their lives.
The Son of God born as the Son of Man
Has drunk the bitter cup, owned Godhead's debt,
The debt the Eternal owes to the fallen kind
His will has bound to death and struggling life
That yearns in vain for rest and endless peace. (Ibid)

The esoteric Christian metaphor, the theology of Christianity is brought into full focus here. The avatar becomes the person who has owned Godhead's debt, "the debt the Eternal owes to the fallen kind." One may find it strange to see Sri Aurobindo affirming the Abrahamic myth of Original Sin and the Fall. However, for Sri Aurobindo, the sense of a Fall is existential, part of the human condition of "thrownness," as Martin Heidegger calls it. This Fall has its origins in the involution of Godhead, the sacrifice of Purusha. Hence, humanity's Fall is redeemable not by man himself but by God. It is God's Original Sin, not man's, in the primordial sense of the evolving manifestation. Hence, it is God who himself descends in the form and figure of a human being to own his debt. He must experience as humans experience the depth of suffering here, to drink the bitter cup to its dregs.

Now is the debt paid, wiped off the original score. (Ibid)

Occasionally we find lines in *Savitri* that move from a mythic past to a prophetic future. This line and what follows bears that quality. The avataric mission of Christ cleans the karma incurred due to the involution of God – the birth of Falsehood as the active will to Ignorance. It makes available a new tapas of divine manifestation. This is also Sri Aurobindo's own work. In these

lines and what follows, he announces the fulfilment of his work in terms of the reverse Sacrifice of the Purusha, the holocaust of the avatar.

The Eternal suffers in a human form,
He has signed salvation's testament with his blood:
He has opened the doors of his undying peace.
The Deity compensates the creature's claim,
The creator bears the law of pain and death;
A retribution smites the incarnate God.
His love has paved the mortal's road to Heaven:
He has given his life and light to balance here
The dark account of mortal ignorance.
It is finished, the dread mysterious sacrifice,
Offered by God's martyred body for the world; (Ibid)

These lines, evoking the Christian mythos, and uttered mystically in Christ's voice, talks of the avatar's sacrifice as the exhaustion of the accumulated karma of error and falsehood. Gathering it into his life, the avatar exhausts it through his death. This is the mystic idea of Christ's crucifixion but this is repeated in the life of every "saviour," the avatar who comes ever-again. In *Savitri*, we may say that it is Satyavan who plays the esoteric role of accepting death to wipe clean the slate of human subjection. But Satyavan's doom is intimately linked to the yogic action of Savitri and hers to that of Aswapati, so the mythic "passion play" in this case is enacted by multiple embodiments of the Divine, not merely one.

In another sense, these lines are darkly prophetic about the passing of Sri Aurobindo himself. Sri Aurobindo's own death can, in this way, be seen as an acceptance of the earth's karma so that a way may be prepared for what he called "the supramental manifestation." The life of a great yogi or avatar is no longer his own but represents and absolves the cosmic condition. We have another example of this kind in Sri Ramakrishna who is said to have suffered and died from throat cancer due to the acceptance of the earth's accumulated darkness. The same is also affirmed of Ramana Maharshi, the sage of Arunachalam. In the case of Sri Aurobindo, this becomes the replay of the mystic Sacrifice of Purusha, so as to open the doors to a divine manifestation.

Gethsemane and Calvary are his lot,
He carries the cross on which man's soul is nailed; (Ibid)

The sad alienation of the avatar's life is hinted at here. No one, during his

lifetime, is in a position to truly understand his mission and his actions. He seems a foolish clown, with excessive aspiration, hurting himself wilfully in a life that is contrary to humankind. They jeer and laugh at him as he goes to his death.

Insult and jeer are his right's acknowledgement;
Two thieves slain with him mock his mighty death. (Ibid)

Christ was crucified with two thieves by his side as if his equals. Like the *Ida* and *Pingala* on the two sides of the *shusumna*, these two represent the left and right hand of God, turned contrary and evil – the mental and vital Falsehood. In the brute levelling of Death, the powers of Falsehood and Truth rub shoulders as equals and demonstrate in stark irony the Law of Inconscient Matter.

He has trod with bleeding brow the Saviour's way.
He who has found his identity with God
Pays with the body's death his soul's vast light.
His knowledge immortal triumphs by his death. (Ibid)

So though the avatar suffers the terrible yoke of human abjection, he leaves behind the legacy of his immortal consciousness and knowledge, which then become the seeds germinating in the lives of millions. This is the repetition of the divine holocaust, the collective reconstitution of the sacrificed body of the Purusha who concretised himself in the embodied form of an avatar.

The other kind of avatarhood dealt with by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri* is, in fact, its central message – the Shakti Avatar. A passage from *Savitri* Book I, Canto II, *The Issue* deals with the Shakti Avatar. Savitri is an avatar of Divine Shakti in this epic. In Book I, Canto II, Sri Aurobindo introduces her to us for the first time through a glorious description that brings out for us her divinity and her divine powers. These lines portray her as a child, but even in childhood she demonstrates her avatarhood. The idea of the Shakti avatar is unique in some sense to Savitri and brings back to our consciousness a notion which belongs to the Tantric tradition and to an even earlier Vedic tradition. Sri Aurobindo, therefore, points out that the story of Savitri actually comes to us from the Vedas. In the later Hindu tradition, the idea of the avatar becomes masculinised; this is so also with Christ in the Christian tradition.

But as with the holocaust of the Supreme Purusha, there is the holocaust of the Prakriti or of the Divine Mother. This is what Sri Aurobindo heightens in his

little book *The Mother* and this also backgrounds the notion of the Shakti avatar in *Savitri*. The holocaust of the Purusha implies that the supreme Conscious Existence subjects itself to its own opposite possibility of Non-Being so that it may emerge from that affirmatively, in Consciousness, Knowledge and Delight. For this act of Sacrifice to be even possible, it is the ground condition of Non-Being that must be established by an act of Creative Consciousness, which is a withdrawing or withholding of Consciousness, a movement of Consciousness known as *nivritti*. Nature, as we know it, is an Ignorance stumbling and groping with its automatisms but instinct with a creative Intelligence that produces all the myriad experimental forms of evolution housing the ascending scale of consciousness. This self-withdrawal of Consciousness and graded emergence through the processes of Nature, subject to automatisms, is an aspect of the holocaust of Prakriti or Shakti that is gradually manifesting the divine consciousness through the processes of Nature.

Thus the idea of the Shakti avatar is that of the incarnation of Creative Consciousness, intimately familiar with the processes of all things and able to identify with them and transform them. It is a feminine incarnation, manifesting the Love and Power of the Divine. It subjects itself from the beginning to the processes of Nature and therefore accepts the Ignorance and the Falsehood in their fullness. The avatars of the Purusha may embody the human aspiration or the aspiration of the cosmos. They may make available higher possibilities of being in potential; but the avatars of Shakti come to transform Nature, to give battle, if necessary, to the powers of Ignorance, within the nuts and bolts of their functioning. Sri Aurobindo introduces Savitri from this point of view. He says

The impunity of unborn Might was hers. (Ibid, p.16)

From the beginning, She is introduced in terms of Power.

Although she leaned to bear the human load,
Her walk kept still the measures of the gods. (Ibid)

One can see here the image of the Divine Mother in human form, a little stooped, as it were, to come closer to the consciousness of human beings and their small concerns, troubles and idealisms while she herself has a vast, oceanic Wisdom and Power and an aspiration to root out the condition of Ignorance. As with Aswapati and Sri Aurobindo, one can see the close relation between the character and person of Savitri and the inner reality and life of Sri Aurobindo's

collaborator and companion, Mirra Alfassa, the Mother. The Mother, housed the incarnation of the Shakti and both spiritually and physically, stooped or “leaned” to come close to those who were around her, entering into what seemed insignificant details of their lives to lend a helping hand and to guide, though as it says here ‘her walk kept still the measures of the gods’.

Earth’s breath had failed to stain that brilliant glass: (Ibid)

This is a description of Savitri as a child who manifests the divinity which is within her in a dreamlike purity here on earth.

It still reflected heaven’s spiritual joy.
Almost they saw who lived within her light
Her playmate in the sempiternal spheres
Descended from its unattainable realms
In her attracting advent’s luminous wake,
The white-fire dragon-bird of endless bliss
Drifting with burning wings above her days: (Ibid)

This is a reflection of the power of Ananda, Delight or Bliss, which is the origin of the Consciousness from which this avatar comes because she is the avatar of Love. Primordial Delight, in its first manifestation, becomes Love and follows the avatar of Shakti as ‘the white-fire dragon-bird of endless bliss’. This passage leads to the fact of her emergence into the maturity of her power that cannot be realised until what Sri Aurobindo has called the Lord of Evolution, or the Master of the Yoga has burdened her with a sense of destiny so that it may bring her deeper powers into action in her life.

There is a darkness in terrestrial things
That will not suffer long too glad a note.
On her too closed the inescapable Hand:
The armed Immortal bore the snare of Time.
One dealt with her who meets the burdened great. (Ibid, p.17)

We have been introduced to this aspect of the avatar and His/Her guide while dealing with the notion of the avatar’s sacrifice as developed by Sri Aurobindo with the Christian mythos in mind. Here we encounter again this Master of Evolution, who is designated the “Assigner of the ordeal and the path.”

Assigner of the ordeal and the path
Who chooses in this holocaust of the soul
Death, fall and sorrow as the spirit’s goads,
The dubious godhead with his torch of pain
Lit up the chasm of the unfinished world
And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss. (Ibid)

The holocaust of the Divine Mother is referred to directly here. Savitri is called upon to finish the anguished and messy work of the Creator – the “unfinished,” in the sense of imperfect, nature of the world brought starkly to Savitri’s consciousness by this “dubious godhead.” To know something imperfect, one must already have an intuition of perfection, of what is lacking in the present. The Assigner of the Ordeal burdens Savitri with the intimation of earthly suffering, a premonition of the experiences she will be put through and challenged to confront with her avataric Powers.

August and pitiless in his calm outlook,
Heightening the Eternal’s dreadful strategy,
He measured the difficulty with the might
And dug more deep the gulf that all must cross. (Ibid)

The plot of *Savitri* is being laid here. Savitri will be faced with the doom of Satyavan, a doom she will choose not to escape. She accepts this dreadful fate so as to challenge the Iron Law of earthly mortality, and transform the conditions of Inconscience here. The master of evolution knows her Power and will push her mercilessly through extremes because it is his role to ensure that She develops the awareness and the capacity to effect that transformation.

Assailing her divinest elements,
He made her heart kin to the striving human heart
And forced her strength to its appointed road.
For this she had accepted mortal breath;
To wrestle with the Shadow she had come
And must confront the riddle of man’s birth
And life’s brief struggle in dumb Matter’s night.
Whether to bear with Ignorance and death
Or hew the ways of Immortality,
To win or lose the godlike game for man,
Was her soul’s issue thrown with Destiny’s dice.

But not to submit and suffer was she born;
To lead, to deliver was her glorious part. (Ibid)

This indeed, is the destiny of Savitri. This canto is called *The Issue* and we are presented here with the central issue of *Savitri*. Savitri as an incarnation of Power will take up human fate, not merely the human aspiration, and effect the Victory for the Divine and for humankind.

Another passage in *The Book of Fate* brings this out in a very powerful way. It is also a prophecy of the destiny of the Mother since Sri Aurobindo would depart from his body and leave the culmination and the fulfilment of his work to the Mother. It says

A day may come when she must stand unhelped (Ibid, p.461)

Here Narad is talking about Savitri and Sri Aurobindo about the Mother.

On a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers,
Carrying the world's future on her lonely breast,
Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole
To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge,
Alone with death and close to extinction's edge,
Her single greatness in that last dire scene
Must cross alone a perilous bridge in Time
And reach an apex of world-destiny
Where all is won or all is lost for man.
In that tremendous silence lone and lost
Of a deciding hour in the world's fate,
In her soul's climbing beyond mortal time
Where she stands sole with Death or sole with God
Apart upon a silent desperate brink,
Alone with her self and death and destiny
As on some verge between Time and Timelessness
Where being must end or life rebuild its base,
Alone she must conquer or alone must fall.
No human aid can reach her in that hour,
No armoured god stand shining at her side.
Cry not to heaven, for she alone can save.
For this the silent force came missioned down;
In her the conscious Will took human shape:
She only can save herself and save the world. (Ibid)

This passage is one of the last which Sri Aurobindo added before he left his body in 1950. It contains the full power in the mantric sense of Savitri as a Shakti Avatar. Sri Aurobindo leaves us here with his prophecy for the destiny of the earth and the role of the Mother in its final determination.

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

God And The World

Joan Price

For joy and not for sorrow earth was made...

— Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo's Major Realisations

The whole of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is based upon his own experiences of the spiritual consciousness. Through his practice of yoga, he had four major realisations:

1. The realisation of the Supreme Reality (God) as impersonal and transcendent of the phenomenal world and of all forms.
2. The realisation of the Supreme Reality as personal, the creator of the universe.
3. The realisation of the Supreme Reality as both motionless (impersonal) and dynamic (personal), formless and having form, beyond the world and present in the world.
4. The realisation of the various planes of being – from the lowest matter to the highest spirit – all integrated in a non-dual reality. Matter is Spirit slowed down, or in another context, Matter is Spirit made concrete.

Spirit and Matter

Based on the above realisations, Sri Aurobindo found that the material world as well as the spiritual world is real. We need to avoid the two extremes that only the physical world is real (materialism) or that only the spiritual realm is real (idealism). Idealistic philosophy that negates matter is as shortsighted as materialistic philosophy that negates spirit. Alone, each of these theories would lead to the negation of cosmic existence and of the importance of individual human life. Both philosophies have their positive and negative effects, but as separate philosophies neither the idealist nor the materialist can offer us a reason

for striving to perfect the world or ourselves in the world.

The idealist views the material world as merely an illusion or an appearance of the ultimate reality which is spirit. The physical world for the idealist is an illusion, a mirage, or at best an appearance of the ultimate reality, which is spirit. The world exists as a reality only to the unilluminated or ignorant mind and when we reach knowledge and illumination, the phenomenal world will be perceived as illusory. This one-sided affirmation of the spirit is characteristic of the Vedanta philosophy, which to this day dominates Indian thought. Such a worldview, says Sri Aurobindo, undercuts all cultural progress by preaching liberation or salvation from life in this world to life in another realm of pure bliss, implying that life in this evolving world has no ultimate worth. Although idealism is only a partial truth, it has done a tremendous service by creating in human beings the aspiration for unity with the Divine by stressing the importance of the spiritual life.

At the other extreme, by denying the reality of spirit, the materialist stands idealism on its head. For the materialist, physical matter or energy called nature is the true reality – all mental or spiritual experiences are merely physiological processes of the brain. Sri Aurobindo regards materialism on shaky ground since it can be demonstrated that there are realms of being inaccessible to the senses. Even sense knowledge transcends the senses, for it is a reconstruction of sensations by the “higher powers of the mind.” We know, for example that for the senses the sun goes round the earth and that the stick in the water appears bent. It takes reasoning mind to correct the error of our senses. We know that human beings cannot be defined as solely physical. No material object, however beautiful or valuable, can make us feel loved, because our deeper identity and true character lie in the subjective nature of the mind, which lies beyond the reach of the physical senses. By limiting any metaphysical inquiry, the materialist must necessarily exclude inquiry into transcendence, immortality, and freedom. On the other hand, materialism has served a worthy purpose by emphasising the reality and value of the physical world.

It was Sri Aurobindo's experience that both idealism and materialism contain a serious error and a precious truth. His major concern was in their insistence on contradicting each other.

The Three Aspects of God

Brahman (God), Sri Aurobindo discovered, has three aspects: transcendent, cosmic/universal, and individual:

Brahman is the Absolute, the transcendent and incommunicable, the Supracosmic Existence that sustains the cosmos, the Cosmic Self that

upholds all beings, but It is too the self of each individual: the soul or psychic entity... it is his supreme Nature or Consciousness-Force that has become the living being in a world of living beings.... He is the Timeless and Time; He is Space and all that is in Space; He is the thinker and his thought, the warrior and his courage, the gambler and his dice-throw... 1

Sri Aurobindo’s experience of the three poises of Brahman (transcendent, universal and individual) is the basic insight of his philosophy. He sees these three poises of God as necessary for the evolution of a divine life on earth. Because God is consciousness and present in all things, then “all is consciousness.”

Are there not in us and in the world forms of consciousness which are submental, to which we can give the name of vital and physical consciousness? If so, we must suppose in the plant ... the name of consciousness although it is not the human or animal mentality for which we have hitherto preserved the monopoly of that description. Not only is this probable but, if we will consider things dispassionately, it is certain. 2

Sri Aurobindo calls these three poises of Brahman, Sat-Chit-Ananda, or Being, Consciousness-Force, and Bliss/Delight. God or Brahman has a transcendent, self-absorbed aspect, but also a dynamic, many-sided fullness, which continuously pours forth a flood of worlds and enters into them as their inner substance and support. Sri Aurobindo speaks of God as Bliss, the Divine Delight that is the secret substance of all things. Thus he solves the perennial problem of the One and the Many in a beautiful synthesis that holds both poles of the Divine Unity in an integral fullness of Delight. God then is not only a stable, motionless transcendent Absolute, but also the dynamic heart of this moving universe: transcendent beyond all manifestation, universal as the support of cosmic existence, and individual as the immanent spiritual centre of each being.

The Fourth Aspect of God

One of Sri Aurobindo’s most astounding discoveries was a fourth poise – the Supramental Truth-Consciousness (Supermind), which, as the directive power of knowledge and will, is the creator of the world and everything in it. Supermind is a force that not only expresses the unity of Being, Consciousness-Force and Delight, but brings them into action as “forms of imperishable substance” –

mind, soul, life and matter.

Sri Aurobindo argues that Supermind is a logical necessity, because God in itself is “a spaceless and timeless absolute of conscious existence that is bliss (delight).” But the world is not timeless and spaceless – the world is working out a development of relations in time and space. Without a mediating principle between the Absolute Reality (unity) above, and mind, soul, life and matter (multiplicity) below, there could be no relation between the two. Supermind or Supramental Truth-Consciousness is the principle that builds the bridge between the higher and the lower hemispheres. It communicates with the unity above it and with the multiplicity below it.

The Divine Hierarchy

Brahman (God)		
Sat (Being)	Chit (Consciousness-Force) (The Divine Mother)	Ananda (Bliss/Delight)
Supramental Truth-Consciousness (Supermind)		
	Mind	
	Soul	
	Life	
	Matter	

Brahman, Sat Chit Ananda, and Supramental Truth-Consciousness are the upper hemisphere of unity. The middle line is the knot (not separation) between Divine consciousness and the lower hemisphere of consciousness which is ignorance (of the higher hemisphere). Everything in the higher hemisphere exists potentially in the lower hemisphere. For example in matter, Sat (Being) exists potentially. Matter is the form of Being and subjects itself to life. Life energy is the aspect of Chit, the Divine Mother (Consciousness-Force) and works out forms and the “play” of conscious energy. Mind is a subordinate power of Supermind. Soul is the “child” of Ananda (Bliss/Delight) and in the world evolving for experience in consciousness.

The knot between the higher and lower hemispheres is where mind and Supermind meet, but there is a veil between them. Part of that veil is our ego that sees all things in the world as separate from each other. Removing the veil is the condition of the divine life in humankind. Once we remove the veil, we

will see an illuminating descent (involution) of the higher spirit into the nature of our lower being and its ascent (evolution) into the nature of the higher. Just as the universe can be understood in terms of these tiers, so each of us is a microcosm or a miniature universe, and within ourselves is a portion of each plane.

Delight in Creation

When asked why God, perfect, absolute, infinite, needing nothing, desiring nothing at all, would create the universe and our world of forms, Sri Aurobindo answered simply, "... it can be only for one reason, for delight." 3

We may ask: If this creation is God's delight, why in our daily life do we experience physical pain, emotional pain, mental pain, and moral evil? These painful experiences would seem to contradict the notion of delight.

Ethical Stage

Indeed we experience pain and evil, says Sri Aurobindo, but only because we are not seeing the whole picture. If we look deeply enough, we can see that our pleasure in life far exceeds our pain, but we don't usually notice pleasure because it is so habitually present and normal. We notice only those things that stand out against our normal experience. If we were to take a broader view of the whole and not limit ourselves to a human standpoint, we would realise that we don't live in an ethical world based on our personal or social ideas of good and evil.

The attempt of human thought to force an ethical meaning into the whole of Nature is one of those acts of wilful and obstinate self-confusion... which most effectively prevent [human beings] from arriving at real knowledge and complete sight. 4

We know that material nature isn't ethical. The laws that govern nature — the law of gravity for example — are impartial. If you jump off a cliff, you will go down, not because the law dislikes you, but because all heavy objects fall in space. Nor is animal nature ethical. If a dog takes a bone from a neighbour's yard, we don't call the dog immoral, but if a neighbour takes a vase from our living room we do consider the act immoral. Thus, ethical values arise within human beings when we begin to make value judgments on what is good and what is bad. We disapprove of that which threatens and hurts us and approve of that which flatters and satisfies us — not just as individuals, but also as communities and as nations. Unlike nature, except for some higher animal forms,

we develop moral standards based on our level of consciousness. We use our limited rational mind to force meaning into the whole of nature. But higher than the rational choices of humankind is what Sri Aurobindo calls a supra-ethical realm that has no need of ethics. Thus, the ethical systems we set up are only a stage in evolution — an important stage, but a stage only.

For Sri Aurobindo the notion of delight is common to all levels of being. Delight is the satisfaction of the Conscious-Force when it achieves the development it seeks. And it does achieve it, but on the way, there is struggle, rejection, and conflict as well as the delight of attraction and union. "...delight of becoming...takes different forms of movement of which pleasure and pain are positive and negative currents." 5

Reason and Duality

In the ethical stage of our development, we judge delight by dualities of right and wrong, good and evil, pleasure and pain. We judge by our faculty of reason, but reason, Sri Aurobindo reminds us, is not a faculty of truth, it is a faculty of division:

Through the duality of reason, we:

1. Lay down our life for a friend and declare war on our enemy.
2. Lend nations a helping hand then turn to them in aggression, ruin, and slaughter.
3. Draw humankind together and give new hope, and at the same time crush it with the burden of monstrous commercialism.
4. Condone altruistic humanitarianism while justifying egoism, vulgar will-to-power and success.

As we have seen, ethics as a judgment of reason is only a stage in our evolution. As our own awareness moves toward a higher state of consciousness and away from our limited views, we will, promises Sri Aurobindo, experience the true universal delight within us and within all things.

.... if and when Mind in man becomes capable of being free, unegoistic, in harmony with all other beings and with the play of the universal forces, the use and office of suffering [will end]. 6

We know that emotions are the cause of psychological pain. We know that with concentration or hypnosis, we can block out physical pain. We know that mental pain arises from our attitude. It is our egoistic attachment to evil, pain, and suffering that keeps us from realising that delight is the cause of creation. We tend to believe that reason is the highest faculty we have and with reason

we can find the answer to all our ills. But reason is the principle of division, thus we identify with our own separate ego. This separation is necessary in the course of evolution, yet it does obscure our knowledge of the underlying unity. Because reason deals with the finite and truth is infinite, we can't as yet grasp the whole truth.

Supermind

With reason we can't answer the questions: Who am I? What created this world? Does life have a purpose? However, with reason we do become aware of our limitation and that is why Sri Aurobindo says we humans are the greatest of living beings because we are the most discontented and feel most the pressure of limitations. We want to know more. And there is more: beyond the duality of the reasoning mind we have Supermind, the energy of infinite existence, eternal, immortal being, and universal delight, and one day we will experience this glorious truth within all things.

In the realms of the immortal Supermind
Truth who hides here her head in mystery, ...
Is Nature and the common law of things.

(*Savitri*, 4th rev.ed, 1993, pp.661-62)

This world exists because God has the delight of its own infinite existence and the delight of its own infinite self-variation. God not only transcends the world, but also enters in and supports everything in the world, thus we have the true unity of spirit and matter. Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother agree: It is “for joy and not for sorrow earth was made.” Thus, “To fulfil God in life” is the goal for humankind.

Notes

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 294. New York: India Library Society. 1965.
2. Ibid., p. 103.
3. Ibid., p. 108.
4. Ibid., p. 114.
5. Ibid., p. 117.
6. Ibid., p. 128.

Sri Aurobindo: Looking for the True Vedanta

Anita Chakraborty Goswami

ABSTRACT

[It is not much known that once Sri Aurobindo had set himself to writing a commentary on the Iōea Upaniōad under the title *The Life Divine*, and which he left incomplete. The title, *The Life Divine* has of course survived in his magnum opus, the miracle of vision and insight, his evolutionary metaphysics based on a rejection of illusion.

The commentarial Life Divine is an important work as it first informs us about what he called the original or real Vedanta. The opening verse of the Upaniōad is crucial in this regard, ie the ontological status of the world whether it is real or illusory. The decision is momentous philosophically. If the world is real then it is so in so far as Brahman is involved in it. Sri Aurobindo has worked at an elaborate argument in support of the involution of the Real in the form of the world. And only if the thesis of involution is granted, then the view of the spiritual evolution would get its edge and credibility. Hence the discovery of the real or original Vedanta becomes a momentous discovery in the history of Indian philosophical literature, thoughts and practice of spirituality].

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of integration is well known. Philosophy, for him, is philosophy of Existence, of which Matter and Spirit are the twin terms. In *The Life Divine* he states that “all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony” and sets himself to discover “the Vedantic solution.” What is the solution? And what is the Vedanta? We may put the solution in his own terms, and go looking for what Sri Aurobindo understands by Vedanta?

The solution is that Life is involved in Matter and Mind in Life. In essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, and Life is a form of consciousness. Our mental consciousness is only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond Mind. There is in man an impulse towards Light, Bliss, Freedom and Immortality. The impulse is imperative, since Nature is seeking to evolve beyond Mind. The next

higher state of consciousness points to a progressive self-enlargement of humanity. Sri Aurobindo acknowledges a series of ascending terms: Life, Mind, Supermind, the grades that link Mind to Supermind, and the grades between Matter and Spirit. Evolution, for Sri Aurobindo, is the evolution of consciousness symbolised by the famous prayer to be led from death to immortality, from darkness to light.

The complex character and the adventurous programme of Sri Aurobindo's futuristic philosophy are presently our concern. Instead we shall try to find out how and why he locates his philosophical orientation as having roots in the 'original Vedanta'. What is the original Vedanta? Why does Sri Aurobindo characterise it as 'original', 'ancient or earlier' and even 'true'? These are judgments belonging to Sri Aurobindo's view of the history of philosophy in India and elsewhere, Europe in particular, in terms of his own integral outlook. That is a fascinating story, and we content ourselves by simply mentioning it.

Sri Aurobindo's magnum opus, *The Life Divine* is known widely. But it is not much known that before he set himself writing *The Life Divine*, he began writing a commentary on the *Iṣa* Upanishad under the title "*The Life Divine*". The task was undertaken in 1912, and left off in 1914. It is incomplete, only two of the Upanishad's eighteen verses are directly commented on in more than a hundred pages. In fact, Sri Aurobindo used this "Life Divine" commentary as a vehicle for presenting his own philosophy. This commentarial "Life Divine" is almost unknown. Sri Aurobindo has commented upon quite a few of the Upanishads, and these are available to the reading public. There is one on the *Iṣa* Upanishad containing translation of the verses and an analysis divided into four movements, followed by conclusion and summary. Presently we propose to concentrate on the "incomplete" commentary on the *iṣa* along with the translation and analysis published separately, and try to form an idea of what Sri Aurobindo meant by the "original" or "true" Vedanta, and what is its significance for him. In short, Sri Aurobindo is a Vedantin with a difference. He does not go by the Vedanta of the schools, rather he follows the distant and dim suggestions of the proto-historical, or as he himself says, the "original" or "true" Vedanta glimpsed in the Vedas and the Upanishads. It is worth mentioning that Sri Aurobindo has written extensively on the Vedas differing significantly from traditional understanding of the sacred texts.

For Sri Aurobindo the Upanisads are Vedantic scriptures. They contain "the original Vedanta", and in the Vedanta of the Upanisads, "the Becoming is accepted as a reality". The reality is omnipresent both in Being which is "One without a second", as well as in the Becoming, "All this is Brahman". The two declarations complement each other. The first requires to be read in the light of

the second. The aspiration of man upward to the Divine is as much real as the descending movement of the Divine leaning downward to embrace eternally its manifestations. The Upanisadic Vedanta voices a larger and completer affirmation than the metaphysical schools that go by that name.

This is evident when Sri Aurobindo translates the first part of the first verse of the *Iṣa* Upanisad : "All this is for habitation by the Lord". The enormous difference between Saṅkara and Sri Aurobindo becomes immediately clear. Saṅkara takes the Sanskrit expression *vasyam* in the sense of "to be clothed". In this significant word the status of the world is staked. Just as the superimposed snake conceals the rope underneath, so does the garment, i.e. the manifold of the empirical world covers the unity of the real behind. Hence it has to be cast off in order that the real stands revealed. Sri Aurobindo has added a long note to the translation. He notes "So explained the first line becomes a contradiction of the whole thought of the Upanishad which teaches the reconciliation, by the perception of essential Unity, of the apparently incompatible opposites, God and the World, Renunciation and Enjoyment, Action and internal freedom, the One and the Many, Being and its Becomings ...". He adds that the image of dwelling place "agrees better with the thought of the Upanishad". According to Sri Aurobindo the central idea of the *Iṣa* Upanishad is "a reconciliation and harmony of fundamental opposites", while Saṅkara interprets it in accordance with the Law of Excluded Middle. The first verse lays down the idea of the one and stable spirit inhabiting and governing a universe of movement and of the forms of movement. "The microcosm is one with the macrocosm". The "ancient Vedanta" holds "Brahman is His own subject and His own object, whether in His pure self-existence or in His varied self-becoming". The two aspects are inseparable. "All appearance of pure subjectivity holds itself as an object implicit in its very subjectivity; all appearance of pure objectivity holds itself as subject implicit in its very objectivity".

In the 'conclusion and summary' part Sri Aurobindo remarks that the *Iṣa* Upanishad is an ancient Vedantic treatise. It is closer to the Vedic roots. It stands face to face with the problem of reconciling human life and activity with the monistic standpoint, and its solution is one of the most interesting passages of Vedantic literature. "It is the sole Upanishad which offered almost insuperable difficulties to the extreme illusionism and anti-pragmatism of Shankaracharya".

For Saṅkara, the spirit alone is real, but the ancient or original Vedanta teaches that "Being and Becoming, One and Many are both true and are both the same thing: Being is one, Becomings are many; but this simply means that all Becomings are one Being who places Himself variously in the phenomenal movement of His consciousness. We have to see the one Being, but we have

not to cease to see the many Becomings, for they exist and are included in Brahman's view of Himself".

All this is quite novel and unique in the history of Indian spiritual thought, since in course of the ages the monastic ideal displaced the balanced integral view of life. We may now turn to the unfinished "*The Life Divine* (henceforth "LD"), for further illumination on the point about 'ancient' or 'true' Vedanta.

Such had been Sri Aurobindo's 'unfinished' commentary on the Ioa Upanisad. Let us see how he formulates the ancient Vedanta. The opening verse contains in a "monumental phrase" the two supreme terms of existence, in juxtaposition, the *Īa* and the *Jagat*, and they are set in their "real" relation. Everything is declared to be the Lord's temple and mansion. The relation of divine Inhabitant and objective dwelling place is the fundamental truth of God and the world. Ancient Vedanta as in the *Īa* Upanishad, builds up "a practical rule of life". The later metaphysical Vedanta, as in the philosophy of Saṃkara, seeks to satisfy the intellect. The very first line of the opening verse of this Upanishad emphasises the generality of *idam sarvam* by the comprehensive particularity of *jat kinca*, and thus brings at once "the Advaitic truth in Vedanta". According to Sri Aurobindo, *advaita* is not a negation of the manifold or multiplicity. It simply asserts that there is a multitude of objects in the universe, but only one soul of things and not many. *Eko calah Sanatanah*. The Soul in all this and in each particular form is one, still and sempiternal one in the multitude of its habitations. "Nature is the multiplicity of God, Spirit is His Unity... Nature is His variation, Spirit is His constant sameness", nothing is to be excluded, the manifold are in themselves, in their sacred reality the living God. This is "the second general truth of Vedanta".

The soul abiding in the world is Atman. Sri Aurobindo's explanation of the concept of atman is worth noticing. He says that the word comes "from old root *a*, still extant in Tamil, and the suffix *Atman*... expresses substance or substantial embodiment". Therefore "all existences whether they are or seem animate or inanimate, are self-conscious or veiled in consciousness". Nature is spirit in motion, the world is God at play.

The conclusion of the ancient Vedanta is momentous. Without recouring to the thesis of *adhyasa*, Nature is explained in terms of *chandas*, rhythms of Existence. Nature, says Sri Aurobindo, is a divine motion of becoming, of which spirit is the origin, substance and control, as well as the inhabitant and enjoyer. Spirit or Brahman, transcendent and original of the universe, is the sole existence, the motion of the universe can only take place in the spirit.

According to Sri Aurobindo, "The identity of the soul and God behind all veils is the Vedantic charter of man's freedom". Vedanta, he says, arrives at

the perception and experience of Spirit everywhere and declares our eternal and indefeasible freedom. It passes beyond the Law itself to the Liberty of which the Law itself is the creation and expression.

Sri Aurobindo, taking his stand on the original Vedanta of the Upanisad, the *Īa* in the present context, reviews the history of metaphysics and ethics in India. Having lost the integral vision of the unity of *Īa* and *Jagat* there arose an opposition of the ideal of *tyaga* and that of *Sannyasa*. The basic teaching of ancient Vedanta is that it is possible to find God as freedom and immortality in the world and not aloof from the world. Instead of taking God and Nature, Brahman and the universe as two hostile and incompatible entities we are asked to realise God manifest in the world. Their apparent divergences in consciousness must be somewhere connected in consciousness, says Sri Aurobindo.

According to Sri Aurobindo, Buddhism is a great watershed. How to escape from grief, death and limitation? All later solutions are affected and governed by Buddhism, and Sri Aurobindo mentions Mayavada and monastic Christianity. The problem is to put man by life, and there have been two solutions, and both are "heroic". Buddha's solution is escape and divorce, the solution of the ancient Vedanta is a recoil: "one is a mighty heroism of difficult retreat and flight, the other a mightier heroism of self-perfection and conquest". The point is further elaborated in the following way: "The most powerful support and argument of purely ascetic philosophies is the Buddhist idea, foreign to the Vedic Hinduism, that true freedom and true bliss are impossible in the universe and can only become possible if we escape out of it into some world-shunning secrecy of being, whether Nihil or Nirvana". In opposition to the Buddhist declaration of the omnipresence of grief and pain outside Nirvana, the Vedanta declares renunciation of the world as mere undivine. The Buddhist emphasis on *sannyasa* as physical renunciation, while *tyaga* of the ancient Vedanta is inner renunciation. Sri Aurobindo thinks that in "the true and early Vedanta, the practical freedom of the soul is not to be gained as in Buddhism by self-abolition". Saṃkara's *mayavada* is a form of reformulated Buddhism. The world is to the Mayavadin a freak of knowledge, an error on the surface of self, a misconception of mind about Brahman. Yet, as Sri Aurobindo notes, "the dominant sense of our later Indian spirituality has been with the conclusion of Shankara and against the conclusion of the ancient", "the inspired, the supranational Vedanta". India, he says "has inertly accepted and combined the Buddhist law of Karma and Rebirth and Shankara's gospel of cosmic Illusion and actionless Peace".

More illuminating is the following comparative study of the two master-makers of India's spiritual history: "Shankara has practically transmuted or replaced Buddha's vague and undefined Nirvana by the actionless and peaceful

Atman, substituted for Buddha's false world of subjective sensations, a false world of erroneous ideas starting from the original self-deception of duality, and accepting Buddha's Law of Karma as applicable only to this false world and Buddha's means of escape by an ultimate act of knowledge, substituted knowledge of real self for Buddha's knowledge of no-self as the essence of that act and the true culmination of inner experience and meditative reason". The intellectual difference between the two systems is immense; their temperamental kinship is close. Both ignore the true Vedanta. Buddhism, for Sri Aurobindo, is the only logical basis for *Mayavada*. As a philosopher of integration, Sri Aurobindo considers all exclusive knowledge as a form and manner of ignorance. Freedom cannot be a silent nothingness. The true Vedanta announces the necessity of life and action, and hence Sri Aurobindo puts the figure of Krishna of the Gita to stand for the ancient Vedantic ideal of life and action, typifying *tyaga* as adjacent ideal of *sannyasa* put forward by Buddha and followed up by Saṅkara. He mentions that even "the great Vivekananda, who was in outward seeming a storm of speech and thought and force and action, was yet reaching always to the rare, remote and sky-pure linga of Amarnath, the still and silent Mahadeva, as his inmost self and goal". Sri Aurobindo seeks to distinguish *tyaga* from *sannyasa*. From Buddha to Vivekananda, through Saṅkara it is the ideal of *sannyasa* that has prevailed over the soul of India. *Tyaga*, on the other hand, is a different ethical ideal.

The Vedanta of the Upanishads, the books of the real, the true and ancient Vedanta teach us not to give up the world as something false and unreal, rather the field of action through which we can fulfil ourselves, This is the injunction of the *Iśa* Upanisad : *kurvanneva karmani*. The stress of the *eva* gives the force, "doing works indeed, and not refraining from them".

Sri Aurobindo notes that Saṅkara's interpretation of karma in the sense of Vedic sacrifices which are intended for the ignorant is not fair. For Saṅkara, the enlightened soul abandons works and the world. This rendering, says Sri Aurobindo, is forced and unnatural. To interpret the *Iśa* Upanisad in favour of *sannyasa* is to get a vain message. The highest teaching of Vedanta is to work desirelessly, with a free soul, doing human action, accepting the full term of human life. It may be recalled that Balgangadhar Tilak too had argued against Saṅkara's *sannyasa* interpretation of the Gita. In his *Gitarahasya*, the notion of *bhagavata dharma* is affirmative enough to make room for intense activity without renouncing the world. This is much in agreement with Sri Aurobindo's line of argument. Again, if one cares for perusing Tagore's interpretative essays on the Upanisadic passage in the *Sadhana* one would find a close hermeneutical similarity with Sri Aurobindo. Both take the word *vasya* implying 'habitation' of

the Lord, and the imperative of ethical actions for living in society. This is the attitude towards life and existence according to the real Vedanta.

It should be worth asking why Sri Aurobindo criticises the ideal of *sannyasa* in the teachings of Buddha and Saṅkara. One of his intentions is the recovery of "the early thought of Vedanta". He notes the wide divergence between the early Vedantic and Buddhist conceptions of karma and the direct opposition between their fundamental conceptions of existence itself. Vedanta in the Upanishads uses the terms *akṛti* and *prakṛti* as the processive working of Brahman. Buddha ignores *akṛti* and *prakṛti* in denying the existence of God and soul or of any essential unity. Vedanta uses karma in the plural, while Buddha sums up the work done in the general singular word karma and elevates it into a determining conception governing and constituting our phenomenal existence. Buddha views the world as void of unity and existence as consisting of a successive continuity of habitual subjective sensations, *samskaras*. For Buddha, therefore, all phenomenal existence is determined by karma, the sum of previous works. For Vedanta all phenomenal existence is determined by the working of *akṛti* or *prakṛti* under the will and choice of *īvara*. Material existence and action exist in sensational consciousness which, in turn, exists as a phenomenon in the void. But behind this sensation-troubled void there is another state, Nirvana. Saṅkara "a less mighty soul" than Buddha built up a position reconciling Vedic *Brahmavada* and the *Karmavada* of Buddhist rationalism. He asserts the real existence of the Atman which alone exists and is indeed the essential substratum of the phenomenal existence. But he admits with Buddha the absolute rule of karma, the law of cause and effect over the conscious soul immersed in the phenomenal universe. Where then is the point of escape, the door?

The point of escape lies for Saṅkara, as for Buddha, in an ultimate act of knowledge which denies the real existence of the phenomenal world. Saṅkara erects a rigid antagonism between essential truth and practical truth, *paramartha* and *vyavahara*, the one we must admit to be the truth, the other we must reject as only apparent truth. But the world is a world of action, of karma, its law drives the soul through the endless chain of birth and death and rebirth, "whirling forever betwixt heaven and earth and hell, tossed from good to evil and evil to good, pain to joy and joy to pain, like a tennis ball kept continually at play between two skilful players". The why and how of all this is rendered possible by self-division, by *bheda*, by *dvaita*, by false conception of the soul of itself as not one, but many, by Avidya, by Maya, a great sin of ignorance, a mighty cosmic self-deception, rooted in the principle of mind.

Sri Aurobindo puts Saṅkara's argument as follows: "Where there are many, relation and action are possible: where there is one, there can be no relation and

therefore no action. Atman or Soul is one, therefore, relationless and actionless”. Hence the denial of the phenomenal world and actions is man’s only escape from his false mental self into the calm essential reality, objectless bliss and relationless self-knowledge of the Atman. “We see then that”, says Sri Aurobindo, “Shankara has practically transmuted or replaced Buddha’s vague and undefined Nirvana by this actionless and peaceful Atman ... substituted for Buddha’s false world of subjective sensations, a false world of erroneous ideas starting from the original self-deception of duality”. For both, release comes by an ultimate act of knowledge, for Buddha it is knowledge of non-self, for Saṅkara, it is knowledge of a sole self-existent Self. Both of them drive straight at the actual fact of bondage, the practical cause of bondage and the most direct path of escape from the bondage. Neither accounts for the existence of the fact of bondage, for Saṅkara Maya is an original mystery, and hence the fact of existence of bondage would for ever remain inexplicable to the mind.

Sri Aurobindo does not deny the value of ideal of asceticism, but resents its implied stillness and world-disgust which has overshadowed for centuries the lives and soul of people. “On one side the race and the world have gained immensely, on the other it has suffered an immense impoverishment The cry of *OM Tapas* with which God creates has grown faint in the soul of India, the cry of *OM Shanti* with which He withdraws from life along arouses and directs the best energies of a national consciousness to whose thought all life is sorrow, self-delusion and an undivine thunder”. What is remarkable is that Sri Aurobindo links philosophical positions to national history in the course of his discovery and recovery of the true Vedanta. It is in the consonance with the original Vedanta that Sri Aurobindo structures his ideas on society and history. Nothing is left out of consideration. There is nothing mundane per se, everything is a symbol of the Divine, and waits for transformational appearance into the categories of Existence towards which Nature is already moving.

Bringing Brahman Down To Earth: Lilavada In Colonial India

Nalini Bhushan and Jay L. Garfield

1. A Risky and Playful Modernity

It is the dawn of the 20th century. Your task, should you decide to accept it, is to develop a philosophical foundation for India’s entry into modernity and a major independence movement. Where do you look? Materialism? Plenty of that on offer in European and Indian marketplaces of ideas. Logicisin? Another good, modern idea. How about British empiricism? Or the Cartesian individualism that launched European modernity? You reject all of these as a suitable foundation for modernity. Instead you reach way back into India’s past to create the future. You adopt Advaita Vedanta, an orthodox, monistic, an idealist school of thought, with an approach to life and a way of thinking that goes back to the ancient philosopher Śaṅkaracārya. What could possibly motivate such a choice?

This, as we have seen in this section, is no fantasy, but the reality of colonial Indian philosophy. How did Vedānta emerge as the dominant voice in Indian metaphysics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries? In this essay, we explain how Sri Aurobindo’s *Līlāvāda* interpretation of Vedanta made so much sense in India at that time as a vehicle for modernity. We explore how Sri Aurobindo understood *Līlāvāda*, and the impact of this understanding on subsequent developments in Indian philosophy and culture.

Let us begin by reminding ourselves of the political and philosophical problems confronting Indian philosophy in this period. First of all, there was the pressing need for a theoretical foundation for modernity. The context of Indian modernity was determined by the encounter with modern Europe and East Asia. The pressures of global trade and the interchange of ideas initiated by British colonialism made intellectual retreat, even to an imagined golden age, impossible. To insist on a scholastic focus on the *śāstras* and on an Indian identity chained to its past would be to guarantee irrelevance. On the other hand, to rush headlong into the embrace of European foundations of modernity would be to forego any hope of national intellectual emancipation or identity. For this reason, the political,

scientific, technological, or economic bases of European (or even Japanese) modernity were not live options. Indian philosophy did not compromise here either. Indian philosophers instead developed an altogether different approach to modernity. They erected a metaphysical foundation that at once unifies a modern vision of India with a classical tradition and breaks with that tradition to forge a creative vision of future philosophy.

Such a strategy is fraught with risk. After all, at the core of classical Indian metaphysics is the doctrine of *māyā* — the doctrine that the world is, *au fond*, a grand illusion, and that reality is to be sought in the transcendent. So, to remain faithful to this tradition is to risk a status as an antique culture, at best one more diorama in a contemporary museum of pre-modern human history. This is not the only risk. To modernise this classical tradition could be to do it serious violence, and to impose contemporary European ideas on an Indian tradition. To navigate between Scylla and Charybdis is to articulate a transcendent idealism that is at the same time an immanent materialism, an ideal of human life that can be lived in the actual world. *Līlā* was the answer. This answer, however, came with its own risk — the risk of communalism in a philosophical context. The fact that Indian philosophy avoided this eventuality is a testament to the success of an unusual secularisation of an originally religious tradition.

2. *Līlā* and *Māyā*

From the beginning, Advaita Vedānta employs both the language of *māyā* and of *līlā*. Both terms, for instance, figure in Śaṅkara *kārikās*. The term *māyā* connotes both *measurement* and *magic*, or *illusion*. So, when the world is represented as *māyā*, it is represented as a magically created illusion, no more real than the snake for which the rope is mistaken; it is the necessarily failed attempt to take the measure of reality, and not reality itself. Śaṅkara does insist that the world is illusory in this sense, and *māyāvāda* has been the dominant strain in Advaita metaphysics since his time. Indeed, the rubric of *māyā* dominates even the early 20th Century Vedānta rhetoric of such figures as Swami Vivekananda.

Nonetheless, Śaṅkara also introduces the term *līlā*. In classical Vedānta thought, *līlā* answers an important question: Why did *Īśvara* create the world? To appeal to a motive would be to presuppose a need, and hence an imperfection; to appeal to a purpose would be to presuppose a duality, in virtue of the need for an unrealised goal beyond *Īśvara* himself. But to regard the act of creation (or for that matter, the acts of sustenance or of destruction) as accidental would be to regard *Īśvara* as a bumbling fool. The obvious solution is to take

the creative, sustaining, and destructive acts of Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva as mere sport, or play — *līlā*. In this sense, these acts are not purposeful but are yet intentional; not necessary, but good fun. They are represented as the overflowing into action of divine joy (see Isayeva, 1993).

Seen in this way, *līlā* accomplishes a secondary religious and philosophical purpose. It infuses an aesthetic dimension into the fabric of the universe. The world, *ab initio* is a site of *ānanda*, of bliss. As an artistic creation, it is already suffused with *rasa* and cannot be understood even metaphysically without being understood aesthetically. Art, on the other hand, becomes not an incidental human activity, but rather a central arena in which we partake of the divine activity of creation — of the manifestation of *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* in the temporal realm.

Inasmuch as the central insight of Advaita Vedānta is *advaita*, or nondualism, *māyā* and *līlā* can be seen as two alternative ways of developing this insight. Until the early 20th century, *māyā* is dominant. It expresses the idea that there is ultimately no duality in reality because all apparent duality is just that — mere appearance. When we recoil from the rope taking it to be a snake and then pick up the useful rope, there are not two objects to which we react — a snake and a rope, each with its proper grade of existence — but one, a rope, mistakenly regarded as a snake.

Māyāvāda establishes nonduality by removing one of the dual poles, viz., the world. This is all right as far as it goes, of course, so long as one is metaphysically content to reject the entire phenomenal world, including the empirical human subject, as illusory. One might be content to reduce one's own existence to cosmic illusion. The doctrine of *māyā*, however, raises further problems. As Banerjee (1944) puts it:

The Absolute Spirit is said to *appear* quite unaccountably as the world of plurality, and not to truly *create* it or *transform* Himself into it. But how can the Absolute Spirit *appear* falsely as a diversified material world and to whom should He appear as such?... The appearance of the Absolute Spirit as a plurality of finite spirits and a world of finite transitory phenomena experienced by them is, therefore, regarded as *inexplicable*. [p.276]

The point is this: The doctrine of *māyā*, while it secures non-duality, does so at the price of mystery. Not only do we need to swallow the inconceivability of our own non-existence despite our conviction to the contrary (or even despite our conviction in favour of this doctrine), but we must accept that the very existence of the supposedly explanatory illusion is itself inexplicable. Sri Aurobindo put the

point this way: “The theory of Illusion cuts the knot of the world problem, it does not disentangle it; it is an escape, not a solution.... It effects a separation from Nature, not a liberation and fulfilment of our nature.” [The Life Divine, p.419]

But suppose one wanted to take the world seriously, while retaining the Advaita insight. *Līlā*, if adopted as an ontological option, as opposed to a mere divine psychology, offers hope. On this understanding, the world is not the illusion that emerges when we take the measure of a non-dual reality; instead, it is the *manifestation* of that reality, its *play* in space and time. Just as when we watch a dancer perform the role of Krishna in a Bharatnatyam we do not see two personae — the dancer and the Lord — but a dancer *playing* the Lord; when we encounter reality, on this metaphor, we encounter not reality and its manifestation, but reality manifested — or *played out* — as a universe.

Banerjee explores this rich analogy between performance or art and the manifestation of the universe as divine *līlā* with particular clarity:

A true sportsman and a true artist give expression to their inner joy and beauty and power and skill in various outward forms with perfect freedom and self-consciousness, without any motive, without any sense of want or imperfection, without any concern about consequences.... A true sportsman thus becomes a creator of beauty and he imports his own inner joy into the hearts of the spectators. A true artist's action is also of similar nature... His aesthetic consciousness is embodied in his artistic productions....

In such cases we find a type of actions, which are essentially distinct from our ordinary voluntary actions, but in which, nevertheless, there is manifestation of free will, dynamic consciousness, creative genius, wisdom and knowledge, power and skill, all these being merged in or unified with a sense of inner joy and beauty. According to the *līlāvādins* actions of this type may give us a clue, however imperfect, to the nature of the divine self-expression....

[The perfect artist — *Brahman*] may be described as a *rasa-rāja* — Beauty personified, or as self-conscious and a self-determining Beauty. Whatever he perceives is beautiful; whatever he thinks is beautiful; whatever he does is beautiful, [pp.278-279]

There is, on this view, no duality between creator and creation, as the creation is the creator as he chooses to manifest himself. This manifestation is spontaneous — as Sri Aurobindo would put it, “an act of free unity,” arising not from imperfection or need, but from a pure aesthetic impulse, an impulse that infuses the world not only with being but with primordial aesthetic value. Sri Aurobindo's genius was to elevate this second interpretation of Vedanta as a foundation for modern Indian philosophy.

It is a truism to say that Sri Aurobindo's magnum opus is called *The Life Divine*. But the obviousness of what is printed on the cover can lead us to overlook its significance. In fact, it indicates clearly the nature of his project, a project whose nature is easily obscured by the luxuriant prose within those covers. The dominant *Māyāvāda* development of Advaita sharply distinguishes between the *illusion* we call *life* and the *reality* of the divine. Sri Aurobindo's project is the radical integration of life and divinity in a unitary totality that is at once *jīva* and *jagannāth*, at once immanent and transcendent. This, for Sri Aurobindo, is the true sense of non-duality in Advaita. But why adopt this interpretation?

In many quarters, Sri Aurobindo's interpretive project is read as a Hindu theodicy. On this account, Sri Aurobindo's *līlāvāda* is represented as a solution to the problem of evil. In the Indian context, this is the problem of explaining how a perfect *Brahman* or *Īśvara* could create an imperfect, indeed, deceptive and illusory world, one at that filled with serpents, investment bankers and other forms of evil. On this view, Sri Aurobindo is a kind of Indian Saint Augustine, trying to solve the conundrum posed by a world permeated by evil created by a perfect God. On this reading of Sri Aurobindo, however much he diverges from the Christian tradition regarding the nature of evil itself, regarding the nature of the Divinity (for sure) and regarding the role of evil in the world, he nonetheless follows Augustine in seeing evil as a necessary consequence of a descent. In the case of Augustine, that is a descent from divine grace; in that of Sri Aurobindo, a descent from divine consciousness.

The problem of evil is said by many who read Sri Aurobindo in this way (Burt, 1956; Maitra, 1956; Deutsch, 1969; Herman, 1971; Betty, 1976; Phillips, 1985) to be solved by denying that an illusory world is created in the first place, and by *identifying* the putatively problematic evil with the infinitely conscious, good, and blissful Brahman, either at present or in a future state of world evolution. Since Brahman is possessed of all of these positive qualities, the apparent evil in the world, not the world itself, is what is illusory, either a mistaken apparition to ignorant consciousness (Maitra), or a failure to appreciate the teleological character of history in which this illusion and evil will be dispelled (Phillips). Phillips puts the point this way:

The central argument of *The Life Divine* is that two facts, one Brahman's being *Sachchidananda*, particularly *Ānanda*, and two, the presence of evil, together indicate the inevitable emergence of divine life, through the instrumentality of evil. [p.276]

Despite its popularity, this view is in error. It is a superimposition of a Christian framework on a text that shares neither its ideology nor its problematic. It is easy to be misled, perhaps, by the parallel sets of three that schematise the relation between divinity and the mundane in the two traditions. The Christian God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent; *Brahman* is *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*. Theodicy emerges naturally from the first, Christian, *triguna*. It does not from the second, Indian, one. *Brahman* is, as Dubey (2002) perceptively puts it, *supramoral*, not good. *Brahman* manifests as the universe; he does not create it. Sri Aurobindo is concerned not with the conflict between evil and good, but with that between ignorance and knowledge. Christian *man* falls from a state of innocence; the *Brahman* of Advaita purposefully descends in the act of creation. Sri Aurobindo himself puts it this way: “The Ignorance is a necessary, though quite subordinate term, which the Universal Knowledge has imposed upon itself that movement might be possible, not a blunder and a fall, but a purposeful descent, not a curse, but a divine opportunity.” (*The Life Divine*. Vol.2, p.361 cited in Nikam, within Amalner symposium, 1950, present volume.)

Inder Sen (often cited as Indra Sen) characterises Sri Aurobindo’s problematic as follows: “His *leitmotif* and the first formulation of the philosophical” question is, “How in divine life, a full life of the Spirit, possible on Earth? How can Spirit be reconciled to Matter?” (present volume p.596) This gets things exactly right. *The Life Divine* is not aimed at the moral reconciliation of a good god with an evil world but rather with the *metaphysical* and *epistemological* reconciliation of mind and matter, knowledge and ignorance. (This is why the late Daya Krishna remarked in conversation that *The Life Divine* marks Sri Aurobindo as a philosopher, not a religious leader.) Banerjee (1944), commenting on the term *līlā* in this context, says:

...The perfectly free and delightful, sportive and artistic, self-expression of the One in the many, of the Infinite in the finite, of the Eternal in the temporal, of the Absolute in the relative, is called by the Vaishnava devotees, his *līlā*. [p.277]

This connection of the term *līlā* to Vaishnava thought is worth further comment, and we will return to this issue in our concluding remarks. For now, though, note that although Sri Aurobindo, like Augustine, is concerned with perfection, and its relation to imperfection, their respective conceptions, of perfection, and hence of the reconciliation of it with its opposite are entirely different. Augustine’s perfection is the omniscience-omnipotence-

omnibenevolence variety scouted above; Sri Aurobindo’s is the perfection of self-understanding and joy in life. Augustine’s perfection is the necessary, but humanly impossible perfection of God; Sri Aurobindo’s, the anticipated and possible perfection of human life. Augustine’s is, however problematically already, and essentially, realised; Sri Aurobindo’s is the cosmic telos. Perhaps most importantly, the dialectic instituted by Augustine’s thought demands distance between the perfect and the imperfect (hence free will, the serpent, and the fall, which insulate God from evil, ignorance, and responsibility); that instituted by Sri Aurobindo demands the unity of the perfect and the imperfect through sublation in the historical, dialectical, ethical, and aesthetic processes of involution and evolution.

The mystery to be solved then, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, is this:

How did an illimitable consciousness and force of integral being enter into this limitation and separateness?... It is the mystery not of an original Illusion, but of the origin of the Ignorance and inconscience and of the relations of Knowledge and Ignorance to the original Consciousness or Super-Conscience. [*The Life Divine*, p.430]

Sri Aurobindo raises the central philosophical problems in this passage. The first concerns the *metaphysical* relation between the reality of the totality of an unlimited being and its instantiation in finite particulars. On the one hand, the requirement that reality must be an infinite unity appears inconsistent with the reality of its many particular parts; on the other hand, without these parts, there is no way for this reality to be manifest at all. The second concerns the *epistemological* relation between the consciousness to which we aspire and our present cognitive status. We are frankly unable to conceive of the epistemic perspective to which we aspire, while at the same time conscious of it as the intentional object of legitimate aspiration. While Sri Aurobindo casts all of this in the language of creation and evolution, the fundamental problem he addresses is that of the relation between the finite and the infinite as it manifests in each of these domains.

Let us crystallise this problem further, so as to feel its irresistible pull on philosophical thought. We can always, on the one hand, as Kant and Hegel – both of whom are important influences on Aurobindo – emphasise, conceive reality as an unbounded whole, and we must think ourselves as parts thereof. But on the other, we are always conscious of our particularity and limitation and so think of ourselves not as moments in a cosmos, but as independent original existences. These ontological perspectives are in tension and demand unification.

On the epistemological side, we are always committed to the views we in fact hold, and to their warrant. Nonetheless, no matter how committed we are to a view we endorse, we are also always conscious of our own limitation, and so of a higher epistemic standpoint from which what we take to be knowledge is exposed as error. Once again, these perspectives are in tension and demand unification.

The moral and aesthetic domains give rise to parallel tensions. As Kant noted, we are forced to think of ourselves as biological organisms governed by the inexorable laws of a causally closed nature; as moral agents, we are forced to conceive ourselves as free. This is an apparent duality that demands reconciliation, but whose poles each resist treatment as mere illusion. As aesthetic subjects we are simultaneously aware of the particularity of our taste and aesthetic response and of the universality of claims to beauty. This requires us, as K. C. Bhattacharyya so perceptively put it (present volume, pp.196-198), to be simultaneously engaged with and detached from the object of aesthetic experience.

Sri Aurobindo's resolution of these tensions — the project of *The Life Divine* — is distinctive in its creative blend of ideas drawn from Vedānta, Sāṅkhya, and Hegel. Vedānta motivates the project through the conviction that the solution is to be found in a kind of non-duality of the mundane and the transcendent, although, as we will see in our exploration of his conception of *līlā*, Sri Aurobindo was convinced that the then-dominant interpretation of this tradition is untenable. Vedānta also delivers to him the insight that the world we experience conditioned by our own sensibility and conceptual framework (*saguna*) is not different from the reality we also must think as transcendent of those conceptual categories (*nirguna*).

But Vedānta is not the only well from which Sri Aurobindo draws. Sāṅkhya is another principal resource both Phillips (1985) and Dubey (2002) note; Sāṅkhya is the origin of Sri Aurobindo's conception of evolution. From Sāṅkhya, and in particular from the primordial principles of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, Sri Aurobindo also draws his conception of the regulative and causal roles played by the idea of progress in human history. This idea of progress is inflected by Sri Aurobindo's understanding of Hegel, filtered through the British neo-Hegelians Bradley and Caird, all as interpreted by the Indian neo-Hegelian Haldar (1927) (see also Odin, 1981). He thus reconstructs Sāṅkhya through the framework of dialectical progress through sublation. This Hegelian reading of Sāṅkhya structures his account of the unity of apparent contradictories in higher moments of understanding. The consequent dialectical understanding of knowledge and reality in turn allows Sri Aurobindo to reconcile the metaphysical and

epistemological oppositions he takes to structure our lives and to imagine transcending them in a life divine.

4. Sri Aurobindo's Critique of Māyā

At the core of *The Life Divine* lie two chapters (II: 5 and 6 on cosmic illusion) in which Sri Aurobindo considers and refutes the hypothesis that the phenomenal world is a grand illusion. He sets up the *māyāvāda* hypothesis as follows:

The cosmic Illusion is sometimes envisaged... as something that has the character of an unreal subjective experience; it... may be... a figure of forms or movements that arises in some eternal sleep of things, or in a dream consciousness, and is temporarily imposed on a pure and featureless self-aware Existence; it is a dream that takes place in the Infinite. [*The Life Divine*, p.377].

He points out the role of stock analogies such as dreaming or hallucination in classical arguments for this version of Vedānta idealism. Sri Aurobindo then, taking this analogy seriously, argues that it fails as an account of ordinary experience. First, he argues, while dreams may contrast with waking life, that mere fact of contrast is insufficient to justify distinguishing them as unreal as opposed to real; for all we know, dreams and waking life could be equally *real*, though different in *other* respects, or even equally unreal (p.378). After all, mirages and water, to take another stock Indian example, are both real. But one is a real liquid and the other a real refraction pattern. Similarly, mirages and water in works of fiction are equally unreal. Nonetheless, within those fictional realities, they differ in ontic status. Second, he points, out, dreams and waking life are in fact very different, and in specific ways: dreams lack the continuity, coherence, and stability that characterise waking life. So, proposing the dream state as an analogy for waking life seems at least unmotivated, at worst misleading (pp.378-379).

The most significant critique Sri Aurobindo develops of the metaphor of *māyā* is the third: Sri Aurobindo argues that even if we set aside the first two difficulties, the dream analogy, even if taken seriously, fails utterly to establish the *unreality* of the world; in fact, if it establishes anything, he argues, it is instead, the *reality* of the world. This critique is important not only because of its depth, but also because it constitutes the foundation for Sri Aurobindo's alternative *līlāvāda*.

Sri Aurobindo points out that dreams are in fact *real*: they are *real dreams*. So, to argue that the phenomenal world is a dream is not to argue that it is unreal in the first place; it is only to characterise the mode of its reality. In this context, Sri Aurobindo notes that psychology, in particular, psychoanalysis, takes dreams seriously as real phenomena to be explained and that can explain other psychic phenomena (pp.379-385). He concludes that “the dream analogy fails us altogether, and is better put out of the way; it can always be used as a vivid metaphor for a certain attitude our mind can take towards its experiences, but it has no value for a metaphysical inquiry into the reality and fundamental significances or the origin of existence” (p.385).

Sri Aurobindo then offers a parallel critique of the metaphor of hallucination, arguing that it is no more useful metaphysically than the dream metaphor. He surveys a number of stock analogies for understanding *māyā*:

The familiar existence of mother-of-pearl and silver, turns also, like the rope and snake analogy, upon an error due to a resemblance between a present real and another, an absent real; it can have no application to the imposition of a multiple and mutable unreality upon a sole and unique immutable Real. (p. 387)

Here and in his subsequent discussion of a number of other putative metaphors for *māyā*, Sri Aurobindo emphasises the pervasive disanalogy between a case in which one real entity is mistaken for another, or one possible property is misattributed instead of another, and the case of *māyā*, in which something entirely unreal and impossible is supposed to be projected. He concludes that the metaphor of cosmic illusion is unwarranted and misleading as a metaphysical image. Instead, he urges, to the extent that any of these metaphors is useful at all, they force us to take seriously the *reality* of the world. Taking its reality seriously, Sri Aurobindo urges, should lead us to inquire not into the mystery of its appearance, but rather into that of the precise nature of its reality.

Sri Aurobindo offers a second line of critique, arguing that even if these metaphors could be made to work in some sense, they would still not solve the problem that *māyā* is introduced to solve, viz, to explain the relation between the manifold nature of experience and the unity of being as such. We begin with the assumption that *Brahman* (Absolute) is real. If the phenomenal world is a product of maya rather than of *Brahman*, the question then arises, “Is Maya also real?” This is a difficult question for the *māyāvādin*. If it is real, then it seems that we are committed to a fundamental duality, that of *Brahman* and *Māyā*. But if it is unreal, then it cannot be causally efficacious in generating the world

of appearance. A traditional response is to conceive of *māyā* as both real and unreal. Sri Aurobindo agrees that *māyā* is real in some sense. But in that case, we need an account of the nature of its reality.

There is a deeper, internal problem for *māyāvāda* here: whether we conceive *māyā* as unreal or as real in some sense, we must ask, “Why does *māyā* mediate between us and the ultimately real *Brahman*’?” Nothing in the theory of *māyā* explains this. This strikes at the heart of the *māyā* metaphor, for that metaphor is posited as an explanation, as an account of why a non-dual reality appears dualistically. But if the theory itself requires a totally inexplicable explanans, it is no explanation at all.

Third, Sri Aurobindo poses an insoluble dilemma for *Māyāvāda*:

[If] *Brahman* is the sole Reality, and if he is not the percipient, who, then, perceives the illusion? Any other percipient is not in existence; the individual who is in us, the apparent witness, is himself phenomenal and unreal, a creation of *Māyā*. But if *Brahman* is the percipient, how is it possible that the illusion can persist for a moment, since the true consciousness of the Percipient is consciousness of self, and awareness solely of its own pure self-existence? If *Brahman* perceives the world and things with a true consciousness, then they must all be itself and real, but since they are not the pure self-existence, but at best are forms of it, and are seen through a phenomenal Ignorance, this realistic solution is not possible, [p.397]

Illusion must be someone’s illusion, but neither the absolute *Brahman* nor the phenomenal consciousness can be the subject. Nothing is solved by *māyā*. As Sri Aurobindo concludes his refutation, “The theory of *māyā*... does not really solve the problem of existence, but rather renders it forever insoluble” (p.418). This is why Sri Aurobindo says that taking the entire world of experience to be *māyā* accomplishes nothing so much as rendering it all meaningless and worthy only of escape, effecting “a separation from Nature, not a liberation and fulfilment of our nature” (p.419). Sri Aurobindo insists that a solution to the problem of existence should account for existence, not explain it away. This, not theodicy, not a mystical vision of transcendence, is the real point of *The Life Divine* and explains why this frankly impenetrable volume of Vedānta metaphysics has exerted such a powerful influence on modern Indian philosophy.

5. Sri Aurobindo’s Doctrine of *Līlā*

What, then, is real? And in what sense is it real? Phenomenal reality is real.

That is where we live, and that is where ontology begins. But phenomenal reality is not therefore the measure of all things. As Sri Aurobindo points out (pp.427-428), it stands corrected both by science, and by rational reflection, each of which can correct its illusions and defects and each of which is of assistance in the evolution of our understanding of reality and its nature. This evolution is what makes possible the attainment of the immanent life divine Sri Aurobindo envisions.

At each level of the dialectic of knowledge (the dialectic of spirit?), our apprehension of reality is enhanced, and more of what is real is manifested. This demands an account of the now central construct of manifestation. Sri Aurobindo's account is strikingly Hegelian: "All manifestation depends on being, but also upon consciousness and its power or degree; for as is the status of consciousness, so will be the status of being." (pp.427-428) Manifestation, Sri Aurobindo argues, is always manifestation *for* a consciousness. To be, in a Hegelian — not a Berkeleyan sense — is to be apprehended, and so all Being is in this sense dependent upon consciousness; as a consequence, the nature and scope of consciousness is not only of psychological, but also of epistemological and metaphysical significance, determining both the range of objects of knowledge and of beings.

This reading allows us to make sense of one of the more obscure aspects of Sri Aurobindo's ontology, one which, when misunderstood, gives aid and comfort to the Theodiscists, viz. his account of *plunging*. Sri Aurobindo poses the question of why there is a material world rather than nothing, or rather even than a world of pure spirit, by asking why consciousness *plunges* into insentience in its manifestation as matter. It is easy to read this as an extravagant metaphysical presupposition of the literal materialisation of the psychic. Read in this way, *The Life Divine* posits a "fall" from spirit into matter parallel to Eve's from grace into sin. Sri But Aurobindo is making a different point He is arguing that for that matter to be a manifestation of being at all, consciousness is presupposed as its ontological ground, and matter must come into existence as its object. The necessary coordination of subject and object entails, he argues, that matter is object consciousness made concrete. This is more Schopenhauer than Berkeley, a Kantian transfiguration of metaphysics into epistemology. He writes:

This, then, is the mystery,— how did an illimitable consciousness and force of integral being enter into this limitation and separateness? How could this be possible and, if its possibility has to be admitted, what is its justification in the Real and its significance? *It is the mystery not of an original Illusion, but of the origin of the Ignorance and Inconscience and of the relations of Knowledge and Ignorance to the original Consciousness or Superconscience.* (p.430; emphasis ours)

The solution to this mystery, the mystery of the nature of the manifestation of reality in experience, is, for Sri Aurobindo, *līlā*. It is worth thinking about the etymology of this term. A. K. Coomaraswamy's comments are useful in this context. He locates the first occurrence of this term in *Brahmasutra* - 11.1.32,33: "*Na prayojanatvāt, lokavāt tu līlākāyvalyam.* (Brahma's creative activity is not undertaken by way of any need on his part, but simply by way of sport, in the common sense of the word.)" (1941, p.98). The point here is that *līlā* is introduced as a way of accounting for voluntary, but not purposive, action, action done just for its own sake, but action nonetheless. In the *jātakas*, Coomaraswamy also notes, the term occurs frequently in the context of Buddha's manifestation in virtuous action or miraculous deeds. Of these occurrences, he writes, "the rendering of *līlā* here [in the *jātakas*] and in the *Pali Text Society Dictionary* by 'grace' is far too weak; the grace of the Buddha's virtuosity [*kuśalam*] is certainly implied, but the direct reference is to his 'wonderful works'; the Buddha's *līlā* is, like Brahma's *līlā*, the manifestation of himself in act" [1941, p.99]. *Līlā*, therefore, in its classical connotation, is not an attribute of the divine, but a manifestation of divinity in action. Indeed, this connotation of *līlā*, as manifestation, as opposed to play, is reflected in the fact that in the Upanisads, the manifestation of the elements in material objects is also *līlā*. "*Yadā līlāyata hy arcīḥ.*" (As soon as the point of flame burns upward, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.2).

How does this account of *līlā* as manifestation help to solve the problem that maya left insoluble? We are still left with a set of crucial distinctions toward the overcoming of which Vedānta is directed — that between the absolute and the relative; the Divine and the mundane; the unconditioned and the conditioned; the unitary and the manifold; the perfect and the imperfect. *Māyāvāda*, Sri Aurobindo argues, attempted, but failed, to reconcile these by denying the reality of one term in each. *Līlāvāda*, by contrast, *affirms* the reality of the relative, the mundane, the conditioned, the manifold, and the imperfect but sees them as *manifestations* of the absolute, the Divine, the unconditioned, the unitary, and the perfect. The resolution of the tension and the dichotomy is thus achieved through an account of non-duality in which the apparent opposites are reconciled as identical in the same sense that the dancer and the divinity are one and the same in the *nāṭya*. Just as the dance cannot be performed unless we have an imperfect — all-too-human — dancer, and it is not a successful performance unless the divinity is evoked, imperfection and its metaphysical, moral, and epistemological cognates are necessary for the manifestation of the perfect in reality. Sri Aurobindo puts the point this way: "When we say that all is a divine manifestation, even that which we call undivine, we mean that in its essentiality,

all is divine, even if the form baffles or repels us” (*The Life Divine*, p.353).

In Sri Aurobindo’s hands, then, *līlā* replaces *māyā* as a way of making sense of the non-duality at the heart of Advaita. Whereas *māyā*, he shows, promises a resolution, of the tensions inherent in the apparent duality of *Brahman* and *lokavyavahāra*, it fails in two respects. First, any resolution is achieved at the expense of denying the reality of the world we inhabit, hence not so much solving the problem of existence as wishing it away. But second, even, if we were to accept that solution, all of the problems that originally attended the duality of life-world and ultimate reality reappear for *māyā*, itself.

Līlā explains both the apparent duality and its ultimate unreality. The duality is that of player and role; the dancer is not a *deva*, and we know that. On the other hand, nor is he different from the *deva* we see on stage, and so the apparent duality is unreal. *Līlā* explains this apparent but unreal duality without denying the facts of our ordinary life, which are rejected as illusory in *māyāvāda* but affirmed as an ineliminable aspect of reality in *līlā*. Finally, *līlā* provides an account of why life in the world we inhabit is meaningful; it is in fact potentially divine and is the locus of our potential for transcendence. *Līlāvāda* thus provides a metaphysics consistent both with the Indian philosophical tradition and with modernity.

Whether the critique of *māyāvāda* Sri Aurobindo mobilises was the point of his *lilavada* or merely an incidental consequence, and indeed whether these two viewpoints can be reconciled in the end, is the subject of the fascinating debate held in Amalner in 1950 (the present volume). That question need not detain us here. Instead, we turn to the momentous impact of Sri Aurobindo’s *Līlāvāda* on subsequent Indian philosophy of the late colonial period.

6. The Impact of *Līlāvāda*

When Sri Aurobindo left politics for philosophy, Advaita Vedānta was indeed dominant in Indian metaphysics and indeed was already being appropriated as a medium for the assertion of Indian national identity. But the Advaita that was current was that of Sri Ramakrishna and his *math*, most eloquently articulated by his student Swami Vivekananda. *That Advaita was Māyāvādin* through and through. (See the selections from Swami Vivekananda, 1915, present volume, p.000) Of course, this does not mean that Sri Aurobindo and Vivekananda are philosophical adversaries. For, as a close reading of Vivekananda on *māyā* reveals, in the end he takes *māyā* more in the sense of *manifestation* than of *illusion*. Nonetheless, his metaphors are the metaphors of *māyā*. When he asserts that “This, too is *māyā*,” he indicates illusion and not reality,

an appearance to be rejected. When Ras Bihari Das follows him in announcing the falsity of the world (present volume), we see the impact of this metaphor of illusion so long dominant in Vedānta. In metaphysics, metaphors are often the most salient and effective expository devices. (As Sellars was wont to say, “In doing philosophy, we stack metaphors one on top the other until, like a house of cards, it all falls down, and then we start again”). It is not surprising that Sri Aurobindo, originally a theorist of poetry, was drawn to these metaphors. In effecting this shift of metaphor from *māyā* to *līlā*, Sri Aurobindo reoriented Vedānta thinking from the transcendent to the immanent and so allowed its discourse to enter that of modernity.

The transmission from Pondicherry to the universities was not entirely literary; it was oral as well. We know (Aster Patel, 2007, personal communication) that numerous professional philosophers were regular visitors to the ashram. Professor Indersen, once he left Delhi to join Sri Aurobindo, was specifically assigned the role of liaison to the academic community. M. Hiriyanna and T. M. P. Mahadevan, among others, were regular visitors, followed later by Daya Krishna. Sri Aurobindo exercised direct influence on academic philosophy in India through these interactions.

We see that influence spreading in the philosophical community in, for example, the work of A. C. Mukerji, distinctive in its development of Vedānta-inflected idealism, redolent with Hegelian themes in a decidedly realistic, scientifically oriented direction. While the line of influence is not so direct in cases like this, there is certainly reason to believe that the *weltanschauung* that makes this philosophical innovation possible derives in large part from the taming of Vedānta accomplished by Sri Aurobindo’s *līlāvāda*. The Amalner symposium on Sri Aurobindo’s impact on Vedānta reproduced in the present volume is additional evidence of the importance of his ideas in academic metaphysics and epistemology.

Līlā is not new to India. But there is *Līlā* and *līlā*. Indian popular religious culture has for centuries manifested itself in public festivals, such as *Rām līlā*, in which communities gather in mass performances in which deities and *asuras* are *enacted*, and attain concrete reality in that enactment. (Sax, 2002). These festivals and attendant practices are woven into the fabric of popular culture and constitute a shared understanding of *līlā* as a site of divine manifestation in the everyday world. Recasting the central idea of Advaita Vedānta in this language presents the possibility of linking this *prima facie* abstruse metaphysics to Indian popular culture. Sri Aurobindo may thus have forged, if only in homonymy, a link between the rarefied world of the *math* and the temple

and the workaday world of the village and the peasant This link is reminiscent of that to which Tagore alludes explicitly in his presidential address to the inaugural session of the Indian Philosophical Congress in 1925 (present volume). Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, however much they disagreed about other matters, agreed that Indian philosophy was not the exclusive province of the elite but saturates Indian culture.

Līlāvāda also reinforces the centrality of aesthetics to Indian philosophical activity in this period. As Banerjee (1944) notes, and as we have argued, a fertile *līlāvāda* metaphor is that of the consummate artist manifesting her skill in creation. This suggests an everyday world pervaded not only by a sense of divine action, but also by a divine beauty produced in the play of reality. To understand Being, therefore, demands an understanding of beauty; to understand the nature of art and of the creative act is to understand the nature of reality. No wonder that so many Indian metaphysicians of this period are also aestheticians!

We should not forget that Sri Aurobindo, before his life as a *rishi* was a political activist and editor of *Bande Mataram*, an influential political journal of ideas. And even after leaving political life for the ashram, Sri Aurobindo's thought developed and spread in the context of the independence movement and provided a philosophical foundation for the construction of a sense of Indian national identity linking contemporary India with its classical past. At the same time, India was negotiating modernity in the context of a vexed relationship with Europe and its version of modernity. Sri Aurobindo's essays, which became *The Life Divine*, were widely read, and, were widely influential. It is apparent that Sri Aurobindo was taken seriously not merely as a religious figure, but also as a philosophical writer.

Neither for the purpose of nation building nor for that of constructing a distinctly Indian sense of the modern was a doctrine of the unreality of the world an ideal vehicle. Sri Aurobindo's genius was to see that idealism did not disqualify Vedānta from this role, and that Vedānta could be given a startling, realistic twist. *Līlā* provided the framework and the metaphors that allowed India to construct its ideological identity and its engagement with modernity on its own terms.

7. Conclusion

Such metaphysical experiments do not come without risk. The great risk of *līlāvāda* was a descent of philosophy into a divisive, sectarian, and even

communal popular religion. It is easy to convert the idea of divine manifestation into that of the manifestation of a *divinity*, and once one adopts a non-dual, even materialistic metaphysics, the most obvious divinity is the *Brahman* of the Vaishnava sects, whose divine *līlā* is that which brings the world into being. To take this route could be both politically and philosophically disastrous: politically because of its communalist implications; philosophically because of the inevitable reintroduction of duality, illusion, and a difficult-to-sustain theism.

Tagore famously averted the politically disastrous consequences of bringing theism into Indian poetic modernity (see his "*Pathway to Mukti*", 1925, this volume) even as he advocated the reintroduction of Baul folk songs with a Vaishnavite flavour into the modern Indian aesthetic canon. In a stroke of genius, rather than emphasising the religious sectarian quality of the songs, he showcases their religious cosmopolitanism. Tagore accomplishes this by juxtaposing the texts of Baul songs with the texts of English poetry, which had the dual effect of rendering the traditional folk songs in a contemporary light as it de-emphasised its sectarian aspect. In this way, Tagore successfully navigates the risk inherent in giving *līlā* a theistic interpretation.

In the work of Sri Aurobindo, we see an avoidance of the distinctly philosophical risk associated with *līlā*. How does the doctrine of *The Life Divine* avoid this risk? Precisely by proposing not the life of a *divinity*, but a *divine* life for us. Sri Aurobindo urges that the world we inhabit is indeed the manifestation of an ultimate reality, but that reality is not a personal divinity, but consciousness itself; that manifestation is not the projection of one entity by another, but rather the identity of the life-world with the spiritual reality that completes its dialectical development. The promise of *The Life Divine* is simply the promise of our own potential realised.

(Thanks are due first, to Daya Krishna, who insisted on the importance of *The Life Divine* to Indian philosophy in the early 20th century, and second to our team of research assistants, Margaret Dodge, Francesca King, Mary Kate Long, Jennifer DeBernardinis, and Shama Rahman, without whom this work would have been impossible.)

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Involution And Evolution:

Some Conceptual Issues In
The Contexts Of Indian Discourses

Murali Sivaramakrishnan

In a land like India with its heterogeneous culture and chequered history, the narratives linking place and humans are innumerable, couched in diverse perceptions and points of view, and filtered through multiple discourses over a long period of time. Geographically, historically and geo-psychically, Indian narratives afford pluralistic and complex readings. Philosophy, religion and poetry have a deep history in this part of the world, as much as oppression, domination, and ideologies of resistance and subversions.¹

In more ways than one, the emergence of ecologically sensitive critical theorising in the academic world has signalled a resuscitation of the *idea of intrinsic value in nature* that has almost come to be buried under the rubble of a postindustrial consumerist culture which constantly seeks to obliterate all differences and moves toward the making of the omnivorous discourse of globalisation and technocracy as monolithic and one-dimensional. Perhaps this return to nature could even be mocked as mere retrogression toward the European Romantic tradition of linking the human and the non-human into some sort of metaphysical essence. Or ecologically sensitive critical theorising could also be demonised as a debilitating attempt to reinstate the grand narratives of a misplaced cultural humanism, on the lines of high modernist elitism. A third probability is that of a universally developing urban culture demonising its own predatory roles in the haloed light of a forfeited primitive human culture! Either way the very suggestion of the notion of sacred or spiritual at the heart of nature's being is sure to invite many raised brows in our present-day world, especially in India today! Nevertheless the direction that ecologically sensitive critical theory is currently heading toward – a direction that implies a search to reinforce idea and action in the material plane (a union of the spirit and matter in different scale), in terms of environmental justice— is a sure sign of its not having lost its way in *the dreary desert sand of dead habit...*²

The story of human nature relationship is the story of the fall from grace, from a life coterminous with the sacred to one of utilising nature as mere resource. The absence of a cultural basis for valuing the land we inhabit is perhaps the root of human behaviour that degrades and pollutes our world! The values that ancient Indian tradition (diverse, multidimensional, manifold, heterogeneous and different) invokes are spiritual and a-temporal. They are rooted in a sense of place and time of course, but transcendental in their significance. They could be seen as proffering both a **bioregional** and **ecosystem** view of life and living. The elemental symbolisms of the Vedic and Upanishadic mantras are rooted in a culture of place and value while the ritualistic and sacred qualities that they evoke are trans-human and trans-natural. Above all the ancient Indian cultural outlook was a constant recognition of the sacred at the heart of all being. This notion of the **sacred** does not devalue the phenomenal world of the senses but on the other hand endows it with deeper significance and value. Ecology might be the socially evoked unified and holistic view of nature for the present, but the ecological vision that a poetic insight engendered through the spiritual, would nevertheless enhance all qualities of life and living, both in terms of the human and non-human, for its significance is not historically conditioned

Indian thought is more concerned with seeking connections than separateness. Even from the very beginnings, the conceptual concerns of the ancient Indian reveal a leaning toward the holistic and a seeking after the interconnectedness of all and everything. *Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*, says the Rig Veda (1.164.46), the Existent is one, but the sages express it variously. There exists a spatio-temporal interrelatedness of all existence in a continuum of quality and this is further embedded in the notion of all life in the world as forming one whole continuous interrelated being — *vasudaiva kutumbakam*. The earth and all its life-forms — living and non-living alike — are held to be of equal value. [This is not tantamount by extension to stating that the Indian values of quality and being are universal values, like the widely held view in the present-day world of market capitalism that economic prosperity ensures moral superiority!] Nevertheless, in a land like India with its heterogeneous culture and chequered history, the narratives linking place and humans are innumerable, couched in diverse perceptions and points of view, and filtered through multiple discourses over a long period of time. As has been mentioned earlier, Indian narratives on account of their complexities afford pluralistic and complex readings. And a great deal of western understanding of India revolves round the religion of the Hindus which is generally spiritual and theistic.

It is not unusual for non-Indian scholars to often equate Indian with the Hindu — this is not unnatural either because the Indian name for India is

Hindustan. A long time ago the Persians referred to the people who lived on the other side of the river Indus as Hindus, and the name became synonymous with the culture and religion in this part of the world. However the Hindu religious practices that are prevalent in the present-day India are a latter day evolution and the Vedic vision that even now underlies it all is “pre-Hindu”. The Vedas and their poetic modifications, the Upanishadic verses, had formulated a unique worldview that was indigenous to this part of the world. This is where our contemporary Eurocentric standpoints fall short in supplying an adequate interpretation — for the Vedic vision is a poetic one and it is an inclusive one — it is “pre-modern” and “pre-scientific” too. The material and spiritual life of the human and the non-human nature is ingrained into the Vedic view of evolution and its unique possibilities. The entire cosmos is seen as a manifestation of the Divine which is in fact *avyaktaparatpara* — that which is unmanifest and unreachable by our senses. The poetic resolution of all life that the Vedas and the Upanishads supply is not one of mere religious belief but one that could be internally realised. The path of the true saints who lived and interrogated these living metaphors is riddled with challenge and rigorous intellectual inquisitiveness. Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950)³ who belonged to the line of Vedic Rishis is one who combined in himself the intellect and the emotion, and often referred to as the *radical mystic* because he was engaged in an adventure of consciousness.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo the Upanishads are:

the expression of a mind in which philosophy and religion and poetry are made one, because this religion does not end with a cult nor is limited to a religio-ethical aspiration, but rises to an infinite discovery of God, of Self, of our highest and whole reality of spirit and being and speaks out of an ecstasy of luminous knowledge and an ecstasy of moved and fulfilled experience, this philosophy is not an abstract intellectual speculation about Truth or a structure of the logical intelligence, but Truth seen, felt, lived, held by the inmost mind and soul in the joy of utterance of an assured discovery and possession, and this poetry is the work of the aesthetic mind lifted up beyond its ordinary field to express the wonder and beauty of the rarest spiritual self-vision and the profoundest illumined truth of self and God and universe.⁴

Truth, experience, aesthesis and poetry all combine in their highest possible manner in the dialogic verses of the Upanishads. Of course, we should realise that only as an aesthetic continuum can the entire universe be finally resolved.

We read in the Upanishads:

*Hiranmayena patrena satyasyapihitam mukham;
Tat tvam, pusan, apavrunu, satya-dharmaya drstyate.*

The face of truth is covered with a golden disc.
Unveil it, *O Pusan* (Sun), so that I who love the truth may see it!⁵

This is indeed a cryptic mantra. That truth and liberation are interconnected in Indian philosophy is a well-recognised fact. And here the Upanishad enjoins us to go beyond the visible light to perceive the greater liberating light that is the true, the vast, and the beautiful. The Upanishads are replete with mantric invocations like this, invoking the reader or listener to seek moksha or liberation through deeper meditation and perception. And it is through the *rupa* or the form that one attains the *arupa*, the formless. The Universe is already an *involved* playground of the *True, the Vast, the Beautiful* and the Lila of life is the slow *evolution* or inner enlightenment (*anataschamatkara*). This is the poetic realisation of life as the Vedic-Upanishadic view maintains, and Sri Aurobindo's experiential realisation is in direct line with this. Now let us turn to a brief discussion of his philosophical thinking, as he has explicated through his renowned texts.

For Sri Aurobindo, *Consciousness* is the essential reality. From the ontological standpoint it is *brahman*; from the psychological it is *atman*. This consciousness which is also pure Existence (*Sat*), Force (*Cit-Sakti*) and Bliss (*Ananda*) is the ultimate ground of all existence. There are varying grades, *avastha*, of consciousness, ranging from gross matter (Inconscient) to the Absolute Spirit (Superconscient, Supramental). Mental consciousness, polarised by subject-object structure is in its essence, different from the higher Spiritual as well as the Inconscient. *Consciousness* is involved in matter (in a pre-stage of Involution) and Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself. This progressive self-revelation of the Spirit, as Sri Aurobindo sees it, is the essence and meaning of the universe. Spirit is the source, evolution and final end.

Man (not the gendered term) at the present stage in his evolution, is a doubly involved being. Part of him in mind and below is involved in subliminal consciousness while that part above mind is involved in Spiritual Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo says that human existence is a sort of refraction of Divine Existence — an inverted order of ascent and descent. As the Divine has descended from Pure existence (*Sat*) through the play of Consciousness-Force (*Cit-Sakti*) and Bliss (*ananda*), man ascends from Matter through a developing Life and Mind towards the Divine. The meaning of human life centres round this cardinal fact of spiritual evolution.

All this is what nature would effect slowly, for the Involved Spirit forges ahead in its own self-expression. But Sri Aurobindo insists that his *Integral Yoga* can effect the triple transformation of Matter, Life and Mind in a rapid

revolution. As consciousness in Matter ascends, there is a corresponding descent of the Divine, which in turn releases the spiritual self involved in Matter. In Sri Aurobindo's vision, body as well as the life and mind have to be spiritualised so as to be a fit instrument and receptacle for the realisation of the Divine⁶.

During the course of his acutely sensitive lectures at the turn of the twentieth century on *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature*, William James remarks:

“One can never fathom an emotion or divine its dictates by standing outside of it. In the glowing hour of excitement, however, all incomprehensibilities are solved, and what was so enigmatical from without becomes transparently obvious.... The only sound plan, if we are ourselves outside the pale of such emotions, is to observe as well as we are able those who feel them and to record faithfully what we observe...” (New York: Touchstone, 1997; 260)

Of course, James's methodology and approach are certainly too old-world for us now in the present. Especially after the great theoretical debates of the last century in the human sciences, when after the poststructuralists and post-colonialists have challenged and exposed many such independent, stand-alone schemas for what they are — through their language and mode, relating them to ideologies and grand narratives — there is little scope for one to talk about emotion, feeling or sensitivity, without being charged either as completely ignorant of contemporary thinking, or worse still, of being a *fundamentalist*. To as much as mention religion or spirituality is to be a revisionist these days (especially in India) and notions of faith and belief (more a matter of heart rather than the head) appear so far distant to be of any aid in the matter. After Edward Said's thesis on *Orientalism*, it is less easy to evoke Indian spirituality without resorting to the binary of western or Eurocentric logic that served to create a cultural curio of all the East as Orient: but the point is that both the spiritual and the logic of reason have been equally valid methods in the human search for abiding truth in the Indian subcontinent. At this point of interpretation one requires a considerable sense of history and sensitivity. Amartya Sen has argued for the recognition and understanding of the long tradition of accepted heterodoxy in this part of the world: it is not that logic, rationality and the concern for the material existence have been less pursued at the expense of the mystical Spiritual. (See his *The Argumentative Indian*).

Sri Aurobindo observes that the assertion of higher-than-mental-life is the whole foundation of ancient Indian philosophy and its acquisition and organisation

the veritable objective served by the methods of Yoga. In the language of Indian philosophy mind is *antahkarana*, inner instrument, and it is essentially a dividing or polarising consciousness. But at the same time its imperfection is a sign of its transitional status. As he envisions it, Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition and Overmind are the next evolutionary stages in the transformation of mind to Supermind. This Supermind occurs at the knot of the two Worlds, the higher and lower hemispheres of being — the *Parardha* or Existence-Consciousness-Bliss and the *Aparardha* or Matter-Life-Mind — and functions as a veil in between. The rending of the veil is the condition of the Life Divine.

Existence	Matter
Consciousness-Force	Life
Bliss	Psyche
Supermind	Mind

The Divine Element in man, the repository of that innate drive towards perfection and divine possibility is that which Sri Aurobindo terms as Soul, or Psyche. It is the aesthetic being in man. It is in constant touch with the Divine and rises on its own curve to its Divine Consummation⁷.

All this is not an intellectual hypothesis in the Western philosophical sense, neither is it prophetically revealed as in religious scriptures of the West, but experientially intuited in Yogic realisation. And to that extent, Sri Aurobindo's works — both his poetry and philosophical texts — are to be read as the codified symbolic constructions of an enlightened Rishi who had pierced open the effulgent golden lid and “seen” beyond all, the face of Truth.

Perhaps if one were to read him with the sort of understanding and openness that is most often required while encountering the works of a mystic, one could perhaps feel *incomprehensibilities...solved, and what was so enigmatical from without become transparently obvious!* He lived with his spiritual quests as we live with our everyday realities and experienced a meaningful relation with those. In these days of post-capitalist and transnational market economics, when all values are reduced to be mere consumables, such spiritual quests might appear to lack lustre and meaning — but all the while we might as well remember that when globalisation reduces all differences into one homogeneous whole, the spiritual that continues to exert its relevance to those who can still think on their own, retains all difference and heterogeneity. Because we all live in a world that is multi-planed and all meaning is acquired only through this act of recognition of difference. Involution and evolution are never unilateral; the world is *vivarta* — constantly changing. Even the Spirit — the dance

of Siva is never the same.

Aurobindo Ghose, occurring as he did at the turn of the century when Indian nationalism was evolving naturally and historically, had an apparent agenda, clear-cut and well-defined. He tailored his explorations to suit his times and attempted an integrated thinking of what was current in the west and the east — Hegel, Bergson, and to a certain extent Spinoza go into the making of his creative evolutionary system. The Vedas and the Upanishads proffered him the spiritual model, and his experience and experiments developed through Yoga, provided him with the corresponding vision. He combined in himself the Renaissance *over-reacher* — in his intellectual inquisitiveness — and the radical mystic — in his austerity and Yoga. Involution and evolution were not a matter of philosophy and a system for him, they were lived experiences. His life and work are testaments to his vision, experience and experiment. Of course, the paradox of the spiritual is the paradox of life itself. *A yogi who writes*, in Sri Aurobindo's words, *is not an ordinary man, for he writes only what the spirit wants him to express*⁸. And of course the spirit has a strange delight in remaining silent when the final statements of life are to be made. Of course, by standing outside in the periphery one may not hear and understand the real calls for the experience per se. Sri Aurobindo's works enjoin us to abandon our little selves and plunge into an adventure of consciousness. Revolution is a matter of change of form, perhaps even merely an upheaval; however, evolution, on the other hand, is a matter of holistic transformation.

All this is not to state that the Hindu way of life stemming from the Vedic poetic vision that sees all life as Yoga and the creative unfolding of the involuted Spirit is the be-all and end-all of human thinking. That the Hindu way of thinking itself is amorphous and heterogeneous is an accepted fact, and hence the point I am trying to make is that a healthy sensitivity to this could perhaps guide us away from the crisis-ridden present wherein we are struggling with our one-dimensional globalising force. The protean focus of the Vedic vision argues for the ultimate holistic view that recognises difference and unity at the same time — the resolution we should remember is not an evasion of the material at the expense of the spiritual, but a recognition of the complementarities of both. We in the present would have progressed with the aid of super science and technology that has of course *othered* nature and the non-human, and perhaps have achieved the acme of our cultural roles; we have even digitised the world and can claim to account for the tiniest fraction of every nanosecond of our lives, but still it is worthwhile to remember that the greatest questions of life and death continue to haunt us — do we evolve or do we stagnate in this pool of our biological stem cells?

In his *The Big Sur Dialogues*, Fritjof Capra records Hazel Henderson, the Economist as stating: “The next evolutionary leap has to be cultural.... So many other species before us have not made it, but we have got an awful lot of equipment to make it with.” (Capra, 1988:287) This cultural evolution perhaps is the possible answer — but we must also remember the conflict between cultures and the crisis that has ensued. All this is because of our hierarchical value systems. To think with the spirit is to think for all humanity. To think with the spirit is to recognise the other as one’s own self. After all, in the final analysis we have only one life, here and now. And yet, as the multifaceted Hindu Puranas would show, we continue to exist in a million dimensions all at once, here and now. It is the consciousness that would make all the difference. As the great guru and Indian intellectual, Sankaracharya has said, *tasmat, jagrata, jagrata... (Therefore, be aware, be aware!)*

The theory of involution and evolution that Sri Aurobindo envisioned, of course, is no theory — it is an experiential vision invoked by a yogi who had rigorously practised austerity and *tapasya* (askesis) in the Upanishadic mode. It is an anticipation of possible human evolution toward an inclusive union of the material and the spiritual. It is a sign of immense possibilities open for the human mind provided we are sensitive to the spiritual at the heart of all being. The sacred of course does no bargain!

NOTES

¹ To refer to the Indian *spiritual tradition* is not to deny the existence and significance of *materialist* discourses that have shaped the thinking of the people of India over the years. There has been a continued debate between the spiritual and the material as much as the theistic and the atheistic (see Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, DD Kosambi, Amartya Sen). However, the focus of my arguments is that Indian thought is *more concerned with seeking connections rather than insisting on separateness*. This claim to connection does not preclude the value of existence and the individual.

² These well known lines are echoes from the opening stanza of Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali* (1913): “Where the clear stream of reason / has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit... Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”

³ **Sri Aurobindo** (1872-1950) was among the significant patriotic nationalists who fought against the British Raj, and quite unlike Gandhi he was never a pacifist. Although, right from his early childhood he was brought up in England by his anglophile father, Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose became one of the most noted of Indian thinkers and philosophers, a radical mystic par excellence. He wrote profusely on various topics ranging from political issues to abstract philosophy, poetics, prosody and history to social and psychological issues, literary criticism to yoga and mysticism, sociolinguistics to Tantric and Vedic studies. His direct involvement in Indian revolutionary nationalism, however, was quite abruptly terminated when he withdrew to the safe haven of Pondicherry (which was a French colony), and continued to live as a recluse. Almost all his major writings and translations have been serialised in his journal *Arya* that he

edited. *The Life Divine* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972) is his major philosophical contribution. Despite all his multifarious involvements in issues relating to politics and society, Sri Aurobindo continued to write poetry. His magnum opus is, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, which he continued to revise and redraft till his passing away in 1950.

⁴ The extract is from http://www.hinduwebsite.com/divinelife/auro/auro_upanishads.asp. It forms part of the article that was originally published in the *Arya* (a journal edited by Sri Aurobindo) in 1920

⁵ *Isa Upanishad*, verse 15. See S Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads*, p.577.

⁶ Sri Aurobindo’s explicit philosophical text is certainly *The Life Divine*, where he systematically explores the ideas referred to here. However, throughout his life he maintained this general direction of evolutionary thinking and in most of his other systematic treatises like *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle* and innumerable articles and essays, he reverts to this cyclical notion of involution and evolution. Thus these two interlinking concepts could be seen to formulate his major thesis.

⁷ For a detailed discussion of Sri Aurobindo’s aesthetics of spirituality see my *The Mantra of Vision: An Overview of Sri Aurobindo’s Aesthetics*, 1998.

⁸ Throughout his innumerable letters and responses to various queries he explored what it meant to be a thinker and creative writer. In fact these responses and reactions lead further on toward a definition of his aesthetic.

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The Human Body – A Spiritual View

Alok Pandey

There is a scientist's way of looking at the human body and there is a spiritual way to look at it. The two views, though different due to a difference in the angle of the vision, are nevertheless mutually complementary if we take the larger interests of the human race in its evolutionary progression. The view of the scientist is of course more narrow, his angle of vision more focused on the details of physical processes, his field of enquiry the outward and the immediate. The scientist brings us to the detailed knowledge of the chemical blocks which build our physical body, the laws and processes that govern our physical existence and the means of physical interventions that can help it to remain fit and healthy and function normally.

The yogi casts a wider look, his angle of vision is broader since his consciousness moves in a larger field of experience, the inner and cosmic. He may not necessarily be aware of the detailed chemical constitution or physical processes governing the body, yet his intervention can be more direct, powerful and effective. This is so because he knows the play of the cosmic forces and their subtle laws and occult processes that work upon matter and govern it from behind. Yet his aim of intervention is not merely to secure fitness and normalcy for their own sake but for the fulfilment of a higher Purpose, of the cosmic Will in man. Therefore does a yogi seldom intervene under any pressure of personal will of the claimant to health but rather more and more in alignment to a deeper and larger cosmic Will which sees beyond the outward and the immediate unless of course the mere intensity of the personal will is enough to move the cosmic Will.

There is of course an intermediate terrain between the physical and the spiritual, a domain of mixed possibilities. The physical scientist has begun to recognise this higher than the physical domain and calls it 'psychological'. What he means by the term is that our thoughts, will, emotions have their physical counterparts, and through these psychophysical components of our physiology, they can and indeed do influence the physical processes, the organs and their

functionings. This is a great discovery and opens doors to an entry into deeper territories. As of now, however, the physical scientist is satisfied with studying only the physical components of our psychophysical parts.

But just as there is a physical side of the psychological parts, there is a pure psychological side of our physical existence. It is occult to our physical vision and yet is teeming with rich and varied possibilities. It consists of a direct seizing upon of mind energies and life energies and other forms of an intermediate energy and their deft handling to heal and succour. This field known to the occultists, the alchemists and the tantrics of old had taken a backseat in the last few centuries that saw man preoccupied almost exclusively with the physical world and his material existence. The triumphant march of sciences based upon a study of gross matter and its possibilities almost blotted out this other type and even a faith in such deeper hidden possibilities. But now since we have explored and sounded the depths of the physical world we see a resurgence of interest in the hidden forces of life.

But as we have said, the view of the yogi is deeper and wider than even the psychological and the occult. This is because to his unsealed vision there is disclosed not only the stray strands of mental and vital and other energies but also the forces and forms and beings and godheads at each of these universal planes of existence. Instead of simply channelling the 'energies' through his personal will, which besides may yet be an ignorant limited and egoistic will, he opens himself to the action and play of the Cosmic Divine and even the Will of the Transcendent Supreme by a progressive surrender of his psychological apparatus and the instrumentality of nature, by a progressive dissolution of the ego to that which is Beyond-ego. The sign of such a surrender is that he no more opens a healing shop or promises miracle to each and everyone who approaches since he can no longer be impelled any more by his own limited personal will or the limited and ignorant will of his clients. He begins to act or rather be acted upon, more and more directly in alignment to a higher Will, more and more silently, yet more and more powerfully. He can claim nothing, nor promise anything unless he sees and knows it as coming from the Transcendent Source of all things.

What then is this deeper view of the human body, its necessity and its ultimate purpose? How do our health and illness relate with this Purpose? And how can we facilitate this great Purpose through both health and illness? This of course is another point of divergence. For while the scientist (physical and occult) hardly evinces any interest in the body other than its utility for survival and physical – vital existence for its own sake, the yogi sees further. The yogi sees in the body the capacity to deliver the soul out of its self-willed confinement in

matter. According to the yogi, the seemingly unconscious field of matter is pregnant with a conscious soul that has entered into a state of self-oblivion having identified with the unconscious state of matter. It has done so deliberately so that by a slow process of an evolutionary progression it can extract the divine possibilities hid in matter. This is possible because, in the deepest vision of the seers, it is Spirit that has become matter. And therefore by a process of reversal (what we term as evolution) matter can reclaim its spiritual status. This evolutionary unfolding takes place by the pressure of the growing soul. As it wakes up, it also wakes up the deeper possibilities of matter – the possibility of sensation, the possibility of impulse to live, of feelings, of thought and ideation. In other words, matter is the field in which seedlings of the Spirit are sown deep, carefully hid in the folds of darkness of our material existence. These seedlings are watered and looked after by the Divine Gardener who pours down the Light and Breath and Force of a higher sphere of spiritual existence through the mediating agency of the soul. The soul holds the trust deed of this field whose ownership is with the Divine. But till the soul grows and is able to exercise a sufficient degree of influence and control over matter and physical existence, it has to act through the already developed agency of a caretaker mind and life.

And herein lies the first knot of the problem of our bodily existence. The body has already developed from within itself the powers of life with its fairly elaborate and perfected processes. The powers of mind and their processes and neurological connections are still developing as some latest researches tell us. In other words, unlike the processes of life, the processes of cognition are yet not fully laid down and new patterns are replacing old ones. But the soul-powers and soul-faculties are still largely asleep except for occasional glimpses from time to time. The yogi's efforts are therefore not focused so much on physical survival or health and fitness for vital enjoyment or to enhance comfort and sense-pleasure. In fact, the yogi may prefer the instrument to be broken rather than being used by reckless powers of an excess ambition and blind lust. His efforts to first of all extract the soul out of its entrapment in matter and secondly, to exercise a spiritual control and mastery over material and bodily existence. Thirdly, and lastly, the aim put forward by Sri Aurobindo, is to progressively spiritualise and then divinise matter.

The problems of the bodily existence that the yogi had set to resolve are therefore different from those of the medical scientist. Though they work upon the same field, they work towards a different aim and with different principles and methods. The medical scientist's job is to repair the damaged bodily equipment and enhance its life span for survival purposes or even to prolong the

ability of sensory enjoyment, physical pleasures and comforts. Therefore the medical scientist multiplies outer methods of prolonging life, repairing defects, handling emergencies, change of organs, etc. To preserve and prolong is his aim. But the yogi's interest lies elsewhere. Not survival for the sake of survival, not prolongation of life for fear of death, not a fresh lease so that he can indulge a little longer in sense pleasures is his aim. So, the first and foremost aim is to keep the body supple and fit, in a reasonably healthy and balanced state relatively free of serious disturbances so that he can concentrate upon his soul. Not that he cannot do so in a sick body. He can, if he has a strong will, but in the usual case, a sick body, and a body full of *tamas* and inertia drag the consciousness outward and downward. True, with practice it is not difficult to learn detaching the mind from our physical condition yet that makes the effort so much more difficult, especially if there is too much of inertia. Besides inertia and *tamas* naturally attract forces of disharmony and disruption, of greed and lust. A physical consciousness that is too *tamasic* preoccupies itself with food, sex and sleep, etc., avoidance of things that make the body heavy and dull or damage the nerves such as alcohol, tobacco, narcotics, heavy or stale food, etc. Some simple medicines as and when necessary to avoid too much discomfort are alright in this stage when one is simply learning to disengage the soul from the body and mind. Life, death, disease are in this stage mere passing incidents that temporarily block our view or pause for a short while our search for the soul.

The second level of difficulty arises when having found his soul, the yogi strives to master each and every movement. The law of moderation is to be replaced here by a growing spiritual perfection. It is no more enough to eat in moderation but to eliminate greed completely. It is no more a regulated sex but an effort to completely master the sex impulse. It is no more having a sound refreshing sleep but to become conscious of the nights. Even with regard to illness, the effort is to get rid of them by an inner control and exercise of a spiritual will and by the pressure of a higher consciousness and its forces. One may still need medicines but rarely and in lower dosages for short duration. As the change proceeds, the so-called normal laws of the body no more hold tight. The body itself is seen as a field and a symbol for the play of various forces and energies of different levels of consciousness reflected and represented in the body. This is a long and protracted battle. The vital and the mind do not easily let go off their old misrule. The subconscious caves where these traffickers and robbers hide raise their head again and again. The effort here is to link the physical consciousness to the soul and through it to the higher realms. This is done through aspiration and opening of the physical consciousness to change, a persistent, painstaking, rejection full of perseverance; a constant referral to

Grace, its invocation to eliminate the many defects and impulses and a surrender to the Divine Will. As the psychic consciousness grows, as the inner being begins to change under the psychic pressure, as the higher forces accumulate, the task becomes relatively easier though by no means a simple one.

A distinction has to be made between the psychic control vis-à-vis a mental and vital control of the body. For people with a strong vital will can impose it upon the body. Usually, this vital will in man being subject to the ego and desire, is used for all the wrong purposes. However, sometimes the vital will and the mind can exercise a strong control over the body. Such a control should not be confused with the control arrived at by a psychic and spiritual consciousness. The vital and mental will impose upon the body certain arbitrary rules based on preferred opinions. These rules may even be drastic ones like raw vegan vegetarianism, or breatharians, or food fads, or an extensive exercise programme without proper and adequate rest and sleep. Such a control may appear drastic and swift to arrive but is usually temporary, achieved by a locking up of mental and vital energy in suppressing something, and is done at the expense of body's health (even though people do not always realise it is as in cases of anorexia nervosa). Besides, such a control usually brings a certain rigidity and harshness in nature. The psychic control takes longer because it keeps the little grain of wheat while removing the chaff, but is more complete, carries a sense of harmony, sweetness, peace and joy. Nevertheless, mental and vital control has its own utilities in our evolutionary journey. The mental and vital control is more external such as not eating certain things even though you like them, the psychic control is more intrinsic such as eliminating greed. Both may therefore complement each other.

The psychic control is usually in the form of an invitation, a subtle indication of the gesture to be made, the thing to be done and the right way to do it. It has neither the harsh insistence of the mind nor the vehemence of the vital but acts more as a subtle but sure compulsion which we (the mind-vital-body ego) may or may not follow. But if persisted and followed, it lends a harmony and grace to the body, a ring of authentic sweetness and peace in the voice and speech, an unerring impulsion to our bodily movements and a spontaneous resetting of body's rhythms in accordance with deeper truths. The food becomes more nourishing and in the right quantity without our thinking or calculating of calories, the sleep becomes much more refreshing and the dreams change their quality, one develops a "natural" (as contrasted with enforced and artificial) distaste for certain crude impulses such as sex and anger. Fear tends to diminish and finally vanish. The very limbs feel a subtle sweetness flowing through them as a rejuvenating sap of some immortal life, amrita and even the taste and other

senses may undergo a corresponding change. A new and deeper sense of beauty comes that is no more deceived by charming appearances and can easily see through them. A spontaneous knowledge, a more subtle but effective will, a quality of tranquillity in feeling and impulsion, a natural state of peace and joy, an uplifting of everything towards the Divine, a clarity that the intellect cannot offer, a goodwill, wideness and love that the heart has not known before, a native generosity of the soul that is equal-visioned to all and therefore at peace and ease with itself and the world are some of the profound physical and psychological changes that arise with the progressive awakening of the psychic. This itself is a great gain and makes us so much more free from many a malady. But since it is difficult for man to remain in constant touch with the soul, there are lapses and recoils, the revolts of the vital, the surfing up of the mind's anxieties and fears, the heart's hopes and expectations, the body's maladies. The subconscious throws up the old ills and habits again at such vulnerable moments and the maladies return. Nevertheless, once the passage is sealed for the psychic streams to pour upon the body it becomes easier and easier to get back to the psychic poise and heal the body form within.

This becomes possible because unlike the mind and the vital, the psychic consciousness can directly link us to the healing forces of a higher consciousness. It can even call down the touch of Grace upon matter and redeem it from its fallen state. And if for some reason it (the soul) decides to leave the body, then One is put in the best and most favourable inner conditions to do so. Then death itself becomes a leap, an opportunity, crisis an evolutionary lever. If this is combined with a strong faith and will in the mind and the vital then it can form an almost impregnable fortress against almost all illness. Such a fortunate combination is however very rare. Often in fact, the story may well be different. A person with a great psychic possibility may be endowed with a great difficulty of nature that is like a shadow which he must conquer to realise his own true strength. And in Nature's great economy and wisdom the obstacle is so arranged so that it may hasten the inner possibility which would remain dormant if it did not meet the friction and resistance of an opposing force which acts as a stimulant or a challenge to facilitate the psychic emergence. To conquer this rock-like obstacle to facilitate the flow of the soothing streams of the nectar of delight that secretly even now supports and heals our existence is the work of the yogi. This work needs time, patience, faith and courage. It is the work of bringing into the frame of our mortal existence that which exceeds all frames. It is the work of preparing our earthly field called the body to receive and implant seeds of light from another realm whose harvest is not yet known to man. But once it begins to blossom and bloom it will solve all problems of disease, incapacity and

death by striking at the very roots of the malady that lie embedded and entangled in the dark concealment of the rock caves of our subconscious nature. Medicines cannot do it, nor can any alternate system of therapy or exercises of techniques of breathing do it for us. These may be and are helpful in their own place and time but only temporarily and perhaps immediately so. But the Yogi looks beyond the temporal and the immediate. He looks at concealed parts, parts of light and parts of night and reuniting them becomes a whole.

From the yogic point of view, each part of the body is symbolic of a higher movement that is reflected here in a more or less distorted manner. Yet there is a subtle correspondence between the two. Now the effort of evolution translates itself in physical terms to create a perfect body that is truly representative of the higher states of consciousness, a body moved entirely by the higher forces and energies rather than by their lower and lesser counterparts as of now. This would naturally lead not only to a perfect immunity that could practically extend to everything but also to a free and full play of divine consciousness and its forces and energies in matter. It would bring, in other terms, a completest possible freedom from all animality and also a death-bound, disease-prone, desire-driven humanity. How will this come about? The first step is to accumulate the forces and energies of a higher consciousness by a constant aspiration, psychic purification and a spiritual opening of the embodied human consciousness right up to the physical. There must increase simultaneously the receptivity of the body cells to this higher consciousness. A conscious and methodical physical education is one of the means to that. Finally, the pressure of the transformed inner consciousness will begin to mould and remould the physical stuff till it finally admits the transformation of each part into a corresponding physical centre of energy.

Secondly, to a deeper spiritual sight, each part contains the whole in itself. There is a whole universe contained or rather crammed within us. In a transformed body it may be possible to effectuate changes in one part of the world by concentrating on a corresponding part of the body and releasing the higher forces locked there. Each body can become then a representative body of the earth. This is the deeper work of the yogi – to awaken and release the spiritual forces locked in the prison house of matter. And by that release turn this prison into a camp or temple-house of God. The scientist's work is simply to study and repair the prison-bars, make them even strong and lasting. Yogis work to change them and in their place erect something new, something far more beautiful and true.

Psychology: Five Major Indian Contributions

Matthijs Cornelissen

One can look at knowledge systems other than one's own in two ways: sympathetically, as a source of insight that can potentially enrich, complement or even replace one's own way of looking at reality, or objectively, as a curious cultural characteristic of others than oneself. The latter is the approach of most historical and ethnographical studies. These disciplines study non-Western knowledge systems not for their intrinsic value, but in order to develop insight into the people and cultures that have produced them. Within modern science, Indian knowledge systems have been studied almost exclusively from such a third person, historical or ethnographical perspective. This is a serious loss for the developing global culture, as it effectively sidelines the contribution these knowledge systems could make to our collective insight into ourselves and in the world around us. It is true that since a long time Buddhist and Hindu Art are accepted as part of our collective heritage. It is even *bon ton* to admit that Buddhist and Hindu scriptures contain nuggets of truth that can help people with a certain disposition in their personal life, but the contribution Indian thought can make to mainstream modern science is largely ignored. This is perhaps understandable as a leftover of 19th century's colonialist parochialism, but given the excellent modern communication facilities it is not excusable, for there are several subjects in which the Indian tradition has produced knowledge that is undeniably more comprehensive, reliable and socially relevant than what the as yet largely Euro-American modern science is producing. A prime example of such a subject, to which the Indian tradition can make extremely valuable contributions, is Psychology.

There are five distinct areas in which the Indian tradition can make a major contribution to Psychology as an academic science:

1. *Philosophical Foundation.*

The Indian tradition provides a comprehensive philosophical framework that can not only support the enormous wealth of psychological knowledge inherent in its own spiritual paths, but also, and with equal ease, all branches of modern

psychology. The core of this philosophical framework is its insight into the nature and role of consciousness, which provides a considerably more fruitful foundation for the social sciences than the materialist-reductionist theories and methods on which Western science presently bases itself.

2. *Epistemology and Methods of Subjective Enquiry.*

Based on this consciousness-based ontology, the Indian tradition contains a perfectly coherent theory of knowledge that has spawned numerous rigorous and effective techniques to arrive at valid and reliable insights in the subjective domain.

3. *Theories of Self and Personality.*

The Indian tradition has an understanding of the Personality and the Self that is more comprehensive, coherent and rewarding than any other personality theory presently available in academic psychology.

4. *Special Areas of Psychology.*

There are a number of specialised fields of psychology to which the Indian tradition has made extremely interesting contributions. Subjects that come to mind include emotions and aesthetics (eg. Bharata's theory of bhava and rasa), language, motivation, human development, etc..

5. *Applied Psychology: Pathways for Change.*

Last, and perhaps most important, the different approaches to Yoga contain insights and techniques to bring about psychological change, that can revolutionise applied fields like psychotherapy and education.

Each of these areas is a world in itself and deserves to grow into an independent discipline within the wider field of Indian Psychology. In the first half of this paper I will touch shortly on a few major directions in each of these five areas. In the second half, I will work the Indian concept of consciousness out in some more detail because it is the foundation of everything else in Indian Psychology. I will base myself for this exposition on the work of Sri Aurobindo, who has not only produced a comprehensive synthesis of the different schools of Indian thought, but also added a dynamic, evolutionary element missing in the tradition as it is commonly understood.

1. *Philosophical Foundation*

The all-pervading Brahman

The heart of Indian philosophy is the concept of the *all-pervading Brahman* (see Phillips, 1997). It is remarkable that in the ancient scriptures the simple mentioning of Brahman's name is enough to settle all doubt. In the Kena Upanishad, which might well qualify as mankind's shortest and yet most profound introduction to cognitive science, there is, for example, a sweet and famous

story in which the gods, after a difficult and laborious victory over evil, have become too cockish for their own good. The gods obviously need a lesson in modesty, and Brahman, the Absolute One, appears in their midst in the form of a simple blade of grass. The gods are baffled by this sudden appearance of a blade of grass in their heavenly abode, and each one of them tries to deal with it in his or her own typical way. But to their great consternation Agni (fire) cannot burn it, Vayu (wind) cannot blow it away, and even Indra (mind) cannot grasp or destroy it. When Uma (dawn) finally recognises that the blade of grass is no other than Brahman, all the gods are stunned and instantly realise the folly of their pride: they are forced to acknowledge the One who infinitely surpasses them.

When we take the gods as divine personifications of fundamental psychological powers and processes, the interpretation of the story is not difficult: Agni, the basic human drive and aspiration, Vayu, the cleaning force of the pure heart, and Indra, the Lord of the mind, are great powers, no doubt, but by themselves they have neither power nor value. In fact by themselves they could not even exist. As Uma, the first dawn of pure discernment, points out to them, there is a "secret ingredient", an Absolute that makes them what they are and that, at the same time, infinitely and eternally surpasses them. That secret One is Brahman, at once the ineffable Transcendence, the all-comprehensive Cosmos, and the ultimate individual Presence. There is nothing beyond Him, nothing outside of Her, nothing too small for It. This lesson in humility is perhaps the one lesson modern man is most urgently in need of.

For the ancient ones, the mentioning of Brahman's name was sufficient, but our sceptical modern mind is not as easily satisfied as these more ancient gods; it does demand further argument. It wonders specifically why the realisation that *All is Brahman* would give any more satisfaction than the realisation that all is energy, mass, charge, charm, spin, or whatever else modern physics may tell us. The modern mind might actually argue that the latter concepts are more useful as they can be quantified and mathematised while the former are intangible, if not incurably ineffable. But contrary to what modern man is wont to believe, and in spite of the immediate practicality of the more mundane physical explanations of reality, there is good reason to hold that Brahman actually is superior to any purely material concept as the ultimate explanation of the Universe. The main ground to believe so is that the concept of Brahman is more comprehensive and integral in the deep sense of the Sanskrit word "*purna*". To be specific, Brahman includes three crucial elements missing or poorly understood in modern science, Personhood, Consciousness and Infinity. While it is impossible to arrive at a full understanding of what it means to be a Conscious

Self on the basis of our present understanding of matter as unconscious substance, it is perfectly possible to develop a good understanding of matter on the basis of the complex Indian understanding of *Sachchidananda*: the lower can be explained in terms of the higher, but the higher cannot be explained in terms of the lower without losing somewhere on the way its very essence.

For a full mastery, however, we need both types of understanding, the spiritual as well as the scientific. As the *Isha* says:

Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.

... He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality.

(*Isha Upanishad*, Sri Aurobindo's translation, 1996, pp. 21-22)

To integrate the spiritual and the scientific, the materialist framework will not do. The integration, which the *Isha* demands, is only possible in the more comprehensive explanatory framework of the ancient, *purna vedanta*. The key of this framework, the conceptual link between the higher and the lower, the absolute and the relative, spirit and matter, is the understanding of Brahman as *Sachchidananda*, which, in its turn, is based on a marvellously rich and complex understanding of the nature and role of Consciousness, not only in the individual but also in the “outer” social and physical reality. We will take this up in some more detail in the second half of this paper.

2. Epistemology

Of the many Indian contributions to epistemology I'd like to mention only three that have major theoretical as well as practical implications. The first one is derived directly from the Vedic ontology. Starting from the idea that consciousness and being are in essence one, Truth is considered a quality of being, more than an attribute of sentences. With the exception of the highly sophisticated metaphysical and logical debates between the medieval *darshanas*, the cultural stress in India has been on experience, rather than on information. Popular Hinduism is full of stories in which the genuine wisdom of kings, old women and ignorant girls is successfully pitted against the experientially empty scholarship of learned pandits. True knowledge is something you have to own with your whole being, you have to become it: the real knowledge is, as Sri Aurobindo calls it, *knowledge by identity*.

Modern science and Indian spirituality are both aware of the fact that Reality surpasses our capacity to understand it. Popular science may make rash

statements of the type: “Earlier we used to *think* that it was like this, but now we *know* that it is like that”, but real science doesn't do so, it always remains open to the possibility that its conclusions will be refuted or refined in the future. Openness to what is beyond our (present) knowledge is an essential element of science as well as of spirituality. There is however one big difference between the pursuit of spiritual knowledge and the pursuit of scientific knowledge. While in science the “extra” is seen as “more of the same”, in the Indian spiritual tradition the “extra” is seen as something of another *order*, something ineffable beyond the whole category of mental statements. In this context it is interesting to note that the way of dealing with that ineffable “extra” seems to have changed in India over time. The authors of the early Upanishads and Vedas give the impression that they discuss reality while solidly established on heights of spiritual understanding quite beyond the mind. It appears that these ancient Rishis were still breathing the underlying oneness, and simply juxtaposed different approaches to the ineffable Absolute without the slightest worry about the logical contradictions this would entail. The medieval exponents of the six *darshanas*, on the other hand, were much more deeply engrossed in their mental logic, and they carried it to its extremes with all the enthusiasm of new converts. Even while at some summit of their being they must have been aware that the “real” reality surpassed their mind, they discuss truth in terms of exclusive mental categories: *if* the Ultimate is Personal, *then* it cannot be Impersonal; *if* it is Immutable, *then* it cannot be Mutable, and so on. Only a few had the courage to carry logic to its bitter end and proclaim, like Nagarjuna, that the Real is not A, not not-A, not both *and* not neither.

Seen from within the Indian system, it is easy to understand why the mind is incapable of arriving at a complete understanding of consciousness: the mind itself is considered to be just one, comparatively minor, manifestation of conscious-existence. The ultimate aim of studying philosophy and psychology is thus, even in the later *darshanas*, not to develop mental information and logical argument, but to surpass the mind and reach a higher order of knowing. As Sri Aurobindo wrote:

[T]he knowledge we have to arrive at is not truth of the intellect; it is not right belief, right opinions, right information about oneself and things, that is only the surface mind's idea of knowledge. To arrive at some mental conception about God and ourselves and the world is an object good for the intellect but not large enough for the Spirit; it will not make us the conscious sons of Infinity. Ancient Indian thought meant by knowledge a consciousness which possesses the highest Truth in a direct perception

and in self-experience; to become, to be the Highest that we know is the sign that we really have the knowledge.

(Sri Aurobindo, 1972a, p. 686)

Even now, what the world is looking for in the Indian tradition is not just information — not even the right information. It is something we have to become.

It may be clear that this conception of knowledge has major consequences for the role and nature of psychology as a science and thus for the teaching of psychology, for research in psychology and for psychotherapy. It is not that western psychology has not realised the difference, for example, between information, assimilated theoretical knowledge and skill, but in the Indian tradition these refinements of the concept of knowledge are not an *ad hoc* addition needed to adjust the theory to the requirements from the field, but something that flows directly and harmoniously from first principles.

The second major Indian contribution to epistemology is based on the first one combined with the insight that there are many different types and levels of consciousness present amongst men. The one ultimate Truth is ineffable, or rather “of infinite quality” as the much richer Sanskrit equivalent, *anantaguna*, says, but it manifests in the form of many smaller truths that all embody entirely different and often contradictory parts and aspects of the One. In the field of religion, this leads to the wonderful concept of the *Ishta Devata*, the idea that the one ineffable supreme, can come to his devotees in myriads of forms. In the field of ethics, or truth in action, this idea of multiformity arising from a deep underlying unity leads to the marvellous concept of the individual *svadharma*, the personal truth of action which is not universal but is meant to guide the individual about what he or she should do in harmony with his or her own *svabhava*, essential nature, under his or her specific circumstances. Again it may be clear how a deep understanding of the twin concepts of *svadharma* and *svabhava* would lead to major changes in psychotherapy, education, developmental psychology, business management and even law enforcement.

The core of both expressions of this second epistemic point is respect for difference in manifestation, based on a deep awareness of an implicit, underlying unity. Interestingly, this is also the hard-fought-for essence of modern democracy which is defined not only as the rule of the majority, which by itself could be monstrous, but as the rule of the majority combined with a deep respect for minorities and individuals.

The third major epistemological contribution of the Indian tradition to psychology that I want to mention here is its methodology. In all areas of science it is implicitly understood that the nature of the researcher does play a role.

A student of physics or medicine does not only learn the established facts of his subject, or even the right research methods, but in the process of his studies he *becomes* a physicist or a doctor. But this inner change is not the key issue in his studies. The largest part of the collective progress in the hard sciences comes about through the development of better theory and better instrumentation, which in turn is made possible by the progressive feedback loop between technology and science. In Psychology the nature of the researcher is, however, of paramount importance, as it is in fact the researcher’s own human nature, which is the main tool for his enquiry in the nature of consciousness. The Indian tradition has worked this out in a detailed and rigorous manner that has simply no equivalent in the West. The enormous wealth of techniques and processes developed as part of Yoga, can all be looked upon as ways to improve the efficiency, purity and resolution of the *antahkarana*, the inner instrument of knowledge. And it is a perfected inner instrument of knowledge, which is most needed to arrive at detailed and reliable psychological insight. A full recognition of this fact — which will have to go together with acceptance of psychology as a first person rather than a third-person science — will lead to drastic changes in selection criteria for psychology students, methods of teaching psychology, research methodologies, establishing lines of authority within the discipline, and so on.

3. Models of the self and the personality

When we finally come to the content of psychology, the most important contribution made by the Indian tradition is no doubt its concept of the Self as the Atman, the Purusha, and the relation of this Self on the one side to the ego, the *ahankara*, and on the other to the cosmic and transcendent realities of Prakriti and Brahman. Together with this, one has to consider its fine understanding of the different types of consciousness (the *koshas*), the centres of consciousness in the human body (the *chakras*), the varieties of mind like *vijnana*, *buddhi*, *manas*, and the way they relate to the *chitta*.

One of Sri Aurobindo’s main contributions in this field is his distinction between the immutable Self, the Atman, above, and the evolving soul, the *chaitya purusha*, which he calls “the psychic being”. Another major contribution is his detailed description of the different types of consciousness, right from the consciousness of the body to the higher ranges of mind, and especially the distinction he makes between the Overmind and the Supermind (e.g. 1972a, 271-89). Of major practical importance is also his understanding of how the vertical Vedic system of different planes of consciousness interacts with a concentric system consisting of the outer nature, the inner nature and the *purusha* on each of these different levels.

4. Special areas

There are many specialised areas of psychology in which the Indian tradition can make major contributions. One can for example think of Bharata's detailed study of aesthetic pleasure and emotions; cognition, perception and awareness; language; personality types (*gunas*, *varnas*); life-cycles (*ashramas*), etc. One of the most interesting for modern psychology is perhaps the Indian approach to developmental psychology. In this field, the contributions from the Indian and the modern Western tradition are clearly complementary. Western developmental psychology has done a lot of work on what is unique to early childhood. Just as in pre-modern Europe, the peculiarities of early childhood have not received much attention in the Indian tradition, and what happens during this period of life is taken largely as not more than a specific application of general principles. But what the Indian tradition can add to developmental psychology are its insights in the evolving soul. While the debate in modern Europe has been largely between nature and nurture, the Indian tradition brings in a third element, the self, the soul. In the Indian tradition our biological endowments, what we would now call the genetic foundations of the personality, are not taken as part of the self, *purusha*, but as part of Nature, *prakriti*, and as such as part of the circumstances of life. The real "I" is the eternal soul, and the focus is first about what the soul does to create the environment it ends up living in, and second how this soul subsequently should deal with that "environment" (which includes the peculiarities of its own character). Though we do get here into an area about which the different religions have strong, sometimes contradictory and often dogmatically defended opinions, this area is too important to be ignored entirely by psychology. To me personally the Indian idea of souls that grow slowly over many lifetimes seems to fit perfectly with experience and can explain much about the huge differences between people and especially young children that is very hard to make sense of otherwise. Luckily, most of the practical consequences for upbringing and education remain the same whether life is seen as a one-time affair for the individual soul or not. The main point, on which the major religions all agree, is that there are individual souls, that they are not in all respects identical, and that they should be helped to grow and flourish. The Indian tradition has an incomparable wealth of insights in the details of this process of growth and development.

5. Change

This is the area where the Indian tradition has probably had the greatest influence on the evolving global civilisation, not only in the subculture but also in mainstream Psychotherapy and Human Resource Development. The latter is

probably due to the fact that these fields of applied psychology are much less theory driven than academic psychology proper and as such more open to new ideas, irrespective of whether they fit in what is traditionally considered scientific or not, as long as they can be shown to work. This pragmatic focus is an advantage as well as a disadvantage. In Western psychology, meditation and yoga are widely recommended as "relaxation techniques" without the slightest hint of their deeper spiritual meaning and cultural context, which is a rather tragical travesty of their original intent. I suppose this has to be accepted as a beginning but we must hope that a more broad-based introduction of Indian psychology in academia will lead to a better understanding of what these techniques purport and how they are related to a complex and intricate web of meaning and purpose.

In this area too, Sri Aurobindo has made a number of significant contributions. The most important is perhaps that he realised that yoga is nothing but practical psychology (1972b), and that he worked out in great detail how the basic natural processes at work in our psychological nature can be used to uplift and transform our existence. In harmony with his vision of an ongoing evolution of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo sees as the ultimate aim of Yoga not only liberation, but also transformation. His yoga involves a triple transformation: first a perfecting of the outer and inner nature as an instrument in service of the soul, then a bringing of more and more of one's being under influence of the higher ranges of the mind and spirit, and finally a supramental transformation which he considers to be the inevitable next step in the evolutionary process (for more detail, see for example 1972a, p. 889 onwards).

The Indian Concept of Consciousness

As mentioned in the beginning, the heart of the Indian contribution to modern psychology is its wonderfully rich and comprehensive conceptualisation of consciousness. But before we go deeper into the Indian understanding of consciousness, it may be useful to realise that Western science and philosophy have failed spectacularly in their attempts at developing a coherent understanding of consciousness. In the beginning of the 20th century the scientific study of consciousness was, in fact, for all practical purposes given up, and for about 80 years, consciousness became more thoroughly taboo in academia, than sex had been in Victorian England (Guzaldere, 1992). Though recent progress in neuroscience and artificial intelligence has revived scientific and philosophical interest in consciousness, the 1997 edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* has not even an entry for consciousness!

The explanation for this amazing failure is to be found in the peculiar history

of modern science in Europe. Since the European “Enlightenment”, European thought has laboured under a strict separation of Church and State, Religion and Science, Spirit and Matter. In a culture where the dominant religion was tied to well-established doctrine by a strong central authority, this was probably needed to create sufficient space for secular progress, and the “Cartesian Split” is widely believed to have helped the physical sciences to prosper. But it has created insurmountable problems for the social sciences and especially for psychology. The crux of these problems is that an exclusive study of external, physical “behaviour” can give psychology no more insight into the human psyche than what a quantitative analysis of paper and ink can contribute to literary studies. Just as literary criticism cannot escape from difficult issues such as “meaning” and “beauty”, a psychology worth its name cannot escape from the study of subjective experience, thoughts, feelings, and consciousness. Sneaking these back into “objective science” by the back door of the (objective) study of (inherently subjective) self-reports that are based on naïve forms of introspection, as psychology has done in the second half of the 20th century, introduces low quality subjective data that no amount of sophisticated statistical analysis can remedy. Comparing the way modern psychology collects data with the manner, in which the exact sciences arrive at their basic data, may make the situation clearer. Astronomy, for example, does not make progress by asking professional astronomers to survey what random members of the lay-population have seen in the sky during their evening stroll, but through the observations which a few exceptionally gifted, well-trained and equipped specialists have made themselves. The Indian tradition has followed the same procedure for psychology: it has developed its massive base of solid knowledge about the inner realities of consciousness by making use of the direct self-observations of a small number of highly motivated, gifted and trained individuals. Western psychology, on the other hand has tried to study what is going on in human nature indirectly through the professional interpretation of the lay self-observations of the “common man”. It is hardly surprising that this has led to a science that has failed to rise above first appearances.

There is still another direction in which the self-imposed limitations of the social sciences have created entirely unnecessary difficulties for psychology. Mathematics and even physics cannot prosper without incorporating in their systems the abstract and immeasurable notions of absolute zero and infinity. For very similar reasons, one cannot have a meaningful psychology as long as one leaves out the possibility of “pure consciousness” and the existence of the intrinsically infinite soul, spirit, and divine in man. However difficult these things may be to measure “objectively”, the numinous is much too crucial a part of

what it means to be human to be ignored with impunity. The European solution of allotting the secular and the spiritual to the two entirely independent and non-communicating knowledge systems of science and religion may have been useful to remove a too dogmatic religion from most of our day-to-day affairs, but in the long run it is not a healthy solution. It is rather the sign of a collective multi-personality disorder that might well prove fatal for the human race if it spreads much further than it has done already.

As a result of this failure to keep science and spirituality together, the dominant concept of consciousness in western science suffers from two serious defects. The first is that it is limited to sensorial awareness of one’s surrounding (in other words to *manas* in its most narrow denotation of sense-mind). Though this limited concept of consciousness is useful for neurosurgeons and anaesthetists who need to determine whether a patient has “regained consciousness” or not, it is not suitable for wider use in psychology, as it doesn’t do justice to the wide range of entirely different *types* of consciousness human beings can have. It is equally unusable for evolutionary biology and philosophy because it turns consciousness into a freak phenomenon unconnected to anything else in nature. The second defect is that consciousness is still routinely confused with a variety of mental functions, which often, but not always go together with human consciousness. Both are rather primitive errors, which were already recognised as such in the earliest Upanishads and the most ancient texts on Yoga, but they have been common throughout the history of modern Western thought right up to the present.

There are still a few caveats before we finally will dive into the Indian concept of consciousness. The first of them is that there are several Sanskrit words that are routinely translated as consciousness, and this leads, obviously, to quite different understandings of the nature and role of consciousness in the Indian tradition. In this essay, I will follow Sri Aurobindo’s conventions for the terminology: I will use the word “Consciousness” mainly for *Chit* and its derivatives, I will systematically use “Self” for the *Purusha* and the *Atman*, and I will keep the word “ego” for the *ahankara*, the temporary formations in the outer nature, with which the *Purusha* mistakenly identifies itself.

Second, there are many different schools of thought in the Indian tradition. If there are 30 crore gods in the Indian pantheon, we should not be surprised to find at least as many concepts of consciousness. The following discussion is not meant as an historical overview of all these different concepts, but as an attempt at distilling an underlying essence, a core that can help to put modern psychology on a more fruitful track. This is obviously a very personal choice, and though it is largely based on Sri Aurobindo’s interpretation and extension of

the tradition, it is not a verbatim rendering of his writing or, for that matter, of any other Indian source. It is my own rendering in modern psychological terminology of what I see as an important common essence that underlies and supports the many different Indian positions.

The third and final difficulty I want to mention, is that everything related to consciousness is interrelated. Different aspects of consciousness can conceptually be separated, but they are still part and parcel of the single reality of Brahman. Awareness and form-giving Energy, Oneness and Duality, Self and Nature, can all be discussed separately but their underlying reality is one. The following 12 points should thus not be considered in isolation, or in opposition to each other, but together, even where they *seem* to contradict each other.

Twelve Aspects of Consciousness

1. Consciousness is Awareness.

—Consciousness is the light in which all is seen.

The first and most obvious aspect of consciousness is “awareness”, but it is amazingly difficult to describe what awareness actually is. Awareness seems to belong to the same category as Time, of which Augustine said, “If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it..., I do not know” (Augustine, 440/1955, Bk. 11, Ch. 14). *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines “awareness” in terms of “knowledge” and “perception”, but then defines “knowledge” and “perception” in terms of “awareness”. The Oxford editors cannot be blamed for this circularity: like time, awareness is one of the foundational elements of our existence, and classical definitions of the Aristotelian type, that start from a more general term and then narrow it down, don’t work. There simply is no appropriate more general term to define awareness with.

It is somewhat easier to show what awareness is not. When an electronic video camera “sees” the world, the camera is making a picture of the world in some electronic form. Yet, there is little reason to presume the camera has any “awareness” of the world. Even if you could connect the camera to a robot, which could imitate all the complex computational processes that happen in the brain, it remains dubious whether you should call this robot “conscious” in an ordinary, human sense. It is more and more widely held that even in humans, all behaviourally relevant cognitive processes can take place without awareness, which leads to the view that awareness is not an intrinsic part of those cognitive processes but something that *can* occur on top of them. It is interesting that this standpoint is totally different from that of Descartes (1641/1931), who put

thinking without the slightest hesitation at the side of the self, and quite close to the Sankhya view in which mental processes as such are considered to be part of external nature, Prakriti.

In the Indian tradition it is often said that consciousness is the light in which the world is visible. This “light” in which everything is seen is itself not a mental process, because it is not part of Prakriti; it is the “Purusha”, the Self. In the Kena Upanishad, it is the secret unknowable that sees in the seeing, hears in the hearing, and knows in the knowing, and this brings us to the second aspect of consciousness.

2. Consciousness is the source of our individual Identity.

—Consciousness is our self, or at least a power of the self.

Consciousness is very closely related to our Self. It is the basic source of our identity. When you wonder what the difference is between a camera and a human being, you could simply say, “in the camera, there is nobody home.” The technology is there, but the person is missing; the seeing is taking place but there is nobody home who sees it. In short, the question of the Kena Upanishad is not answered. Sri Aurobindo calls consciousness a power of the Self but the two are so close that many scholars simply identify both as one and the same thing. For this reason both Purusha and Atman are sometimes translated as consciousness and sometimes as Self. Experientially one could well argue that we humans are, more than anything else, our consciousness.

3. Consciousness is not only Individual, but also Transcendent and Cosmic.

—Consciousness is the transcendent source and all-pervasive upholder of the universe.

There is no consensus in modern science on any aspect of consciousness, but in the most common view all the consciousness that exists on earth occurs inside our human bodies, or at most in a few other highly developed animals or perhaps machines. Consciousness is nowadays widely considered to be an “emergent property” of information processing, that is to say, as something that comes into being during information processing when it reaches a certain level of complexity. As such it can exist only inside those animals (or machines) that have a brain that is complex enough to generate it. According to the Indian tradition, it is just the other way around. Consciousness is the very stuff of which the world is made. It is primarily transcendent, secondarily universal and

only in the third instance individual. Our little individual centres of consciousness are small emissaries of the real thing who mistakenly identify themselves with an individual mind, ego, life and body, just as if waves would think themselves to exist apart from the ocean. Through yoga we can retrieve our Selves from this entanglement and re-identify ourselves with the one cosmic and transcendent consciousness, which we always have been in our essence, even at the time when our surface mind was not “aware” of it.

4. Consciousness is Unitary.

—There is only one light in which all is seen.

A fourth basic and fascinating attribute of consciousness is that consciousness is unitary: there is basically only one consciousness. This singularity is true again on many different levels. One of the big issues in neuroscience at the moment is the “binding problem”: it has been found that at any given time hundreds if not thousands of parallel processes take place in the brain but there is no clear anatomical structure that is responsible for the fact that in the end we have only one integrated view of the world. In our subjective experience we can consciously only do one thing at a time and all the rest is done subconsciously. Even when we compare, for example, different ways of looking at reality, we still rely on one extra frame into which we put all these different smaller frames together. Phenomenally, our consciousness appears thus as a small, single window that looks out on a tiny selection from the multitude of mental processes that take place in the mind at any given time.

The Indian tradition has focused on the unitary aspect of consciousness on a quite different scale, the scale of the manifestation as a whole. In spite of the Sankhya position that there are many purushas, and the theistic schools that stress that there always remains a difference between man and God, the most common and most typically Indian understanding is that in ultimate essence, each separate Self is one with the Supreme Self. In the end, there is thus only one consciousness, the Consciousness of the Divine, which carries this whole world and all that are part of it. And this brings us to our fifth point.

5. The individual Self is one with the Cosmic and with the Transcendent Self.

— This is “the Knowledge, which, once known, makes everything known”.
— Each individual can realise his identity with the Absolute, every other and every thing.

If you add up the first four factors — that consciousness is awareness, that it is the source of our identity, that it can manifest on an individual, a transcendent, as well as a cosmic level, and that it is basically one — the conclusion imposes itself that in essence our own individual consciousness is one with the consciousness of the whole. As such, it should be possible to “realise” this in one’s experience. And this is, of course, exactly what the great mystics have managed to do, and what they say each one of us can do if we care to put in the necessary effort.

6. Consciousness is Joy

— Joy is the affective essence of consciousness and of all that is.
— The ultimate reality is *Sachchidananda*.

This sixth aspect of consciousness, that it is one with Joy, is derived from the concept of *Sachchidananda*. The idea that the ultimate reality is an inalienable oneness of Existence, Consciousness, and Joy, is one of the greatest masterpieces of Indian thought and for psychology perhaps more important than Einstein’s famous equation of mass and energy for physics. I think it is simply brilliant to realise that essentially being, consciousness and joy are one and the same thing, for, indeed, you cannot have one without the other.

Experientially the concept is derived from the fact that the realisation of absolute consciousness goes together with absolute joy. On our more humble levels of existence, consciousness and being, the equation of consciousness with joy may, however, not be so obvious. For us the world is divided into a curious mixture of pleasure, pain, and indifference, and there are not a few who have felt that in the end pain dominates. The problem of pain and suffering is one of the greatest mysteries of life and it is not possible to do justice to the issue here, but a few points can be made.

One way to understand the contradiction between the yogic assertion of all-pervading joy and the everyday pervasiveness of suffering is to compare joy with temperature. If you need a domestic scale of temperature you can use Celsius or Fahrenheit. Both start at an arbitrary place that happens to be convenient to us, like the temperature at which water freezes. Anything above that is called positive, warm; anything below that, is called negative, cold. With joy we do the same thing. Anything that is somehow within our range of liking we call positive, joy; anything outside this narrow range we call negative, suffering. The scientific way of measuring temperature, however, is Kelvin, which starts at absolute zero, and as such it has no negative points. In Kelvin, any temperature is positive. Only with such an absolute scale it is possible to

work and think effectively and scientifically with temperance. With joy it might be the same thing. For domestic use the usual scales of pleasure and pain with a fairly arbitrary zero point in between are appropriate. But if you want to deal effectively with and think seriously about the basic Joy of Being, you have to start at the absolute zero and take everything beyond that as positive. After all, it is just our human smallness and ignorance that make us look at some things as suffering and some things as joy. They have no absolute meaning and the border between them is much more arbitrary and nebulous than popular sentiment presumes. Anybody who has tried even a little bit of self-mastery, knows that there are many things that in the ordinary, egoic life produce suffering, but that with a little effort can be made interesting, if not positively enjoyable. This is, like so many things, true at the top and at the bottom of human experience. Psychiatrists know for example that most people who have serious psychological problems, at some level or another enjoy having these problems. There is something in man, obviously something perverse, that likes trouble, is addicted to it and clings to it. At the top end of the human ladder as well, we see that many great mystics have suffered pain with a happy heart. And in between these extremes people do like to put in effort, and people actually enjoy discomfort, for example in sport or during holidays, as long as they manage to see it “as part of the game”. Essentially it seems to be only our human smallness and our ego that make us dislike pain and feel suffering. When our consciousness increases, our capacity for both joy and suffering increases. In fact, initially one may become more aware of the pain than of the joy inherent in life, just as one becomes aware of the dust in a room only after one starts cleaning the room. But in the end another Joy far beyond pleasure takes over and begins to penetrate every aspect of being.

All spiritual traditions have asserted the possibility of overcoming suffering, but for at least 3000 years there has been a tendency to seek the eternal Joy outside the earthly manifestation, either in some heaven beyond earth, or in a total annihilation of one’s individuality. In India, the perception of life as an illusion wins from the perception of life as Brahman, and the manifestation is seen as Brahma’s veil, *Maya*, rather than as his play, *Lila*. Even the otherwise life-affirming Gita, gives in one place as its ultimate aim the release from the cycle of birth and death. According to Sri Aurobindo this is a diminution of the original Vedanta, which did not have as its goal release from birth and death, but immortality. Sri Aurobindo’s answer to the problem of pain is not to escape in an absolute of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss beyond manifestation, but to call that Absolute Consciousness and Bliss right down into the manifestation. He sees this as a new possibility, and as part of the next step of our biological

evolution, which will move from an embodied mind, *manas*, to an embodied “supermind”, *vijnana*, through a radical transformation of our nature. It may be clear that this change of perspective has major consequences for many areas of psychology, especially for one’s ideas of personal growth and motivation.

These are six essential, static and passive qualities of consciousness, related to “being”.

There are also six dynamic aspects of consciousness, aspects related to “becoming”.

Both in the West and in the East, the passive qualities of consciousness have dominated philosophical discourse. It is interesting to ponder why this is so. A sceptical psychologist might argue that there is no other reason than that philosophers, as people, tend to be idle observers of the world-scene who as such only recognise the passive aspect of consciousness in themselves and around them, while those who get actively engaged in the world, rarely find the time to write philosophy. But there may be more profound experiential reasons as well. In the early stages of yoga it is for example comparatively easy to develop a pure witness consciousness, “pure” in the sense of a total separation from “nature at work”, but it is extremely difficult to develop a pure will. All power corrupts, as the saying goes, and the dynamic will tends to be too mixed up with our lower animal nature to be distilled into a genuinely free, independent force. Karma Yoga is often seen as an early, preparatory stage of Yoga, (for example in the *Yogasutras* of Patanjali) and work can, no doubt, be used as a preparation for more contemplative aspirations. But to reach perfection in Karma Yoga is more difficult than to reach perfection in contemplation, as it necessitates a level of transformation of the nature that is not needed in Jnana or Bhakti Yoga where the nature can simply be put aside. In the later stages of yoga too, it is easier to identify with the Absolute in its transcendent, witness aspect, than in its dynamic, cosmic action. It is thus not surprising that the Advaita tradition, with its stress on the passive, witness aspect of consciousness, has become dominant over other more integral approaches. As a road to liberation it simply works because for a realisation of the Infinite it is not needed to come to a full reunion of Purusha and Prakriti. It is sufficient to separate the Purusha from the Prakriti and to reach the ultimate Oneness by dismissing Prakriti as Maya, illusion.

The original Vedic tradition is open to different interpretations, but it seems to have acknowledged both the active and the passive sides of consciousness equally. It may well be argued that such a more balanced approach should lead

to the most complete realisation because Brahman itself clearly has a dynamic as well as a static aspect. This by itself is reason enough to value both equally, however difficult it may be to “realise” the dynamic side in one’s personal experience. And so we will add six more aspects of consciousness that balance out and complement the earlier six. If Sri Aurobindo’s vision of an ongoing evolution of consciousness is correct, then recognition of the dynamic aspect of consciousness will become crucial in the time to come.

7. Consciousness is Power; *Chit* is also *Chit-Shakti*

— Consciousness is not only passive awareness, but also form-giving energy, force.

The first of the dynamic aspects of consciousness is that consciousness is power. Consciousness is not only a passive witness. It does something. On the physical level, it is the consciousness in material things that gives them the habit of form and the tendency to obey certain fixed laws of nature. As you go up the ladder of consciousness, consciousness takes different shapes. Will on all levels is conscious power. On the vital plane, for example, both fear and desire tend to attract what is feared or desired. On the level of the mind, the clear formulation of an idea helps to bring it into existence. Such “conscious” or “subconscious” mental formations, the morphogenetic fields of Sheldrake, neurosis, Mantras, Samskaras are all complex forms of consciousness that have an active influence on what will manifest in the social and physical world. For us as individuals, the most important form of consciousness as power is our *śraddha*, the faith arising from the depths of our nature which determines what we will become: *yo yacchraddhah, sa eva sah*, as the Gita says. For the cosmos as a whole it is the consciousness-force of the Divine, which creates the worlds, and the Grace of the Shakti who guides our ways.

8. Consciousness is *Biune* (*Ishwara – Shakti*) and Dual (*Purusha – Prakriti*), as well as Unitary

— Consciousness is One, but it can manifest as none, biune, dual, or even many

One interesting aspect of consciousness is that consciousness is one, but not only one: it can also manifest as none, biune, two or many. These different aspects of consciousness lead to radically different experiences of the fundamental nature of reality, experiences that are so strong and convincing that they have given rise to different philosophies and religions, which are difficult

to reconcile for the narrow logical mind, but which all find expression within the richness of the Indian tradition. Consciousness in the ordinary waking state is largely dual: it has a clearly marked ego as subject and an equally distinct and “real” nature as object. This state and the ideas derived from it are part of the current orthodoxy in the modern Western philosophy of science. As a result, intentionality is widely taken as the main criterion of consciousness. Even Jung, who was otherwise deeply influenced by Indian thought, could not imagine that a state without ego could be anything else than unconscious. At the other extreme are on the one hand the experience of the utter unreality of everything including the self, which leads to the Buddhist concepts of *anatta* and *śunya*, and on the other hand the Vedantic experience of the eternal Self being one with Brahman. In between there are the theistic religions which have different views on the ultimate nature of individual souls, and the Sankhya conceptualisation of many individual Selves, in whose immutable and unstained mirrors a single Nature is reflected.

The Sankhya stress on duality is generally taken as one step short of the Advaita experience of ultimate oneness. But it is such an important tool for progress on the spiritual path that there is virtually no school of yoga that does not in some way or another recommend the development of the pure witness consciousness. It is the easiest way of getting out of our entanglement in our ego. But whatever road one follows, whatever aspect one may try to stress, it seems that in the end one has to accept, realise, and enjoy, the many and the one as two faces of the same ineffable mystery.

9. Consciousness is Love

— *Love is the essence of all relation.*
 — *Joy and Love are one.*
 — *Knowledge and Love are one.*

The most beautiful form of consciousness is Love. It is as Love that consciousness sustains the world. But, like almost everything else in human life, love gets easily corrupted till as desire it has turned into its very opposite. Yet, in essence Love and Joy are the same thing. Love is the dynamic, the active part of That. Joy is the passive, receptive side. And again this is true on the highest level of Absolute Ananda, as well as on the very mundane level of a mother with her child, or of two people “in love” with each other. Love is a simple, unconditional joy in the being of another person. Just as a child comes into being because of the love between his parents, however diminished or perverted that love may be, so this whole wide world would not exist if it was not carried by

the Love of the Divine. One could fill volumes with the beautiful texts from the Indian tradition describing on the one hand the Love of God for his devotees, and on the other, the human love for God, which is seen as one of the highest and most profound ways of knowing him.

10. There are many Levels and Types of Consciousness

- There are different *types* of consciousness, physical, vital, mental and beyond mentality.
- These types exist not only “in us” as states of our personal being: they make up the world we inhabit, as well as the independent, typical worlds.
- Each world presents a different relation between Purusha & Prakriti.

This is again an aspect of consciousness, which is obvious to all who are even faintly familiar with any occult or mystical tradition, but as we have seen in the introduction, it is at the moment not acknowledged in the given “orthodoxy” in scientific Consciousness Studies which take consciousness as a simple on/off mechanism: either you are conscious or you are not. It may be clear that an incorporation of India’s deep and complete understanding of all the different types of consciousness active in man, and the myriads of ways in which they interact would revolutionise psychology.

11. In Time, Consciousness Manifests as an Ongoing Evolution of Beauty, Truth and Joy

- Consciousness gradually takes form in space and time.
- The World is not finished; it is a work in progress.

For me the most fascinating aspect of consciousness is that in space and time consciousness manifests primarily as a big adventure — as an evolution — in which slowly consciousness evolves, both in the individual and in the world as a whole, till, as Sri Aurobindo says, the consciousness of the Divine will be fully manifest in matter. The *Puranas* contain the story of the ten avatars, but till recently this seems to have been understood mainly as depicting stages in the progress of the individual. The idea of a collective evolution of consciousness is something that some orthodox Vedantins might immediately disqualify as absurd on the ground that consciousness is a property or power of the Purusha, which is eternally the same so that there is nothing that can evolve in consciousness except Maya. But as we saw in the introduction, the Indian tradition is very rich and the immutable Purusha is not the only word that can be translated as consciousness. When Sri Aurobindo talks of the evolution of consciousness, he talks about the evolution of Chit, which is the very stuff of existence and as such does enter into creation and does allow change.

After Darwin’s work on the biological evolution in nature, Sri Aurobindo and a few others realised that the evolution Darwin describes is actually not just an evolution of the biological form, but an evolution of consciousness, and more importantly, that in this evolution, the human being may not be the final stage. Man has all the trappings of a transitional creature somewhere halfway between the worm and the Divine. If you compare the evolution that has taken place so far with the Vedic classification of consciousness in seven layers, then it is clear that the highest step evolution has manifested so far is the embodied mind, *manas*. It is tempting to think that the next step of the evolution might be the embodiment of the supra-mental, *vijnanamayakosha*, which, as the link-layer between the higher and the lower hemispheres, could enable a divine, Gnostic consciousness in matter. This evolutionary view of our earthly enterprise makes many things fall into place that otherwise are hard to accept. Sri Aurobindo explains, for example, most of human suffering as due to the fact that we are as yet nothing more than “transitional beings”. The famous painter Van Gogh says something quite similar. He writes to his brother that we should not blame God for the state of the world: It is only a draft, God has not yet finished his painting!

We, human beings, are in process and have to wait and see what God makes out of us.

12. Consciousness is a Mystery

- One cannot understand God, but one can Love God, Know God, and even, to some extent, Become God.

After all that is said about consciousness, it is still a mystery, and luckily it will always remain a mystery. The more we know about it, the deeper the mystery becomes. The final truth cannot be understood with the mind because the mind itself is only a middle term, a quite limited form of consciousness. You cannot *understand* God; you can become God. You can very much love God, and to some extent you can know God in yourself and in the world, but you can never make a mental understanding that fully encircles it.

These 12 points and the introductory remarks I made before them are all very basic and seemingly simple ideas, but if taken seriously, they could have far-reaching consequences for almost all areas of human endeavour, but especially for psychology. They do not contradict materialist science anywhere except in its claims of exclusivity and completeness. Without a deep understanding of the role of consciousness and the Divine in the world, the world would be dead and meaningless. Science has delivered humanity from the pits of ignorance, superstition and fear, for this we must be grateful, but it would be an absolute disaster if we would allow a materialistic science to rob us of the summits of the spirit.

Conclusion

The neatest and most beautiful summary of the Indian contribution to Psychology is formulated in one of the oldest and most recited verses of the whole tradition, the sloka from the *Brihadaranyaka*, which describes our eternal yearning, the quest to lead us

*from the non-being to true being,
from the darkness to the Light,
from death to Immortality.*

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Notes

¹Avidya, literary “no-knowledge”, is translated traditionally as “ignorance”, but it is used most typically for knowledge that is not knowledge of the Absolute. As such it includes science.

²The Dean of the Physics department at Cambridge University once told one of his students that the M.Sc. programme had only two objectives: 1) to convince the students that they know nothing; 2) to teach them how to continue learning without being taught!

³It may be noted in passing that the centrality of this idea in Indian thought is a major argument not to consider Hinduism as a single religion in the exclusive Hebraic sense. Unlike Islam and

Christianity, Hinduism is not exclusive, and can best be seen as a comprehensive philosophical and cultural framework that can embrace all forms of religion. As long as a religion doesn’t make claims on having found the one and only acceptable form of the Truth, it can always find a place under the Hindu umbrella. This tolerant, non-exclusive attitude, which is an intrinsic part of the Indian tradition as long as it is known, is in the West only a very recent phenomenon, and the rising world culture can learn much from the way religious tolerance has been practised in India for millennia.

⁴As Dr. Kapil Kapoor has pointed out (personal contact), the concept of minorities should not be limited to the few major political groupings that are identified as such in Indian politics. Everyone alive on this great and complex earth, whether Christian, Sikh, Muslim, Parsi, Brahmin, Dalit, artist, teacher, tall, small, green-eyed or whatever, is simultaneously member of several overlapping minorities and at the same time a member of the single joint family of humanity. The point is the respect for individual differences which modernity has such an amazing difficulty with.

⁵Buddhism seems, of course, to be the exception with its dogma of *anatta*, no-self, but this may be more a matter of theory than practice. The stress on “compassion towards all sentient beings”, which is common to all schools of Buddhism, is in practice dominant over the nihilistic trends in Buddhist theory.

⁶The question whether it is possible to make non-conscious machines (“Zombies”) that are functionally fully equivalent to human beings, is considerably more complicated than it looks at first sight. The *Journal of Consciousness Studies* published a long series of papers on this issue till one of the more perceptive participants brought up that according to the Indian tradition ordinary human beings are quite like zombies in the first place and that the most urgent question should not be how to create zombies, but how to stop being a zombie! After this the debate fizzled out in no time (see JCS, volumes 1 and 2). The opposite question, whether we can make machines that are conscious, becomes more and more relevant as we begin to make machines that mimic conscious behaviour more and more closely. For an interesting discussion of many different aspects of this question, see the special issue on Machine Consciousness of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* vol. 10, no. 4-5 (2003).

⁷For a full discussion of the empirical data, see Velmans, 1991.

⁸There is an extensive “panpsychic” tradition, even in the West (see Skribina, 2003), but it seems to be almost forgotten in recent times, and is certainly not part of scientific “orthodoxy”.

⁹For a good discussion of the limits to Jung’s understanding of the Indian tradition, see Harold Coward (1985, e.g. pp. 73-75)

Towards A Spiritual Mankind

Usharanjan Chakraborty

I

Ours is a normal human society. This society stands on the gregarious instinct, on the clash of egos and the conflict of interests. The normal society treats man as a physical, vital and mental being. It develops in him a system of ethico-aesthetic culture. It develops a system of vital growth for vital enjoyment and economic efficiency. By creating a system of physical culture, the society tries to set right the imbalance created by the mental and the vital growth. In spite of the creation of the different systems men ultimately die. This is a sure sign of the inner weakness of the normal society.

All civilised developments of vitality and mentality end in exhaustion and annihilation. So advanced conscious minds declare that the present human civilisation is a failure and society too admits of this fact. Hopelessly we crave for any remedy. All developments suffer from deficiency because of man's inclination to mind-body complex. But apart from the mind-body complex man has in him an inner reality known as the soul. The soul is man's true being, the central principle of his existence. The external civilisation of mankind finds no assurance of permanent survival. Outwardly the human civilisation has progressed much but inwardly remains backward. Natural and unnatural calamities and annihilations have thrown great challenges to the survival of the present mankind. Before this challenge, the soul alone is the sole reality that preserves its eternity and immortality. The soul is imperishable beyond any destruction and death.

In general, neither the individual nor society is aware of this soul. Men "never seized on the discovery of the soul as a means for the discovery of the law of its own being or on a knowledge of the soul's true nature and need and its fulfilment as the right way of terrestrial perception"¹. This non-recognition of soul as the inner reality of both individual and society is the root cause of all kinds of maladies and failures.

The aim of social development should not remain confined within the physico-mental growth. It must have a special reference to the development of the soul. Real social progress consists in spiritual progress. Spiritual progress implies transformation of physico-mental transitory powers into the eternal spiritual powers. The truth of human appearance on earth consists in this realisation that man is not simply a temporary phase of existence but that he possesses a power of eternal existence in him though in seed form. This is the real aim of the existence of mankind. This spiritual aim is the real aim of human existence. This spiritual aim alone recognises that "man as he grows in his being must have as much free space as possible for all its members to grow in their own strength, to find out themselves and their potentialities. ... Each part of man's being has its own dharma ... The Dharma of science, thought and philosophy is to seek for truth by the intellect dispassionately, without prepossession and prejudgment, with no first propositions than the law of thought and observation itself imposes. ... In the end, if left free in their action, they will find the unity of Truth with Good and Beauty and God and give these a greater meaning than any dogmatic religion or any formal ethics or any narrower aesthetic idea can give us"².

The change from vital and mental order to the spiritual order takes place first in the individual and then in the collective. The change is felt in the individual directly and consciously but in the collective it is known indirectly and subconsciously. Through individual minds the mass becomes conscious. The individual is an important instrument of manifestation of all great changes in the collectivity. The mass follows imperfectly, slowly and confusedly. Therefore whatever it follows, there is a chance of its failure or distortion. This being the nature of the mass, all changes come to individuals first.

For a spiritual change, two conditions have to be fulfilled. First, there must be individuals who have a clear sight and who can recreate themselves in the light of the Spirit. They can communicate new ideas to the masses. Secondly, there must be a community or a group-soul who can receive and assimilate the new ideas and follow the new change without any hesitation.

The change in the individual takes less time because the individual consciously wills for a change. But no such willingness is found in the mass. The mass becomes conscious through the consciousness of the individuals. This is why change in the mass takes a longer time than in individuals. When the mass becomes ready for a change communal change is inevitable. But for that change to happen the mass needs not only mental awareness but also spiritual awareness. Like the individual the mass too has a soul. It now needs to be aware of its own soul.

This awareness of the existence of the soul will be reflected in the activities of both individual and the mass. This awareness will make thin the wall between matter and the soul. Then there will be attempts “to extend exact knowledge into the psychological and psychic realms with a realisation of the truth that these have laws of their own which are other than physical, but not the less laws because they escape the external senses and are infinitely plastic and subtle. There will be a labour of religion to reject its past heavy weight of dead matter and revivify its strength in the fountains of the Spirit”³.

In the life of both individual and the mass, an imbalance has been created due to the unawareness of the existence of the Spirit within. Beings of this world are object-conscious but not self-conscious. Man possesses the power of both object-consciousness and self-consciousness. Therefore, for man there is a fair chance of his progress. But unfortunately, he is more conscious of his vital and mental powers and less conscious of his spiritual powers. This is why his progress in the physico-vital-mental world is greater than in his spiritual world. “His central will of life is still situated in his vital and physical being, ... not dominated and uplifted to a higher plane. The higher life is still only a thing superimposed on the lower, a permanent intruder upon our normal existence”⁴.

The lower life is the abode of instincts and impulses. Reason may extend its control over them but cannot kill them. Life-power expresses itself not only in physical growth but also in the expansion of commercial, political and economic fields. Vitalistic force is irresistible in its nature. It has a tendency to crush everything that stands before it. So it needs a restriction. And to do this reason comes forward. But even reason is not always safe, because in place of controlling vital force it may lend its support to it. Therein lies the danger. We can escape this danger if we can discover the soul power. Spiritual power transforms the vital power. It not only controls but also transforms the very nature of vitality and helps the vital power to rise high above and enjoy a higher status of its own.

This leads to a change in the centre of our living. We feel that the central will in our life is not only vital will in the life and body, but is the spiritual will. “To transfer from the vital being, the instrumental reality in us, to the spirit, the central reality, to elevate to that height our will to be and our power of living is the secret which our nature is seeking to discover”⁵. In this act of transference, mind also should elevate itself inwardly and outwardly and look upward to the Spirit.

This transference of will and power of life is necessary for the sake of perfection. Through this transference, the Spirit will dominate over life. Nature has worked out a kind of perfection in the plant life and the animal life. But that

perfection is not sufficient for man. As a mental being he looks upward for a higher life. So the perfection of man “cannot consist in pursuing the unilluminated round of the physical life. Neither can it be found in the wider rounds of the mental being; for that also is instrumental and tends towards something else beyond it, something whose power indeed works in it, but whose larger truth is superconscious to its present intelligence, supramental. The perfection of man lies in the unfolding of the ever-perfect Spirit”⁶.

The lower perfection of nature found in the plant and the animal is instinctive, spontaneous, automatic and subconscious. The higher perfection in man is spiritual which is also spontaneous and unlimited, intuitive and supramental. “It will be an illimitable perfection capable of endless variation, in its forms, - but securely the same in all variations, one but multitudinously infinite”⁷.

This perfection comes to man not through intellect but through a contact with the spirit.

II

Evolution is a continuous process of progress. Evolution starts first in an inconscient material state, then passes through living plants and animals and now it has reached the mental state creating the mental being, man. Man has both ‘without’ and ‘within’. With the ‘without’ aspect he acts and reacts with the external nature and with his ‘within’ aspect reveals different hidden realms of mind. Through this gradual revelation, man comes in contact with the subjective aspects of life. This is a state when mankind will turn his outlook from objectivity to subjectivity. This subjective outlook will bring forth a new progressive onward march of mankind. In his inward looking, man will know that as there is the external matter, external life and external mind so is there an inner matter, inner life and inner mind. After becoming fully aware of these inner states a further step for spiritual progress will develop. So a subjective awareness is necessary for a future spiritual awareness.

Subjectivism is concerned with our inner worlds. Our inner world consists of inner life, inner mind, inner soul. Subjectivism helps to give us information about the inner vital, inner mental, inner psychic and spiritual worlds. Subjectivism proclaims that “economic state and social institutions are themselves governed by his psychological demand on the possibilities, circumstances, tendencies created by the relation between the mind and the soul of humanity and its life and body. Therefore to find the truth of things and the law of his being in relation to that truth he must go deeper and fathom the subjective secret of himself and things as well as their objective forms and surroundings”⁸.

Subjective elements give vent not only to personal life but to the national life too. This is why each nation takes pride in its own culture, education, art and music. The objective world thus gets impetus from the subjective world. This is why the study of the subjective world is so much important for an onward march of the humankind.

The subjective history of mankind passes from the vitalistic subjectivism to the mentalised subjectivism. But that cannot be the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is to evolve the spiritual character out of the mentalised subjectivism. Only then will the spiritual age start its journey. The evolution cannot stop short till it reveals the spiritual character in man. Therefore “a general spiritual awakening and aspiration in mankind is indeed the large necessary motive-power, but the effective power must be something greater. There must be a dynamic recreating of individual manhood in the spiritual type”⁹.

The spiritualisation of mankind cannot be by a leap, it has to be done step by step. First, material and vital man has to be raised to the level of the mental man, then the mental man to the level of the psychic man and finally the psychic man to the level of the spiritual man. Any overlooking of intermediate levels will not help to realise the goal. If a material man avoids the vital or the mental level and tries to be spiritual by a leap, that will end in a disaster. When man consciously passes from one level to another, he gathers the strength of the realisation of the higher level. This makes him a fit vessel for spiritual realisation.

In a spiritual age, a spiritual world would realise three essential truths of existence: God, freedom and unity. Without God we cannot realise freedom and unity and the true meaning of freedom and unity if we give up the concept of God. “When man is able to see God and to possess him, then he will know real freedom and arrive at real unity, never otherwise”¹⁰.

By giving up the ego character and living in the soul, man becomes spiritual. This is true in respect of both individual and collectivity. As the egoless man is spiritual, so is the egoless society spiritual. An egoless individual and egoless society will discover the presence of the universal Spirit in him and in all. To discover this universal and divine Self in all things and beings of the world is the aim of the spiritual age. In the spiritual age the physical, vital, mental laws will be replaced by the spiritual law; ethics, sociology, economics, politics, arts, sciences, etc. all will breathe a spiritual flavour. To discover the spirit in all and as all is the special character of the spiritual age. Men in spiritual age will realise that they are free from within and are never under the compulsion of any external law. They will realise that their sole freedom consists in absolute submission to the Spirit alone and to none else. God permits every man to grow from within so that he may realise his freedom perfectly. God is absolutely free

and so a God-lover too enjoys this character of freedom.

Unity is the unity of the spirit. This too will be realised in everyone’s life when he is fully absorbed in himself. Perfect freedom, perfect unity are the mark of God’s perfection. A perfect man sees the Divine not only in himself but in all and hence extends his love for all knowing all as God. “The spiritual age will be ready to set in when the common mind of man begins to be alive to these truths and to be moved or desire to be moved by this triple or triune Spirit”¹¹.

The spiritualisation of mankind first begins with particular individuals and then it spreads into a greater number of individuals or collectivity. “The leaders of the spiritual march will start from and use the knowledge and the means that past effort has developed in this direction, but they will not take them as they are without any deep necessary change or limit themselves by what is now known or cleave only to fixed and stereotyped systems or given groupings of results, but will follow the method of the Spirit in Nature. A constant recovery and new formulation and larger synthesis in the mind, a mighty remoulding in its deeper parts because of a greater enlarging Truth not discovered or not well fixed before is the Spirit’s way with our past achievement when he moves to the greatness of the future”¹².

This endeavour may appear difficult to individuals, but not so for the race. It may take time but it will come to a success even after so many failures. The ascent to the spiritual height is a must but it is not the end of the journey. There are many spiritual levels, from high to higher. A gradual self-unfolding will open the gates through which mankind will enter into the highest spiritual and supramental level. This is the destiny of mankind.

“If the light that is being born increases, if the number of individuals who seek to realise the possibility in themselves and in the world grows large and they get nearer the right way, then the Spirit who is here in man, now a concealed divinity, a developing light and power will descend more fully as the Avatar of a yet unseen and unguessed Godhead from above into the soul of mankind and into the great individuals in whom the light and power are the strongest. There will then be fulfilled the change that will prepare the transition of human life from its present limits into those larger and purer horizons; the earthly evolution will have taken its great impetus upward and accomplished the revealing step in a divine progression of which the birth of thinking and aspiring man from the animal nature was only an obscure preparation and a far-off promise”¹³.

References

1. SABCL, vol.15, p.211
2. Ibid, pp.214-15
3. Ibid, p.234

4.Ibid, p.222
5.Ibid, p.227
6.Ibid, p.228
7.Ibid, p.229
8.Ibid, pp.23-24
9.Ibid, p.247
10.Ibid, p.239
11.Ibid, p.244
12.Ibid, p.252
13.Ibid, pp.253-54

How An Egyptian Discovered Sri Aurobindo

Zackaria Moursi

[Note: We may call it the “come to Sri Aurobindo moment”. It is a psychic awakening, a distinctive phase in life when the mind falls in rhythm with the elegant cadence of Sri Aurobindo’s elongated sentences, when the heart feels gladdened reading the sensitive and sublime insights of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and little by little, one begins to grasp and live their teaching. Zackaria Moursi, Egyptian by birth, came across a book on Integral Yoga while studying in Germany in the 1960s. In this article, he describes how that book launched him on the spiritual path.]



Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, Deir el Bahari, Luxor (Thebes), Egypt circa 1910. From the Notre Dame Architecture Library.

At the age of 23, studying on a doctoral scholarship in Germany, I had everything a young man wishes to possess: health, affluence and success. I had come two years earlier from Egypt to a different culture, but the change proved to be anything but a cultural “shock”. As a student, I had rented a room in the apartment of a highly educated woman, who, seeing how much I was taken by classical music, encouraged me to learn piano and introduced me to a German composer, living in the area, and author of some renown, who, besides piano and music, took up my education in literature and art. All this was going on parallel to my actual engineering studies. Germany was the ideal place for the intellectually insatiable person I was. Visiting the great German cathedrals and museums with my host, going to concerts, hiking in the Black Forest not far from where I lived, and making trips to adjacent European countries, I felt I was starting to live for the first time. Yet, Germany had much more in store for me....

Having been born in a well-known and respected Egyptian family, I had in many ways a privileged childhood. The Islam I grew up with was tolerant, open-minded, and progressive. My grandfather and his brothers had fought against the British occupation: one was exiled to the Seychelles, another jailed in Upper Egypt, but this did not prevent a third brother from marrying an Englishwoman, nor did it prevent the family from sending some of its children to European and American schools, even if they happened to be religious.

I hardly knew my parents: my father, a successful lawyer, was constantly working, and when at home, he, like most men of his generation, was not in the habit of sharing much time with his children. My mother constantly complained from breathing difficulties and kept to bed most of the time. The care of the children was left to a nurse and other help personnel. My father had collected a marvellous library in his study: leather-bound volumes of classical Arabic literature, side by side with French and English books regularly sent to him by bookstores in downtown Cairo. I must have been seven, when I started to sneak to this otherwise rarely frequented study, shut the door behind me and lose myself in whatever, at my age, I could make out of its treasures. The study soon became my magical world, a world of adventure, heroism and beauty to which I could take refuge whenever I felt lonely.

The sunshine of my early childhood was soon to give way to mounting clouds. The 1952 revolution changed Egypt dramatically; and, in the “nationalisation” wave that followed, my family lost most of its possessions. Soon after, my father died suddenly with a heart attack. With the onset of puberty, not long after that, my exile from Paradise was complete. I experienced for the first time real anguish and sorrow. A sort of chronic “bad conscience” took hold of

me and made me go around with bent shoulders as if carrying a crushing load. The feeling I often had of being lifted up and soaring on wings was gone. Life became a challenge that had to be met with a great effort of will. In my college years, I studied with ferocious determination. Excellence at school was the one expectation my father had again and again stressed to his children. Unconsciously I wanted to fulfil his wish, but my more urgent need was to get a scholarship that would enable me to study abroad and to discover a wider and more stable world. At the age of twenty, my wish was granted: I completed my studies, received an engineering degree, and won scholarship to do graduate work in Germany.

So here I was in Germany avidly pursuing avenues of which I didn’t have the faintest inkling only a short time before. One day, flipping through the books of my host, I grabbed an undistinguished book with the title “*Der Integrale Yoga*”. Till then I had thought yoga nothing more than extreme “physical exercises” developed in India, and I looked in the book for the usual photos of yogis in impossible postures. Instead I found dense texts with long sentences and difficult Sanskrit words. The book turned out to be a compilation of texts by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, of whom I had never heard before (translated into German by Heinz Kappes). I put the book back on the shelf; I had anyway a huge list of other things I urgently needed to do. There was no reason for me to return to this book, but I did return to it again and again in the following weeks. It was destined to trigger a turning point in my life.

The affirmations of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were a refreshing blend of an inconceivable spiritual fairytale with down-to-earth reports of lived experiences. They were about a “psychological” spirituality, which was different from the occult and ascetic spirituality I had read about so far. The texts were objective reports of experiences; there was in them no eagerness to convince, no promises of easy and fast rewards and no threats of terrible consequences if one chose to drop them and go other ways. There was no mention of sin or regret over past mistakes; they talked only of restoring harmony and balance and putting each thing in its right place. They taught that a soul could not be lost forever but only delayed in its growth and evolution; and that man’s goal was to participate consciously in his own evolution and to hasten it according to his capacities and means. But there was something else that attracted me to the book: I was much intrigued and perplexed by the authority and the sublime height from which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were writing: something in their assertions seemed “simply too much”, and yet the doubter in me could not dismiss statements that sounded so authentic and true as exaggerations and pretence. I wanted to get to the bottom of it all, and I was conceited enough to

take the matter as a challenge and to tell myself: “Here is a challenge for you!”

The teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother filled an emptiness inside me that all my previous intellectual pursuits had not been able to fill. I finally understood that true growth should be the growth of the being as a whole, and that true knowledge was not just knowledge of the mind but also that of the heart and the soul. The goal was far and high, but the path was clearly shown; I just had to step on it and start walking.

Outwardly things were shaping up nicely for me. Inwardly the words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had started to ferment. And then something strange happened.

I had just finished the first half of my doctoral programme and had all reasons to celebrate. Instead, I suddenly found myself in a severe depression, the kind that makes you afraid to leave bed in the morning and that haunts you with suicidal thoughts the rest of the day. No one understood what was happening, nor did I understand what was going on inside me.

In one of my most desperate moments, I remembered the Integral Yoga book. *I looked at Sri Aurobindo’s photo and felt a faint but unmistakable quiver in my heart, upon which I fell into a sound sleep, something I hadn’t been able to do for quite some time. Next day I knew I was mending, and things started to change.* The change was slow and hesitant at first, but I somehow managed, in a month or so, to get over my depression and to resume normal life.

A great and long adventure had started for me; for decades demolition and construction went on simultaneously inside me, and my path meandered in totally unexpected ways. My journey made me change country and career several times and meet people whom I never imagined I would meet in real life. It was not always easy to fulfil my previous commitments while aspiring to give myself fully to a new orientation and a distant aim. The discrepancy between the Ideal and the Reality was still too great, and my inner resistance created hardships. Most difficult of all, was my inability to make myself understood by those whose lives were closely bound with mine, and who were necessarily affected by my actions.

On the whole my lot was much better than that of millions of others, and I was not asking for more. Slowly the pieces of life’s huge puzzle started to fall one after the other into place. To my amazement I discovered that, despite my many meanderings and aberrations, I have landed not too far from where I always wanted to be. I started to see how every leg of the long journey had been a necessary preparation and to perceive the incredible Grace that has guided me through many detours and much stumbling to the “niche” that was

all along intended for me. Life started to become simple and serene; the need for straining and effort grew less; the conflict between “Inner work” and “outer work” lost its edge; the fears and worries that had long haunted me began to fall away; and I started to grasp faintly what Sri Aurobindo must have had in mind when he wrote his *The Life Divine*.

I am approaching my seventieth birthday, and my hope seems increasingly justified that the exile from Paradise I experienced almost sixty years ago was not final after all.

Originally posted at <http://saamia.com/en/contact.php>

(Zackaria is currently engaged activities in translating the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother into Arabic. See the website SAAMIA for some samples.)

Georges van Vrekhem

– An Obituary



On the afternoon of August 31, well-known author and lecturer Georges Van Vrekhem left his body following a cardiac arrest. He was 77. Georges had been fighting coronary arterial disease for over 20 years.

Georges first came to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1970, after having been a well-known poet and having had a successful career as playwright and artistic adviser of the Dutch Theatre Company of Ghent, in Flemish-speaking Belgium. The ‘roots’ of his writing, he said, produced their first shoots at 14 when he ‘spontaneously’ started writing poetry. This led in the late 1950s and 60s to the publication of three volumes of poetry and a number of poems in various magazines. He also wrote nine original plays, translated and adapted a number of plays of other authors and wrote essays and articles. His literary talents were acknowledged when he was awarded the 1965 Prize for Literature by the City of Ghent.

In that period Georges read a staggering amount of books in Dutch, German, French and English. One of the authors was Satprem whose *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness* ignited a spark. “This is what I had been

looking for,” he said afterwards. But it took some time for the spark to become a flame. Georges’ reading, writing and theatre work were complemented by a regular immersion in the bustling nightlife of Ghent – he knew all the pubs, he said afterwards – to ‘interact and discuss issues with the artistic society of Ghent’. Then, in 1970, after a brief stint as tour guide, this life ended when he moved to a small room in the Rue Suffren in Pondicherry and joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. As he later wrote in a poem, “One day I broke through an inner wall and found a fire within, and the power of that fire has gradually conjured me to another continent.” The Mother gave him the name Matripasad (meaning ‘Blessing of The Mother’ or ‘Offering to The Mother’) which he however never used. He started teaching at the Ashram school and, because of his proficient language skills, also became one of the secretaries of the Sri Aurobindo Society, in charge with international relations for their project Auroville.

Yoka and I met him in 1976, during our first visit to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Georges had stopped working for the Society, had started practising astrology and was translating Satprem’s trilogy *The Mother* into Dutch. Could we find a publisher, he asked? But the publisher deemed the investment too risky. This led to the creation of Stichting Aurofonds, a Dutch Foundation that aims at supporting Auroville and at publishing books from and on Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in Dutch and other languages. With the help of this foundation the trilogy was eventually published. Over the years, Stichting Aurofonds remained instrumental in helping to publish Georges’ books.

In 1978, five years after the passing of The Mother, Georges packed all his belongings on a bullock cart, left the Ashram and joined Auroville, settling in a small hut in the Aspiration community and starting teaching at Last School. The times were hard; there were the fights with the Sri Aurobindo Society and *L’Agenda de Mère (Mother’s Agenda)* had just started to appear. Initially enthusiastic, Georges aimed at translating all the 13 volumes of *L’Agenda* into Dutch. But after an extremely painful fall-out with Satprem this project was shelved, never to be taken up again. Instead, he translated Rajagopalachari’s abbreviated version of the *Ramayana* into Dutch, which was followed by the *Mahabharata*.

In 1995, Georges began writing his own books. *Voorbij de Mens, Leven en Werk van Sri Aurobindo en De Moeder* was published in 1995; he then transliterated it into English as *Beyond Man, the Life and Work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother*. It was published in India in 1997 and became a highly acclaimed seminal book. Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna) judged it “among the best that have been written on Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.” In this book Georges, for the first time, spoke about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother as the

Two-in-One, the double-poled Avatar of the Supermind. That same year the publication of Georges' compilation of Mother's conversations translated into Dutch appeared. This compilation was later published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram under the title '*The Vision of The Mother*.'

These books came at a high personal cost. In 1997, Georges suffered a heart attack, was admitted to JIPMER hospital in Pondicherry and later subjected to a coronary angiography in Belgium, in preparation for a heart operation. But the operation was cancelled when the angiography showed that a bypass would have no effect as a part of the left heart chamber had died. Realising that his life would henceforth move at half-speed and that he could not fully depend on allopathic medicines, Georges taught himself homeopathy. He obtained a degree from the British Institute of Homeopathy and started treating himself, with considerable success. Yet, his health would never be the same and often he would complain of an uncertain future. The Belgian experience also gave rise to a bundle of autobiographic Dutch poetry, *De Reis naar België*, (*The voyage to Belgium*) in which he described his angst at leaving India – will he ever return? But, he says in one poem, there are hands that save. “‘You are living under very high protection,’ said the seer.”

Georges had meanwhile been able to build and move into a two-room house in the Shakti community nearby Aspiration. It was a true hermitage, filled with books, with just sufficient space for a desk and a bed. Continuing his habit of reading copiously (friends and friendly foundations would donate towards his book purchases), he wrote a few more books: an extensive biography *The Mother, The Story of Her Life* (2000); *Overman — the intermediary between the human and the supramental being* (2001); and *Patterns of the Present — from the perspective of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother* (2002).

Then, for a period of four years, Georges spent his time studying one of the most gruesome periods of human history, the Second World War. “This reading makes me sick,” he used to complain. His motive: “Sri Aurobindo and The Mother had been speaking to their disciples about this War, about its occult significance, and about the asuric entity that possessed Hitler. Is there any historic material that collaborates Their views?” There was, plenty – in German, English, French, Dutch and Spanish. His bookshelves soon flowed over. But it was with more than a sigh of relief that Georges finally disposed of this collection when his book '*Hitler and His God, the background to the Hitler phenomenon*' was published in 2006.

Meanwhile, Georges' fame as author was spreading. Many of his books were translated and published in The Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain and Russia. In 2006, he was awarded the Sri Aurobindo Puraskar by the Government

of Bengal. Increasingly, he was touring Europe and the USA giving lectures. The travel, he said later, was certainly not good for his health, even though he often experienced it as a prayer. In more recent years he only agreed to give lectures in Auroville and through Skype.

He continued writing about aspects of Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's vision, such as the book '*Evolution, Religion and the Unknown God*', (2011) where he described the various theories of evolution and the concepts of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. That same year saw the publication of his last book, '*Preparing for the Miraculous*', containing the 11 lectures Georges had given in 2010-2011 at Auroville's Savitri Bhavan and Town Hall. In the last essay in this book Georges shared his conviction that the Two-in-One Sri Aurobindo and The Mother were, in fact, the Kalki Avatar who, in the Hindu tradition, will come at the end of the present Kali Yuga.

With Georges' passing, the Auroville community worldwide has lost a friend and one of the few exegetes of Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's views. As Dakshina from the Lodi Ashram, USA, commented, “Georges was a pillar of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's work and legacy, leaving behind a wealth of books and transcribed talks that the world may better understand Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, their lives and vision and purpose, and what role we all who are called to this path of Integral Yoga share in the unfolding evolution we have taken birth to participate in. Though an all-consuming labour of love, this life-work was not easy and often took the form of a long battle, each book a hard-won victory over a host of opposing forces.”

He will be sorely missed.

(Reproduced with due acknowledgement and thanks to *Auroville Today* where it appeared in its Sep 2012 issue, No. 278. The photograph of Georges van Vrekhem by Sergey Stanovykh has been kindly made available by Carel B Thieme. All of Georges' books and their translations are now available online www.beyondman.org)

Notes On Authors

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

Anita Chakraborty obtained her MA in Philosophy in 1st class from North Bengal University securing a gold medal. She subsequently completed her M.Phil from the same university. She is presently working as Associate Professor in the Dept. of Philosophy, Chanchal College, Chanchal, Malda, West Bengal.

Jay Garfield is Doris Silbert Professor in the Humanities, Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Logic Programme and of the Five College Tibetan Studies in India Programme at Smith College, Professor in the graduate faculty of Philosophy at the University of Massachusetts, Professor of Philosophy at Melbourne University and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies. He teaches and pursues research in the philosophy of mind, foundations of cognitive science, logic, philosophy of language, Buddhist philosophy, cross-cultural hermeneutics, theoretical and applied ethics and epistemology. Garfield's most recent books are his translation, with the ven Prof. Geshe Ngawang Samten of the Fourteenth-Fifteenth Century Tibetan philosopher Tsong Khapa's commentary on Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika (Ocean of Reasoning)* and *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation* (Oxford University Press 2002 and 2006), respectively. Garfield is also working on projects on the development of the theory of mind in children with particular attention to the role of pretence in that process; the acquisition of evidentials and its relation to the development of theory of mind (with Jill deVilliers, Thomas Roeper and Peggy Speas), the history of 20th Century Indian philosophy (with Nalini Bhushan) and the nature of conventional truth in Madhyamaka (with Graham Priest and Tom Tillemans). Other books in progress include the *Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy* (editor), *Readings in Buddhist Philosophy* (co-editor with William Edelglass for Oxford University Press), *Trans-Buddhism: Transmission, Translation and Transformation* (co-editor with Nalini Bhushan and Abraham Zablocki, for the University of Massachusetts Press), and *Sweet Reason: A Field Guide to Modern Logic* (co-authored with Jim Henle and the late Thomas Tymoczko)

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Overview of Sri Aurobindo's Aesthetics (1997) and a number of critical essays and four volumes of poetry. He is the founder President of ASLE India (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) and has travelled widely and participated in several conferences and workshops within the country and abroad. He has held more than 14 solo exhibitions of his works in India and abroad. He has authored over 100 research papers and his academic publications include: *Figuring the Female: Women's Discourse, Art and Literature* (2005) co-edited; *Tradition and Terrain: Aesthetic Continuities* (2005) co-edited; *Nature and Human Nature: Literature, Ecology, Meaning* (2008); *Learning to Think like Myself* (2010); *Ecological Criticism for the Present: Literature, Nature and the Critical Inquiry* (2011) co-edit; *Image and Culture :The Dynamics of Literary, Aesthetic and Cultural Representation* (2011). *Inter-Readings: Text, Context, Significance* (2012) co-edited.

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Nalini Bhushan earned her B.A. in Economics at Stella Maris College, and her M.A. and M.Phil. in Philosophy at Madras Christian College, Chennai, India. She completed her Ph.D. in Philosophy at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Bhushan is currently Professor of Philosophy at Smith College and Co-Director of the South Asia Concentration. Her research addresses questions in the philosophy of mind and language, aesthetics, the philosophy of science, and 19th and 20th century Indian philosophy. Bhushan is co-editor of *Of Minds and Molecules: New Essays in the Philosophy of Chemistry* (Oxford University Press 2000) and author of several influential articles in that field. Bhushan has also published articles in aesthetics and the philosophy of mind and language. She is co-editor of *TransBuddhism: Translation, Transmission and Transformation* (University of Massachusetts Press 2009), *Indian Philosophy in English from Renaissance to Independence* (Oxford University Press 2011) and *Contrary Thinking: Selected Essays of Daya Krishna* (Oxford University Press 2011). Bhushan is currently at work on a book on the history of Indian philosophy in the 19th and 20th centuries and on the work of the modern Indian artist Amrita Sher-Gil.

Zackaria Moursi, Egyptian by birth, was born in a well-known and respected Egyptian family and enjoyed a privileged childhood. In the 1960s at the age of 23, while studying in Germany on a doctoral scholarship, he came across a book on Integral Yoga, a compilation of texts by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, about whom he had never heard before. This triggered a turning-point in his life. Zackaria lived one year in Auroville and Pondicherry, and is currently living in the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, California, where he translates Sri Aurobindo and Mother into Arabic. He has already translated the Ashram compilation "*Integral Healing*", and the Arabic version is available in print. He has a bilingual website: www.saamia.com, where he posts miscellaneous translated texts. Professionally he has worked as university Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering, school teacher, and programmer in different countries, and now, in his retirement, pursues his soul's and heart's desires, basking in Sri Aurobindo and Mother's Grace and Light.