

Sraddhā



श्रद्धा



(Vol. 4 No. 3)

21 February 2013

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The link of the finite with the Infinite,
The bridge between the appearance and the Truth,
The mystic aim for which the world was made,
The human sense of Immortality.

Savitri, 4th rev ed, 1993, BkV, Canto III, p.408

Śraddhā

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The Mother and Sri Aurobindo*

Vol.4 No. 3

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श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṃl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Editorial

21 February 1978. A new dawn broke.

Then through the pallid rift that seemed at first
Hardly enough for a trickle from the suns,
Outpoured the revelation and the flame.

This

... glamour from unreached transcendences
Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,
.....
... with her aura of magnificent hues
... buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.

Thus was born Mirra, the 'Sun-Word', the 'radiant fountain of the world's delight', the bringer of Light to the 'earth-soul', whom Sri Aurobindo later rechristened as the Mother. Once when asked by a disciple thrice if the Mother whom we adore as the Mother was indeed the 'individual' Divine Mother who has embodied the power of the 'two vaster ways of existence', of the Transcendent and the Universal Mother, and whether she has indeed not descended amongst us into the Darkness and Falsehood and Error and Death in her deep and great love for us, Sri Aurobindo replied each time 'Yes'.

Anilbaran Roy has recorded Sri Aurobindo telling a group of disciples in 1926: 'When I came to Pondicherry, a programme was dictated to me within for my sadhana. I followed it but could not do much by way of helping others. Then the Mother came and with her help I found the necessary method' (KR Srinivasa Iyengar, *On The Mother*, 1994, p.201). Sri Aurobindo also wrote 'the Sadhana and the work were waiting for the Mother's coming' (*SABCL*, v.26, p.459). 'Before the Mother came all were living in the mind with only some mental realisations and experiences. The vital and everything else were unregenerated and **the psychic behind the veil** (emphasis ours).... At that time I was still seeking my way for the transformation and the passage to the Supramental and acted very much on the principle of *laissez faire* with the few sadhaks who were there' (*SABCL*, ibid, p.460). He is reported to have said that left to himself he would have perhaps been able to give this yoga to a handful of ten disciples but with the coming of the Mother, it had become a world possibility.

'The Mother', as Nolini Kanta Gupta states, 'is creative consciousness; ... wherever she is called upon to be, her very presence moves for creation, creating a new world and a new dimension of being and consciousness, according to the need of time and place'. She laid special emphasis on 'physical education in order to prepare the body and senses to receive the golden light. She always said, physical education gives you the basis for the new consciousness, the new light, we must have a strong body, a beautiful body, a body that endures: for the new light is powerful, it is not merely light, it is force, one must be able to bear it and carry out its commands' (*Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, v.6, p.6).

Contrary to the belief that meditation is the representative activity of the spiritual pursuit, the Mother placed a high emphasis on works as they also provide a test for the state more or less achieved in and through meditation. Occupation itself can become a constant yoga by progressively changing the inner spirit and attitude of his works and that can lead him to the highest spiritual fulfilment. Beauty as a distinctive and powerful approach to the integral yoga is another area to which the Mother paid great attention. In the moral and mental approach, there is strain, tension and struggle. In the aesthetic approach, the mood of enjoyment is dominant.

To the Mother, an aimless and an unorganised life is not worth living. 'The core of the first principles of the art of living', according to the Mother, 'lies in elevating our life to a cleaner level, and the first and most important need is to put each thing in its place. ... We do not always notice how very disorderly we are, ... our actions are haphazard, and in our inner life we are as disorderly as in our outer life ... One of the things the Mother has been trying to teach us both by her word and example is this, ... that to keep our outer life and its materials in proper order and neat and tidy is a very necessary element in our life upon earth' (*Ibid*, v.7, p.499). Let us conclude our homage to the Supreme Divine with this exquisite *Hymn to Bhavani*, *Bhavanyastakam* by Shankaracharya, rendered into English in his own, unique, inimitable style by Nolini Kanta. (*Ibid*, v.8, pp.55-6)

Hymn to Bhavani

Nor father nor mother, nor friends nor brothers,
Nor son nor daughter, nor servants nor master,
Nor bride nor learning nor profession have I:
Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

In this world, this shoreless ocean brimming with its dread
suffering,
I lie prostrate, full of desire, full of greed, full of delusion;
For ever entangled I am in the meshes of wrong movements:
Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

I know neither benefaction nor meditation nor yoga,
Nor do I know secret practices nor charms nor chants occult;
I know not rites of worship, nor the process of renouncing:
Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

I know not virtue, I know not pilgrimage,
I know not liberation nor any annihilation either,
I know not devotion nor even ascetic discipline, O Mother;
Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

I am a wrong-doer, wrong company, wrong-witted, wrong
servant,
I have abandoned all customs of ancestors and I have
embraced all wrong customs;
To see wrong, to speak wrong I am always prone:
Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

Lord of the people, Lord of the Divine Mother,
the great Lord Himself, the Lord of the Gods,
Lord of the day, Lord of the night,
I know none else among the Gods for everlasting shelter;
Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

In strife and gloom, in error, in other lands,
In water and fire, in the mountains and among enemies,
In forest-ranges I seek my shelter, protect me always:
Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

I have no protector, I am destitute, I am stricken with age
and ailings,
Wholly dispossessed, lowliest, ever reduced to an inert figure;
I have entered into calamity, thoroughly undone:
Thou art the refuge, thou the sole refuge, O Bhavani!

January 13 marks the beginning of the 125th birth anniversary of Nolini Kanta Gupta, dreamer and revolutionary, linguist, scholar, poet, philosopher, mystic, yogi, a man of deep spiritual realisation, the foremost exponent of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, the traveller on the path to Supermind, the '*manasputra*' of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. We take this opportunity to pay our deep love and respect to this great savant by reproducing a very perceptive article by Rick Lipschutz which appeared in *SABDA Newsletter*, Nov. 2003.

We acknowledge with thanks Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust's permission to reproduce extracts from *Savitri*, *SABCL*, v, 16, 26, excerpts from the *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, v.6,7,8, and the photograph of the Mother 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.

Just a note to point out that although the article by Zackaria Moursi, which appeared in the Nov. issue, was originally posted at <http://saamia.com/en/contact.php>, the introduction with the accompanying picture appeared in the auromere.wordpress.com blog maintained by Sandeep Joshi. We regret the omission.

Due to unavoidable circumstances, we are not able to include in this issue Debashish Banerjee's paper on TheTriple Soul-Forces in the ongoing series of his Savitri lectures. We shall, however, publish the entire paper in full including the introduction and the interpretation in our April number.

The Glorious Future

Sri Aurobindo

If the emergence and growth of consciousness is the central motive of the evolution and the key to its secret purpose, then by the very nature of that evolution this growth must involve not only a wider and wider extent of its capacities, but also an ascent to a higher and higher level till it reaches the highest possible. For it starts from a nethermost level of involution in the Inconscience which we see at work in Matter creating the material universe; it proceeds by an Ignorance which is yet ever developing knowledge and reaching out to an ever greater light and ever greater organisation and efficacy of the will and harmonisation of all its own inherent and emerging powers; it must at last reach a point where it develops or acquires the complete fullness of its capacity, and that must be a state or action in which there is no longer an ignorance seeking for knowledge but Knowledge self-possessed, inherent in the being, master of its own truths and working them out with a natural vision and force that is not afflicted by limitation or error. Or if there is a limitation, it must be a self-imposed veil behind which it would keep truth back from manifestation in Time but draw it out at will and without any need of search or acquisition in the order of a right perception of things or in the just succession of that which has to be manifested in obedience to the call of Time.

This would mean an entry or approach into what might be called a truth-consciousness self-existent in which the being would be aware of its own realities and would have the inherent power to manifest them in a Time-creation in which all would be Truth following out its own unerring steps and combining its own harmonies; every thought and will and feeling and act would be spontaneously right, inspired or intuitive, moving by the light of Truth and therefore perfect. All would express inherent realities of the spirit; some fullness of the power of the spirit would be there. One would have overpassed the present limitations of mind: mind would become a seeing of the light of Truth, will a force and power of the Truth, Life a progressive fulfilment of the Truth, the

body itself a conscious vessel of the Truth and part of the means of its self-effectuation and a form of its self-aware existence. It would be at least some initiation of this Truth-consciousness, some first figure and action of it that must be reached and enter into a first operation if there is to be a divine life or any full manifestation of a spiritualised consciousness in the world of Matter. Or, at the very least, such a Truth-consciousness must be in communication with our own mind and life and body, descend into touch with it, control its seeing and action, impel its motives, take hold of its forces and shape their direction and purpose. All touched by it might not be able to embody it fully, but each would give some form to it according to his spiritual temperament, inner capacity, the line of his evolution in Nature: he would reach securely the perfection of which he was immediately capable and he would be on the road to the full possession of the truth of the Spirit and of the truth of Nature. ...

If we could draw down this power [Truth-Consciousness] into the material world, our age long dreams of human perfectibility, individual perfection, the perfectibility of the race, of society, inner mastery over self and a complete mastery, governance and utilisation of the forces of Nature could see at long last a prospect of total achievement. This complete human self-fulfilment might well pass beyond limitations and be transformed into the character of a divine life. Matter after taking into itself and manifesting the power of life and the light of mind would draw down into it the superior or supreme power and light of the spirit and in an earthly body shed its parts of inconscience and become a perfectly conscious frame of the spirit. A secure completeness and stability of the health and strength of its physical tenement could be maintained by the will and force of this inhabitant; all the natural capacities of the physical frame, all powers of the physical consciousness would reach their utmost extension and be there at command and sure of their flawless action. As an instrument the body would acquire a fullness of capacity, a totality of fitness for all uses which the inhabitant would demand of it far beyond anything now possible. Even it could become a revealing vessel of a supreme beauty and bliss, — casting the beauty of the light of the spirit suffusing and radiating from it as a lamp reflects and diffuses the luminosity of its indwelling flame, carrying in itself the beatitude of the spirit, its joy of the seeing mind, its joy of life and spiritual happiness, the joy of Matter released into a spiritual consciousness and thrilled with a constant ecstasy. This would be the total perfection of the spiritualised body.

(Reproduced from *SABCL*, v.16, pp.16-18 with thanks and acknowledgement to Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry)

The Mother Image in Sri Aurobindo

Prema Nandakumar

1. Mother Goddess in Indian Culture

Mother India.

The nation has been automatically referred to as mother. Yes, ours is a motherland. From times immemorial we have been taught to offer the prime place to mother in the order of elders.

Matru devo bhava.

Nor is this mother worship confined to one place or two. Throughout India, when civilisation touched its soil, the first impulse has been to worship the Mother Goddess. Why, the very first isolable word uttered by man seems to be ‘amma’! The encyclopaedic range of Sri Aurobindo is such that even this basic element in world language has been brought to our notice in his writings. In searching for ‘the origins of Aryan speech’, he points out the need to know the terms used in very early times which have given rise to so many variations in as many languages. Usually we refer to words as ancient and then add that in course of time these words have disappeared. Sri Aurobindo puts our probing lenses right when he says: “It is the preservation of common terms and not their disappearance that is the miracle of language.” Even dividing languages as Aryan and Dravidian groups could lead us to fallacious conclusions. The one chapter that we have of his proposed book on the subject (alas! which was left unwritten) is enough to prove the stupidity of an Aryan conquest of Dravidian lands, a grievous mistake perpetrated by German philologists and taken up by the English rulers of India to help their “divide-and-rule” policy. The harm done then continues to haunt India even today.

Sri Aurobindo takes up the term ‘mother’ in Tamil and Sanskrit to show how they are not from divergent linguistic groups. For this is one of the oldest words that have survived millennia and mean the same thing even today. Sri Aurobindo

writes:

“Mother in Tamil is amma not mata; there is no Sanskrit word amma, but there is the well-known Sanskrit vocable *amba*, mother. What is to prevent us from understanding the Tamil amma as an Aryan form equivalent to *amba*, derived from the root *amb* to produce, which gives us *amba* and *ambaka*, father, *amba*, *ambika* and *ambi*, mother and *ambarisa*, colt of a horse or the young of an animal.”ⁱ

It is also conjectured by some philologists that the English word ‘mother’ probably evolved from ‘Maata’ in Sanskrit and later went to Latin and Greek. All this assures us that ‘mother’ is certainly one of the oldest words to have endured. So also mother worship seems to take precedence when man entered the plane of theistic consciousness. One of the finest ancient Indian legends speaks of Mother Earth as a treasure-rich cow.

The Bhagavata gives us the legend of Mother Earth and King Prithu. Prithu was a great king. At one time, Prithu’s land was overrun by a severe drought. With the lack of food all life suffered, scorched and died in droves. There was none interested in guarding the Vedas and the Sastras. Prithu was incensed and went to attack Mother Earth for withholding her riches from life. She began running away from him in the form of a cow. When she sought asylum with Brahma, Shiva and Indra they directed her back to Prithu as he was Vishnu’s portion. She came to Prithu and asked him to spare her:

“Why do you want to kill me, an insignificant person who has done no wrong? Besides, I am a woman. How can you, learned in the codes of Dharma, kill me, a woman? Even uncultured people do not strike women, even if they be guilty. How can a kind and merciful personage like you do so?”ⁱⁱ

King Prithu agreed to spare her provided she gave all her wealth without stinting to sustain life on earth. She told him that she had hidden the cereals as the whole world had become corrupt and full of thieves, and it was all needed for yajna. But if he wanted to be assured of the future, he must appoint competent and incorruptible persons to be in charge of the earth’s riches. King Prithu agreed provided she gave all her wealth without stinting to life on earth. With her green signal, the entire earth glowed with green and plenty of food.

The Bhagavata says that Prithu used Swayambhuva Manu as a calf to milk all the cereals. Following him, the rishis, the Devas, the Asuras, the Gandharvas the Pitris, the Siddhas, the vidhyadaras and Kimpurushas, the Nagas and the

rest milked Mother Earth enriching themselves with the Vedas, nectar, spirituous liquor music, sweet words and magic powers to name a few. It is a fascinating document but the lesson is simple: the Mother is patient, compassionate when there is a crisis. She is the first manifestation of the Formless Supreme.

The Vedas themselves have plenty of hymns addressed to the Supreme as mother. The Sri Sukta stands at the apex of such hymns and stands witness to the command: “*Matru devo bhavah*”. The child’s gratitude for the mother is immense for the mother’s compassion is not based on any condition. The scriptures have pointed this out by the statement: *sraddhayaa devo devatvamasnute*: Narayana gains divine lordship because of Lakshmi (*Sraddha*). The other notable hymns in the Vedas addressed to the Mother are Medha Sukta, Aditi Sukta and Vak Sukta. For, Motherhood has many brilliant facets. The Sastras deal with them all in various texts. The ‘Lakshmi Tantra’ of the Pancharatra Shastra has Lakshmi revealing her greatness to Indra. While the Lord is Supreme, she remains his eternal Power of Movement: *tasyaaham paramaa sakthirekaa Srirnaama saasvati*. The opening of the Sri Sukta has a sublimity that is kept up throughout the hymn:

*Hiranyavarnaam harineem suvanarajathasrajaam
Chandraam hiranmayeem lakshmeem jaathavedo ma aa vaha*

“O Jatavedas, the Lord who created the Vedas! Kindly inspire me with Lakshmi who is gold-sheened, doe-like, adorned with golden and silver garlands, cool like the moon, who is an image of gold.”

The Mother is also the prime Goddess in Dravidian culture. The earliest reference to her occurs in the 3000-year old *Tolkappiyam*, an ancient Tamil text which is a work that deals with a variety of grammatical facets of the Tamil language like phonology and prosody. She was termed the goddess of desert regions in Tamil Nadu. Ancient Tamil aesthesis divided the land into Mullai, Kurinji, Marudam, Neytal and Palai and gave them each a divine being as guardian deity. Mullai was forest area and was presided over by Tirumal (Vishnu); the mountainous region of Kurinji had Murugan (Subramania); Marudam was cultivable fields and had Indra as its deity; the sea and the seashore were termed Neytal and the area was in the charge of Varuna. The Palai referred to deserts. There are no deserts in Tamil Nadu but any of the four regions mentioned earlier was termed the Palai at the peak of summer and was in the guardianship of the Mother Goddess Kotravai along with the fiery deities, Surya and Agni.

A work of later times, the *Purapporul Venpa Malai* dealing with ancient Tamil aesthesis in detail explains ‘Kotravai-nilai’ (the state or invocation of Kotravai). A pot filled with things that promise victory was raised high as an image of the Mother-Goddess and prayers were offered:

“The invocation of Kotravai: She holds
Victorious armaments that are ever bright;
Also, grace that is ever full of compassion”.

Though she carries the killer-lance, she is yet a mother, a compassionate mother. There is then a pictorial presentation of Kotravai’s image. She has a flag with the figure of lion imprinted on it, and a parrot in hand. Her mount is a stag and her army is made up of ghouls. The worship of Kotravai is given in detail in *Silappadhikaram*, the ancient Tamil epic.

The hero and the heroine, Kovalan and Kannaki are going towards Madurai along with the Jain nun, Kavundi. On the way they pass a forest where the huntsmen are offering prayers to Kotravai. In the course of the rituals, a young girl is possessed by the deity. Such is her message:

“The deity who rides the stag will not bless your bows with victory unless she gets the sacrificial offering due to her as the price of her earlier favours. O people who live by robbery! If you desire to drink toddy and enjoy life, pay to the deity her due.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Immediately the huntsmen go to work and decorate the girl in their conception of the Mother Goddess Kotravai:

“Hearing these words of the virgin belonging to the ancient lineage of warriors who cut their enemies’ heads and count them and never allow themselves to be killed, the huntsmen braided her short, bristling hair into a long plait, tying it with a silver string shaped like a little serpent; they adorned her head with the crescent-like tusk they had snatched from the wild boar which had destroyed their fenced fields; they put on her a necklace in which were strung together the white teeth they had plucked from the mouth of the ferocious tiger; they draped her waist with a tiger-skin resplendent with stripes and dots; they gave her a bow of matured bamboo after bending it with great difficulty; they put her on a stag with coiled horns and devoutly offered her dolls, parrots, wild cocks with beautiful, downy feathers, blue peacocks, balls and crickle-nuts.”

The serving-girls of the warrior-clans of the place now come in carrying plates of sacrificial food and spread the feast before her. For the heroine of the

epic, Kannaki, all this was strange and new since she knew of no rituals except what was performed by Jains. As she stood at the back shy, wondering and even awed, the deity-borne girl's eyes fell upon her. She said in loud tones so all could hear:

“Lo, this damsel is the treasure of the Kongu land, the queen of the western hills, the idol of the south Tamil land, the fruit of penance, the jewel beyond compare in the whole world.”

Some Tamil scholars have pointed out that this Kotravai in *Silappadhikaram* is the transformational image from the tribal Mother Goddess to Uma Haimavati, the consort of Shiva. Though this is a huntsmen's gathering, the epic's author, Ilango Adikal transports us to Puranic literature:

“The deity whose head wears the crescent moon; whose forehead sports an unwinking eye; who has coral-like lips and a silvery smile; whose throat is black through consuming poison; who bent the lofty Meru mountain into a bow and strung it with the ferocious snake, Vasuki; who wears as her breast-strap a snake with venom-filled fangs; who wields a trident in her bangled hand; who wears the elephant-hide as her upper garment and the lion's skin as her girdle; whose small feet move to the jingle of the artistic anklet and the ankle-ring signifying victory; the deity with the victorious sword; the goddess who straddles the head of the broad-shouldered Mahishasura whose body is a blend of two creatures, the immortal one who is worshipped by many...the self-same Kotravai possessed the spirit of the aptly-dressed virgin and, on being worshipped by the huntsmen, blessed them.”

Kotravai here is spoken of as Vishnu's sister and as one who has occupied half the body of Shiva. There is terror and beauty in the image of *Silappadhikaram's* Kotravai. At the same time we can see other inspirations entering the worship of the Mother Goddess as she is also seen as Krishna at times:

“You crawled through the pair of arjuna trees and felled them; you kicked to pieces the revolving wheel sent by your deceitful uncle Kamsa. Please accept this offering from the huntsmen who rob and wound wayfarers and never show any mercy!”

Still Dravidian culture never distanced itself wholly of the imaging of the Supreme as Woman-Power, bridging the human and the divine worlds effortlessly: Meenakshi of Madura, Kamakshi of Kanchipuram, Abhirami of Tirukadavur, Andal of Srivilliputtur...the list grows long. Why, we owe the revival of Sanatana Dharma in modern times to the Mother Goddess. Time was when India was fast losing its soul in the 19th century because of its suicidal fascination for western culture. Sri Aurobindo has recorded the scenario at that time:

“British rule, Britain's civilising mission in India has been the record success in history in the hypnosis of a nation. It persuaded us to live in a death of the will & its activities, taking a series of hallucinations for real things and creating in ourselves the condition of morbid weakness the hypnotist desired, until the Master of a mightier hypnosis laid His finger on India's eyes and cried "Awake." Then only the spell was broken, the slumbering mind realised itself and the dead soul lived again.”

“The Master of a mightier hypnosis” was of course, Swami Vivekananda. And he had been invested with the self-confidence and power to go abroad and announce the message of Hindu religion by the Mother Goddess Kanyakumari. After the passing of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and his brother-disciples had fanned out as parivrajakas and travelled to different parts of the country. Swami Vivekananda's route took him to South India. Even as he was garnering experiences and meeting people, often incognito, it had been suggested to him that he should go to Chicago and attend the Parliament of Religions to unfurl the flag of India's peerless culture. But there were problems, doubts about going so far into an unknown land and where was the money to be had to make the journey? Having wandered for four years and a half, Swami Vivekananda found himself at the southernmost tip of India. Aspiration rose from him but he needed a sign from above. Kanyakumari proved to be the right place for him to get assent from the Supreme Mother that he was indeed treading the right path.

The town of Cape Comorin is on the seashore which is the confluence of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. As he worshipped the Goddess imaged as a beautiful maiden standing with a garland of beads in her hand, he found his questioning mind getting quietened gradually. He came to the seashore and stood facing the waves. Yes, with this Mother's sanction he would cross the waves and go into the alien land. Meanwhile he would test his

sinews. Swami Vivekananda simply plunged into the ocean and swam to the rock jutting out around three kilometers away. It was known as the Sri Paada Rock which contained an imprint of Goddess Kanya Kumari. He sat upon it, and surrounded by the rush of waves around, went into deep meditation. He had three days of undisturbed meditation as he went over the past glory of India, its present degradation and the future possibilities of India becoming the guru of the world. When he came to himself it was Christmas Eve, and there were no more doubts in his heart. The soul had been released from all the bondages of worries, doubts and self-distrust.

“His soul lived as eternity’s delegate,
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,
Each moment was a beat of puissant wings.
The little plot of our mortality
Touched by this tenant from the heights became
A playground of the living Infinite.
This bodily appearance is not all;
The form deceives, the person is a mask;
Hid deep in man celestial powers can dwell.
His fragile ship conveys through the sea of years
An incognito of the Imperishable.”^{iv}

A couple of years later, in March 1894, he wrote about this meditation and the grace granted by the Mother Goddess in a letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda:

“At Cape Comorin, sitting in Mother Kumari’s temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock, I hit upon a plan. We are so many Sannyasins wandering about, and teaching the people metaphysics – it is all madness. Did not our Gurudeva use to say, an empty stomach is no good for religion? That those poor people are leading the life of brutes is simply due to ignorance. We have for all ages been sucking their blood and trampling them underfoot. Suppose some disinterested Sannyasins, bent on doing good to others, go from village to village, disseminating education and seeking in various ways to better the condition of all down to the Chandala, through oral teaching and by

means of maps, cameras, globes and such other accessories – can’t that bring forth good in time? All these plans I cannot write out in this short letter. The long and the short of it is — if the mountain does not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain. The poor are too poor to come to schools and Pathashalas, and they will gain nothing by reading poetry and all that sort of thing. We, as a nation, have lost our individuality, and that is the cause of all mischief in India. We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and raise the masses. The Hindu, the Mohammedan, the Christian, all have trampled them underfoot. Again the force to raise them must come from inside, that is, from the orthodox Hindus. In every country the evils exist not with, but against, religion. Religion therefore is not to blame, but men.”

Our Vedic seers and ancient Tamils onwards, this faith has been the sustenance of the Indian psyche and the base for all its high endeavours. Even today, one has only to go to the *nahabat* in Dakshineswar and bow in reverence at the steps before entering the tiny room to get a visible feeling of the Divine Mother’s touch cleansing and electrifying the physical body. Such has been the glory of the Mother Goddess image of India.

References:

- i. *On the Veda* (1956), p. 648
- ii. Translated by Swami Tapasyananda
- iii. Translations from *Silappadhikaram* quoted in the article are by S. Krishnamoorthy
- iv. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Book I, canto iii.

Triple Aspect of the Mother's Work

(Compiled from Her writings)

Ananda Reddy

I. Introduction

[It was long back, almost four decades back, that I used to attend, as a student, almost all of Nolinida's talks which he used to give in the Ashram playground. I still remember him entering the playground with slow but surefooted steps, walk to the entrance of the Mother's room in the playground and rest for a while before starting his talks on themes woven around the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's vision. His talks were imbued with the Mother's presence. They used to be brief, crisp, simple but with a depth which had the stamp of experience. We could, if we may, call his writings experiential knowledge or embodied knowledge, as the modern term goes.]

It is perhaps this kind of knowledge that the Mother had referred to when she had written to me in 1972 —when I wanted to write a homage to Sri Aurobindo in his centenary year: “qu'il vaut mieux de ne pas parler de ce qu'on ne sait pas” (3.7.1971). (“It is better not to speak of what one does not know.”) Yes, there is the embodied knowledge, there is a psychic knowledge which can know the truth of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's consciousness. But none of us, perhaps, can nowadays claim to have any of these levels or types of knowledge. But may be to accommodate myself and many other devotional writings, we could speak of a level of knowledge — where one feels intensely on the heart level her presence. When one reads the writings of the Mother or Sri Aurobindo, one feels their presence therein, one has the joy of discovering different aspects of their consciousness and being. It is as if they, out of their grace, are unveiling layer by layer their glorious consciousness. It is this joy of discovering the Mother anew that I wish to share with you this evening, not by any rhapsodic description, which, frankly, is beyond my capacity, but by selecting and compiling passages from Her writings, I have woven my garland of offering at her golden feet.

It was, again, one of Nolinida's articles, ‘The Mother : The Nature of Her Work’ (NKG, vol. 6) which had brought to me an understanding of the Mother's work. But it was only recently, when I chanced upon one of the explanations given by the Mother herself that a whole new perspective of her work and sadhana dawned on me.]

II. Triple Aspect of the Mother's work:

A. There are two parallel things that, from the eternal and supreme point of view are of identical importance, in that both are equally essential for the realisation to be a true realisation.

On the one hand, there is what Sri Aurobindo — who, as the Avatar, represented the supreme Consciousness and Will on earth { Sri Aurobindo is

the Lord, but only a portion of the Lord, not the Lord in His totality because the Lord is All — all that is manifested and all that is not manifested. (*Mother's Agenda*, v.6, p.209)} declared me to be, that is,

1. the supreme universal Mother; and on the other hand,
2. there is what I am realising in my body through the integral sadhana.

a. I could be the supreme Mother and not do any sadhana, and as a matter of fact, as long as Sri Aurobindo was in his body, it was he who did the sadhana, and I received the effects. These effects were automatically established in the outer being, but he was the one doing it, not I — I was merely the bridge between his sadhana and the world.

b. Only when he left his body was I forced to take up the sadhana myself; not only did I have to do what I was doing before — being a bridge between his sadhana and the world — but I had to carry on the sadhana myself. When he left, he turned over to me the responsibility for what he himself had been doing in his body, and I had to do it.

So there are both these things. Sometimes one predominates, sometimes the other (I don't mean successively in time, but ... it depends on the moment), and they are trying to combine in a total and perfect realisation: the eternal, ineffable and immutable Consciousness of the Executrice of the Supreme, and the consciousness of the Sadhak of the integral Yoga who strives in an ascending effort towards an ever increasing progression.

B. To this has been added a growing initiation into the supramental realisation which is (I understand it well now) the perfect union of what comes from above and what comes from below, or in other words, the eternal position and the evolutionary realisation. (*Mother's Agenda*, v.1, p.209)

C. *The Relationships with Human Beings based on these two aspects of her work:*

(How are these two aspects related to us, the human beings, on a day to day level, we may ask? Here is the Mother's clarification.)

Depending upon each one's nature and position and bias, and because human beings are very limited, very partial and incapable of a global vision,

- i. there are those who believe, who have faith, or to whom the eternal Mother is revealed through Grace, who have this kind of relationship with the eternal Mother.... *but the others don't have this relationship of sadhak to Guru* they are only in contact with the eternal Mother

and, in the simplicity of their hearts, they expect Her to do everything for them. If they were perfect in this attitude, the eternal Mother would do everything for them — as a matter of fact, She does do everything, but as they aren't perfect, they cannot receive it totally.—
 ii.... and there are those who themselves are plunged in sadhana, who have the consciousness of a developed sadhak, and thereby have the same relationship with me as one has with what they generally call a 'realised soul.' Such persons consider me the prototype of the Guru teaching a new way,.... (*I am taking the two extremes, but of course there are all the possibilities in between*).

iii. But the two paths are very different, the two kinds of relationships are very different; and as we all live according to the law of external things, in a material body, there is a kind of annoyance, an almost irritated misunderstanding, between those who follow this path (not consciously and intentionally, but spontaneously), who have this relationship of the child to the Mother, and those who have this other relationship of the sadhak to the Guru. So it creates a whole play, with an infinite diversity of shades.

Those who have what I would call the more 'outer' relationship compared to the other (although it is not really so) — the relationship of yoga, of sadhana — consider the others superstitious; and the others, who have faith or perception, or the Grace to have understood what Sri Aurobindo meant (perhaps even before knowing what he said, but in any event, after he said it), discard the others as ignorant unbelievers! And there are all the gradations in between, so it really becomes quite funny!

It opens up extraordinary horizons; once you have understood this, you have the key — you have the key to many, many things: the different positions of each of the different saints, the different realisations and ... it resolves all the incoherencies of the various manifestations on earth.

iv. For example, this question of Power — the Power — over Matter. Those who perceive me as the eternal, universal Mother and Sri Aurobindo as the Avatar are surprised that our power is not absolute. They are surprised that we have not merely to say, 'Let it be thus' for it to be 'thus.' This is because, in the integral realisation, the union of the two is essential: a union of the power that proceeds from the eternal position and the power that proceeds from the sadhana through evolutionary growth.

(*Comment: the eternal position is that of the immutable consciousness of the Executrice of the Supreme and the evolutionary realisation is that of the sadhak of integral yoga. Or, as Nolini-da explained: “ The Supermind...links the two ends in a supreme and miraculous synthesis negating neither, giving the full value to each, for the two are united, concentrated in its substance. Thus is found the golden bridge uniting earth and heaven.” (Complete Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, v.4, p.300)*)

(*In another conversation with a sadhak, the Mother explained this dual aspect of her work in this manner:*)

v. Yes, my presence helps to advance the process. I hasten the descent but it does not mean that all this will be done in a day. It is not possible that overnight all this is transformed, supramentalised by a miracle. It is not possible. Because of me the things are done a bit faster. I only give an impetus, but it is He who does all, I help a little in His work. It is because of me that the New World is born. I have compressed the work of many centuries. I help a bit. I also follow a determined curve. I can hasten the descent following the curve. But I cannot jump to the highest consciousness to bring it down on earth. It is not possible because the earth is not ready. And if it descends, then it will crush everything by its pressure. It is so formidable. That is why I prepare the base here below and bring down what is necessary, not more. Even this, the earth cannot contain. (*The Supreme*, p.12)

III. The Mother as the supreme universal Mother representing the Supreme Consciousness and Will on earth; the Executrice of the Supreme. This aspect of the Mother has been revealed to us by herself in a conversation with one of her disciples:

a) Ah! You do not know what a favour I am doing to you all.

...You have no idea that the whole world, the entire universe bows down to me, imploring me in an act of adoration to serve me. You do not know who I am, who has descended in the ignorance among you, who has consented to be human, to take up a physical body among you all. You have no idea of who is there before you. Well, even the gods whom you revere so much, perform tapasya in order to have a glimpse of me. It is for me and through me that the whole Universe exists and it vibrates in my consciousness. It is through me that all living beings and inanimate things and all that you see in the Manifestation, acts and progresses. There is nothing that is not within

me. I am the Cause. It is in me that all things disappear. Everything, everything is expressed in me and aspires to take refuge in me. Those who know me a little give their entire lives to find me.

...I am above the whole Manifestation. (*The Supreme*, p.11)

b) Talking of gods, let me narrate to you a very interesting conversation of the Mother with Durga:

This morning I had a visit from Durga. She pays me a visit every year, but this morning it was interesting because she explained to me her point of view, how she feels existence, and at the same time.... You know that she came last year, I told you the story. (Previously, when I used to go downstairs to give darshan, she would not only come but stay there for the whole time.) But when she came last year I told her, "Very good, it's very good, you fulfil your universal function very well, but you are missing something...." And I explained to her the meaning of being in conscious and attentive contact with the supreme Will. She understood. She understood and adhered, she said yes. And during the year she must have tried, because when she returned this morning, there was really a difference, especially a difference in the understanding, and she explained it to me. Then I spoke to her about the physical human nature and its infirmity, and she told me, "There is in this body something we — all of us up above — do not have and cannot have: the possibility of a constant Presence of and a constant contact with the Divine." She had never thought of it before! Only since a year ago. And she said it with such intensity — such intensity and understanding and meaning.... It was as though all human miseries instantly disappeared in front of this extraordinary thing — the possibility of feeling in every cell the divine Presence.

It was really interesting. The morning was really interesting.

She stayed here while I was washing, and she told me, "See, you can do all this, and not for a minute, not for a second do you lose the contact with That, with the supreme wonder. And we who are full of power, without any of your petty miseries, any of your petty difficulties, we are so used to our way of being that we don't see the value of it, it's something obvious, almost inevitable." And she said (*Mother smiles*), "We never think of the Divine, because we ARE the Divine.... So there isn't that will to progress, that thirst for ever better, ever more — we totally lack it."

It was really interesting. I am putting it into words (of course, she didn't speak to me in French!), but it was very simple, the contact

was very simple (*gesture of inner exchange*), and very natural, very spontaneous. At one point I even asked her (*laughing*), "Do you enjoy all this worship people give you?" She said no. "No, I don't care." She is too used to it, she doesn't care. (*Mother's Agenda*, v..8, pp.333-4)

c) Another conversation from *The Supreme* tells us more about Durga:

Well, you know, I will tell you something. In those days, when I used to give special Blessings for the Pujas — Durga, Mahasaraswati, etc. at that time, Durga and the others used to come to me; besides, they used to meet me from time to time. They came by turns and even now they come for some work or the other. And I do not know if it was last year or the year before — moreover, time has no importance for me; in fact, there is not much difference, since I have stopped giving Blessings for the Pujas — anyway, it was close to the Pujas, and as usual Durga came to me. She was so beautiful and formidable, like all the other children, but it was an entity which possesses the cosmic force. And I told her: "Shall there be no end to these little entities and is it not time to turn towards the Supreme, leaving behind the little personal egos?"

Then you know what happened? Something marvellous and unexpected: in a humble gesture full of gratefulness she abandoned everything to the Supreme in such a joyous and spontaneous atmosphere which cannot be expressed in words but has to lived to be seen. And She told me: "Yes, I am Thine completely, what Thou wilt, I shall do. I give myself to You". And she prostrated herself at my feet. It was a complete surrender. There was no hesitation. I was so beautiful. It is since then that I have stopped the Blessings for the Pujas. Because it is no longer necessary. It is over, once and for all, ...oh! in such a fine act, such a charming gesture! (*The Supreme*, pp.6-7)

IV. The Mother as the Sadhak of Integral yoga.

a) I began my sadhana at birth, without knowing that I was doing it. I have continued it throughout my whole life, which means for almost eighty years (even though for perhaps the first three or four years of my life it was only something stirring about in unconsciousness). But I began a deliberate, conscious sadhana at about the age of twenty-two or twenty-three, upon prepared ground. I am now more than

eighty years old: I have thought of nothing but that, I have wanted nothing but that, I had no other interest in life, and not for a single minute have I ever forgotten that it was That that I wanted. There were not periods of remembering and forgetting: it was continuous, unceasing, day and night, from the age of twenty-four (*Mother's Agenda*, v.1, p.157)

And for as long as I did the work, for ... (how many years?) the thirty years I worked with Sri Aurobindo and he was there, and I was like this (gesture hidden behind Sri Aurobindo), so comfortable, you know — I was in front, I seemed to be the one doing the work — but for my part, I felt completely protected, behind him like this (same gesture); I was very quiet, not trying to understand or know or anything — I was simply attentive to ... what had to be done, the necessary action. It was rarely necessary to tell him; if sometimes I was faced with a difficulty I would tell him, but he didn't need to answer: it was immediately understood — thirty years like that. (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol.8, pp.295-6)

But with this Sadhana I am doing, there are some threads that lead you along, and I have some sentences by Sri Aurobindo.... For the other sadhanas, I was used to it: all that he said was clear, it showed the way, you didn't have to look for it. But here, he didn't do it; he only said or made certain remarks now and then, and those remarks are helpful to me. (There is also my meeting him at night, but I don't want to count too much on that, because ... you grow too anxious for the contact, and that spoils everything.) There are in that way several remarks that have remained with me and are, yes, like leading threads. For instance, "Endure ... endure." (*Mother's Agenda*, v.8, p.61)

b) You see, I'm doing the sadhana really along a ... a path that has never been trod by anyone. Sri Aurobindo did it ... in principle. But he gave the charge of doing it in the body to me.

That was the wonderful thing when we were together and all these hostile forces were fighting ... (they tried to kill me any number of times. He always saved me in an absolutely miraculous and marvellous way). But you see, this seemed to create very great bodily difficulties for him. We discussed this a great deal, and I told him, 'If one of us must go, I want that it should be me.'

'It can't be you,' he replied, 'because you alone can do the material thing.'

And that was all. He said nothing more. He forbade me to leave my body. That's all. 'It is absolutely forbidden.' he said. 'You can't, you must remain.' (*Mother's Agenda*, v.1, p.488)

... Sri Aurobindo said to me, "Your body on earth ..." He said, "What I see is that your body is the only one that has sufficient endurance to go through the ordeal." But, you understand, this body knew nothing about it, it has no ambitions (!), still less pretensions. But basing myself on that, when he told me, "You will do the work," I said yes. So there we are. (*Mother's Agenda*, v.8, p.69)

After that (this took place early in 1950), he gradually ... You see, he let himself fall ill. For he knew quite well that should he say 'I must go,' I would not have obeyed him, and I would have gone. For according to the way I felt, he was much more indispensable than I. But he saw the matter from the other side. And he knew that I had the power to leave my body at will. So he didn't say a thing, he didn't say a thing right to the very last minute... (*Mother's Agenda*, v.1, p.488)

c) Sri Aurobindo's Passing

He wanted to go.

You see, he had decided to go. But he didn't want me to know that he was doing it deliberately; he knew that if for a single moment I knew he was doing it deliberately, I would have reacted with such a violence that he would not have been able to leave!

And he did this ... he bore it all as if it were some unconsciousness, an ordinary illness, simply to keep me from knowing — and he left at the very moment he had to leave. But ...

And I couldn't even imagine he was gone once he had gone, just there, in front of me — it seemed so far away ... And then afterwards, when he came out of his body and entered into mine, I understood it all ... It's fantastic.Fantastic.

It's ... it's absolutely superhuman. There's not one human being capable of doing such a thing. And what ... what a mastery of his body — absolute, absolute! ...

I would like very much to ask you something ... Why did he have to go?

"We can put it this way: the world was not ready." (*Mother's Agenda*, v.1, pp.439-40)

"he had to make a great effort to be satisfied with things and people; it was his compassion that made him to accept people around

him as they were. Otherwise he used to suffer a lot.” (*Mother’s Agenda*, v.6, p.319)

Another instance of his suffering is narrated in connection with Sri Aurobindo’s last photos:

“...the photo in the armchair...it was a bit late; he was already beginning to feel that...the world wasn’t ready to go to the end. There is already the expression of suffering on his face.” (*Mother’s Agenda*, v. 6. p.275)

“I always saw him with a perfectly peaceful and smiling face, and above all, the dominant expression was compassion. That was what predominated in his appearance. An expression of compassion so ...so peaceful, so tranquil, oh, magnificent.” (*Mother’s Agenda*, v.6. p.275)

“But...when I saw the photo (....) I was dumbfounded...he had that expression.” (*Mother’s Agenda*, v.6. p.275)

But to tell you the truth, it was the totality of things around him that was not ready. So when he saw this (I only understood this afterwards), he saw that it would go much faster if he were not there.

And he was absolutely right, it was true.

Once I saw that, I accepted. When I saw it, when he made me understand, I accepted; otherwise ...

There was a difficult period. (silence)

It wasn't long, but it was difficult.

When he left, I said twelve days, twelve days. And truly, I gave it twelve days, twelve days to see if the entire Work ... Outwardly, I said, 'After twelve days I will tell you if the Ashram (the Ashram was nothing but a symbol, of course), if the Ashram will continue or if it is finished....,' (*Mother’s Agenda*, v.1, pp.439-40)

.....For the first three days, I remained standing there, near his bed, and in an absolutely ... well, to me, it was absolutely visible — all the organised consciousness that was in his body deliberately came out of it and into mine. And I not only saw it but felt the friction of its entry. All that supramental power he had attracted into and organised in his body little by little came into me methodically.

I didn't say anything to anyone because it was nobody's business, nobody's concern. I remained standing there. (*Mother’s Agenda*, v.8, p.184) When Sri Aurobindo left, I knew I had to cut the link with the psychic being, otherwise I would have gone with him; and as I had promised him I would stay on and do the work, I had to do that: I

literally closed the door on the psychic and said, "For the moment this doesn't exist anymore." It remained like that for ten years. (*Mother’s Agenda*, v.7, pp.157-8)

V. The Mother: The Protagonist of Physical Transformation

a) Yes, this problem of the transformation, I see more and more clearly that there are three approaches, three ways to go about it, and that in order to be more complete one should combine the three.

i. One — the most important, naturally — is the way we could call "spiritual," the way of the contact with the Consciousness-Love-Consciousness-Power, that is. These three aspects: supreme Love-Consciousness-Power. And the contact, the identification: making all the material cells capable of receiving Him and expressing Him — of Being That.

Of all the ways, that is the most powerful and most indispensable.

ii. There is the occult way, which brings all the intermediary worlds into play. There is a very detailed knowledge of all the powers and personalities, all the intermediary regions, and it makes use of all that. That's where one makes use of the Overmind godheads: it's in this second way. Shiva, Krishna, all the aspects of the Mother are part of this second way.

iii. Then there is the higher intellectual approach, which is the projection of a surpassing scientific mind and takes up the problem from below. It has its own importance too. From the standpoint of the detail of the procedure, it reduces approximation, it gives a more direct and precise action.

If one can combine all three, then obviously the thing will go faster. Without the first, nothing is possible (and even, the other two are an illusion without the first: they lead nowhere, you go round in circles endlessly). But if you clothe the first in the other two, then I think the action is more precise, direct, rapid. (*Mother’s Agenda*, v.8, p.72-3)

a) *The first approach, that of the spiritual, seems to have been fulfilled by the Divine Event of 29-02-1956:*

This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine.

As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that “the time has come”, and lifting with both hands

a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces.

Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow. (CWM, v.13, p.52)

b) *The Divine Event of Feb 29th was of “a general nature” but on the individual level, intended for her came to her soon after. The Mother had for the first time experienced a supramental entity possessing her body on the 12th of Sept, 1956:*

A supramental entity had entirely possessed me.

Something a little taller than myself: its feet extended below my feet and its head went a little beyond my head.

... A solid block with a rectangular base — *a rectangle with a square base* — one single piece.

... A light, not like the golden light of the Supermind: rather a kind of phosphorescence. I felt that had it been night, it would have been *physically* visible.

... And it was denser than my physical body: the physical body seemed to me almost unreal — as though crumbly — like sand running through your fingers.

... I would have been incapable of speaking, words seemed so petty, narrow, ignorant.

... I saw (how shall I put it?) the successive preparations which took place, in certain *anterior* beings, in order to achieve this.

... It felt as if I had several heads.

... The experience of February 29 was of a general nature; but this one was intended for me.

... An experience I had never had.

... I begin to see what the supramental body will be. (*Mother's Agenda*, vol. 1, p.85-6)

c) *Later the Mother had the experience of the supramental force penetrating into her body on the night of 24-25 July, 1959. But it was more distinct when the supramental light entered her body shortly before 15th August, 1959:*

... For the first time the supramental light entered directly into my body, without passing through the inner beings. It entered through the feet (a red and gold colour — marvellous, warm, intense), and it climbed up and up. And as it climbed, the fever also climbed

because the body was not accustomed to this intensity. As all this light neared the head, I thought I would burst and that the experience would have to be stopped. But then, I very clearly received the indication to make the Calm and Peace descend, to widen all this body-consciousness and all these cells, so that they could contain the supramental light. So I widened, and as the light was ascending, I brought down the vastness and an unshakable peace. And suddenly, there was a second of fainting. (*Mother's Agenda*, v.1, pp.327-28, October 6, 1959)

VI. The Mother's Mantra and Japa

One of the most important discoveries in her sadhana of the body was the realisation of the need of the mantra and japa:

a) I have also come to realise that for this sadhana of the body, the mantra is essential. Sri Aurobindo gave none; he said that one should be able to do all the work without having to resort to external means. Had he reached the point where we are now, he would have seen that the purely psychological method is inadequate and that a japa is necessary, because only japa has a direct action on the body. So I had to find the method all alone, to find my mantra by myself. But now that things are ready, I have done ten years of work in a few months. That is the difficulty, it requires time ...

And I repeat my mantra constantly — when I am awake and even when I sleep. I say it even when I am getting dressed, when I eat, when I work, when I speak with others; it is there, just behind in the background, all the time, all the time.

In fact, you can immediately see the difference between those who have a mantra and those who don't. With those who have no mantra, even if they have a strong habit of meditation or concentration, something around them remains hazy and vague. Whereas the japa imparts to those who practice it a kind of precision, a kind of solidity: an armature. They become galvanised, as it were. (*Mother's Agenda*, v.1, p.301)

b) *And this mantra of the Mother was “ Om namo Bhagavate” and we get its explanation as follows:*

I will tell you my old mantra. It keeps the outer being very tranquil: OM, Namō, Bhagavateh.... Three words.

To me they meant:

OM: I implore the Supreme Lord.

Namo: I obey Him.

Bhagavateh: Make me divine.

(silence)

This, I found, has the power to calm everything. (*Mother's Agenda*, v.13, p.377)

The japa is made precisely to control the physical mind.

I myself use it for a very special reason, because ... You see, I invoke (the words are a bit strange) ... the Lord of Tomorrow. Not the unmanifest Lord, but the Lord as he will manifest 'tomorrow,' or in Sri Aurobindo's words, the divine manifestation in its supramental form.

So the first sound of my mantra is the call to that, the evocation. With the second sound, the body's cells make their 'surrender,' they give themselves. And with the third sound comes the identification of this [the body] with That, which produces the divine life. These are my three sounds. (*Mother's Agenda*, v.1, p.434)

VII. The New Body

But it was not until 1972 that the Mother had her new body established in a permanent manner:

a) Yes, I was like that. It was me; I didn't look at myself in a mirror, I saw myself like this (*Mother bends her head to look at her body*), I was ... I just was like that.

That's the first time. It was around four in the morning, I think. And perfectly natural — I mean, I didn't look in a mirror, it felt perfectly natural. I only remember what I saw (*gesture from the chest to the waist*). I was covered only with veils, so I only saw.... What was very different was the torso, from the chest to the waist: it was neither male nor female.

But it was lovely, my form was extremely svelte and slim — slim but not thin. And the skin was very white, just like my skin. A lovely form. And no sex — you couldn't tell: neither male nor female. The sex had disappeared.

The same here (*Mother points to her chest*), all that was flat. I don't know how to explain it. There was an outline reminiscent of what is now, but with no forms (*Mother touches her chest*), not even as much as a man's. A very white skin, very smooth. Practically no abdomen to speak of. And no stomach. All that was slim.

I didn't pay any special attention, you see, because I was that: it felt perfectly natural to me. That's the first time it happened, it was the night before last; but last night I didn't see anything. That was the first and the last time so far.

But this form is in the subtle physical, isn't it?

It must be already like that in the subtle physical (Mother's Agenda, v.13, p.98)

It was the prototype of the new body of the superman, the one that will exceed the human form.

b) Conception precedes manifestation and expression, that is quite certain. And all those who have had a direct contact with the past have the memory of a kind of human prototype, far superior to mankind at present, who came on earth as an example and a promise of what humanity will be when it reaches its acme.

(Silence)

There is in life a certain tendency to imitate, a sort of effort to copy "something". One can find very striking examples of this in animal life — it even begins already in plant life, but in animal life it is very striking. One could give numerous examples. And so, in that sense, one might very well conceive of a sort of effort of animal life to attempt to copy, to imitate, to create some resemblance to this ideal type which would be manifested on earth by occult means, and it was probably through successive attempts, by a more and more successful effort that the first human types were produced. (*CWM*, v.9, p.238)

c) *In fact this is what Sri Aurobindo himself had envisaged when he wrote in one of his last essays, 'The Divine Body' :*

For the manifestation or building of a divine body on earth there must be an initial transformation, the appearance of a new, a greater and more developed type, not a continuance with little modifications of the present physical form and its limited possibilities. What has to be preserved must indeed be preserved and that means whatever is necessary or thoroughly serviceable for the uses of the new life on earth; whatever is still needed and will serve its purpose but imperfect, will have to be retained but developed and perfected; whatever is no longer of use for new aims or is a disability must be thrown aside. The necessary forms and instrumentations of Matter must remain since it is in a world of Matter that the divine life has to manifest, but their materiality must be refined, uplifted, ennobled, illumined, since

Matter and the world of Matter have increasingly to manifest the indwelling Spirit.

The new type, the divine body, must continue the already developed evolutionary form; there must be a continuation from the type Nature has all along been developing, a continuity from the human to the divine body, no breaking away to something unrecognisable but a high sequel to what has already been achieved and in part perfected. The human body has in it parts and instruments that have been sufficiently evolved to serve the divine life; these have to survive in their form, though they must be still further perfected, their limitations of range and use removed, their liability to defect and malady and impairment eliminated, their capacities of cognition and dynamic action carried beyond the present limits. New powers have to be acquired by the body which our present humanity could not hope to realise, could not even dream of or could only imagine. (SABCL, v.16, pp.39-40)

d) *In her own sadhana the Mother had come to the end, fulfilling the third aspect of her work upon earth:*

I feel that ... I AM THAT — With some resistances the present consciousness may still have, that's all. (And we recall Mother's words: "Only some violence could stop the transformation, otherwise it will go on and on and on...." (Mother's Agenda, v.13, p.375)

That is what she had said long back, in 1958, that she is given to take the initiation into the supramental realisation, that is, to unite in herself the eternal position and the evolutionary realisation. She had now in 1972 physically become THAT bridging in Her body that eternal position with the evolutionary eternal!

e) *Obviously, there is a vast difference between what Sri Aurobindo had achieved in his body and the Mother's transformation of her body into the prototype of the next race. When a specific question was asked in this light:*

"For instance, what difference is there between the work you are doing now and what he was doing at the time?" the Mother replied:

There is a difference in the Power of the action.

He himself — he himself has a greater action, a greater power or action now than when he was in his body. Besides, that's why he left — because it had to be done that way.

It's very tangible, you know. His action has become very tangible.

Of course, it isn't something mental at all. It is from another region. But it isn't ethereal or — it's tangible. I could almost say material. (Mother's Agenda, v.13, pp.326-7)

In this universality of Their action upon the world, we have to have perhaps a different perspective of the Ashram and all other centres of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The Mother had said in the context of a strike by the salaried workers in the Ashram, way back in 1956:

"And what is the Ashram? (I don't even mean in terms of the Universe — on Earth only.) A speck. And why should this speck receive exceptional treatment?...

Perhaps if people here had realised the supermind. But are they so exceptional as to expect exceptional treatment?

People say, 'I gave everything, I sacrificed everything. In exchange, I expect exceptional conditions — everything should be beautiful, harmonious, easy.'

But the divine vision is global. The people in the Ashram do not want this strike but what about the others? They are ignorant, mean, full of ill will, etc., but in their own way they are following a path, and why should they be deprived of the Grace? By the fact that their action is against the Ashram? It is certainly a Grace.

I said that I had not even thought of intervening. When things threatened to turn bad, I simply applied a force so that it wouldn't become too serious....

I have called for a greater 'package' of Grace and asked that the truth of things prevail. We shall see what happens. (Mother's Agenda, v.1, p.89)

Years later, in 1972, on April 2nd, the Mother perhaps gave her last advice to the quarrelling disciples:

I will tell you that we are preaching unity — unity of humanity — and we are all quarrelling horrible quarrels, resentments and all sorts of urgings that we condemn in the others. We are giving a nice example, and people laugh! Voilà.

It has come to me from many quarters.

Begin with yourself, they say, and they are right.

Each one, all of you have good reasons, everybody seems to lie. Everybody has "good reasons." You know, the ego is the most clever rogue I have ever met. He takes such nice, nice appearances, and each one says: "I would, but I can't." Voilà. And I tell you, from some

places far away and from near, from far and from near, from India and from other countries: Begin with yourself. That is, we are ridiculous — ridiculous. And such good reasons we have! — all the people have good reasons. It is above reason, it has nothing to do with reason, nothing to do with that, we want ... a new creation. ...

For centuries and centuries, humanity has waited for this time. It has come. But it is difficult. I don't simply tell you we are here upon earth to rest and enjoy ourselves, now it is not the time for that. We are here ... to prepare the way for the new creation....

So I have called you to tell you that. Take what you can, do what you can, my help will be with you. All sincere efforts will be helped to the maximum. (*Here Mother starts talking in French again*)

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

You are here now, I mean on earth, because you once chose to be — you don't remember it, but I know; that's why you are here. Well, you must stand up to the task. You must make an effort, you must conquer pettiness and limitations, and above all tell the ego: your time is over. We want a race without ego, with the divine consciousness in place of the ego. That's what we want: the divine consciousness, which will enable the race to develop and the superman [Mother later corrected "superman" to "supramental being."] to be born.

If you think I am here because I am bound, you are wrong. I am not bound. I am here because my body has given itself for the first attempt at transformation. Sri Aurobindo told me so, he told me, "I know of no one who can do it, except you." I said, "All right, I will do it." It's not ... I don't wish anyone to do it in my place, because ... because it's not very pleasant, but I am doing it gladly, because everybody will benefit from the results. I ask only one thing: don't listen to the ego. That's all. The time of the ego is over. We want to go beyond humanity and its ego, to leave it behind, we want a race without ego, with a divine consciousness in place of the ego. There, that's all.

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

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

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

That is all I had to say. (*Mother's Agenda*, v.13, pp124-7)

(Note: A talk given at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram School Courtyard on 22.02.12. This is a compilation of selected passages from the *Mother's Agenda* with a few connecting sentences by me indicated in italics. The passages have been edited for the purpose of adding an emphasis.

—Author)

The Mother Divine in Devi Sukta

Subha Mallick

*Viśvesari tvam paripāsi viśvam
Viśvātmikā dharyasīti viśvam¹*

Oh Divine Mother, you are the Mother-Force of the whole universe,
You are the all-sustaining protecting power of the entire world.
Oh Mother, you are the conscious soul of the universe,
You support and preserve the whole of universe.

She was absorbed in the abstract contemplation of divinity and as Sri Aurobindo explained this mental plane in *Savitri*

And entered where the Wings of Glory Brood
In the silent space where all is forever known (*Savitri*, 4th rev.ed, 1993, p.74)

From that plane of mind and vision the divine lady Vak articulated these hymns

*Aham rudrebbhirvah subhiścarāmyaḥ ādityairuta viśvadevaih
Aham Mitrā Varuṇvā bivarmyahmindrāgni aham āśvinovā²*

These hymns are called Devi Sukta. This Devi Sukta is a great part of Rig Veda. As every sukta begins with specific deity and saint and metre, this Devi Sukta also presents its characteristics at first. This is the 125th sukta of the 10th Mandala in Rig Veda. It commences with the detailed account that the deity of this sukta is Paramātmān. The name of the sage is Vak. The metre is ṛṣṭup and jagatī. But in later period when this Vedic sukta was inserted in Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa's Devi-Māhātmya Sri Sri Chandī, the deity of the sukta is invoked as Ādi Śakti.³

This Ādi Śakti, the primordial Force is the source of the universe. She is the Mother-Force. So she is invoked here as Devi, the Mother Goddess. According to Yaska, the word deva or devi has derived from the root *div*. So Devi bestows the enlightenment, unfolds the black wrapper of the darkness of ignorance and manifests herself in all the cosmic forces and powers of the Almighty. This sukta contains only eight hymns but this is the purport, the essence of the Vedas and of Devi-Māhātmya (Sri Sri Sapta-shatī Chandī) containing seven hundred hymns.

Sri Aurobindo says in *The Secret of the Veda* (SABCL, v.10, p.8)

Their aim was illumination, not logical conviction ... The Rishi was not the individual composer of the hymn, but the seer (dṛṣṭā) of an eternal truth and an impersonal knowledge. ... a rhythm not composed by the intellect but heard, a divine Word that came vibrating out of the Infinite to the inner audience ... Vedic expressions; these and cognate words signify, in the esoteric terminology of the hymns, revelatory knowledge and the contents of inspiration.

Sri Aurobindo explained

In the Vedic idea of revelation there is no suggestion of the miraculous or the supernatural. The Rishi who employed faculties, had acquired them by a progressive self-culture ... the revelation came only at the end, the light was the prize of a final victory.⁴

This Devi Sukta, like all other Vedic suktas, is the spiritual experience and a divine ecstasy of the Rishi, a sage, lady Vak. She was called Amvṛṇi because her father's name was Amvṛṇ. He, too, was a great sage.

As Rishi Vak was accomplishing the devotional austerities and was absorbed in her spiritual contemplation, she realised the very truth, the truth of Pure Existence of the soul, the Conscious Soul of the individual and the universe. She discovered that she was not a mere woman, not only a creature or human being, but all the forces of universe, all matter and all the forms and activities are within her Conscious Soul. She realised that her conscious soul, her Psychic Being was identical with all these forces of Nature, the supreme Power of Absolute or Universe. The sun and the stars, the earth and the sky, the hills and the streams, the grass and the gigantic trees, all the mortals, animate and inanimate and every activity are the same thing, having the same vital power and force and evolve from that same source of Pure Existence.

As her Truth-Consciousness revealed that oneness, that eternal divine identity with Paramātmā, her heart became saturated with divine illumination and that eternal bliss, Sat-chi-ananda. She, Rishi Vak proclaimed that she is Rudra, Aditya, she is Mitra, Varuna. She herself is Indra, Agni, *aśvinovā – Ahamrudrebhirvah subhīścārāmyah ādityairuta viśvadevaih*.

She identified her own individual self with each and every matter and every form of the universe, she expressed her omnipotence that she is wandering in the universe on the wings of eternal power of Pure Existence.

In the Veda, every word, every name of the deity is symbolic. Each of them represents a definite psychological expression and scientific explanation. The Veda has explained the solar power as *sūrya ātmā jagatas tasthuśca*. It means that the solar power is the vital Life-Force of the universe of all animate and inanimate objects of the world.

‘Rudra’ means those who make a life, make a human being cry *rodhayati iti rudra*. We cry for our unending want and thirst for our inordinate desires. These rudras are eleven in number. The sense faculty, a great combination of five senses perceivable by knowledge, *jñānendriya* and the other five perceivable by activities, *karmendriya*. The eleventh one is mind. Mind is the preserver of all imprints of every thought and activity. Indra represents Mind-Power. The word *indriya* is derived from his name. His realm is *swar*, a word which means sun or luminous. Aditya or surya represents illumination and *swar* is the mental plane that receives the illumination.

Srimad Sankaracharya has explained *manah*, mind in his notes on the Upanishads and Vedānta philosophy. In Kenopaniṣad, he said *manute anena iti manah*. About the illumined mind he has said *na hi antahkaraṇamantarena caitanya jyotiṣa dipitam. Svaviśaya saṁkalpa adhyānādi samarthan syat*. It means that without the illumination of consciousness, mind will not be able to perceive properly and perform perfectly. So mind and intellect and integral knowledge must be united.

Vayu is associated with *prāṇa*, the life energy. Indra, Vayu both purify the mind with divine illumination for the activities of the Truth-Consciousness, and Mitra and Varuna, the power of illumination and the power of thought. So they accomplish a richly luminous thought (*dhi*) and represent the working of the Truth in the human mind and temperament.

Rishi Vak declared *aham somamāhanasam bivarṁyahan tvaṣṭaramūta pūṣanam bhagam*. This hymn means ‘I bear, I carry these deities Soma, Tvaṣṭā Pūṣan and Bhaga. Soma represents *ānanda*, the wine of divine bliss and delight of immortality which comes from within. This happiness, this peace of mind comes from contentment, *santoṣ* and it showers the ambrosia, the fountain of

nectar in every sphere of life.

Here we remember the famous lines of sadhak Ramprasad *surāpān korine āmi, sudhā khāi kālī bole* – I do not drink wine but enjoy the bliss of nectar. She exclaimed *aham rāṣṭri sangamani vaṣunām* – I pervade the universe, aggregate all the wealth. I am the equilibrium of all the riches. *Rāṣṭri* means the sovereign power of all the states. Here the word state does not mean narrowly a piece of land but the ocean of spheres – *triloka, jala, sthala antarikṣa*, the entire atmosphere and wealth. Riches in our *sanātana dharma* mean more than material riches or wealth. It implies the richness or the riches of Mind, mentality.

Rishi Vak declared – I am the inward spirit, the pure existence in all matters and forms of the universe. The sanctified ascetic lady asserted – I am affixed in everything, I am all in all, *bhūriṣṭhātrām bhūryāveśyantim*.

Herein lies the cohesion, the homogeneous character of the universe. All the gods of Veda, all the deities have a profound base of scientific reasoning and metaphysical inner meaning. These are the definite psychological expressions of human mind and they work on mind to perfect a human mind’s intellect, *dhi*, the thought-power. Agni is the heat, it is that energy, that force which helps a being to live, to sustain, to proceed, *agre nayatiti agni*. This energy generates will-force in the mind. So Agni is the Mother-Force, *janitṛī śakti, mātṛī śakti* of human mind’s power of will, *icchā śakti*.

Agni is the human aspiration. These – Indra, Agni, Mitra, Varuna are the manifestation of that one infinite supreme Power or Energy or Force which gives birth to three streams of forces – *jñānaśakti*, power of knowledge, *icchā śakti*, power of will *saṁkalpa, kṛatu* and power of activities, power of performance, *karmaśakti* or *kriyāśakti*. Each one is correlated by a causal connection. Everyone connected, tied by an unobserved tie, the cause of the causes, the primordial female or Mother-Energy, *ādīśakti*. These have an effect and an impelling force on the human being’s body, soul and mind, *bhuḥ, bhuvah, swar*.

Rishi Vak articulated with radiance *mayā so annamati yo vipaśyati* – all creatures, all the beings eat and drink and can see and hear, talk and walk because of my gracious presence in them. She announced with affirmation *yaṁ kāmāye tantamugra kṛṇomi tvam brahmānam tamṛṣim tvam sumedhām* – I create everyone as I wish.

Upto the fifth hymn of this Devi sukta the oneness, the pantheism, the spiritual identity between the individual and the universal is depicted. All the manifestations of the Absolute have been described. According to Sri Aurobindo ‘the Gods in the Veda represent Universal Powers descended from the Truth-Consciousness,

Ritam; which builds up the harmony of the worlds. For it is the Will – the Vedic *kratu*; the inner sacrifice, the sadhana, the devotional practice – that is in harmony with the revelation of the Truth and as it enters more and more into the wideness of the Truth-Consciousness becomes wider and vast, free from limitation.’

We can well see the reflection in Tagore’s poem – ‘*hr̥day āji more kemoney gelo khuli, jagat āsi koriche kolākuli*’. Rishi Vak realised this power of *Ritam*, the Truth-Consciousness of the entire universe within herself. As the *Isopanishad* says

*Yastu sarvāṇi bhūtāni ātmanyevānupaśyati
Sarbabhūteṣu cātmanam tatoḥ na vijugupsate (Īśa,6)*

He or she who does not discriminate, but can behold
Everything within him or herself human afflictions (*tritāp*) stay afar
from him or her and she enjoys the bliss of oneness.

*yasmin sarvāni bhūtāni ātmaivābhūd vijānataḥ
Tatra ko mohah kaḥ śoka ekatvamanupaśyataḥ (Īśa,7)*

He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are
Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded,
whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?

As Rishi Vak achieved, realised this self-knowledge, as she perceived this spiritual oneness, the unison she became bewildered. She declared she is stringing the bow of *Praṇava*. *Praṇava* is the monosyllabic word *Aum*, the mystic name of Param Brahman, the threefold divinities, *trayi* Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara and the three atmospheric regions *bhuh*, *buvah*, *swar*, *jāgrat*, *swapna* and *suṣupti* and the threefold powers of life – body, soul, mind.

She is stringing the bow of *Praṇava* to eradicate the worldly attachments for the emancipation of the soul of human being

aham rudrāya dhanurā tanomi brahmadviṣe śarabe hantabā u.

I am the origin, the first primordial Energy, primordial Power, I am the original Water from which the universe sprung, the Supreme Consciousness, *parā caitanya*, the unalterable eternal Intuition in the intellect of beings. I created every bit of the universe and I hold and bear everything and like the wind I blow, I flow upon the three worlds, *bhuh*, *bhuvah*, and *swar* but I am indifferent to everything.

*Ahameva vāta iva pra vāmyāravamānā bhuvanāni viśvāḥ
Paro divā para enā prthivaityābati mahina sam babhūtaḥ*

This Rig Vedic Devi Sukta is complete.

The question that now arises is that if *aham* is the symbol of *ahamkāra*, egoism, conceit, for attaining the ultimate realisation egoism should be renounced. If we split the word *aham*, we see that the *Aa* is the first vowel pronounced in *śruti*. This is *ādi swar*, means Vishnu, *paramātma*. According to *varnamālā tattva*, *ha* means *ākāśa* and *anuswara* means *swasti* and *śānti*. That means satisfaction and peace of mind. So the word *aham* means *paramātma*. This Devi sukta is the combination, the compilation of the Vedic doctrine of integral knowledge, *jñānakāṇḍa* and *karmakāṇḍa*, the principles of rituals and regulations.

Sri Sri Saptasatī Chandī or Devi Māhātmya is eulogy of the magnitude of that Supreme Power, the Divine Mother-Force. The seven hundred hymns of Devi Māhātmya of Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa are the analysis of this Rig Vedic Devi Sukta. These eight hymns of ecstasy of divine bliss are a surge of delight and a unique musical concord of universal harmony, a rapture enchanting the world of galaxies.

Aum Tat Sat Aum

References:

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2. *Devi-Sukta* - Rig Veda 10/125/1
3. *Sri Sri Saptashatī Chandī* - *Devi-Sukta*
4. Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, v.10, p.8
5. *Isopanishad* - 6,7
6. *Devi-Sukta* - 8

The Primacy of the Divine Works: Understanding Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of the Gita

R.C.PRADHAN

Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Gita¹ is a unique recreation of the message of the Gita which synthesises diverse thoughts of the text into one integral system and emphasises the primacy of the Divine Will over human will and actions. The Gita is originally conceived as a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna about *brahmavidya* or the metaphysics of the Divine Reality and it teaches a *yogasastra* or the doctrine of Yoga². Sri Aurobindo keeps the original intentions of the Gita intact in his interpretation by emphasising the metaphysical tone of the Gita underlined by the practical teachings of the Yoga. He makes the Gita free from the sectarian interpretations for the reason that the Gita itself aims at a synthesis of all views in Indian philosophy and makes an all-out effort to transcend the divisions among all metaphysical and ethical schools.

In this essay I will take up for discussion on the central theme in the Gita, namely, the nature of the primacy of the Divine Will and Works vis-à-vis the human will and actions and examine how Sri Aurobindo reconciles the Divine Will, on the one hand, and human freedom and agency, on the other. The problem of the compatibility between divine necessity and individual freedom is solved by Sri Aurobindo within the framework of the Gita by showing that the human freedom and agency are not antagonistic to the Divine Will.

1.The Divine Will and the Divine Works:The Basic Principle of the Gita

The metaphysical framework of the Gita stands on the principle of the Divine Will which is the bedrock of the universe or the cosmos which includes the human world. The Divine Reality is called the Purushottama or the Brahman, the supreme Spirit. Sri Aurobindo characterises this Reality in the following way:

We arrive at the first description of this supreme Purusha,— the Godhead who is even more and greater than the Immutable and to whom the Gita gives subsequently the name of Purushottama. He, too, in his timeless eternity is immutable and far beyond all this manifestation and here in Time there dawn on us only faint glimpses of his being conveyed through many varied symbols and disguises a *avyakto akṣarah*³.

The Gita's metaphysics of the Purushottama is meant to characterise Reality in personal terms not only because the personal terms are more suggestive, but also because they ultimately describe the supreme Divine as the one supreme Being. The supreme Being or Brahman is all that counts in the ultimate analysis, because it remains beyond all descriptions and thought-constructions. In the metaphysical scheme of the Gita, the reality of world and man is derived from and dependent on the supreme Reality or Brahman. Gita accepts the reality of the world and man as ultimately supported and sustained by the supreme Godhead⁴.

In view of this, it is worthwhile to know how the divine works, that is, the actions of the Godhead affect the universe at large. The Gita takes the universe as the manifestation of the Godhead and therefore all the activities in the universe are logically workings of the Godhead. These divine works, as Sri Aurobindo calls them, constitute the incessantly flowing universe such that all the actions in the universe including the physical happenings are the works of the Godhead. God is the ceaseless worker⁵, according to the Gita. The Gita model of the universe is such that in it the universe is dynamic to the core and it is presided by the supreme Divine Being. The Divine Being is the source of the universe and is also the maintainer of it such that nothing happens in it which is not directed by the Divine Being. In a sense, the Godhead is manifesting Himself in all the universe's happenings.

One cannot fail to notice here that in the Gita the universal drama that takes place is played by the Divine Being and that He is the sole Agent that makes the universe run on the prescribed course. One may take this as a case of divine determinism according to which nothing moves except by the Divine Will. All the actions and events taking place in the universe are controlled by the Divine Will. Such a universe has the following features:

- 1.The universe is divinely (not physically) closed, since all that happens in the universe is ultimately governed by divine laws⁶.
- 2.The human life and actions are part of the universe and so are embedded in the Divine Being. The reality of the human being is a part of the divine existence.

3.The Divine Will is the source of man and the universe and so is beyond them both.

2.On How the Divine Works in Man and the Universe

Sri Aurobindo makes a Divine-centric interpretation of the universe in view of the Gita's assertion that there is nothing in the universe that is not caused by the Divine Being⁷. It is in this sense that the Gita unfolds the cosmic form (*viśwarupam*) of the Divine Being which shows that everything that is happening now or has happened in the past or will happen in the future is due to the divine law⁸. But then the question arises: How does the Divine work in and through the universe and man? The Gita is explicit on this. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The supreme Nature, *para prakṛtiḥ*, is then the infinite timeless conscious power of the self-existent Being out of which all existences of the cosmos are manifested and come out of timelessness into Time. But in order to provide a spiritual basis for this manifold universal becoming in the cosmos the supreme Nature formulates itself as the Jiva⁹.

What is unfolded here is the way the Divine works in the universe by dividing its own Nature into the multiple phenomena. His supreme Nature is the matrix of all the phenomenal existence. "All existences are instinct with the life of one indivisible Spirit; all are supported in their personality, actions and forms by the eternal multiplicity of the one Puruṣa"¹⁰.

Sri Aurobindo emphasises the fact that in the Gita the universe must be understood as Divine-centric and so must be taken as the Becoming in relation the Being. It is the unfolding of the Divine in Time that makes the universe the process of Becoming. The intricate metaphysical relation between Being and Becoming in the Gita can best be understood in terms of the idea of the temporalisation of the Timeless in the form of the universe. Time is not antagonistic to the Timeless because it is the latter which takes the form of Time. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

God is imperishable, beginningless, unending Time; this is his most evident Power of becoming and the essence of the whole universal movement. *Aham eva aksayah kala*. In that movement of Time and Becoming God appears to our conception or experience of him by evidence of his works as the divine Power who ordains and sets all things in their place in the movement¹¹.

Thus the Divine Being works in and through the manifested beings in the universe and makes them move according to a divine plan. The universe is well

ordered because of its divine origin and so there is place for every being in this divine scheme of things. The Gita does not allow for a chaotic universe precisely because the universe is presided over by the supreme Puruṣa¹².

Now the question arises: Why, according to the Gita, does the Divine Being work, when He is supposed to be the self-complete, eternal and transcendent Being? There is no reason for the transcendent Being to work. The Gita's response is that if God does not work, then He will set a wrong model for everybody and the universe will meet its own destruction¹³. The inner meaning of this is that God Himself is an active Agent in the universe because He is the presiding Deity over the whole set of activities going in the universe. Sri Aurobindo therefore takes Gita's God as the supreme Divine Being who manifests Himself in the universe in a ceaseless way for the benefit of all creatures. He writes:

As the Divine manifest in cosmic Nature he acts in close identity with Nature. He is himself then Nature, so to speak, but with a spirit within her workings which foresees and forewills, understands and enforces, compels the action, overrules in the result¹⁴.

That is to say, the Divine Being works through Nature which is its instrument and Himself remains detached to the ongoing activities of the Nature. The Divine Being is the real doer, but remains beyond the universe. In a sense, He does everything and yet does nothing. The Godhead is the centre of the universe and the Spirit, but He remains beyond everything. "He bears the universe as the secret spirit in us bears our thoughts, works, movements"¹⁵.

The Divine Being also works through man because man is part of the universe and is integral to the divine scheme of things. The Gita views man from a cosmo-centric and divine-centric point of view and therefore takes human actions as part of the divine works. Human beings are not central to the Gita's picture of the universe, because they owe their existence to the Divine Being and in that sense, all that they do are part of the cosmic order. Sri Aurobindo brings out this point of view in his emphasis on the divine nature of the human self and also its absolute dependence on the Divine. Man, for Sri Aurobindo, is a divine worker such that all that he does is actuated by the Divine Force. He says:

Again, the sign of the divine worker is that which is central to the divine consciousness itself, a perfect inner joy and peace which depends upon nothing in the world for its source or its continuance; it is innate, it is the very stuff of the soul's consciousness, it is the very nature of the divine being¹⁶.

3. Man as the Divine Worker: the Meeting of the Divine and Man

The main challenge before the Gita is how to make man realise that he is a divine worker and that he must act with the realisation that he is doing everything as the instrument¹⁷ (*nimitta*) of the Divine Being. This realisation is the ultimate aim of the Yoga and ethics of the Gita. The Gita presents the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna as the dialogue between Divine and Man for making this realisation possible.

The metaphysics of the unity between the Divine and Man is the main theme of the Gita which brings to the fore the necessity of redefining the human nature in terms of the divine spirit. Man is taken as the embodiment of the Spirit or the Godhead because human existence is a part of the divine consciousness which pervades the universe. Human existence is in space and time and is bound to the world and its laws. In that sense, the Gita defines human existence in terms of temporality and finitude. But this aspect of the human existence is the contingent aspect of the embodied self which is subject to decay and death. It is this aspect of human being which is changing (*kṣara*) and ephemeral. But there is another aspect of the human self which is unchanging and immortal and that is the Atman or the soul which never dies and can never be destroyed¹⁸. It is this immortal soul or Atman which is divine in origin and is part (*aṁsa*) of the Divine Reality. In this respect, the human reality is beyond space and time and is the transcendental self. The Gita is committed to the reality of the transcendental self as a part of the Divine Being. This makes man and the Divine meet in their essential nature.

However, human beings are not aware of their divine nature as they are shrouded in *avidya* or ignorance. Man's egoistic nature does not reveal the true self and so it is propelled by its own desires and passions and forgets its own being. This state of forgetfulness is called in the Gita the bondage of man. The Jiva feels alienated from the Brahman and thus falls into darkness and so cannot see the Self. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The ordinary mind and life of man is a half-enlightened and mostly an ignorant and partial uncompleted manifestation of something concealed within him. There is a godhead there concealed from himself, subliminal to his consciousness, immobilised behind the obscure veil of a working that is not wholly his own and the secret of which he has not yet mastered¹⁹

Such an ignorant man is bound to suffer in the cycle of worldly activities and is therefore condemned into the cycle of birth and death. The Gita's assumption

is that such a man goes from birth to birth without knowing the root cause of his suffering. The Gita does not shy away from the assumption of rebirth as it gives many chances to human beings to get liberated by spiritual elevation.

For the spiritual elevation of man, the Gita introduces Yoga as the practice of spiritual and moral values. The essential teachings of the Gita are concerning the practice of Yoga and the values associated with it. Its Yoga has been described as Karmayoga but the other forms of Yoga such as Jnanayoga and Bhaktiyoga are part of the Gita's system of Yoga. Sri Aurobindo takes Yoga as an Integral Yoga²⁰ because it presents a synthesis of all jnana, bhakti and karma. For him Gita redefines Yoga keeping in view the larger goal of man, namely how to become a divine worker. The Gita minces no words in rejecting the prevailing forms of yoga which emphasised total renunciation of life and action in the world. It turns Yoga into an active participation in the Divine Works such that man is liberated from the confines of the ego and his limited life in the world. The true Yoga lies in performing actions with the spirit of sacrifice to the Divine. The essence of Karmayoga as Sri Aurobindo sees it is as follows:

Works must be done as a sacrifice to this Lord of works, and we must by growing into the Self realise our oneness with him in our being and see our personality as a partial manifestation of him in Nature. One with him in being we grow one with all beings in the universe and do the divine works, not as ours, but as his workings through us for the maintenance and leading of the peoples²¹.

The quintessential divine worker is one who does all actions in the spirit of surrender and sacrifice (*yajna*) to the Lord of the universe. That shows that though he performs the action he does not claim its authorship and thus forgoes all claims to the results, good or bad. The karmayogi lives in the world and actively participates in all actions by surrendering all these to the Lord. This liberates him from the bondage to himself and the world. The karmayogi gets freedom from bondage by virtue of snapping all bonds with the ego of oneself. "For that we have to get first away into ourselves from the action of the external world upon our senses; that is to say, we have to live inwardly and be able to hold back the natural running of the senses after their external objects"²². The release from the ego is the first step towards spiritual freedom of the agent or the doer of actions. The complete surrender of the actions of the agent to the Divine is a sine qua non of the complete spiritual freedom of the karmayogi.

4. The Divine Agency vs the Human Agency

The Gita postulates two kinds of agency, namely the divine and human for

the reason that the Divine or the Godhead, unlike man, is the ultimate initiator of all activities in the universe. Human agency is of a subordinate kind, because the Divine Agency is the source of the human agency. The Divine Will and the Divine Agency go together because what we call the Divine Will is itself the primary initiator of all activities of the universe. That is, from the Divine Will everything follows as a matter of divine necessity. The Divine Purusha brings out the universe containing the objects both moving and non-moving (*sacaracara*) out of Himself or the Para Shakti which is His higher Nature²³. In that sense, the Divine Purusha is active in the universe as the supreme Agent who is “the Timeless manifest as Time and World-Spirit from whom the comm- and to action proceeds. For certainly the Godhead when he says “I am Time the Destroyer of beings” does not mean either that he is the Time-Spirit alone or that the whole essence of the Time-Spirit is destruction. But it is this which is the present will of his workings, *pravrtii* ²⁴.

However, the Gita accords agency to human beings so far as they are the instruments of the divine actions and it is in the human world that actions properly take place. Human actions, as defined by the Gita, pertain to what human beings do according to their will which is active in them. All human agents are involved in actions (karma) in the world because without actions they cannot survive²⁵. That is, the human self is so constituted that it is always engaged in action in the world. This is the reason why the Gita does not prescribe renunciation of action because it goes against the laws of Nature. Man by his own nature is involved in actions such as physical, mental and verbal. Given the inevitability of human actions, it is pertinent to raise the question whether human beings can give up action at all.

What the Gita prescribes, however, is the renunciation of attachment to the fruits of action, that is, the attachment to one’s agency. The agent’s ego limits or circumscribes the sphere of his or her own action. It converts all action into selfish action born out of the ego-sense. This has to be denied if action is to become truly divine action. The divine worker shuns his ego and his ego-infected agency and does his action out of reverence for the divine law. The Divine Will commands him to do what he does and the divine worker surrenders his ego to the Divine Being. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

The highest way appointed for him (the agent) is to carry out the will of God without egoism, as the human occasion and instrument of that which he sees to be decreed, with the constant supporting memory of the Godhead in himself and man, *mam anusmaran*, and in whatever ways are appointed for him by the Lord of his Nature. *Nimittamatram bhava savyasacin*²⁶.

Thus the human agency has to be rid of its ego-sense and then only can it become the true agency. In this sense, the Gita points out that a true agent is the divine agent even in the case of the human being. The human agent must feel that he or she is the divine agent and is doing actions which are ordained by God. Such is the status of the divine worker in the scheme of the Gita. Sri Aurobindo says:

All individual, all social action, all the works of the intellect, the heart and body are still his, not any longer for his own separate sake, but for the sake of God in the world, of God in all beings and that all those beings may move forward, as he has moved, by the path of works towards the discovery of the Divine in themselves²⁷.

This is the way we can redefine the human agency as transcending its lower order agency and becoming of a higher order since the latter identifies itself with the Divine Agency. The human agency transforms itself to a higher order agency by virtue of moral and spiritual effort which is called Yoga in the Gita.

5.Divine Necessity vs Human Freedom

The Gita struggles with the reconciliation of the divine necessity with the human freedom in view of its commitment to the availability of liberation or *moksa* for the human beings through the practice of Yoga. The divine is necessity imprinted in the universe not as the necessity of a causal law in Nature but as the divine law which is the basic law in the universe. For example, the divine law determines the emergence of the universe out of the initial state of existence. The physical universe evolves out of the initial conditions by the necessity of the physical laws, but why the universe came into existence at all can be explained only by appeal to the Divine Will, according to the Gita. The Gita’s explanation of the why of the universe is a metaphysical explanation and so we have to look for the Divine Will as the ultimate principle of existence. Such a universe is no doubt a divinely determined universe.

But the question is, does the divine necessity contradict human freedom? The determinists generally argue that if the universe is determined, then man has no freedom because everything is already determined by a divine agency. Therefore, if God is real, then human freedom is denied. Such is the extreme determinist position in metaphysics. But the fact of the matter is that when we assume the determined character of the universe, we assume that man himself is determined like stones and stars or even by the sub-human animals. But the

compatibilists²⁸ have always argued that such is not the case because both freedom and universal determinism can exist together. Man is free so far as his actions are concerned, while the universe has a causal order. In a chaotic universe, even human actions will not be possible. The Gita argues for human freedom in a compatibilist manner in the sense that it admits human will and action in a God-ruled world. The latter is necessarily governed by the divine law and yet man exercises his will to obey or disobey the divine law. If he obeys the law, he becomes a free agent but if he goes against the law, he remains in bondage of his ego and is condemned into ignorance.

Man's freedom is a fundamental fact of the universe in the sense that man engages in action and also by knowing the true nature of his own self, he frees himself from the ego-induced bondage. Freedom is due to knowledge of the ultimate nature of Reality including his own higher self. If he has no freedom can he be expected to surrender himself to the Divine? That is, can he be expected to rise to the higher self? Here there are two kinds of freedom: freedom of choice, that is, freedom to and freedom from²⁹. The latter is the spiritual freedom in the sense freedom from bondage, while the other is the freedom in the sense of having will for action. In both senses, freedom is guaranteed to man. The divine necessity is the very foundation of both kinds of freedom because without that man cannot be taken as having a free will. Therefore the Gita in the ultimate analysis allows man to choose what he wants to do after knowing the basic metaphysical Truth about himself and the universe (*yathechchasi tatha kuru*)³⁰.

The basic problem for the Gita is to convince the individual man about his own divine identity and his obligation to the Divine Reality. The Gita is not a Gospel of social action or action for the welfare of all but a Gospel of the divine works which necessarily entails action for the welfare of all (*lokasamgraha*). Sri Aurobindo puts this as follows:

Undoubtedly, the Gita is a Gospel of Works, but of works which culminate in knowledge, that is, in spiritual realisation and quietude, and of works motivated by devotion, that is, a conscious surrender of one's whole self first into the hands and then into the being of the Supreme, and not at all of works as they are understood by the modern mind, not at all an action dictated to by egoistic and altruistic, by personal, social, humanitarian motives, principles and ideals³¹.

That is to say, the Gita teaches us to work in the universe with the knowledge that we are not the real doers but instruments of the Divine.

To conclude: the Gita is a Gospel of Divine Works, according to Sri Aurobindo

for it teaches us to engage in actions in the battlefield of life and the world as true divine workers. This is the supreme secret of the Gita, according to him, because it opens before us the path of the ascent to the Divine Reality, not by renouncing life and world, but by being engaged with it in the spirit of a divine worker.

Notes and References

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6. *Ibid.*, IX, 18-19.
7. *Ibid.*, X, 39-40.
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27. *Ibid.*, p.139.
28. Cf. A.J. Ayer, "Freedom and Necessity" in *Philosophical Essays*, (Macmillan, London, 1954).
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The Way of Experience – a search for one's Psychic Being

Deepti Tewari

After the decisive experience of 29th February 1956, which announced the birth of a new world, the Mother made a call to all who love adventure – the Great Adventure – she called it. It was, she said, no more a matter of repeating spiritually what others had done before, for the adventure began beyond that. It was a matter of a new creation, wholly new, the road to which had to be hewn, step by step, in the unexplored. And whose goal was a complete transformation of the material world and the establishment of a divine life upon earth. A much vaster outward action was initiated, at this point, which would give birth, among other things, to the ambitious Auroville experiment.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have launched an immense spiritual adventure, the attempt to realise which has never been tried before. Up to the present all Yogas, all individual efforts at finding and uniting with the Divine have been largely content to discard, to leave the material world just as it is. Moreover, the field of yoga has not been openly available; it has been a domain of initiates or those who seem to have a special aptitude. The demands of Sri Aurobindo's yoga which is on the contrary concerned with the material world and which must work its way through the obscurities of the instrumental nature, the mind, the life and the body, are thus quite different from those of other yogas. And most significantly, the very seeking for the Divine has been generalised into the larger human collectivity – of course if it assents to the conversion. Everyone is given a chance, there seems to be only one main criterion for selection: a burning aspiration that consumes all limits in the fire of its ardour.

The question that inevitably arises in any sincere individual seeker is: What can I do to actively participate in this great change? Is there an attitude, position, centre of consciousness that I may assume to make the journey easier? Sri Aurobindo and the Mother gave much time and attention to addressing the concerns of sadhaks on the processes of their yoga. Mother's *Conversations*

and Sri Aurobindo's *Letters on Yoga* are so many luminous guideposts given to representative seekers in which answers can be found. But if one were to summarise what is asked for, then the primary task for each individual is to find and unite with his or her own psychic being: the conscious, evolutionary soul seated in the inmost chamber of the heart. If the psychic being could be brought forward and made the true master of mind, life and body, much of the darkness that is associated with human life could be dissipated. This is the first step. Sri Aurobindo and The Mother never tire of repeating this: aspirants must light a psychic fire within into which all is thrown with the Divine Name upon it. And in that fire are purified all emotions, every undivine perversion in the being burned away, so the being can awaken at last to a divine delight.

What does this entail? The initial movements of the yoga involve breaking through the walls of the limited mentality, and transcending the trammelled life of the unregenerate vital and physical. Our habitual mental scaffoldings and vital supports need to be removed in this process of dynamic change. We must accept to be suspended for a while with nothing to hold us up and keep us going but our faith and trust, until we are able at last to step through that deep grotto in our inmost heart to realise the bliss of the psychic. Unfortunately, not many are ready to embark upon this journey, there is always one more outer reason to hold one back!

There is much that can be said about this mystical instant when something in the being, a dissatisfaction, a disquiet perhaps or an inchoate yearning awakens and one turns at last to the pursuit of the unknowable. Even so, there comes a moment, which may arise for numerous outer reasons, when the outer life palls. It loses its hold upon the being. One is ready at last for the greatest of all adventures: the journey into one's Self.

Nothing could satisfy but its delight:
Its absence left the greatest actions dull,
Its presence made the smallest seem divine.
When it was there, the heart's abyss was filled;
But when the uplifting Deity withdrew,
Existence lost its aim in the Inane.

(*Savitri*, 4th rev.ed, 1993, pp.305-6)

What follows is an attempt to string together some luminous threads, collate a few laboratory notes as it were, culled from the much that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have clarified, which might be of use through the process of forging the outer nature in the fires of the psychic truth of the being.

Another way of Knowing

A most disconcerting discovery we make when entering the inner countries is that all the knowledge we have acquired outwardly becomes somewhat redundant. No amount of erudition or scholarship can help one find one's psychic being. What gets us there is that need, so unavoidable that nothing else counts. It is the pursuit of that and that alone for without it life is empty, inane.

But there are movements, as well as powers and faculties within us that can make the journey easier. The mind, as long as it does not arrogate to itself a larger role, is an excellent tool to bring order and method into the process. When it beams its eye within, the first thing it can observe is that the turn towards conversion requires two simultaneous movements. Our being is organised both concentrically and vertically. In the concentric structure, the psychic is to be found at the core of the inmost sheath. We have to plunge to profound depths, into a deepest chamber to bring it forward. And we must take care not to conflating the psychic being with the inner mind, inner vital and inner physical of all of which it must become the master. We also discover that we are connected to each of the planes of the world (both rising above us into the superconscious and descending below into the unconscious). It is always the power of the higher planes that has to be brought down to transform the lower, but the mere human consciousness is inapt to fulfil this work. This action can be undertaken safely only by the Force of the *Mahashakti*. Her Force streams into us in the measure of our opening and surrender and the extent to which we have 'cleaned' our house to make her welcome! As the being grows in purity this infusion of the Conscious-Force is what creates the ascension of consciousness.

The Faculty of Identification

Human beings have a faculty that can prove very useful in this quest for our inmost self. What we know to be ourselves is a customary mass of thoughts, reactions and feelings that we think we are, simply because we habitually identify ourselves with them. But quiet and conscious observation shows that it is merely the movements within us of universal nature to which we seem inclined to be open. If we can stop identifying ourselves with these reactions, if we identify ourselves with something else, we can change who we are. We have merely to shift this capacity for identification from nature's movements in outer life into the inner planes, even into the inmost plane. We have to tell ourselves that we are a spark of the eternal and undying soul and must be therefore worthy of embodying it.

Sometimes it is useful to provide ourselves with an idea, an expressive figure

or a symbol to which we can attach our aspiration. When we adhere to any image or form or expressive figure, we can make ourselves grow towards it by emulation. What we admire we want secretly to be: that which we worship – we may become. This power of emulation has been recognised in India as a great motor force for growth and change. Indian tradition offers a choice of Gods, *ishta devatas*, and some very potent symbols and expressive figures are to be found in the Epics and Puranic legends. In our quest for the Psychic being, one figure offers up itself as a perfect model: this is Radha.

Radha is forever associated with Krishna in a mystical union celebrated in countless legend, myth and song. The intense Bhakti of the popular mind of India has been nurtured upon this significant cult. Even now if one travels to centres of Vaishnavism, where the cult of Sri Krishna is predominant, most especially the Brindavan area, known as *Braj Bhoomi*, one can experience the power of her presence. Radha embodies the consciousness that all must assume when turning towards Godhead. She is the symbol of a perfect surrender, a perfect self-giving, a perfect acceptance of all life's touches, even those that come in the guise of disasters – so absolute is her mystical union with the Beloved. All that comes to her in life is an ecstasy and rapture for she receives each thing, contrary or positive, as a gift divine. And, this direct perception keeps her in a state of supreme felicity.

Here is a vibrant representation of the pure psychic consciousness when it has taken possession of the mind, the vital and the physical and casts them in the moulds of its flawless self-offering. All we have to do is to live this consciousness and measure our own surrender, our own growth into the psychic consciousness by our capacity to be Radha. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have both spoken of this figure. There is a creeper, whose flower the Mother called Radha's Consciousness, from which a healing syrup is made. Also from the Mother is a wonderful little meditation which she called *Radha's Prayer*. In limpid, luminous simplicity, Radha offers the truth of her being at the feet of the All Beloved. Examples of unconditional and unquestioning surrender exist in other traditions but nowhere is there the vibrancy and comprehensiveness of Radha's expressive figure. Indeed, Sri Aurobindo speaks in one of his Aphorisms of the birth of devotional religion which took place in Brindavan during Krishna's exile, as one of the great events of world history. To be captivated by the charm of the Divine Flute Player, to become a *gopi* in that eternal paradise where Krishna dances his Lila, may be an experience that transcends all things.

Radha's Prayer

O Thou whom at first sight I knew for the lord of my being and my God,
receive my offering.

Thine are all my thoughts, all my emotions, all the sentiments of my heart, all my sensations, all the movements of my life, each cell of my body, each drop of my blood. I am absolutely and altogether Thine, Thine without reserve. What Thou wilt of me, that I shall be. Whether Thou choosest for me life or death, happiness or sorrow, pleasure or suffering, all that comes to me from Thee will be welcome. Each one of Thy gifts will be always for me a gift divine bringing with it the supreme Felicity. (13 January, 1932)

Were we able to personify each of these states of being in the forms of our own mental vital and physical consciousness, then we would have no need for emancipation or liberation for we would live ever in the sheer Delight of being. Radha represents the highest individual realisation; beyond her beckons the spiritual transformation bringing with it the descent of the universal.

Transformation

Sri Aurobindo's yoga is concerned with transformation. It does not permit one to escape the outer realms. One does not have the luxury to retire into superconscious domains and meet the divine in the higher mind and higher vital alone. Each time one ascends one has to correspondingly descend further. One has to bring the light down. It is often not understood how much the process of transformation is one of disintegration. One has to repeatedly take apart the present poise of the being; literally dis-integrate its existing balance. A shift in the centre of the gravity is needed. Normally we allow the movements of nature to flow in and through us, but now the inner Purusha, provisionally the inner mental, vital and physical, but finally the psychic Purusha has to be enthroned. To develop a deep inner life one has to reorganise and reorient the outward direction that one's education and training have given the being. To consciously convert oneself from one's earthbound caterpillar crawl to the butterfly that flies through the air one has to literally change one's dimension.

One has to go into the fourth dimension, remarked the Mother when trying to describe where the Divine is; not something far away and beyond reach – but there at the core of everything, only not in a dimension available to the outer nature. But as long as we identify with our lower nature the process is quite painful. Cut a chrysalis open and one would find something closer to a decomposing insect with neither the solid caterpillar strength nor yet the light airiness of the butterfly! Until we spread our butterfly wings in the new dimension we still are tied to earth.

In most people there is a division between the internal and external being. The former may want the Truth and the Divine but the other pursues its own

path. In a letter, Sri Aurobindo has remarked that the external nature of most of the sadhaks who turn to his yoga is like that of almost all human beings, very selfish, self-centred and full of desire. The trouble is that in this yoga it does not really help to have a much advanced inner being if the outer consciousness refuses change and continues to pursue its fixed nature. This yoga insists upon results in the external nature.

Much painstaking labour is needed. And we cannot by our own unaided aspiration and will conquer the forces of our lower nature. Our will and aspiration have to bring down the divine Force and keep our being on its side while dealing with the lower parts. It is the Divine force fulfilling the spiritual will, and the heart's psychic aspiration which can alone bring about the conquest. Initially the higher force works on our inner being and prepares it, while it is our own psychic being that must be brought forward to change the outer nature. Therefore if we wish to tread the sunlit way, to be one of the fortunate few, the psychic needs to be in command. It alone can transmute by its presence the condition and substance of outer circumstances; it is the touchstone that turns all into fuel for accelerated growth.

Psychicising the Vital

In one of his responses, Sri Aurobindo remarks that everything is dangerous in the sadhana or can be except the psychic change. An entry into the inner countries does unleash many unexpected difficulties. Here the seeker has to find the right attitude to front these troubles. Whatever the experiences that come to us in life, even the most terrible, one has emphatically never to see oneself as a victim. However adverse a situation it can always be a moment for growth and progress. One meets life's circumstances with the strong soul's poise and confidence for this too helps to keep the psychic presence in front.

Indeed the yoga of transformation does not seem to encourage siddhis or realisations; one can even argue that these can be a great handicap! Simple workers, ready to do a quiet and humble labour in material domains are required. The fundamental necessity is to clean up the terrestrial inconscient and there everyone, without exception, is a mere worker – perhaps with a vaster or lesser field of work – but the toil is exactly the same and there is no superiority here except perhaps in the capacity to take up a larger share of the burden.

If one wants to be protected from surrounding human reactions and encircled always by a sort of *Lakshman Rekha* of the Divine's Grace, whatever the outer appearance of circumstances, then it is essential to surrender completely. Each time one suffers, all one can say is: 'my surrender is incomplete'. One recognises that one's field of action is entirely in one's own hands, for no one

can decide what one's reaction to a situation will be except oneself. Even in the ordinary conditions of the world there are extraordinary examples of the manner in which the human spirit has fronted the most frightful circumstances. The heroes are those who can turn every ordeal, every seemingly unbearable experience, into an expression of the unconquerable spirit that dwells within.

Courage stems from the secret divinity within us – it is a living demonstration of the aristocracy of the inner nature. When the vital joins in love for the Divine, says Sri Aurobindo, its contribution is to add enthusiasm and intensity to the process. The true vital is the hero, it can also embody through itself the spirit of self-sacrifice and passionate self-giving. With its help one can conquer all difficulties. An enthusiastic vital can turn every difficulty in yoga, every failure, into a grace.

It is only psychic love that is not capable of diminution due to external causes; it is not self-regarding or prone to bargaining. When the vital too is psychified it becomes filled with the trust and confidence of the psychic. Thus, even when growth comes to us veiled in the contrary mask of an ordeal, the moment can be converted into an instance of accelerated progress bringing with it a felicity and joy that a mundane response could not. And therefore one can face whatever comes with the trust that it is there for progress, that there is a Grace in it, even if one does not perceive it for the moment, and then one may lean back as if upon a cushion of the Supreme Grace and one is carried by something else through the circumstances that surround one, to the golden future that awaits.

Multiplicity of Personalities

When we turn to the yoga we make a perplexing discovery. Each of us has many personalities – not multiple but multitudinous, says Sri Aurobindo – the more we grow in complexity the more the personalities that can come in to play! Most of the time one does not agree with the other we find, and if there is no conscious control exercised by the central being, what we have is an amorphous amalgamation. Traditional yoga systems just 'sit' upon; enforce a shrivelling up, so to say on all this complexity. But it is part of the perfection required in Sri Aurobindo's yoga to accord and transmute each of these so as to have a personality that is fully integrated. This is a task only the psychic being can undertake when it is brought in the front. Therefore again this bringing forward of the psychic being is put as the very first necessity in the yoga. It is the only protection and the only acceleration that propels the being into the future.

Sri Aurobindo recommends that we work towards developing a capacity for a vivid observation of the personalities and forces that move about upon the

psychological stage of our being. We must note their motives, their impulses and their potentialities. We must have a living vision and perception of how things are done in us. It is not an analytic or ratiocinative mind that is needed here, but a seeing idea and an intuition. It is not this guilty *mea culpa* mentality we need but the quiet and determined capability to adhere at every cost to the truth of our being. Our nature has to be strong, for a weak nature invites a trampling upon it by all that is dark in the world. Also the standards we have to base ourselves upon are not necessarily those erected by moral and religious values. Sri Aurobindo disparages completely what he tellingly calls the 'intellectual ethical virtue-and-sin dodge' which he says is a mere mental construction with no real inner value. In fact, he remarks that all the values of the mind are constructions of ignorance and must be discarded and replaced by the psychic fire, which is at once a fire of aspiration, a fire of purification, a fire of Tapasya and a fire of transformation.

Higher knowledge is often confused with mental knowledge. The development of the mind brings order and structure into the thought processes, it can even bring some wideness, but this mental capacity only finds its true growth when it rises to the plasticity and wideness and comprehensiveness of the higher knowledge planes. For many intellectuals so-called, their intellectuality may be a stumbling-block as they bind themselves with mental conceptions or stifle their psychic fire under the heavy weight of rational thought. On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo speaks of comparatively uneducated people expressing higher knowledge with an astonishing fullness and depth and accuracy. It all depends, says he, upon where the consciousness places itself and concentrates itself. It is this stress of consciousness that makes all the difference. That is why one has to concentrate the consciousness in the heart centre in order to go within (or on top of the head to go above). It is, he says, the disposition of the consciousness that determines everything; makes one predominantly mental, vital, physical or psychic. The psychic discrimination is a direct perception which is filled with light, insight and tact; it always seeks what is true and right. Its presence reverses one's customary way of thinking and of being.

Consciousness is not Mentality

In one of her conversations, the Mother laments that for most people consciousness is 'thinking things out'. But consciousness is certainly not mentality; it is something wholly lucid. The mind is one instrument of consciousness but consciousness can and does express itself through all the parts of the being. The intention in the yoga is to shift the centre of consciousness from whatever its usual location – mind, vital or physical, or a combination of one of these – to

the psychic. To know mentally is to know as if through a veil; but one can know directly through the psychic being or even through the consciousness. In fact, Sri Aurobindo speaks of two kinds of understanding – understanding by the intellect and understanding in the consciousness. And while it is good to have the former if it is accurate, it is not indispensable. Unfortunately the mind and its knowledge are liable to be misled by the vital when it gets up to its tricks; therefore this is an unreliable witness. Sri Aurobindo has letters where he describes the problems of the vital; but the life power in its fullness is essential for a yoga aimed at transformation. The power of life is a ‘booty’ that must be ‘wrested back from the powers that oppose’ he remarks in one of his inimitable sentences! But the vital is a trickster; it can clothe its desires and preferences with all kinds of wonderful intentions and it hides its trickeries, resentments and disappointments under the most favourable appearances. Therefore one must be fearlessly honest with oneself, with a sincerity that never fails. Every movement, formation, direction, inclination of thought, will, emotion, sensation, action, reaction, motive, disposition, propensity, desire, habit of conscious and subconscious physical has to be lighted up unerringly in the psychic light. For those who argue that there is no prescribed method in Sri Aurobindo’s yoga, these are indeed very precise instructions!

Again, understanding by the consciousness comes if there is faith and openness, though it may come only gradually and through many steps of experience. As one grows in consciousness and the power of awareness increases, it is as if one develops antennae everywhere, remarks the Mother. A consciousness that is pure, simple and luminous shows things as they really are and not as they want to appear. It is like a screen that faithfully records all things as they pass. Each time one discovers through this screen a fault in oneself it is a great acquisition, exclaims the Mother, it is a gift that one must never ignore. It is as though a flood of light had come into oneself to show one just what needs to be changed. And if one can make a movement of offering rather than a hiding and a shrinking away; if one opens oneself and says simply – take this that I am, and change it – then it is as if a sunburst of Grace light enters the being. Difficulties are always Graces, says the Mother.

Many Destinies

Just as we may make the disconcerting discovery that we are constituted of a chaos of personalities to which we have painstakingly to bring order, so also we find that we have multiple destinies. Depending upon the part of the being which is our habitual centre of thought and action we create the conditions and circumstances of our life. We exist on many planes of consciousness

simultaneously but are habitually aware of only those zones of expression that we customarily consider to be ‘ourselves’. Each plane of consciousness, each part of the being comes with its own determinism. Our environment and education, the body we have inherited from our biological birth with its accompanying atavistic tendencies, the combination of mental and vital movements that express themselves through us – all these have created and continue to create the destiny that we think is ours. But if once we step back and desire intensely the Divine, if our aspiration, inner will and a true surrender take possession of our being it has the power to override all the other determinisms of the being. Then it is as if we have stepped on to an escalator that will take us right to the highest destiny available to us which is the destiny of our psychic being. It is at such moments that miraculous reversals take place and one can do in an instant what might take lifetimes.

Surrounded as we are by the illuminations of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, it is not justifiable that we yet pursue the limited destiny of the external being, content at most to ameliorate somewhat the complexity of the inner being, even as we turn away from the great prospect that a psychic future offers. As if there were a worldly success that could match the joy and delight that comes from the perfect peace, the shadowless light, the harmony, total beauty and irresistible power which is the divine presence.

A Call to Youth

Would it not be better to embark on the journey with time and energy and youth upon one’s side? Most people assume that yogic discipline has to be taken up in the fullness of time after much life experience. But imagine if one starts when one is young, fresh, untouched and untrammelled by innumerable mental constructions that will take forever to be dismantled. Sri Aurobindo’s call is specially addressed to youth and the youthful. The Mother wanted that children would grow up without losing contact with their souls, without catching that most rampant of all today’s diseases – utilitarianism – the pursuit of success, career and money, which acts as a dissolvent on any chance of a higher and truer life. Rather she wanted that the growth of consciousness be made the main aim of education. In one of her classes with the Ashram children she offers them a short cut. They have, she says, the possibility to be placed upon a funicular railway – just as they are, fresh, innocent, even ignorant – and this would take them straight and sure to the top of the mountain precisely because they have much psychic stuff in them that is simple and straightforward which is as yet unburdened and unblocked into any kind of construction or fixed system of knowledge. But the choice to be made is theirs, of turning to the psychic,

using the opportunity or not.

It is especially important for those who are responsible for the education of children and youth to recognise that the best they can do at every moment is to create conditions for their charges that open the way for this highest destiny, the psychic destiny. It is not a question of filling up young minds with a host of unnecessary associations and mental constructions; it is that everything that is done must encourage the movements in the being which express light. If from a young age, children are habituated to recognise that pulsating, luminous presence within themselves, if they are trained to keep it by their side always, and if this awareness is given its rightful status in the educational process, there is a chance that much pain and suffering can be mitigated. It is this light, awaiting discovery within their beings, that has to grow; not the determinisms of the material and vital life. The intention of all educational processes should be to awaken as soon as possible a conscious will within the child so that it can make the right choices at each stage of its development.

Youth need to be given the discernment that recognises the many ways of 'knowing' and that knowing outwardly has only a limited utility, that there are states upon states of consciousness and learning how to move consciously from one to the other is a great acquisition. True empowerment and a real individuality come not from mental knowledge or vital power but from the psychic. The psychic being, when it is allowed to intervene, can replace the mechanical methods of ordinary education and bring about a growth of the psychological nature in a manner that is presently quite inconceivable. This has been the intention of the educational experiments of the Ashram and Auroville. The attempt has been to see if it is possible to create a group of youth who have from the beginning grown in the psychic light and who may not therefore need to pass through the cycle of being kneaded and broken apart because of intractable outer natures. Has the opportunity for accelerated growth through harnessing the massive power of consciousness made available by Sri Aurobindo's action borne fruit or has the moment been dissipated and the force allowed merely to overflow because individual vessels have not been sufficiently enlarged?

Unfortunately, doubt and scepticism remain the malady of the modern world and often it is the tracts of an ordinary growth that are settled for, because common sense and collective suggestion encourage that path. The pursuit of a successful career and the making of money continue to dominate. Youth remain predisposed to seeking relaxation downwards, perhaps because nothing in the surrounding environment is helpful in showing that this is never a solution. The wisdom which would suggest that one should work energetically at the inner

transformation so that one may emerge victorious is not yet a leading idea. The art of living would be to maintain oneself in one's utmost state of consciousness and thus allow the highest destiny to dominate the others so that what happens shall always be the best that could, and one is propelled by the shortest route possible to one's divine truth of being.

The Grace of the Psychic

The psychic being is a special grace given to evolutionary beings upon earth, says the Mother. The psychic, by its very nature, is a being wholly surrendered to the Divine. It is the Bhakta. In an illuminating letter, Sri Aurobindo says that Bhakti is not an experience it is a state which arises out of the heart and the soul. When the psychic is awake and prominent in the being it naturally awakens an unconditional love and Bhakti. It automatically leads one to a living contact with the Mother. A perception of truth which is inherent in the deepest substance of consciousness, a sense of the good, the true, the beautiful, the Divine is its privilege.

The psychic presence is something given especially to the material world and to evolutionary beings like ourselves. The beings that inhabit the many planes of the world, including the great Gods of the Overmind who have presided over the formation of earth, are typical rather than evolutionary in character and do not possess a psychic being. If they wish to experience this very special state of Bhakti for the Supreme as well as the sense of progress, they must take a body. This psychic presence is what makes the human being in evolution superior even to the Gods. It allows the aspiration to traverse all the transitional planes and reach the Supreme without the aid of any intermediary. In one very vivid metaphor, the Mother gives the example of a serpent biting its tail to explain the connection of the material plane, which is presently most obscure, with the highest spiritual plane. This point of materiality – if we see the ladder of worlds as a rounded serpent, the tail and the head meeting – is the farthest point and it becomes closest to the Supreme. And therefore it is said that the earth is a specially chosen spot in the universe. The work can and must be accomplished in matter and the yoga of transformation becomes realisable only here, upon earth.

Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls;
Earth is the heroic spirit's battlefield,
The forge where the Archmason shapes his works.

(*Savitri*, rev.ed, 1993, p.686)

It is through the psychic that the Supramental will finally manifest. Therefore the most important work that any human being can do to fulfil his birth is to find

and unite definitively with his psychic and make it the centre of life and action in the world. To achieve this, the whole nature has to harmonised and modulated in the psychic key, put in spiritual order.

Conversion of External Being

Sri Aurobindo has repeatedly written that his yoga demands a transformation of the external nature and only then will there be some visible result. Both he and Mother have had to remind sadhaks that the best attitude is that of a simple worker or a child. It is not a question of getting illuminations in the mind, nor of conquering power and luxuriating in all kinds of experiences in the vital, certainly not a question of acquiring any kind of *siddhi*. The main intention is to manifest the true soul power and to bring the psychic being in front. There has to be this psychic new birth and the conversion of the being into a child new born from the Mother. Only so can the yoga be done. Otherwise there is a failure in the Sadhana. This has been stated often and in unambiguous terms.

They have also spent much time demystifying the spiritual domains. No sensible question from sadhaks about the inner planes has been left unaddressed. Reading their words one can develop a good understanding of the ladder of worlds as well as the planes and parts of the being. But this is of little use unless translated into experience. If one knows, one has little excuse not to act and change the present into its truth of tomorrow.

In this yoga there is no time to rest upon one's spiritual laurels! Even, in one of his letters Sri Aurobindo remarks that incarnating the divine – bringing the seven suns to descend into the seven centres – is really not the intention of his yoga. If the darkness at the root of the inconscient is not changed once and for all, what matters one incarnation more or less! After all, even this would be merely a means and not the goal itself. Perhaps as a result of this approach, it is most refreshing to meet no ostentatious claims in those who stay faithful to the spirit of this yoga's demands. The work remains simple and everyday, the attitudes down-to-earth; there is little drawing of attention to oneself. "*Fear not to be nothing that thou mayest be all.*" says a line from *Savitri*. No one who is serious about this yoga will arrogate to him/herself any special *siddhis* or position, simply because until we are wholly divine, we are not! And more or less of divinity hardly matters. Indeed if one were to truly live inwardly and outwardly the Divine life, claims of special statuses or realisations would become impossible.

It is not a sublimated humanity that is the aim of this yoga. As we are, there is a clear inaptitude to manifest even the pure psychic self, leave aside divinity, and it is a very long process to create the conditions and the capacity. There is

too much egoism, strong passion, excessive ambition, and vanity, obscurity of mind and will, weakness of life force, unsteadiness and want of balance in human nature. This yoga implies not only the realisation of God, but an entire consecration and change of the inner and outer life till it is fit to manifest a divine consciousness and become part of a divine work. This means an inner discipline more exacting and difficult than mere ethical and physical austerities. Sri Aurobindo does not encourage anyone to enter on this path, vaster and more arduous than most ways of yoga, unless one is sure of the psychic call and of one's readiness and willingness to go through to the end.

Spiritual Unity

A somewhat disconcerting experience of those who turn to this yoga is that any exterior unity with others tends to break down when confronted by the spiritual consciousness because the spiritual life reverses the principle of building the unity. Outward arrangements do not endure. So, those who turn to the yoga with a mental sense of being 'universal' in spirit are often perplexed at what takes place. Often what is mistaken for psychic ardour is the false coin of something closer to new age sentimentalism. But we can feel unity only when we feel others as ourselves. And this is an experience that cannot be faked, for life itself breaks things down sooner or later. It is when we have a direct perception of the oneness that we can dynamise in ourselves the intimate consciousness of one-being and let that govern by the truth of its action our lives. Then it is no longer a precarious interchange of the mental and vital ego. Indeed, if one attains the true consciousness there is no problem to solve. What you have to be you become. What you have to know you know. What you have to do you have the power to do. Till then all is built upon shifting sands – a superstructure with no true foundation that will collapse sooner or later.

For the individual in the interim, one can work to develop the sense of being alone with the Absolute in the midst of life's circumstances. This is the true victory to be won in life. To be alone, with the Supreme for companion, is the highest of all privileged states for the sadhak. For one can then make all existence a communion in the chamber of the heart as well as in the temple of the universe. Moreover that is the beginning and base of the real oneness with all, for it establishes that oneness in its true base, the Divine, for it is in the Divine that one meets and unites with all.

Integrality demands Universality

Sri Aurobindo called his yoga the Integral Yoga. Sometimes it is not fully recognised what exactly this means. The psychic conversion takes you within,

into the deepest centre of yourself and you fulfil your individual destiny. But that is not enough for this revolutionary yoga. After you have found your true individuality, or simultaneous with the process of doing so, you also have to widen yourself, expand your consciousness until the whole wide world can find its home in you as if it were yourself! As long as there is a possibility for an ‘otherness’ to exist for you, you can only say you have not yet arrived, for you are not really ‘conscious’ of the Divine, even though you may have found him immanently. In her last New Year Message, for the year 1973, the Mother said: “*When you are conscious of the whole world at the same time, then you can become conscious of the Divine.*”

Here is the radical point of departure from previous yogas. These former tremendous disciplines aim at realising the Infinite on that particular plane of the world on which they are focused. The realisation when it comes is centred upon that particular point, which is often some higher mental plane. Thus one realises the Infinite; but just at that one point. The realisation is perfect in itself but it is not integral because the material plane is, so to say, discarded, left to pursue its own obscure course. So what is realised is, in a sense, one’s very own Infinite and one can stay there, in that realisation, for all eternity. But where does that leave progress in an evolutionary sense?

This is fine for those yogas aimed at Nirvana but it is certainly not acceptable for the demands of the yoga of transformation which wishes to realise the infinite and bring that Power and Consciousness and Light and Love down into the material world as a force of transformation. Mother clarifies this in an Agenda conversation:

what we want is the direct and integral contact between the manifested universe and the Infinite out of which this universe has emerged. So then it is no longer an individual or personal contact with the Infinite, it is a total contact. And Sri Aurobindo insists on this, he says that it’s absolutely impossible to have the transformation (not the contact, but the supramental transformation) without becoming universalised – that is the first condition. You cannot become supramental before being universal. And to be universal means to accept everything, be everything, become everything – really to accept everything. And as for all those who are shut up in a system, even if it belongs to the highest regions of thought, it is not THAT.”²

In Conclusion

There are moments in the earth’s cycles of growth and change when

Mahakala, the Time Spirit, turns upon us his fiercest mask and the Earth Mother herself, so patient and long enduring, seems to veil her face and allow her creatures to be engulfed in a destructive dance of ferocious energies. We are struck dumb in our ephemeral mortality. And like *Arjuna*, on the field of *Kurukshetra*, confronting the fierce form of Godhead as Destroyer, we yearn for his beneficent face, and long for a return of the friend and helper of creatures to heal the aching throb of life.

It has been often said that the descent of the new forces will lead to great upheavals and perhaps the best that we who wish to serve the future can do is to concentrate intensely in our hearts, offer our matter up to the light, let the divine force to do its work within, consent wholeheartedly to change our consciousness, give up our ego and accept at last to be spiritualised.

(Based on a talk presented at a seminar in Auroville in January, 2005)

Footnote:

1. *Collected Works of The Mother*, Vol. 15, p. 224
2. *Mother’s Agenda* 20th September 1960

A New Political System based on Indian Ideals

Kittu Reddy

Political thinkers, statesmen, policy makers, strategic visionaries, spiritual and national leaders, and others who are concerned about the future of India, and particularly in how we govern ourselves towards a future that we can be really proud of, would do well to reflect on the fact that the Indian constitution, as it currently stands, is almost totally bereft of any insight or input from our 10,000+ history of native governance, during most of which the populace of the sub-continent enjoyed the highest standards of material, social and spiritual living. The current corruption and degradation in the homeland of dharma are directly traceable to our total and wilful disconnect from the universal ideals that are founded on that profound concept, and our hope for awakening, correction, redemption, rejuvenation and renaissance therefore rests returning to our own genius in organising society and nation, instead of having it be outsourced to the template of the alien British constitution, which is what we have slavishly copied and implemented since the so-called Independence in 1947.

And since our borrowed constitution is totally out of tune and alignment with our unique character, history, culture, values and ideals – all of which rest on the eternal principles of *dharma and svadharma* – it cannot but lead us disastrously astray in how we conduct ourselves at home and work, in society at large, and in how we run our nation's affairs.

We are therefore proposing a new system of governance based on the Indian ideal of dharma. The development of this system is guided by key thoughts culled from the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo on topics very relevant to our current political situation, starting with our Constitution.

“The first thing that you ought to do is to change the Constitution in such

a way that those people who combine honesty and capability should come to power. Normally, people who are honest are not capable, and those who are capable are not honest. Therefore it is very important that people who combine these two qualities should be able to come to power.”

India the Mother, Sri Aurobindo, pp.204-205

In the book *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Sri Aurobindo has described the quality of the present day politician in prescient terms:

“It is immaterial whether these (the politicians) belong to a governing class or emerge as in modern States from the mass partly by force of character, but much more by force of circumstances; nor does it make any essential difference that their aims and ideals are imposed nowadays more by the hypnotism of verbal persuasion than by overt and actual force. In either case, there is no guarantee that this ruling class or ruling body represents the best mind of the nation or its noblest aims or its highest instincts.

“...the modern politician in any part of the world...does not represent the soul of a people or its aspirations. What he does usually represent is all the average pettiness, selfishness, egoism, self-deception that is about him and these he represents well enough as well as a great deal of mental incompetence and moral conventionality, timidity and pretence. Great issues often come to him for decision, but he does not deal with them greatly; high words and noble ideas are on his lips, but they become rapidly the claptrap of a party. The disease and falsehood of modern political life is patent in every country of the world and only the hypnotised acquiescence of all, even of the intellectual classes, in the great organised sham, cloaks and prolongs the malady...” (CWSA, vol.25, pp.296-297)

In the light of the above, and buttressed by our observations of the current Indian political scene, we may now assert that if any dramatic change or real improvement in our governance has to take place, then the first and essential requirement is that the quality of politicians and other decision-makers and power-wielders has to be of a much higher level. Our primary challenge then is to develop a system based on our indigenous genius that will ensure this higher calibre and character of politician. A passage from the Mother's writings is most noteworthy in this regard as we survey the vicious party politics of the present day.

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

“Pull the consciousness up, up, above party.

“And then, naturally, certain people who couldn’t come into political parties — that! that is truly working for tomorrow. Tomorrow it will be like that. All this turmoil is because the country must take the lead, must go above all these old political habits.”

“Government without party. Oh! it would be magnificent!” (25 May 1970: CWM, vol.15, p.428, emphasis added)

On 6 October 1969, the Mother had given the following message to the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi:

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

Since long it was the habit to govern through division and opposition. The time has come to govern through union, mutual understanding and collaboration.

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

The greatness of a country does not depend on the victory of a party but on the union of all the parties.

And finally, a passage from Sri Aurobindo on what form of democracy is best for us:

Parliamentary Government is not suited to India. But we always take up what the West has thrown off.... [In an ideal government for India,] there may be one Rashtrapati at the top with considerable powers so as to secure a continuity of policy, and an Assembly representative of the nation. The provinces will contribute to a Federation, united at the top, leaving ample scope to local bodies to make laws according to their local problems. (AB Purani: *Evening Talks*, 3rd ed, 1982, Dec.27, 1938, p.564)

Desiderata for a Better Democracy

We will now sum up the salient requirements, based on the above guiding thoughts, which a better model for democracy should meet:

1. People in power at all levels, both in the Executive and in the Legislature, need to be both honest and capable. Impeccable character and integrity coupled with high calibre professional competence should be the minimum desiderata for all politicians.

2. Politicians must believe and accept unanimously that our country, our nation’s integrity and welfare is their highest and greatest priority; they must rise above all other loyalties – party or regional or religious or caste driven – to always put the country’s interests first. Patriotism must be their highest mantra and national welfare their primary guiding principle.

3. Politicians should subordinate their party interest and all other narrow interests to the national interest; they should work with concord and unity across party lines, despite differences of opinion or ideology, for the common welfare.

4. Power has to be centralised in the most important and vital aspects of governance at the national level; but in all other areas there must a great deal of decentralisation, right up to the village level.

5. The government must be truly representative of the people, that is to say it has to be really democratic in practice.

The first lesson we have to learn from the ancient Indian ideal of politics is that mass popularity and charisma cannot be the sole basis of political leadership. One of the surprising facts of modern society is that while specific standards of qualification, experience, skill, ability and aptitude are insisted upon for leadership positions in business, industry, commerce, education and other fields, no standards exist at all in the world of politics! How can there be sound politics when the products of mass popularity become politicians and ministers? The simple fact which is unanimously recognised and practised in all other sections of society – that a leader should have the right ethical values and professional abilities for the role – is totally ignored in modern democratic polity, which elects its political leaders by popular vote without setting any minimum qualifications for them. As a result, there has been a great deterioration in the quality of political leadership in popularity driven democracies.

Cultivating a New Genre of Leaders

In this regard, we may ask: *What are the qualities we desire to see in a leader of the new order that we advocate?* A short list of essential attributes would include the following:

1. He/She must have a consciousness which is higher than that of the mass of the populace.

2. He must have exceeded his individual ego: his preferences and emotions, his personal likes and dislikes.

3. He should have a sense of the universal consciousness which embraces the interests and aspirations of all who come under his management.

4. He must be both wider and higher than the rest. It is only then that he can be trusted to strive for the collective welfare and carry others with him.

5. He must identify himself with the true interests of the community and not let his own personal preferences interfere. In other words, he must be able to forget himself! Of course, it does not mean that he should be just a mouth-piece for the commonality.

6. He should be a leader whose consciousness is above all manipulation, strong enough to impose itself correctively, warm enough to gain the acceptance and loyalty of right-thinking elements.

How can we cultivate such a cadre of leaders for the Indian body politic of the 21st century?

The first step is to educate citizens and voters on the ideals of true leadership and on the type of leaders who can bring the highest well-being to people and society. In this task, modern mass-media with its extensive reach can be a great help in educating the public, provided it can rise above its own agenda and biases to the true standards of professional journalism in a progressive society.

The second step is to ensure that certain basic mental and moral standards are met for contesting elections for public office. Minimum educational qualifications, character attestations, including having no criminal records or charges pending, public service records and accomplishments, and other such indexes of worthiness for public service should be insisted upon before allowing candidacy to contest elections.

The third step is to educate elected officials on the ideals of leadership and governance and help them develop the psychological, moral and spiritual power needed to lead and govern in the right way. For example, in most of the corporates, managers and executives go through regular training and development programmes for upgrading their knowledge and skills, and many of them make systematic efforts to educate and groom their future leaders. Similar programmes have to be implemented in the political domain with immediate effect.

The fourth step is to promote creative thinking and research in political thought, governance and leadership. If there can be a science of management for the business world, we can as well develop a shastra of governance for the world of political leadership. In terms of a creative contribution to the modern era and

yet rooted in our native wisdom, we should evolve and perfect a uniquely Indian model which is rooted in the knowledge and practice of dharma.

Designing a New Democracy

After these remarks on the leadership and educational changes needed to arrive at a higher order of democracy, we will now turn to the design of the new system, keeping in mind the following words of Sri Aurobindo:

A system is in its very nature at once an effectuation and a limitation of the spirit; and yet we must have a science and art of life, a system of living. All that is needed is that the lines laid down should be large and noble, capable of evolution so that the spirit may more and more express itself in life, flexible even in its firmness so that it may absorb and harmonize new material and enlarge its variety and richness without losing its unity.”
(CWSA, vol.20. p.232)

We shall therefore propose a new system which is large and noble, capable of evolution to meet our needs organically, and which reflects the temperament and genius of the India psyche. Its features and benefits can be debated in civic fora and it will gradually evolve to a version that best serves our interests. We assert that it must meet two important purposes, whatever be its eventual form:

It must provide all possible facilities for cooperative action, prevent harmful waste and friction, and remove injustice.

It must help secure for every individual a just and equal chance of self-development and satisfaction to the extent of his powers and in the line of his nature.

The Dharma Connection

We will now link these thoughts on a new model of governance with the concept of Dharma. Sri Aurobindo lays out the broad sweep of Dharma thus:

“A greater sovereign than the king was the Dharma, the religious, ethical, social, political, and customary law organically governing the life of the people. This impersonal authority was considered sacred and eternal in its spirit and the totality of its body, always characteristically the same, the changes organically and spontaneously brought about in its actual form by the evolution of the society and with the Dharma no secular authority had any right of autocratic interference. The Brahmins

themselves were recorders and exponents of the Dharma, not its creators nor authorised to make at will any changes. The king was only the guardian, executor and servant of the Dharma, charged to see to its observance and to prevent offences, serious irregularities and breaches. He himself was bound the first to obey it and observe the rigorous rule it laid on his personal life and action and on the province, powers and duties of his regal authority and office.(CWSA, vol.20, pp.391-392)

We may envision Dharma as the Constitution of the Universe, the mode of operation of all natural systems and human beings in concordance with the *rta*— the right way, the harmonious order — that sustains the worlds and evolves their beings. The word *Dharma* connotes a combination of meanings from the etymological *that which upholds* to one's personal *nature and duty* to the societal ideal of what is *righteous, sustainable and just for the collective*. It is all of that and more, as Sri Aurobindo's quote above reveals to us. The sages have told us that while there is an eternal dharma, the Sanatana Dharma, guiding cosmic evolution, there are also time and space and person specific dharmas that apply to individuals and groups in ways relative to their unique evolutionary levels. The purpose of dharma is to align each individual, given his or her unique position in the evolutionary ladder, with a mode and culture of living that will rapidly advance that person's ascent up that ladder, while also serving society's best interests with their special talents. Dharma is, in effect, the law of progressive evolution at work through individuals and nations, guiding each soul to find its perfection and fulfilment in the symphony of the divine that is playing through all beings. Hence the veneration of dharma in Indian civilisation through all of history, and till recent times.

Dharma in practice: a lesson from the Ramayana

Turning now from general principles to how dharma at the leadership level worked in the past, in practice at the ground level, and to learn some vital lessons – eminently valid to our current problems — that our own history can teach us, let us recall a telling episode from the Ramayana. As the dharma avatar of Maha Vishnu, Sri Rama was the very embodiment of dharma. The Ramayana is a narrative of the perfect exemplification of dharma at every stage through the royal story of Rama — from his youth exploits to his marriage to Sita and exile to the forest, then the abduction of Sita concluding with his victory over Ravana to rescue her, followed by his glorious coronation, and then his sad parting with Sita. For our purpose here, it is that last part — the poignant and controversial story of Devi Sita's exile — which is most instructive.

Sri Rama, to dispel the persistent gossip among some of his subjects about Sita's chastity due to her imprisonment under Ravana's control for a long time, asks her stoically to leave the palace, though his own heart is broken in the process. In asking Lakshmana to escort her to the forest, Rama was fulfilling his royal duties as a king, the Raja Dharma – the dharma of the king that demands that he abide by the wishes of his subjects and do his utmost to please them, without any consideration for his personal love or pain in any situation. Such was the power of dharma in those days.

Contrast that with today's politicians who will smugly and ruthlessly cling to their power even in the face of any number of proven cases of egregious corruption or massive maladministration involving them. They will challenge you to bring a majority vote complaint by ballot to unseat them if you can, as compared to Rama who sacrificed Sita for the sake of a handful of disgruntled peasants. Notwithstanding the numbers or the societal level of the complainants, the hold of dharma was so strong in its embodiment, Rama, that he acted in the only way he could to abide fully by the higher authority it exercised even over him as the king.

Of course, Sri Rama has by this act become a target of feminists and gender activists for his cruel treatment of Devi Sita. While the application of a modern perspective may raise controversial issues when used to analyse the past, this should not detract us from realising that a critical lesson of dharma is being taught here, in this heart-rending moment when the Avatar of Vishnu in human royal form has to ask his Sri, his Lakshmi in the form of Sita, to be gone to redress a few citizens' complaints. The story illustrates powerfully and poignantly that a dharmic ruler will put the call of dharma above his personal interests. He will place duty above rights or personal interests, no matter how dire the consequences, and no matter how history may judge him.

We quote again below the last para from Sri Aurobindo's excerpt above, which may now be read in a new light with Sri Rama in mind as the supreme exemplar of political dharma:

“...The king was only the guardian, executor and servant of the Dharma, charged to see to its observance and to prevent offences, serious irregularities and breaches. He himself was bound the first to obey it and observe the rigorous rule it laid on his personal life and action and on the province, powers and duties of his regal authority and office’.

(CWSA, vol.20, p.392)

Codes of conduct based on dharma

In the modern context, we may broadly construe Raja Dharma as the duties, responsibilities and obligations expected of those aspiring to positions of public service or power. Obviously, these are to be defined so as to serve the highest national interests and welfare. So defined specifically for various levels of leadership from the national to the local, and for different branches of the executive, legislature and judiciary, *modern codes of conduct based on dharma* can be developed for all politicians, bureaucrats and other power-wielders of the land, both elective and appointed. The sincere willingness and commitment to adhere to, uphold, and abide by the dharmic code of conduct that applies to them would be a necessary qualification, guaranteed by an oath if necessary, for all aspirants to public service in the new model we are proposing here. Rigorous mental and moral education and discipline of leaders would also be a requirement to enable them to uphold the code of conduct, i.e. to uphold their individual dharmas as national servants.

Such changes will contribute greatly towards harnessing the highest intellectual, moral and spiritual energy of the community for uplifting the political life. In ancient India, councils of ministers would comprise people of the highest character, wisdom and experience for guiding the ruler. Guidance from the wisdom of seers and seekers of spiritual knowledge was also a priced input for making difficult decisions. Value and respect for our traditional modes of governance is an integral part of the new system we would like to see bloom out of these time-tested dharmic practices.

The Varna Approach to Eliminating Corruption

Most political observers would agree that some form of corruption is endemic to most modern democracies. In India the disease is particularly virulent and pervasive at all levels, to a degree where corruption is the accepted modus operandi for surviving and thriving in power and business. The misuse and abuse of power by politicians and bureaucrats, babus and peons, clerks and magistrates, telephone technicians and 4G tycoons, to name a few have led to the mix-up of political and money interests so much as to have cost our nation *thousands of lakhs of crores of rupees* through various scams, preferred allocations, benami transactions, and a whole slew of egregious frauds perpetrated on our public assets and resources in the last two decades.

How can we root out this toxic virus of corruption when it has infected our national psyche so deeply? How can this culture of corruption be changed, if its root is at the top of the national pyramid of leadership and its branches cascade down through various layers, like in the legendary asvatha tree, to the levels of

the common man at the base of the structure? This brings us to the issue of *conflict of interest*. Any corruption incident also entails automatically a conflict of interest for at least one of the two involved parties, most often the person accepting a bribe or other payoff. He or she has to violate their fidelity to their job title, role-based duties and responsibilities, i.e. their dharmic code of conduct as we have defined it above, to partake of the bribe or other opportunity for corruption. Since the root cause of corruption is thus conflict of interest in the first place, the direct and most effective way to uproot this disease is by *eliminating conflicts of interest totally*.

If we look around modern society in so-called democracies, and this could apply to communist and despotic regimes as well since all regimens are happily addicted to corruption, we find that everything everywhere is tinged by conflicts of interest. As a short list of examples, consider these diverse scenarios: politicians and other so-called public servants in India routinely siphon the best lands, forests, mines, and other resources to their families and cronies at ridiculously low prices; businessmen, and even corporations, are allowed to fund elections so that they can bankroll the victory of candidates who will promote their interests over public welfare; university researchers, on salaries and tenure, want a share of the profits that will come out of commercialising their discoveries and inventions made on public money. In each of these instances, the conflict is broadly between a public interest and a private interest. Corruption occurs when dharma is violated to pander to the private vested interest. The role-based responsibilities or duties, or dharmic code is sacrificed to take care of their greed or other needs.

In its original principle and proper application, the varna system of organising society on four broad classes or categories of professions was the brilliant way devised by the rishis to avoid totally such conflicts of interest that are the root enablers of corruption. In its broad principle and proper application, the varna system classifies human professions into four natural categories determined by their own innate inclinations and aspirations, called their svadharma, or individual dharma. In modern terms, these classes are: a) the *knowledge* class comprising those who seek learning and wisdom of all kinds, as also teaching the same; b) the *power* class of politicians, leaders, bureaucrats, public servants, soldiers and other defense personnel; c) the *money* class of businessmen, agriculturists, traders and other wealth generators, and d) the *service* class comprising those who serve the other three professions in some useful capacity, such as providing labour.

This system created a harmonious mode of transaction and interaction within the members of each class and between them, without placing people in the

situations of conflict of interest and temptation that are the hallmark of our loosely organised professional society today. In other words, the roots of corruption are avoided in such an ordering of work groups and professions. This was accomplished by:

- a. Assigning duties and responsibilities specific to each varna and requiring adherence to one's chosen svadharma, i.e. one's voluntarily chosen profession,
- b. Providing clear guidelines to each class as to its do's and don'ts to avoid conflict within the group and with other professions,
- c. Creating guild-like forums to *self-monitor* and enforce norms and rules organically within the group,
- d. Ensuring that each person in society would know the perimeters of allowed, i.e. dharmic, behaviour relative to their role and the consequences of violating the same, and
- e. Providing a path of migration across the classes if a person wanting to transfer is proven to have the qualities for the new class,

Based on these lessons from the varna system that can help us root out corruption, we recommend the following measures for practical implementation to start addressing this problem seriously across the four mixed-up and conflicted classes of today:

1. Establish and demarcate the boundaries of duties, responsibilities, rules and norms of behaviour for the ruling class (administrators, rulers, politicians, technocrats, bureaucrats, public servants, etc.) such that only people of impeccable character and moral standards, with a passion for public service and a commitment to national interest over all else are allowed to be a part of this group.
2. Businessmen and others with avowed interests in other professions would be disqualified from belonging to the ruling class. In particular, politicians with assets disproportionate to their legitimate sources of income would be automatically disqualified from contesting elections or standing for public office at any level.
3. Build a firewall between business interests and government officials, politicians, etc. such that money cannot influence or buy power, as is the norm today. In particular, not a single rupee of corporate funding will be allowed to taint the public interest through financing of election campaigns of individuals.
4. Screen and remove from the public payroll anyone whose main allegiance is not to his or her job, organisation and nation. Public jobs should not be entitlements to exploit for side income and then retire comfortably. Rather they should be seen as ways to serve the national interest through selfless dharmic duty.

5. Establish clear rules of conduct and standards for knowledge workers, so that their search for truth and knowledge is not tainted by coveting after money or power. Ensure that people who are in roles of advisers or consultants to governments, think tanks, economic councils, etc. are not subject to conflicts of interests due to their role as investors, corporate employees, business lobbyists, and other vested interests.

Shifting to a presidential system

The benefits of a dharma based system are more likely to be realised if we shift our Parliamentary system to a Presidential system, as was advocated by Sri Aurobindo in one of the quotes above. This move would separate the legislative and the executive branches so that they will be independent of each other, thus removing undue influences or conflicts of interest between them that can lead to corruption or compromise governance for the national interest.

In our proposed new system, the President will be the Chief Executive, elected directly by the people. The President must fulfil the following essential qualifications, in addition to the leadership qualities we have listed earlier: 1) He/She must have had at least twenty years of eminent public service in any capacity. 2) He/She must have a record of impeccable character.

It is inevitable that there will be a few candidates who will stand for the Presidency. One can then adopt the French system of successive elections. However since our country is large and it will be very costly to have run-off elections, we propose that voters should indicate their 1st, 2nd and 3rd preferences. If after the first count, one candidate gets more than 50% of the vote, he is elected. If not, the candidate getting the lowest number of first preference votes is eliminated, the second preference voters who voted for him are then assigned to the other candidates, and so on till one of them gets more than 50%.

The President's term will be of a duration of five years and he can be removed only by impeachment. He/she may be allowed to stand for two terms only. The President will select ministers from any qualified citizen of India, as per the criteria we have listed earlier. Ministers must not be part of the Legislature. If selected from that body, the candidate must resign from the Legislature before assuming the minister role.

Ministers must have a long record of public service in any field; there must be no criminal case filed in any court against them. If there is any case pending, the Supreme Court must dispose it off within three months. If a minister is convicted, he/she loses the post and has to resign, otherwise they may continue. Ministers will be allowed to attend and participate in the Legislature; however

they will not be allowed to vote.

The present system of elections may continue. However, it must be made clear that the legislators have only one work to do and that is to make the laws for the country; their whole concentration should be focused on this and this alone. Therefore they should be debarred from holding any office of profit or other post. They should be paid their salaries and nothing else. All laws made by Parliament will have to be finally approved and signed by the President. Voting as a duty must be made compulsory.

Here too there must be a careful scrutiny of those who aspire to be legislators. Candidates must have some a record of public service in some field in addition to professional qualifications and character credentials, and no criminal record. If there is a case against a legislator, the Supreme Court must dispose it off within three months. If convicted, the legislator loses the right to contest future elections.

It is important that the legislators represent the different classes and to ensure this a system of reservations may be introduced. In other words, the Lok Sabha must represent the four professional classes: the men/women of knowledge, power, money and service. As a suggestion, we could reserve 100 seats for each of the four classes. Thus 400 seats will be reserved and the remaining 142 seats will be open to all citizens of India.

Concluding Remarks

We have made the case that the governance of India must be based on time-tested and effective lessons from our own history and genius of dharma-based polity. The ideals of dharma have to be re-introduced to guide the welfare of the nation. We must make dharma the touchstone of the new political order. There must be stability and continuity in government from the currently corrupt and inefficient pseudo-democracy to the new dharmic model that is designed to avoid the root causes of corruption and ineffectual governance. The present system may continue till the changes we propose are discussed by concerned citizens and leaders at all levels and implemented in a wise sequence to make the new dharma-based democracy a reality in India within a generation. In this alignment with the natural order lies our renaissance and fulfilment as a great civilisation, culture and country in the 21st century.

Om Tat Sat

Reason and Religion

Usharanjan Chakraborty

Reason

I

Reason is the highest knowing faculty in man. Man seeks after a rule of his life, being and works, seeks after a principle of self-development. And here reason provides him the necessary help. Man 'seeks for an intelligent rule of which he himself shall be the governor and master or at least a partially free administrator. He can conceive a progressive order by which he shall be able to evolve and develop his capacities far beyond their original limits and workings; he can initiate an intelligent evolution which he himself shall determine or at least be in it a conscious instrument, more, a cooperating and constantly consulted party'¹.

Like all other things, man, too, is a product of Nature. But it is only through man that Nature becomes self-conscious. In evolution this is a great change, because through self-consciousness Nature discovers its own self which was so long hidden to it. Nature observed the presence of the soul in everything. Before the advent of man, Nature did not have self-consciousness, it had simply an instinctive consciousness. It is only in man that it discovered its own self-consciousness.

The intellectual reason in man is only one means of knowledge. There are other means too. All actions, imaginations, impulses, wills, etc. imply the work of a universal force of knowledge behind them, which has its own laws and principles of order and arrangement. For that they do not depend on reason. But the advantage of reason is that it can disengage itself from its works, stand back from them to study them, analyse them and analyse the principles. This cannot be done by any other source or power of knowledge because others are involved in their actions. They are carried out by their actions. But reason is not carried out by its actions. It can stand back from its actions. Its existence is for

an enquiry into the knowledge. 'Reason is science, it is conscious art, it is invention. It is observation and can seize and arrange truth of facts, it is speculation and can extricate and forecast truth of potentiality It can look through the immediate appearance and unveil the hidden truth behind it. Therefore it is a sovereign power by which man has become possessed of himself, student and master of his own forces, ...².

In spite of its greatness, reason is not all-powerful, because it suffers from its inherent limitations. In the field of religion and mysticism reason is helpless. Religion bases itself on faith. Reason goes contrary to faith. Religion derives supersensuous knowledge through faith. Reason has no access to supersensuous knowledge. 'Religion alone has been strongly successful in its claim that reason must be silent before it ... where faith alone ought to be heard....'³.

Some again claim that in the field of vital emotion reason has no role to play. To the vitalists there is a greater godhead than reason. This godhead is Life itself or a secret Will in life. The truth of life is greater than the truth of reason. This is why 'Life escapes from the formulations and systems which our reason labours to impose on it; it proclaims itself too complex, too full of infinite potentialities to be tyrannised over by the arbitrary intellect of man'⁴.

All rational systems have failed because of their partial outlook on life. They fail to realise all complex aspects of life, take only a selected part of it and study it partially and the consequent result they arrive at is also partial.

In spite of this partial study, there is a faith that in future reason will be able to enlarge its field of study and thereby bring life under its control. But this is a hope that still remains unfulfilled. 'The human mind is beginning to perceive that it has left the heart of almost every problem untouched and illumined only outsidess and a certain range of processes. ... Vast abysses of Truth lie below in which are concealed the real springs, the mysterious powers and secretly decisive influences of existence. It is a question whether the intellectual reason will ever be able to give us an adequate account of these deeper and greater things ... these other powers are much larger, subtler, deeper down, more hidden, elusive and variable than those of physical Nature'⁵.

The main problem is that it is very much limited in nature and yet it tries to explain those things which lie beyond its domain. There is a threefold limitation of reason. First, it can satisfy limited interests demanded by ordinary men, but it fails to meet the demands of the spiritualists in respect of higher and nobler interests. Secondly, it may study life based on facts. But life maintains its existence without reference to any fact. And thirdly, life is very much complex. Some facts of life are outwardly perceived but not all. Life still keeps hidden many more facts. These unrevealed facts are still inaccessible to reason. For another

reason, a rational study of life is still incomplete. There is often no connection between reason and facts of life. Reason, therefore, can dissociate itself from facts of life. Facts of life like instincts and impulses carry within themselves a hidden action of the universal Knowledge-Will and reason has no access to this universal Knowledge-Will.

The difficulty with reason is that it cannot expand its range. The earthly reason is limited to the earthly facts of life. But there is the Infinite. Man has in him an infinite life. The earthly limited reason cannot expand itself to the reality of infinite life. So it does not know the nature of the infinite life.

Not only this, '... there is not only an Absolute, an Infinite in itself which governs its own expressions in many forms and tendencies, but there is also a principle of infinite potentiality and variation quite baffling to the reasoning intelligence; for the reason deals successfully only with the settled and the finite. ...The reason can govern but only as a minister, imperfectly, or as a general arbiter and give of suggestions which are not really supreme commands ...The real sovereign is another than the reasoning intelligence. Man's impulse to be free, master of Nature in himself and his environment cannot be really fulfilled until his self-consciousness has grown beyond the rational mentality, become aware of the true sovereign and either identified itself with him or entered into constant communion with his supreme and knowledge'⁶.

II

Man is known by his rational power but the rational power is not absolute in him. So man is partly rational and this partly rational power cannot be the highest ideal of manhood. The supreme rational power is absent in man. The spiritual power is the supremely rational power. To arrive at that position man needs to transcend his present manhood. In place of physical man, he has to be the spiritual man. 'The Spirit that manifests itself in man and dominates secretly the phases of his development, is greater and profounder than his intellect, and drives towards a perfection that cannot be shut in by the arbitrary constructions of the human reason'⁷.

Reason performs manifold action. First it helps man to be more conscious of himself. Secondly, it takes the lower powers of man's existence and teaches them to be aware of their laws of being and action. Thirdly, it teaches those lower powers to discriminate higher and lower and stick to the higher only. Fourthly, as a guide it helps those powers to be aware of themselves and thereby gather a knowledge of them. Fifthly, it 'strengthens and purifies the hedonistic and the aesthetic activities and softens their quarrel with the ethical mind and

instinct'⁸. Sixthly, it helps them to be aware of their solidity and seriousness. Seventhly, it 'sweetens the ethical will by infusing into it psychic, hedonistic and aesthetic elements and enables by all these separately or together the practical, the dynamic and utilitarian temperament of the human being'⁹. Eighthly, it takes the role of a judge, imposes on lower powers some fixed rules so that the human soul can walk as per these rules. Those rules are the means by which ethical, aesthetical and socio-political-economic rules can be questioned. 'By this double action of the intelligence, affirming and imposing what it has seen and again in due season questioning what has been accomplished in order to make a new affirmation, fixing a rule and order and liberating from rule and order, the progress of the race is assured, ...'¹⁰.

There is a twofold action of the intelligence, one is to turn downward and outward, and the other to turn upward and inward. In its outward turn, it determines the law and action of the subjective and external life; in its upward and inward turn, it accepts divinations from the hidden eternities. 'It is opened in this power of vision to a Truth above it from which it derives ... an indirect knowledge of the universal principles of an existence and possibilities; it receives and turns what it can seize of them into intellectual forms ... it defines the ideals which we seek to accomplish.... Only the forms we give these ideas are intellectual; they themselves descend from a plane of truth of being where knowledge and force are one, the idea and the power of self-fulfilment in the idea are inseparable'¹¹.

But unfortunately when these powers are translated into intellectual forms they become disparate and conflicting ideals. We fail to get any satisfactory harmony. In fact that harmony belongs to a higher consciousness which the human being at present does not possess. Still contribution made by intelligence is of immense value.

Man has to follow a double movement of self-illumination and self-harmony. Here reason helps him. He has to convert the animal impulses and instincts to intelligence through his self-consciousness. But as he has to proceed from ignorance to knowledge, his act of conversion will take place bit by bit and create a harmony between different elements. 'It is not only that he has to contrive continually some new harmony between the various elements of his being, ... but each of them again has to arrive at some order of its own disparate elements,¹². Ethics, aesthetics, politics, etc. will have a harmony of their own which is different from the other. Each of them possesses contradictory elements which demand a new form of harmony with which disparities will be eliminated. In fact this is the way of social progress.

The intellect has a twofold action. First, the intellect acts dispassionately, disinterestedly, seeking truth for the sake of truth, seeking knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Secondly, it acts with a passion for practice and governs life by the discovered truth. Intellect tries to build a harmony between these two tendencies of action. Reason is not satisfied with its own action only but also tries to play upon all the others, tries to discover their law and truth. But in the application of ideas to life, reason stumbles and faces difficulties because in such an act reason becomes partial and passionate and yields to something which is other than the truth. Herein lies the limitation of reason. As long as reason is after its pure form and stands for its own sake, there is no trouble in it. But when it tries to apply to life, confusion grows. This is why 'reason is in its nature an imperfect light with a large but still restricted mission and ... once it applies itself to life and action it becomes subject to what it studies and the servant and counsellor of the forces in whose obscure and ill-understood struggle it intervenes'¹³.

We come across contrary rational views that are equally important. Philosophy supports them with reasons. In philosophy reasons are there to support monism and pluralism, being and becoming, optimism and pessimism, activism and quietism, theism and atheism which are opposite in nature. But why so? Because real truth is not known to the rationalist and 'he is supported by two constant articles of faith, first that his own reason is right and the reason of others who differ from him is wrong, and secondly that whatever may be the present deficiencies of the human intellect, the collective human reason will eventually arrive at purity and be able to find human thought and life securely on a clear rational basis entirely satisfying to the intelligence. His first article of faith expresses this truth that it is the legitimate function of the reason to justify to man his action and his hope and the faith that is in him and to give him that idea and knowledge ... and that dynamic conviction ... in the highest light available to him. The reason cannot grasp all truth in its embrace because truth is too infinite for it; but still it does grasp the something of it which we immediately need, and its insufficiency does not detract from the value of its work, but is rather the measure of its value. ... The first business of reason then is to justify and enlighten to him his various experiences and to give him faith and conviction in holding on to his self-enlargings'¹⁴.

The second article of faith also contains both truth and error in it. Reason can neither arrive at any final truth, an infinite truth, nor can it embrace their secrets. It deals with the finite only. Reason fails to discover a perfect life for man – be it a life of individual or society. 'But this is true that by constant enlargement, purification, openness the reason of man is bound to arrive at an

intelligent sense even of that which is hidden from it, a power of passive yet sympathetic reflection of the light that surpasses it'¹⁵. Through this enlargement and enlightenment reason will realise that the truth lies in the soul, the Self or in God to which it must show its obedience and loyalty.

Religion

I

Man's earnest desire is to make himself perfect inwardly and outwardly, reach the highest height of the enlightenment and realise the divine Reality as a supreme truth of his being and mould his life with the divine light. To fulfil this desire, neither the Hellenic ideal of perfecting life with enlightenment nor the modern ideal of a cultured life governed by the selective reason can be regarded as the highest goal of social progress.

The Hellenic ideal bases itself on the old Latin maxim of a sound mind in a sound body (*mens sana in corpore sano*, Juvenal). A sound body is known by its health, strength and beauty. Such a body is capable of a rational use. A sound mind means a clear and balanced mentality, an enlightened and well-trained mentality. But mere combination of body and mind cannot give us knowledge of the truth of the world. The ancient Greek mind was enriched with philosophy, science and politics, the modern mind is more interested in rational and practical soundness, building a well-ordered and organised life. To both, man is partly physical and partly mental.

The new tendencies of the subjective age surpass both of the above ideals. The ideal of the subjective age consists of a perfectly conscious, self-illuminated and self-mastered soul. Such a soul lives in a pure and perfect mind and body. Its range is extended to a spiritualised perfect life. The spiritual self-fulfilment does not depend on reason. It depends on self-finding and self-fulfilment. 'We must remember that our aim of self-fulfilment is an integral unfolding of the Divine within us, a complete evolution of the hidden divinity in the individual soul and the collective life'¹⁶.

The spiritual or the suprarational always aims at the realisation of the Absolute. This Absolute, the Infinite exists in the finite. Although it is the absolute unity it exists in all multiplicities, in divisions and differences. 'Our spiritual evolution ascends therefore through the relative to the absolute, through the finite to the infinite, through all divisions to oneness. Man ... feels the large and serene presence of the infinite in this finite, discovers the reconciling law of a perfect unity in all divisions and differences'¹⁷.

As the suprarational realises the infinite spirituality following its own nature, so the infrarational, too, realises that spirituality in its own nature. The infrarational comprises impulses and instincts. Reason stands in between infrarational and the suprarational. 'On one side it takes up and enlightens the life of the instincts and impulses. ... On the other side it looks up towards the absolute, looks out towards the infinite, looks in towards the One, but without being able to grasp and hold their realities, ...'¹⁸. These three powers, suprarational, rational and infrarational are present in our activities but with numerous variations.

The limitations of reason are distinctly felt before the psycho-spiritual experiences. In the realm of religion, reason has nothing to do. Religious experiences are expressed in mystical language. To reason, all mystical experiences are superstitious, there is no logical basis of such experiences. Reason studies religion with an external outlook. Everything has two forms: inner and outer. Reason rejects the inner form, but it studies religion in its outer form. The outer form consists of formalistic prayers, dogmas, some systematic rules and regulations, etc. But in religion this outer form is inessential. Its inner form consists of an inner urge for a constant union with the supreme Reality. Prayers and rituals originate in the inner experiences. If the inner spirit is left out, in spite of linguistic prayers and dogmas, religion ceases to exist. Moreover, what prayers convey in language are essentially based on inner experiences.. Without such experiences no artificial prayers could be composed. That means the outer form of religion is completely dependent on its inner form. But as reason has no such inner experience, it simply feels free to reject it. To reason anything to be true must be rational in nature. 'So the thoroughgoing rationalist asks the religious spirit, if it is to stand, to satisfy the material reason and even to give physical proof of its truths, while the very essence of religion is the discovery of the immaterial Spirit and the play of a supraphysical consciousness. So he tries to judge religion by his idea of its externalities, ...'¹⁹. And herein lies the great error. While reason stresses upon externalities as marks of true existence, religion stresses upon truths realised through inner experiences. Thus the domains of the two are completely different. Yet reason demands to test religion, while religion in itself is beyond the reach of reason. 'The deepest heart, the inmost essence of religion, is the search for God and the finding of God. Its aspiration is to discover the Infinite, the Absolute, the One, the Divine, who is all these things and yet no abstraction but a Being. Its work is a sincere living out of the true and intimate relations between man and God, ... an absolute surrender and service, a casting of every part of our existence out of its normal status into an uprush of man towards the Divine and a descent of the Divine into man. ... The knowledge of God is not to be gained by weighing the feeble

arguments of reason for or against his existence: it is to be gained only by a self-transcending and absolute consecration, aspiration and experience. ... Wherever religion finds itself, — wherever it opens itself to its own spirit, ... its way is absolute and its fruits are ineffable'²⁰.

It is true that reason cannot prescribe any law or rule for a religious life. Its business is to explain clearly the meaning of religious experiences as far as possible. But it cannot impose its own law upon any religious experience, because reason originates in the mind while religion originates in the Spirit. So religion is suprarational and spiritual. Reason may simply clarify the results of spiritual experiences. More than that reason can do nothing. 'Reason is safest when it is content to take the profound truths and experiences of the spiritual being and the spiritual life, just as they are given to it, and throw them into such form, order and language as will make them the most intelligible or the least unintelligible to the reasoning mind. Even then it is not quite safe, for it is apt to harden the order into an intellectual system and to present the form as it were the essence. ... It is well-known to the experience of the spiritual seeker that even the highest philosophising cannot give a true inner true knowledge, is not the spiritual light, does not open the gates of experience'²¹.

In spite of all this, reason still has a part to play in the field of religious experience. Man has a past history of the infrarational period. Even in the infrarational period man retained spiritual experiences. But they were mixed up with superstitions. These superstitions are still present even in this rational period. Reason can eliminate these superstitions from the present religious field and can thus help religion to maintain its purity and sanctity.

Reason can do another thing. When religious forms become corrupted, it can annul those corruptions from religion and thus help religion to retain its original purity. A rational religion is safer than an irrational religion. True religion never sympathises or compromises with superstition, corruption or distortion. Yet reason has to play a restricted role. While the essence of religion is spirituality, the essential in reason is not spirituality but the proper application of logic. And the danger lies in giving a verdict by an unspiritual reason on an absolutely spiritual matter. 'The life of the instincts and impulses on its religious side cannot be satisfyingly purified by reason, but rather by being sublimated, by being lifted up into the illuminations of the spirit'²². But reason cannot understand it, cannot understand that there may be truths even in instincts and impulses. Reason cannot judge correctly what is non-rational in nature. Moreover, religion by nature is suprarational. How can rationality judge suprarationality? 'If reason has to play any decisive part, it must be an intuitive rather than an intellectual reason, touched always by spiritual intensity and insight. For it must be

remembered that the infrarational also has behind it a secret truth which does not fall within the domain of the reason and is not wholly amenable to its judgments'²³.

But religion and reason need not always be antagonistic to each other. A refined reason, refined by spirituality, or intuitive reason can give necessary help to spirituality. An enlightened reason is nearer to spirituality. And such a reason need not go against religion, rather an undogmatic reason will be a helper of religion. A spiritual reason and a rational spirituality always go hand in hand.

II

The spiritual consciousness aims at the union of the individual with the collectivity and with the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being is both transcendent and immanent. This union is the consummation of all spiritual attempts and practices and cultures. Reason cannot achieve this consummation because reason is confined to intellection and the Supreme Being is beyond the range of intellection. Neither ethical nor aesthetic culture can reach this summit. Only spiritually converted ethics and aesthetics can have any such access to the Reality. Reason 'stops short of the Divine and only compromises with the problems of life, and culture in order to attain the Transcendent and Infinite must become spiritual culture, something more than an intellectual, aesthetic, ethical and political training. Where then are we to find the directing light and the regulating and harmonising principle? The first answer which will suggest itself, ... is that we shall find it directly and immediately in religion. And this seems a reasonable ... solution, for religion is that instinct, idea, activity, discipline in man which aims directly at the Divine, ...'²⁴. Religion is a means that helps a direct communion with the Divine and thus makes the life of the individual and the society perfect. Still religion, in modern times, has been attacked by enlightened minds. But why? Because at times religion has stepped aside from its original line and has turned to perversion, crudity, cruelty and error. This is why the people of the Renaissance period in modern Europe attacked religion violently and wanted to get rid of it altogether.

But we forget that like all instincts, the instinct of religion is ingrained in human nature. Instincts can be subdued, can be controlled but cannot be killed. Hence protest against any religious perversion helps religion to return to its original purity, and then religion is saved from further distortion. But original religion based on spiritual experience can never be destroyed. And its existence is a must, because without it we can have no other source of direct communion

with the Supreme Being.

‘There are two aspects of religion, true religion and religionism. True religion is spiritual religion, that which seeks to live in the spirit, in what is beyond the intellect, beyond the aesthetic and ethical practical being of man, and to inform and govern these members of our being by the higher light and law of the spirit. Religionism, on the contrary, entrenches itself in some narrow pietistic exaltation of the lower members or lays exclusive stress on intellectual dogmas, forms and ceremonies, on some fixed and rigid moral code, on some religio-political or religio-social system’²⁵. We should be careful about the true nature of religion and keep it safe avoiding altogether religionism and distancing from religionism. Religious creeds and dogmas have to be followed as long as they express the real truth of religion, but whenever they would slip from the original truth, they have to be mercilessly rejected. Too much intellectualism kills the spirit of religion. Dogmas are the result of intellectual culture. We should stress upon spiritual culture, not intellectual culture. That will help religion retain its pristine beauty. ‘The spiritual essence of religion is alone the one thing supremely needful, the thing to which we have always to hold and subordinate to it every other element or motive’²⁶.

There is a misconception about spirituality. It is assumed that spirituality ignores the earthly life and aspires after a distant heaven. If that be the aim of religion, then religion will never get a support in human life. Human being loves his earthly life, he does not want to leave it in the hope of an unknown heaven. He wants his life to become spiritually fulfilled, and this earthly life to realise divinity. No true spirituality disregards this truth. It is here in this earthly life that all spiritual attainments are possible. So spirituality is not averse to life. Therefore, none need give up his present earthly life for spiritual fulfilment.

It is true sometimes some religions have overemphasised the truth of the otherworldly, spiritual life. Sometimes it becomes necessary to detach human mentality from trifling matters of the earth. Unnecessary attraction for sensuous gratification leads life to perdition. The selfish life is a hellish life. To save man from this state, call for a heavenly life is sometimes given. But if we can avoid any selfish attraction we need not give up our earthly life for heaven. The distant heaven will be realised on this very earth. Too much attraction for earth is as bad as too much attraction for heaven. So what we need to seek is ‘for the directing light and the harmonising law, and in religion only in proportion as it identifies itself with this spirituality’²⁷.

References

1. *SABCL*, vol.15, p.94
2. *Ibid*, pp.96-7
3. *Ibid*, p.97
4. *Ibid*, p.100
5. *Ibid*, p.101
6. *Ibid*, p.104
7. *Ibid*, p.105
8. *Ibid*, p.106
9. *Ibid*, p.106
10. *Ibid*, p.106
11. *Ibid*, p.107
12. *Ibid*, p.108
13. *Ibid*, p.111
14. *Ibid*, pp.112-13
15. *Ibid*, p.114
16. *Ibid*, p.117
17. *Ibid*, pp.118-19
18. *Ibid*, p.119
19. *Ibid*, p.121
20. *Ibid*, p.122
21. *Ibid*, p.123
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The Sad and the Sublime: Sri Aurobindo's Early Lyric Poetry

Sarani Ghosal (Mondal)

Sri Aurobindo's early lyric poetry has hardly received any critical attention during the last two decades, even though Professor Iyengar made some significant observations on these neglected verses of young Aurobindo in his masterful biography of 1945 (1954) and in its extended versions that came out throughout the 1970s and the 80s (*Biography*:1985:25-166). Sri Aurobindo's pre-Pondicherry lyric poetry may be better understood if one reads them with an eye on his later poetry and the philosophical ideas of his mature period. This will help readers to understand the philosophical ideas of his mature period. This will also help readers to understand the mysterious melancholy of a budding seer curiously fused with the sublimity of his early poetry. Aurobindo Ghose was far behind his final intellectual position between 1885 and 1910, yet he had the prescience of his central world-view even in those early years, some kind of a foreknowledge of his poetry written between 1914 and 1950. His early poetry has all the limitations of a maturing poet and a maturing thinker. However, the poet's humble confessions (to his disciples) regarding his early poetry in his later life should not blind us to the authentic Aurobindonian voices sounding out through the apparent stylistic turns of Arnold, Meredith, Rossetti, Swinburne, Stephen Phillips and a few other later poets of the Victorian era.

Among the Victorians and the late Victorians, Sri Aurobindo shows his obvious fondness for Meredith and Stephen Phillips. He does not seem to have been quite enthusiastic about the others, although he appreciates Hopkins as a genuine poet and acknowledges the influence of Swinburne and Arnold on his early poetry. While attempting a revised history of English poetry in *The Future Poetry* he refers to them with an obvious enthusiasm. Later in his life, curious disciples around him raised these names again in the letters. Taken together,

The Future Poetry and the letters shed significant light on these poets. The weakness for Meredith, Stephen Phillips and Arnold becomes clear again and again. Although Sri Aurobindo certainly does not rank them with Whitman, a kind of special fondness for them becomes quite obvious. Speaking on them, he repeatedly hints at the presence of a higher afflatus in them.

I read *Marpessa* and *Christ in Hades*, the latter in typescript, shortly before I left England and they aroused my admiration and made a considerable impression on me. I read recently a reference to Phillips as a forgotten poet, but if that includes these two poems I must consider the oblivion as a considerable loss to the generation which has forgotten them. His later poetry disappointed me. The only other poet of that time who had some influence on me was Meredith, especially his *Modern Love* which may have helped in forming the turn of my earlier poetic expression. I have not read the other later poets of the decline. I know only A.E. and Yeats, something of Francis Thompson, especially the *Hound of Heaven* and the *Kingdom of God*, and a poem or two of Gerald Hopkins; but the last two I came across very late, Hopkins only quite recently, and none of them had any influence on me, although one English reviewer in India spoke of me in eulogistic terms as a sort of combination of Swinburne and Hopkins and some have supposed that I got my turn for compound epithets from the latter! The only romantic poets of the Victorian Age who could have had any influence on me, apart from Arnold, whose effect on me was considerable, were Tennyson perhaps, subconsciously, and Swinburne of the earlier poems, for his later work I did not at all admire. Still it is possible that the general atmosphere of the later Victorian decline, if decline it was, may have helped to mould my work and undoubtedly it dates and carries the stamp of the time in which it was written. It is a misfortune of my poetry from the point of view of recognition that the earlier work forming the bulk of the *Collected Poems* belongs to the past and has little chance of recognition now that the aesthetic atmosphere has violently changed, while the later mystical work and *Savitri* belong to the future and will possibly have to wait for recognition of any merit they have for another strong change. As for the mystical poems which your friend praises in such high terms, they are as much challenged by others as the rest of my work. Some reviewers have described them as lacking altogether in spiritual feeling and void of spiritual experience; they are, it seems, mere mental work, full of intellectually constructed images and therefore without the genuine value of spiritual or mystic poetry.

(SABCL, v. 26,1972, pp.254-55)

Poets, artists and intellectuals started living in Pondicherry from the late 1920s, forming a devoted circle around the Master, even though he had gone into seclusion since 24 November, 1926. It was time then for the wonderful letters that flowed out from his secluded room. As late as in 1947, a disciple ventured to ask Sri Aurobindo in a letter about the influences of those famous poets whom he had seen in his formative years:

Q: In that long letter on your own poetry, apropos of my friend's criticisms, you have written of certain influences of the later Victorian period on you. Meredith's from *Modern Love* I have been unable to trace concretely – unless I consider some of the more pointed and bitter sweetly reflective turns in *Songs to Myrtilla* to be Meredithian. That of Tennyson is noticeable in only a delicate picturesequenss here and there or else in the use of some words. Perhaps more than in your early blank verse the Tennysonian influence of this kind in general is there in *Songs to Myrtilla*. Arnold has influenced your blank verse in respect of particular constructions like two or three “buts” as in

No despicable wayfarer, but Ruru,
But son of a great Rishi,
or
But tranquil, but august, but making easy...

Arnold is also observable in the way you build up and elaborate your similes both in *Urvasie* and in *Love and Death*. Less openly, a general tone of poetic mind from him can also be felt: it persists subtly in even the poems collected in *Ahana*, not to mention *Baji Prabhou*. I don't know whether Swinburne is anywhere present in your narratives: he probably does have something to do with *Songs to Myrtilla*. Stephen Phillips is the most direct influence in *Urvasie* and *Love and Death*. But as I have said in my essay on your blank verse he is assimilated into a stronger and more versatile genius, together with influences from the Elizabethans, Milton and perhaps less consciously Keats. In any case, whatever the influences, your early narratives are intensely original in essential spirit and movement and expressive body. It is only unreceptiveness or inattention that can fail to see this and to savour the excellence of your work. (Ibid, pp.263-264)

This is a long question with Mr. Sethna's own observations added to it. But

that is the typical K. D. Sethna, never sparing the Master without his own perceptive queries. However it made Sri Aurobindo enlighten the issue:

A: The influences I spoke of were of course only such influences as every poet undergoes before he has entirely found himself. What you say about Arnold's influence is quite correct; it acted mainly, however, as a power making for restraint and refinement, subduing any uncontrolled romanticism and insisting on clear lucidity and right form and building. Meredith had no influence on *Songs to Myrtilla*; even afterwards I did not make myself acquainted with all his poetry, it was only *Modern Love* and poems like the sonnet on *Lucifer* and the *Ascent to Earth of the Daughter of Hades* that I strongly admired and it had its effect on the formation of my poetic style and its after-effects in that respect are not absent from *Savitri*. It is only Swinburne's early lyrical poems that exercised any power on me, *Dolores*, *Hertha*, *The Garden of Proserpine* and others that rank among his best work,— also *Atlanta in Calydon*, his later lyrical poetry I found too empty and his dramatic and narrative verse did not satisfy me. One critic characterised *Love & Death* as an extraordinarily brilliant and exact reproduction of Keats: what do you say to that? I think Stephen Phillips had more to do with it. (Ibid, pp.264-265)

Interestingly enough, Sri Aurobindo is not referring to the influence of the British poets on his consciousness, but only on his expressive devices, his poetic style. In these letters, Sri Aurobindo is pressed by his disciples, chiefly Sethna, to comment on the influences of the Victorians and the late Victorians on his early poetry. But then, there are also plenty of Petrarchan and Shakespearean echoes in Sri Aurobindo's early sonnets, and many of his lines are reminiscent of the poetry of Keats and Wordsworth. The early love sonnets were written in his late twenties, in Baroda, and yet one cannot say that he was imitating Petrarch or Shakespeare in those strange sad-and-sweet sonnets, which first came out in print for the public in 1980.

One has the impression that while young Aurobindo was under the spell of Petrarch, Shakespeare, Keats and Wordsworth, he was deliberately seeking to practise the Arnoldian restraint even from his days in the college in England. He also wished perhaps to maintain the natural simplicity of Arnold :

The sea is calm to-night
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits...

(Arnold, Palgrave, 1964, p.365)

Now let us listen to the natural simplicity tinged with gravity in young Aurobindo's lines

Ocean is there and evening; the slow moon
Of the blue waves that like a shaken robe
Two heard together once, one hears alone ... (SABCL, v.5,1972, p.24)

But it is important to remember that Arnold himself was not out of the spell of Wordsworth and Shelley in his poetry. For instance, *Dover Beach* alone will show the two Romantic voices. "Listen you hear the grating roar" is an instant reminder of Wordsworth's "Listen! The mighty Being is awake" in *By the Sea*, and the fluent flow of negatives at the end of *Dover Beach* – 'neither joy, nor love, nor peace, nor help for pain' – immediately take us back to Shelley's despair in his *Dejection Near Naples*. Similarly, young Aurobindo was not just remembering Arnold, but also the other poets like Keats, Wordsworth and Petrarch – just to mention some of the most obvious echoes – in his controlled images and syntax. Iyengar sees the blend well, but he is quick to remind us of the innovative sense and the new voice, even in Aurobindo's poetry written in England:

No doubt the derivative element is prominent in much of Aurobindo's early verse. The names and lineaments and allusions cannot but appear rather exotic to an Indian reader; but, then, knowing as he did at that time hardly anything about India and her culture, Aurobindo could not have done otherwise. Besides, the literary echoes are many, and are drawn from varied sources; the result, however, is invariably very good verse and not seldom true poetry. (Iyengar,1945, p.31)

Iyengar is talking here of the poet's maiden publication, *Songs to Myrtilla*, and he cites two significant lines:

But day is sweeter; morning bright
Has put the stars out ere the light. (Ibid, p.31)

Iyengar links this up with the opening stanza of Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyam*, but the poet of *Dover Beach* is very much there present secretly behind these lines, as Sri Aurobindo was certainly learning then from Arnold a masterful straightforwardness and true simplicity. Also, there are various voices from the

past creating a new style even in *Songs to Myrtilla* (1895). Young Aurobindo had a prescient knowledge of his own style of *Savitri* in lines like "Her life is but a bath of love". Also, he has the ability to recreate Keats in lines like the following:

I found as in a jewelled box
Love, rose-red, sleeping with imprisoned locks ... (Ibid, p.5)

The mystic Rose of Sri Aurobindo's later poetry was very much there in the 1890s, as in *Night by the Sea*, although the full Aurobindonian symbolism is certainly not blooming out in these poems. K. D. Sethna draws our notice to one Mr. Parichand's question to Sri Aurobindo about whether there were roses at the time of the Veda or the Upanishads. Sri Aurobindo answered in a letter dated 2.1.1935: "There were no roses in those times in India – roses came with the Mahomedans from Persia". One suspects that Sri Aurobindo picked up the idea of the flower in his early poetry from his readings of Yeats and Wilde. The rose's fathomless depth as a symbol in *Savitri* is certainly not there in his poetry written in England, Baroda and Calcutta.

II

Anthologies have a tendency to ignore the early poems of Sri Aurobindo, but their limpid structural patterns would be immensely helpful for students who wish to read Sri Aurobindo (even if it is Aurobindo Ghose and not Sri Aurobindo proper) in their B. A. and M. A. classes. Let us listen to the grave Arnoldian tone of this very original poem, which shakes off the Arnoldian melancholy in search of the spiritual foreknowledge of his later poetry:

The Sea at Night

The grey sea creeps half-visible, half-hushed,
And grasps with its innumerable hands
These silent walls. I see beyond a rough
Glimmering infinity, I feel the wash
And hear the sibilation of the waves
That whisper to each other as they push
To shoreward side by side, — long lines and dim
Of movement flecked with quivering spots of foam,
The quiet welter of a shifting world. (SABCL, v.5,1972. p.46)

Sri Aurobindo had a lifelong passion for the sea. His early poems on the sea reveal his struggle to understand the mystery of the sea, its power to help him climb the heavens, feel the “Glimmering infinity” as in this poem. In *To the Sea*, he calls the sea a ‘lion’ and wishes to fight it to discover the mystery hidden below it. Here too, he sees beyond the sea a wide God-knowledge lying mysteriously to be explored by him. The ‘shifting world’ is young Aurobindo’s awareness of the law of evolution. In *Evening*, he leaves behind Wordsworth’s *By the Sea* as he recreates the old poem as a new poet. A new work of art thus arrives with a memory of the existing order:

Evening

A golden evening, when the thoughtful sun
Rejects its usual pomp in going, trees
That bend down to their green companion
And fruitful mother, vaguely whispering, – these
And a wide silent sea. Such hour is nearest God, –
Like rich old age when the long ways have all been trod. (Ibid, p.46)

Sri Aurobindo’s awareness of the first eight lines of Wordsworth’s poem is much too evident in the above poem. The great twilight has flared up and illumined the inmost beings of both the poets. Wordsworth’s evening is ‘beauteous’, ‘calm’ and ‘free’, for a real sense of beauty can only be felt when one is calm. It is a great feeling of freedom and Wordsworth is quite right in choosing the word ‘free’ in the opening line of *By the Sea*. Wordsworth’s holy time is Sri Aurobindo’s ‘golden evening’, the word “golden” being symbolic of the awakening of the psychic being by the touch of the evening twilight. At this juncture of day and night, the mind automatically feels the calm and the quiet. The word ‘breathless’ in Wordsworth’s poem is a supplement to ‘calm’ and ‘quiet’. The phrase ‘breathless in adoration’ is a yogic state of consciousness, which comes to Wordsworth naturally as he stands by the sea. Nature aspires to God and in her meditative adoration she has become so quiet that no sound of her breath can be heard in this expressive silence. It is a marvellous silence, which is intensified by the slow downward move of the ‘broad sun’ which has no sound. The last word in Wordsworth’s first quatrain is ‘tranquillity’, and the second quatrain in “*By the Sea*” continues the impact of calm, quiet and tranquility. The *mantric* intonation may easily be felt in the first two lines, which have no decorative gesture. Sri Aurobindo would have seen in these two lines something appearing from the Infinite and then disappearing into the Infinite.

The gentleness of heaven is on the Sea:
Listen! The mighty Being is awake ... (Palgrave, 1964, p.273)

It would be interesting now to see Aurobindo Ghose’s own realisation in the midst of a golden twilight by the sea. The ‘thoughtful sun’ is a mature sun, which images the mature soul of man. Maturity rejects pomp and decoration and all kinds of exhibitionism. Trees and plants are seen as companions and at this marvellous hour the trees are leaning towards the grass and the plants. Young Aurobindo can already hear the vague whisper of the Mother earth. His phrase ‘a wide silent sea’ has a visual effect and it is certainly economical. Sri Aurobindo uses ‘such hour’ in place of Wordsworth’s ‘holy time’. The rich old age indicates Sri Aurobindo’s vision of the future. In Wordsworth, two aspects of Nature have been presented: the sea and the sun. Sri Aurobindo adds to them the trees and the green below the trees. But even though Sri Aurobindo is passing judgment on a miracled moment of Nature, a deep experiential idea can be felt to be lurking behind the apparently impersonal gesture of the poem (Ghosal, *Mother India*, December, 1999). Yet despite Sri Aurobindo’s painful confession regarding recognition which we have cited at length in the first section, much of his early poetry may be seen as an anticipation of modernism in English poetry. There is that same density of expression, careful versification and that *recherché* in thought and expression, which Sri Aurobindo himself noted in modern poetry. He found two things lacking in modern poetry, “the inspired phrase and the inevitable word and the rhythm that keeps a poem forever alive”. (SABCL, vol.1972, p.441) But Sri Aurobindo’s early poetry does not lack these two things despite its anticipation of the post-1922 poetry. Amidst his shorter lyrics of the late 1880s, 1890s and those written in the first ten years of the twentieth century, the inspired phrase and the inevitable word spring up at sudden moments of revelation, as in this poem:

Revelation

Someone leaping from the rocks
Past me ran with wind-blown locks
Like a startled bright surmise
Visible to mortal eyes, –
Just a cheek of frightened rose
That with sudden beauty glows,
Just a footstep like a wind
And a hurried glance behind,

And then nothing, – as a thought
Escapes the mind ere it is caught.
Someone of the heavenly rout
From behind the veil ran out. (SABCL, v.5,1972, p.47)

Again, his doctrine of the time comes out as imagination in a much less rapturous tone in another short poem marked by a bare economy:

A Tree

A tree beside the sandy river-beach
Holds up its topmost boughs
Like fingers towards the skies they cannot reach,
Earth-bound, heaven-amorous.
This is the soul of man. Body and brain
Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain. (Ibid, p.47)

This world-view has a distinct relation with the mature philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, who is painfully aware of man's failure to respond to the call of the more despite the fire of aspiration always burning in his heart. And that is due to the fact that man is a multiple personality. Even when the psychic push is there in us, we tend to be swept away by the vital desires. In *The Dream Boat* written in Pondicherry, the poet sees the golden god coming to him in a dream boat with a call to leap into it for a pilgrim's voyage, but he helplessly feels the earth pulling him from behind with all its joys and felicities. Experiments with epigrammatic poetry continued throughout Sri Aurobindo's life, but in his early years this form is clearer, because the lines come as thought-images, not as the pure visional stuff, something that we see later in Pondicherry in his experiments with new metres. Here is an example:

Life and Death

Life, death, – death, life; the words have led for ages
Our thought and consciousness and firmly seemed
Two opposites; but now long-hidden pages
Are opened, liberating truths undreamed,
Life only is, or death is life disguised, -
Life a short death until by life we are surprised. (Ibid, p.54)

Death and life constitute a major theme in Sri Aurobindo's later poetry. In 1980, all the sonnets written by Sri Aurobindo came out in a collection entitled *Sonnets* from Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Here we find some strange love *sonnets*, untitled and undated, with the editor's conviction that they were written shortly after 1900. Aurobindo Ghose was then in Baroda, just approaching the age of thirty. At least eight of these sonnets are mature poems on mundane love verging on a sacred Mother-worship. One wonders about the woman he was addressing in these strange sonnets, and one has reasons to suspect that it was his little wife Mrinalini, whom he was then trying to tame and enlighten, explore and adore. The Petrarchan and the Shakespearean echoes create a mingled impression in these very original love sonnets. The style blends the modern and the classic, at least in some of them. Here is an old world glory recreated around 1900:

O Face That I Have Loved

O face that I have loved until no face
Beneath the quiet heavens such glory wear,
They say you are not beautiful, – no snare
Of twilight in the changing mysticness
Or deep enhaloed secrecy of hair,
Soft largeness in the eyes I dare not kiss!
Unreal all your bosom's dreadful bliss.
Too narrow are your brows they say to bear
The temple of vast beauty in its span
Or chaste cold bosom to house fierily
Beauty that maddens all the heart of man.
I know not; this I know that utterly
My soul is by some magic curls surprised,
Some glances have my heart immortalised. (*Sonnets*, 1980, p.76)

The line "Unreal all your bosom's dreadful bliss" is the only hint at a gesture of Mother-worship. The others are too mundane. From bosom, Aurobindo turns to the feet in the next poem along with all the mundane aspects of beauty, and of course with the Petrarchan image of 'stars'. The phrase "burning heart" is another memory of Petrarch in this adoration of a cosmic lady.

I Cannot Equal

I cannot equal those most absolute eyes,
Although they rule my being, with the stars,
Nor floral rich comparisons devise
To detail sweetness that your body wears.
Nor in the heavens hints of you I find,
Nor dim suggestions in this thoughtful eve;
The moonlight of your darker grace in blind
Who can with such pale delicacies deceive
A naked burning heart. Only one place
Satisfies me of you, where the feet
That I shall never clasp, with beauty press
The barren earth in one place only sweet,
One face in the wide world alone divine,
The only one that never can be mine. (Ibid, p.77)

Here is a queer blend of sublimity and sadness, even if the young poet is worshipping the cosmic Mother. Only the spiritual frustration in the last line does not seem to be a mere literary exercise. There is no octave-sestet division in these sonnets, which might be indicating the need to highlight an idea, a single idea, a moment of worship and meditation, to be finished in one single breath, or perhaps the lingering in a necessary stylistic device to complete the image of a worship to be done without a pause. The confusion – a woman or the Eternal Feminine – deepens in the next sonnet:

O Letter Dull And Cold

O letter dull and cold, how can she read
Gladly these lifeless lines, no fire that prove,
When others even their passionate hearts exceed
Caressing her sweet name with words of love?
O me that I could force this barrier, turn
My heart to syllables, make all desire
One burning word, then would my letters yearn
With some reflection of that hidden fire.
Ah if I could, what then? This fiery pit
Within for human eyes was never meant.
All hearts would view with horror or with hate

A picture not of earthly lineament.
Yourself even, sweet, would start with terror back
As at the hissing of a sudden snake. (Ibid , p.78)

Whose sweet name does the poet mean here? Making all desire one burning word of aspiration is a metaphor of his later poetry, by which he adores either the World Mother or the Divine. The phrase “hidden fire” is another image of his later poetry. Ambivalence apart, the sonnet reads well with its densely imagistic texture and fine rhythm. Most probably, the poet wishes to turn the bondage of earthly love towards the cosmic Mother. All desires he wishes to convert to an aspiration for that “hidden fire”. Later in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo says about the World Mother: “She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire”. (*Savitri*, 1950, p.284) The poet wishes his weak mundane words to change into an incantatory aspiration. Only then may his penned words mirror the hidden fire that burns within his heart, or the Mother or the eternal guru seated at the inmost centre of his heart. Quite often in Sri Aurobindo’s later poetry the inmost or the psychic being is synonymous with the Mother, who is the chief agent of human transformation leading us to the Supernature or the new species, the Supramental Gnostic being. There must be a woman behind this sonnet, whom the poet is trying to teach the value of the psychic fire within us which gives real value to our love life. The psychic love, the “fiery pit”, is not meant for love that is just an animal’s desire, a craving of flesh for the flesh. Words or language can never acquire a high status without the touch of the “hidden fire”, the psychic presence in us or the Mother’s guidance from within. Without the operation of the hidden fire, words are dull and cold, lifeless contours, lacking in that white fire of love, that fire, of which the Vedic and the Upanishadic *rishis* had sung in ancient India. Some can utter the Mother’s name fondly; others can only make caricatures of that name. To be aware of the fire within us is a great achievement, for the fire frees us from all bondage.

The *Rig Veda* must have been all the time working in the mind of young Aurobindo at that time. Let us listen to a verse from the ancient text, in Sri Aurobindo’s own translation, made at a later period, in Pondicherry:

He shines with the light that makes pure, the
light that awakens to knowledge, shines in
beauty on the earth as if with a splendour of Dawn.
He is as if one hewing his way in
the march and battle of the shining Horse; he
is like one athirst and luminously blazing,
the ageless fire. (*SABCL*, v.11,1971, p.273)

For Sri Aurobindo, the fire sits within us in a feminine form, which is also the Divine of the Veda. He simply calls it love in the next poem, and this time it is clear that the yearning is for the cosmic Lady, the Lady of the voyage, the guide within us:

My Life Is Wasted

My life is wasted like a lamp ablaze
Within a solitary house unused,
My life is wasted and by Love men praise
For sweet and kind. How often have I mused
What lovely thing were love and much repined
At my cold bosom moved not by that flame.
'Tis kindled; lo, my dreadful being twined
Round one whom to myself I dare not name.
I cannot quench the fire I did not light
And he that lit it will not; I cannot even
Drive out the guest I never did invite;
Although the soul he dwells with loses heaven.
I burn and know not why; I sink to hell
Fruitlessly and am forbidden to rebel. (*Sonnets*, 1980, p.79)

This poem is suffused with an intense psychic sadness. Unlike the frustrated poems of Swami Vivekananda (see *My Play is Done*), here the complaint is not against fate, but young Aurobindo is indicating here his own callousness or sloth. It is his own fault that he has not used the opportunity that had been offered to him by his "love". Once again the remorse is related to that flame or fire, which has so long been unused. In his heart's chamber, that flame weeps for his attention, as the 'cold bosom' of the poet has been unresponsive to that fire. But the fire rises up despite his callousness and he knows he has no power to stifle it. The poet cannot drive away that presence from within him, which had occupied his self uninvited. In the last two lines, he alludes to Petrarch masterfully in his style, but certainly there was no Laura behind the lines:

I burn and know not why; I sink to hell
Fruitlessly and am forbidden to rebel.

Sri Aurobindo takes up the image of burning from Petrarch's sonnets written before the death of Laura, but uses it for a new kind of spiritual sadness, which

is transformed into happiness because this hero or heroine does not have to be followed. He or she herself chases the poet with his/her flaming presence. The poet uses the masculine image of the Divine hero, but the sonnet sequence highlights the feminine aspect of the Divine. The feminine aspect returns with the image of 'rose' in *Because Thy Flame Is Spent*. The mystic rose, the world-Mother, drags him to her in a tale of mystic romance.

Because Thy Flame Is Spent

Because thy flame is spent, shall mine grow less,
O bud, O wonder of the opening rose?
Why both my soul and Love it would disgrace
If I could trade in love, begin and close
My long account of passion, like a book
Of merchant's credit, given to be repaid,
Or not returned, struck off with lowering look
Like a bad debt uncritically made.
What thou couldst give, thou gav'st me, one sweet smile
Worth all the sunlight that the years contain,
One month of months when thy sweet spirit a while
Fluttered o'er mine half-thinking to remain.
What I could give, I gave thee, to my last breath
Immortal love, immovable by death. (*Ibid*, p.80)

Sri Aurobindo's love story with the World Mother is not a sudden happening in *Rose of God* and *Savitri*. There had been a preparation going on for this ever since the start of the twentieth century. Did he already know that without the help of the cosmic Mother nobody can be united with the Supreme Lord? Was he already negotiating with the mediating force – the one whom the Christians call Mary, the channelling Grace – to take a supreme leap to the Supramental continents? The interplay of love and death had already started in his mind as we see in the last two lines of the above sonnet. The theme strikes us also in the two narrative poems Aurobindo Ghose wrote about the same time, *Urvashi* and *Love and Death*, which show the struggle against the ultimate spoiler, Death, with a strong note of Love, although Aurobindo was still far behind Sri Aurobindo, the poet of *Savitri*. In one of the last sonnets in the sequence, the poet perhaps for the first time puts up resistance against Death with the help of Love.

Rose, I have Loved

Rose, I have loved thy beauty, as I love
The dress that thou last worn, the transient grass,
O'er which thy happy careless footsteps move,
The yet-thrilled waysides that have watched pass.
Soul, I have loved thy sweetness as men love
The necessary air they crave to breathe,
The sunlight lavished from the skies above,
And firmness of the earth their steps beneath.
But were that beauty all, my love might cease
Like love of weaker spirits; were't thy charm
And grace of soul, mine might with age decrease
Or find in Death a silence and a term,
But rooted to the unnameable in thee
Shall triumph and transcend eternity. (Ibid, p.82)

There is here already a quest for the secret powers of the deathless Rose of *Savitri* and *Rose of God*. The poet has already found a clue to the 'unnameable' hidden behind the Rose. Here and in quite a few other places in his early poetry, Aurobindo Ghose has found an inkling of the great Rose symbolism of his later poetry, where eternity itself directly meets us in the form of the Rose. At this early stage, the poet seems to have been under the spell of Yeats' famous rose poems. K.D. Sethna thus quotes some wonderful lines from Yeats to link them up with Sri Aurobindo's mature idea of the Rose.

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told;
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,
With the earth and the sky and the water, re-made, like a casket of gold
For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart.
(Sethna, 1989, p.142)

Sethna then goes on to explain the inner reality lurking behind Yeats' Rose symbolism, which Sri Aurobindo carries forward in *Savitri* and *Rose of God*.

The poet (Yeats) is addressing his beloved, but the love in which he holds her is cored with the sense of some perfection that is the ideal to which all outer things should conform. The marvellous inner reality, this flower of flawlessness rooted in a depth of dream and adoration, is hurt by the varied

cruelty, clumsiness and carelessness making so many processes of time... A Divine Presence glows within, an unwithering Rose whose eternity all time movements should reflect instead of obscuring or betraying as again and again they now do. The pain of the obscuration or betrayal is untellable because what is obscured or betrayed is the Supreme whose loveliness is ineffable. (Ibid, p.142)

This is why the early poetry of Sri Aurobindo should be taken into account before dealing with his later poetry. The Rose grows and deepens throughout his days in England, Baroda and Calcutta and then finally takes a whole shape in Pondicherry between 1930 and 1950, the last twenty years of his life, which may be seen as the most creative period of Sri Aurobindo, the mystic and the spiritual poet. If Sri Aurobindo wrote these early sonnets just after 1900, there is certainly a possibility of the constant shadows of Mrinalini chasing the poet. The mundane image drawn in the sonnets seems too familiar to the poet. Aurobindo married Mrinalini on April 30, 1901, and contrary to the popular belief, he loved his wife deeply. And although the editor of the *Sonnets* (1980) is not quite specific, one suspects that the image of Mrinalini is filtering in here and there in these sonnets. In *Still There is Something*, he expresses his wish to be a one-girl-man.

Still there is something that I lack in thee
And yet must find. (*Sonnets*, 1980, p.84)

Who would solve the mystery of young Aurobindo's problem with a "torturing beauty"?

Knowest thou not then
I have purchased with my passion all of you
And wilt thou keep one nook for other men? (Ibid, p.85)

The sudden Shakespearean memory takes us by surprise in the last sonnet of this sequence. Was it just a mere literary exercise or a fleeting pain in young Aurobindo, who was still suffering as a mundane human being?

III

There is an undercurrent of sadness in Sri Aurobindo's early lyric poetry, which might have had its source in the lonely life of a Cambridge student,

whose mother was insane, and who suffered from financial problems as his father would send him money only irregularly. Temperamentally too, Aurobindo did not interact much with his other classmates and also stayed away from cricket and other games. Apart from the note of sublimity, which was already there in his early lyric poetry written between and mid-1880s and 1910, we come across sudden painful lines here and there in some poems written during his stay in Baroda in the 1890s.

For there was none who loved me, no, not one
 Alas, what was there that a man should love?
 For I was misery's last and frailest son
 And even my mother bade me homeless rove. (SABCL, v.5,1972, p.22)

Images of paleness and cold abound in his early lyric poetry, even though he rises up always to end on an optimistic note. Hence it is difficult to agree with Sisirkumar Ghose that there is a 'stylised fancy' in these early poems (Ghose,1969, p.60). Aurobindo Ghose might have been an introvert, but his poetry always holds a mirror up to his problems, be they spiritual or personal. But then, at other places Sisirkumar Ghose with his powerful insight could also find that personal touch and the authentic melancholy in some of these early poems written during his stay in England, Baroda and Calcutta. Ghose, while commenting on young Aurobindo's *Poems* (1905), specifically distinguishes between the poems written in England and the poems written in Baroda. In Baroda, writes Ghose, "the world of youthful romance gives way to more intellectual interests, to problems of belief and criticism of life" (Ghose,1969, p.8). Although a great Aurobindonian scholar, he obviously misses the meditative elements, which I have already discussed in section II. In fact, these meditative elements are mixed up with the poetry of pain, problem, debate and criticism.

I have touched upon those poems, where the sublimity seems to have been an answer to a deep personal crisis owing to the essential loneliness of Aurobindo Ghose, a sense of isolation, which had virtually made him an "Island" in England. The undercurrent of sadness curiously lying embedded in his sublime utterances of the Baroda period (1893-1905) and the Calcutta phase (1906-1910) certainly owes to his personal crises. His marriage made him very happy for some time after 1901, but then again the changing consciousness that constantly pressed him to be alone might have created serious problems with Mrinalini, whom he was always trying teach his own ways. Even much later in Pondicherry, when he was beyond the human shores, when his father-in-law carried to him the news of Mrinalini's sudden death, he saw tears in Sri Aurobindo's eyes. Later

in a letter to his father-in-law, dated 19th February, 1919, Sri Aurobindo wrote: "God has been good to lay upon me the one sorrow that could still touch me to the centre... when I have once loved, I do not cease from loving". (SABCL, vol.27,1972, p.422) The sublime passages in his early poetry speaking of death and love, the law of evolution, the exploration of the sea and the mystery of night have very certain links with Sri Aurobindo's later poetry, where the common human crises and miseries show up here and there, as in *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*.

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‘The Secret Face that is our own’: Nolinida’s body of literature

Rick Lipschutz

[Nolini Kanta Gupta was not only the foremost disciple of Sri Aurobindo, but a prolific writer and exponent of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga in his own right. Rick Lipschutz delves into his works...]

A blade of a question, shot back to a question, shows the esteem Sri Aurobindo held for his spirit-born son. “If Nolini does not know my yoga, who does?” “Nolini’s writing is direct and powerful,” he wrote in a letter to his brother Barin. As war drowned Europe in that sea of madness, the Master calmly observed, “I always see the Light descending into Nolini.” From Tagore, on whose travels into infinity Nolinida shed much light, we learn, “Nolini Kanta Gupta’s contribution to the literature of Bengal is unique.” The young revolutionary who “in blood drawn from his chest” wrote out a vow to give his life in service to the Motherland, evolved into the yogin whose revolution in consciousness rendered his whole life pure Shakti-movement. He authored more than 60 books, and his *Collected Works* available from SABDA run to eight volumes that grace the reader with inner inspiration, Brahmic silence applied to this new human hour, even concrete help in sadhana. This essay proposes to focus on his writings as a whole — search-rays into our human condition and its successor, literary criticism, poetry, mysticism, sociopolitical essays, philosophy, science, Vedic and Upanishadic interpretation, penetrations into the essence of the Indian spirit, talks to the Mother’s children, luminous personal reminiscences. His body of literature, like his life, is, as V. Madhusudan Reddy declared, “a model of psychic individuality and unique self-expression.”

A deep sonorous voice arises from Nolinida: “Do not say the load is too heavy for me, say rather, I have not yet learnt how to bear it.” “It does not

prove anything that I cannot become a Kalidasa; for that matter Kalidasa cannot become what I am.” “The greatness of a person is the greatness of the Impersonal in him.” “We need at the present hour a complete and precise science of the Divine Consciousness.” “A solitary second can be the spark potent to explode a whole past.” “The Day will come towards which the whole creation has been aspiring from the beginning of time, it will come inevitably in due course, it may be today or tomorrow, it may be a decade hence, or it may even be a century or a millennium hence; it will come all the same.” Imprisoned in Alipore Jail long ago, he came upon a passage of Sri Aurobindo’s that he found “absolutely unadorned and still most effective! The movement is that of an arrow, strong and firm and straight.” The “grand style simple” was in fact his own. Nolinida painted in few but vivid brushstrokes, a fine verbal artist, avoiding excess, true to essentials. Language all but transparent married music to meaning and stamped it throughout with clarities of vision. “A certain kingly ease and dominion in every shade of his expression” breathes through his writings, like a spiritual breeze. A natural formality is tempered and softened with use of phrases of the day. He wears lightly the mantle of erudition. In later volumes, he becomes more and more a ray of the Mother’s consciousness. His “*Reminiscences*” is shot through with humour and colour, more personal touches. The style, like the man, is unobtrusive; he hides his art. In the future more will come to appreciate the incredible intricacy interwoven with that classically simple surface.

We discover in K.R.S. Iyengar’s *On the Mother* that Mother once assigned Nolinida to the line of sadhaks in whom Light was the dominant aspect. In the early 1930s, when she asked several sadhaks to describe the goal of their sadhana, Nolini wrote two words: “Divinising life.” Mother led the Ashramites in games where they concentrated, then chose passages from books; significantly, Nolinida struck upon the Kutsa Angirasa suktas from *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. Sri Aurobindo’s rendering runs: “This is the fire of our sacrifice! May we have strength to kindle it to its height, may it perfect our thoughts. In this all that we give must be thrown that it may become a food for the gods; this shall bring to us the godheads of the infinite consciousness who are our desire.” If this is true for a true sadhak, then Nolinida was truly a sadhak among sadhaks. For he cast into purest fire everything he had and was, and so fuelled his sadhana. This fire carried him to the heights of consciousness, made his mind a precious instrument, brought into him the powers and personalities of the Divine Mother. Restored to the Mother’s consciousness, his soul then served only to make her felt among the people, by all means, and with “well-connected words.” He did not learn of Sri Aurobindo or about the Mother; he knew them by becoming them. Finding his greater individuality in their light, this most reticent of sadhaks

released his creativity in an unending stream. “His is the pure mind,” observed Sri Aurobindo of Nolini; and as Kapali Sastriar shows in his commentaries on the Kutsa hymns near the end of the *Siddhanjana*, the human being with such an inner instrument becomes “a meeting ground of the Gods.”

In “Man and the Gods,” Nolinida subtly suggests that the suppler human virtues surpass in some essential quality the powers of the universal spirits. The gods are “powers...agents of the One Divine...highbrow entities [who] carry things with a high hand...an imperial majesty...a sweeping mastery and sovereign indifference.” The human, however, has progressed slowly, developing through effort and much error. “The terrestrial creature... knows of things which the gods do not...has an experience which even they, strange to say, covet.” For a god is a “fixed and definite type”—bound by his godhood but the human embodies all modes of consciousness, growing and changing. We, human, fail more than we succeed, gaining a fire-tested endurance. Forbearance and forgiveness are “the badge of the tribe.” And the gods? They tend toward impatience, a brittle perfectionism, brook no quarter, are in fact egoistic! Theirs is a sattvic egoism, replete with a sense of separate mission, rigid in its own orbit, lacking “the mellowness...understanding...sweet reasonableness of a human.” For our human ego is blocked at every turn, and our “mind...has something to give which even the overmind of the gods does not possess and needs.” Our very failings “contain and yield a deeper sap of life and out of them a richer fulfilment is being elaborated.” For “the divine grace embedded in matter”—the psychic being —“is the sole privilege of the terrestrial creature.”

To progress requires a psychic being; to advance, therefore, a god must take on a human body, which though rigid is more flexible than it seems and can “suffer a sea-change...not within the reach of the radiant body of an immortal.” The essay ends on a grace note of synthesis, a luminous suggestion. There is an evolutionary gap but no essential gulf between the human and the divine. The human mode of being holds within it its successor, and, in the new creation, even the gods shall change.

“*The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*,” Volumes Three and Four of Nolini Kanta Gupta’s *Collected Works*, received its name from Sri Aurobindo himself. These volumes — clear short comprehensible essays — provide this revolutionary yoga a lucid presentation creative yet faithful to the original. An exception in its relative length, “Lines of the Descent of Consciousness” is an enduring contribution to a clearer understanding of Integral Yoga. The theme could not be broader, yet closer to the heart of the curious human: “Let us see how it all came about.” Truly, as Sri Aurobindo writes in a perhaps related context, “All the Aspects disclose themselves, separate, combine, fuse, are unified together.”

Consciousness, according to Nolinida, extends five distinct lines of descent. First comes that of Sachchidananda, supreme impersonal reality — the delightful conscious existence now masked behind all this grave and sorrowful stupidity. All the lines, the author weaves and disentangles. Read “Lines of the Descent of Consciousness” and much of *The Life Divine* may come into clearer focus. The essay itself is a descent of master consciousness that “unravels the mystery.” I continue to learn much from his exposition of how the psychic being will “come into its own precisely by a descent of its own self from above, in the same manner as the other descents” and how it will unite with the Jivatman. There is much material here presented in a novel manner with many strands teased together. We see here Nolini-as-scientist of the divine consciousness, differentiating the high gods from the highest gods, the upper from the lower poles of the Overmind (where the One becomes “like a silent partner”). One can observe how the personal works together with the impersonal and the Divine with the human in a tour through all the worlds with this most reliable and charming of guides.

With an authenticity that can come only from experience he writes of the psychic being in many passages sprinkled throughout his work; how all one’s limbs can become a psychic movement. One can feel the psychic firmly in front in his writings; even as he scales the high overhead planes the soul is most prominent, that eternal sweetness of divine presence, firm and solid and profound. He shows us how, in Mother’s words, to “become concretely what we are essentially.” In “The Mounting Fire” and “The Labours of the Gods” and other essays, we meet Nolini-as-technologist of self-transcendence. He tells us much that we may wish to know about the “science of inwardness.”

Nolinida was also an accomplished sportsman. He sprinted into his eighties, and his “My Athletics” veers from reminiscences on to the very essence behind exercise. If this is not to be another lopsided yoga, athletics comes to play an integral part in our spiritual training. Our frailty must become strength to embrace the divine light descending. “If the consciousness is of the right sort, the new force can descend even from supraphysical worlds and give to the movements of the body a supreme beauty and strength.” All the parts of the being then participate in a more conscious exercise and the fire, light, and force can be grounded, harmonised, wonderfully contained. Here sublimity becomes practical and the practical is made sublime. His athletics is our challenge.

Nolinida is one whose psychic opening and transformation was allowed to proceed in the psychic way, who has shown a unique ability to express the higher consciousness in writing that is, indeed, direct and powerful. In his life and his writings he represents “at every moment, in all circumstances, one

[who] follows the voice of the highest in oneself...and no inferior echo.” He had a long “happy collaboration” with the Mother, the Divine Consciousness — her own son André and others have described how they felt her in Nolinida; their “head was ringing for hours” after merely talking with him; they found a lifelong friend who continues after his passing at age 95 in 1984 to be present to them or they actually saw a vision of the New Creation. On our human condition, our maladies, the driving force of our times, his gaze is unflinching, his thought balanced, his point of view global yet close to the “tears of things.” His poetry in “To the Heights” is a rhythmic record of his sadhana in the 1930s. Volumes Three and Four, “*The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*,” will only gain in importance with time as an original exposition of Integral Yoga rendering its aspects more comprehensible for the human consciousness, providing a much-needed bridge to Sri Aurobindo’s own writings. Perhaps equal to his third volume is Volume One, “*The Coming Race and Other Essays*,” which climbs the highest ranges of spiritual literature and at times manifests an intense mantric vision. His writings on India are universal and speak from an identification with her very soul and mission. His later writings provide diamond-like windows of the Mother’s Consciousness and an opening to the Yoga-Force. “Reminiscences,” his personal memoir is of much interest, a gleaming jewel of the genre. His writing on the Vedas and Upanishads (translations, commentary, tales) contain ancient Indian spiritual knowledge essential to more fully appreciate Sri Aurobindo’s writings and work.

Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta has given us all a subtle body of literature bound to widely extend into the frontal consciousness. What he said of Vivekananda’s words (which woke his courage up in Alipore) is true of his own: “These are luminous life-giving mantras and the world and humanity...have need of them.” One-volume editions include *Lights from Nolini Kanta Gupta* (highlights taken from individual essays) and *Evolution and the Earthly Destiny* (selected essays). *Education and Initiation*, translated from the Bengali, more timely than ever, has now been released. His eight-volume *Collected Works* continue to grow in relevance and merit more detailed scholarly study. Surprisingly, the eight volumes are as affordable as they are full of delights and unexpected turns. Or one may prefer to read his translation of *Savitri* into Bengali. The shining Arjuna of spiritual aspirants has left us a portion of the new creation, full of the force of yoga and packed with the light of Sri Aurobindo.

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The True Voice of Raga

Murali Sivaramakrishnan

My father had by birth and background, a sense of sound and a sound of sense. He was far from being a musician, nevertheless his musically-sensitive ear was tuned on to the finer aspects and nuances of the Carnatic kind and he had a genuine ear. However, among his all-time favourites were often those rustic Dravidic beats and rhythms of the drums and horns and cymbals – which could probably sound like the crude cawings of the crows against a backdrop of the most elegant *swansong* of the refined Carnatic to the purist ears of the classically trained! Now, despite his love for the classical Carnatic any day, my father could also easily be swayed by the rhymes and rhythms of what now goes under the name of *folk and Dalit*. I have often watched him going into a sort of trance, eyes tightly closed and hands beating away to the non-complicated *talas* of the folk rhymes. When occasion demanded, he always played the simple tunes of the people’s variety for us as children and egged us all thus toward evolving a sense of the secular and spiritual in terms of an eclectic aesthetic which he had gained, on his own.

We grew up listening to the famed renderings of the classical maestros alongside those of the desi kind. Among Appa’s favourites were Dandapani Desikar’s cinematic rendering of Nandanar’s *Ayye metha kadinam* (the lyrics of Gopala Krishna Bharathiar, done for the movie of that name), the over-dramatic versions of *Kelungal Tharappadum* (the Tamil popular song built around the life of Christ, and the *Allah, Allah* songs by Nagore E.M. Hanifa – all ever so popular in their own times among the not-so-highly evolved or the so-called non-elitist music lovers. But, even now after many years when I listen to these, my eyes naturally overflow with the touch of the evocative and powerful feelings that these “crude” renderings proffer to any sensitive *sahrdaya*. Let us not demean them as being overly dramatic and sentimental. If the very idea of music is to touch the heart, then touch they do. There is a direct rendering of

emotions, a singular reaching after.

Tales of the Saivite Saint Nandanar, for instance, are popular in the Tamil country and yet so very few among us realise the subversive nature of the Tamil religio-mystic tradition — this could also be perceived in the internalisations of the Abrahamic religions in their own *bhakti* versions as well. Bhakti has so often been deemed to be mere submission for salvation. And that is how it has been projected in the popular minds, in a trivial way. In our own times after the decay of the Dravidic movement (which opposed the entire idea of religion in any form as being mere opium of the masses, and which has now petered into mere party politicking stunt for certain power-hungry politicians for their own self-seeking gains) the idea of bhakti has only gained momentum in the minds of the common people as surrender to the innumerable idols and paying obeisance to the ceremonial splendours of a dominant deity. Somewhere along the way, the Tamils appear to have forfeited the direct living link with the subversive tradition of Bhakti which survived for the most through the marvellous renderings of innumerable musicians of equally endearing compositions of great saints.

The saints of the south Indian folk tradition – the Alvars and Nayanmars, like the Kannadiga Lingayats and their Telugu counterparts — were all great composers on their own; they sang addressing their favourite deities as if directly confronting them in a language of everyday emotion and feeling and often spoke in the first person. The wonder and uniqueness of these saintly compositions reside in their ability to wheel freely in and out of joy and pain, laughter and tears, delight and sorrow, life and extinction of the senses. The *lord* that they address and most of the times even quarrel with and curse, is someone who is more of a friend, philosopher and guide than any all-powerful male potentate. In almost all their impassioned compositions they find solace and comfort in the arms of their beloved deities in a sort of finality, in peace and contentment. This final identity might be achieved after the great *viraha* or pain on account of separation, or a sort of heightened existential *dukkha* — but their compositions almost always lead the listener or reader through a variety of moods and feelings which are on their own powerful enough as religious experiences.

Nandanar, Pattinathar, the other major Saivite Nayanmars and Vaishnavaites. Alvar saints may not all have been composers of equally popular songs or perhaps many of their compositions were not set to music, or not even recorded for posterity. But then their *vacanas*, their statements, their utterances, their lines, have seeped into the minds of generations of listeners. The simplicity of their style and the directness of their expression certainly have something to do with this. Strangely enough this is generally true of most of the Dravidic saints of the great Bhakthi period in south of India — despite their cultural, linguistic

and psychological differences, each one embodied in their own specific idiom the experience of oneness in simple terms but never reducing anything to the simplistic level.

There is this popular tale of the 16th century Malayalam poet Poonthanam Namboothiri who composed *Njanappana* in simple Malayalam and submitted it to the well-known Sanskrit pundit and poet Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri while he was at the renowned Guruvayur temple in Kerala, with a humble request that the greater poet might perhaps find time enough to glance through the verses. Bhattathiri in all the haughtiness of a scholar asked at once why the verses were not in Sanskrit, the accepted format for versification, and of course the language of the gods! Poonathanam replied that he was only at home in his own mother tongue, Malayalam. Bhattathiri at once dismissed the poor aspirant from his presence and the humble poet was totally shattered. He turned to his beloved Lord Krishna in complete surrender. It is said that a voice was heard from within the *sreekovil* (the sanctum sanctorum): “Poonthanam’s bhakthi is closer to my heart than Bhattathiri’s *vibhakthi* (grammatical inflections!)” Krishna of course is famed for his love of the simple and the passionate: and see how he dismisses the pompous and grandiloquent. The tale of course continues with Melpathur falling sick and paralytic in one heap and later recovering after becoming a penitent and repenting deeply for his haughty behaviour toward the simple bhakti poet! The Lord of Guruvayur is certainly one for revealing his taste for both the high-brow and the low-brow art forms — the *marga* and the *desi*, for He is adept at appreciating the classical and the folk at one go! The language of the gods, Sanskrit and the people’s lingo Malayalam, were both equally like honey to the lordly aesthete! Melpathur and Poonthanam were on the same level for the discerning eye of the Lord — albeit the openly declared love for the simple.

Telugu is a fabulously rich language — and the more rich on account of the innumerable *kritis* of Tyagabrahmam — Saint Tyagaraja. Of course there are innumerable compositions of Annamacharya and Bhadrachala Ramadas in the language only to mention two other notable saint poets. Nevertheless Tyagaraja occupies a position of uniqueness in the rich tradition of Carnatic music. Muthuswami Dikshitar, Syama Sastri and Tyagaraja constitute the Classical Trio unparalleled in the history of music elsewhere. In the Carnatic tradition there is this unique blend of the high and low art — compositions in the language of the masses like Telugu, for instance, reach into the level of high classical art, especially at the hands of a virtuoso like Tyagaraja. Sanskrit no doubt is the language of the gods but when Tyagaraja writes *yenataro mahanubhavalu anataru ki vandanamu* — (many are the great ones to them all my salutations!)

the art of music reaches the heights of oneness with the great art of poetry. It has been said that he dedicated this great piece to the maestro Shadkala Govinda Marar, a renowned vocalist of his time who could render tonal variations in six *kalas*!

Sabdārtha sahitaṭau kavyam says Bhamaha, *sabda* sound, and *artha* meaning, become integrated into one, and *kavya*, poetry, is born! Music is the highest art, or in other words, *all art aspires to the condition of music* — for its directness of reach, and the richness of its dimensions. Tyagaraja is the visionary poet with an eye for music, in him *raga* and *sabda* merge into one oceanic being.

All this is possible only when the poet is the visionary — able to see Rama in all and everything. There is this amazing composition that goes like this: *moksamu galada bhuvilo jivan muktulu gaani vaaralaku...* (Is salvation attainable by anyone in this world who has not realised the Self?) Towards the end of this extraordinary piece he says: *vina vadana loludau shivamano vidha merugaru tyagaraja vinuta*. Such is the force of pure poetry! Although Tyagaraja was a devout Rama bhakta he could poetically experience the divine presence of Siva here in this ultimate poetic piece (He states: To those who cannot intuitively perceive the mind of Siva, who worships *naada* through the *Veena*, is salvation attainable?)

Siva is the supreme musician, he plays the *Veena* and his musical notes are supposed to wring the living hearts out — we become his music: and this is the touch of *nadabrahma*, the *alaukika ananda* or divine beatitude. [According to *Muktika Upanishad*, there are only two kinds of Mukti — '*Jivan-mukti*' and '*Videha mukti*' or '*Kaivalya*'. The same *Upanishad* also mentions '*sālōkya*', '*sā-rūpya*', '*sāmipya*' '*sāyujya*' to be four types of Mukti. (*Muktika Upanishad*) Those who are familiar with Sri Aurobindo's discriminations of these states can see the similarity in perceptions here.]

In another amazing kriti Tyagaraja sings: *raga sudha rasa panamujesi, ranjillave O manasa...* (Relish in the essence of swara, raga, and nada, and be illumined O mind) Here the kavi in Tyagaraja propounds that engrossing one's own self in the raga, swara, and nada you will ultimately merge with the nature of Siva, as *Om kara nada*. This is the ultimate experience of *sangitamukti*, perhaps. To listen to the rendering of this kriti (*mokshamu galada* and *raga sudha rasa*) with all one's heart and head would be the ultimate *mukti*. The *sahridaya* becomes one with *sabdabrahma*. One forgets the language of the *sahitya* — Telugu merges with the language of the gods very much like the Dravidic drums leading the soul into a crescendo of devout experience. There is the sublime in the humble, and the tiny in the true — the vast and the beautiful

(*satyam, sivaṃ, sundaram*).

One listens to the Carnatic maestro or to the folk poet with one's heart and soul. One has to have the touch of profound feelings and emotions in order to reach the divine — the experience is one where the heart and the head become fused together and then everything vanishes leaving no trace. Even those mortals among us who have not seen the face of Siva would be able to recognise and realise the divine through this composition. This is the dance of Siva in the *poyyatha ponnabalam* (the golden temple of no untruth) that Nandanar speaks about in this line *poyyatha ponnambalaththayya yirukkumitam*! (the suggestion is of course, the temple at Chidambaram — take a closer look at this very concept where the *chit* (consciousness) merges with *ambara* or *akasa*)

There is nothing that differentiates the true aesthetic experience in the final analysis, because there is nothing that is untrue! Everything evolves in the dance of Siva and perishes in the touch of the divine. As I said earlier, the wonder and uniqueness of these saintly compositions lie in their ability to wheel freely in and out of joy and pain, laughter and tears, delight and sorrow. All emotions find their ultimate expression in the divine dance. As my father would have put it in his own characteristic fashion, *ellam onnuthan* (everything is one!)

After all, in more ways than one, spirituality is irreligious; the spiritual is boundless and unconditional, it is dynamic and vibrant and holds nothing sacred including the sacred. There is an old Tamil song that was quite popular at one time in my part of the world. It goes like this:

Nanda vanathil oru andi
Avan arezhu nalaka koyavanai vendi
Kondu vandan oru thondi

Athai kondadi kondadi
Pott utai thandi
Nanda vanathil oru andi

The Begging Bowl of Clay
An andi there was
In Nandavanam
Who prayed and prayed
At the potter's door
For days on end to get
A begging bowl of clay
He danced with joy

*All the way back
With his begging bowl of clay
He danced with it
In sheer delight
That he dropped
His begging bowl of clay.
He broke
The begging bowl of clay...*

The unconditional and uncaring manner in which the *andi* — the mendicant — drops his hard-earned begging bowl of clay in a frenzy of dancing, is the real spiritual way of being, where nothing matters any more. The breaking of the bowl is the final release into the real. Musical delirium leads one through the entire gamut of *bhavas* through to the ultimate release of the merely being human!

Emily Dickinson the American poet once confided in a letter... *If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is true poetry.* This is true of music too. But the simile is not something without any experiential grounding either. The aesthesis of the raga is heard in the ear of the ear — the *srotasya srotam* — felt along the veins, distanced and integrated at once in the brain, and relished in the *hridaye guhayam* (the secret cave of the heart) — what if the deity is referred to as Siva, Vishnu, Christ or ya Allah? True music is the touch of the divine. And the divine is everywhere: we need to hear it with our hearts and sense it with our minds. In the aesthetic of the divine there is no high or low art — because the vertical and the horizontal emerge in a multiverse and space-time. *This is the true voice of raga.*

Raga Sudha Rasa and Alaukika Ananada

A little while ago, while discussing that amazing *kriti* of Tyagaraja that begins with this remarkable evocation: *raga sudha rasa panamujesi, ranjillave O manasa...* (*Relish in the essence of swara, raga, and nada, and be illumined O mind!*) I felt that I needed to dwell a little more in this context and perhaps even take a detour into the demarcations of spiritual experience that Sri Aurobindo proffers. It could be that one might strike a parallel here.

In this unique composition, the *kavi* in Tyagaraja propounds that by engrossing one's self in the Raga, Swara, and Nada one will ultimately merge with the nature of Siva, as *Omkara Nada*. Perhaps, this is the ultimate experience of *sangitamukti* or liberation through music, vouched as true experience by spiritual

masters (*forgive* the gendered structure; and let us use this for want of a better sensitive word at this point)

Music, as Tyagaraja states here, will bestow on one all the fruits of Sacrifices, Rituals, Tyaga, Yoga, Bhoga — in terms of the ultimate beatitude. This leads one toward the total dissolution of the little self that a genuine bhakta too seeks. Bhakti, one has to remember, can be of various forms as evidenced by the innumerable dimensions that the pioneers of the Bhakti cult have established. Worship, with fixity of consciousness and purity of feeling and free of all extraneous thought, becomes itself a sort of *Bhavasamadhi*. As a result of this *Bhavasamadhi*, the Bhagavan appears before the inner eye of the bhakta, in the form which he/she has chosen for worship. The vision is not merely a matter of imagination; it is a direct experience.

Sri Ramakrishna has illustrated the two variant phases of the bhakta's attitude in terms of the monkey and the cat. The monkey's offspring clings vehemently to the mother's back or belly as the case may be — this is like the ardent bhakta who never lets go of the Bhagavan. On the other hand, like the innocent kitten allowing itself to be caught between the jaws of its mother and be lugged from place to place, the other kind of submissive bhakta surrenders himself totally to the Bhagavan. Both are devotees of the lord, both experience compassion and liberation — but there is a qualitative difference.

There are four distinct states of awareness that the bhakta passes through in terms of god-realisation and final realisation or *mukti* — yet these need not be in this respective manner or order: *Sālōkya*, *Sāmiṇya*, *Sārūpya*, *Sāyujya*.

Without difference of location, when one abides in the presence of the Bhagavan, in the self same place, it is called **Sālōkyamukti**. The experience of realising all that is seen as the glory of the Bhagavan besides being always with the Lord, as in *Sālōkyamukti* is referred to as *Sāmiṇyamukti*. Existing ever with the Lord, witnessing always the glory of the Bhagavan, and becoming suffused with God-consciousness is **Sārūpyamukti**. When all traces of difference disappear, and that final oneness is attained then the **Sāyujyamukti** stage is reached. This comes of only with the aid of the Divine, with what is usually understood as Grace. Bhakthi results also in the attainment of *Brahma Jnana*. Even if the Bhaktha does not crave for it, the Bhagavan vouchsafes it to him.

It has appeared to me that Sri Aurobindo had experienced all these four states *Sālōkya*, *Sāmiṇya*, *Sārūpya*, *Sāyujya* — poetically, as evidenced through his short poems over a period of time. His contention was that poetry works as an index of the evolving human consciousness, and his own poetic experiences were qualitative evidences of his spiritual states of awareness and becoming.

A poem titled *Trance*, composed on 15-10-1933, evidences the experience of Salokya or abiding in the presence of the spirit.

A *naked* and silver-pointed star
Floating near the halo of the moon;
A storm-rack, the pale sky's fringe and bar,
Over waters stilling into swoon.

My mind is awake in *stirless trance*,
Hushed my heart, a *burden* of delight;
Dispelled is the *senses'* flicker-dance,
Mute the body aureate with light.

O star of creation pure and free,
Halo-moon of *ecstasy* unknown,
Storm-breath of the soul-change yet to be,
Ocean self *enraptured* and alone!

The image of the star, the moon and the sky over the tranquil sea is established in stark contrast to the ... *storm-rack, the pale sky's fringe and bar* — and later interlinked to the last-but-one line — *storm-breath of the soul-change yet to be*... The poem abides in the softening presence of the spirit despite the turbulence of the inner soul. The poet writes: *My mind is awake in stirless trance* (or is it *starless*?) This is the pure experience of *Sālōkya*. The experience is structured in the three stanzas of the poem — while the first stanza revolves around the star, moon, sky, and sea, the second gathers in the mind, heart, senses, and body — the third correlates the earlier two. The star of the opening line connects to the mind *awake in stirless trance*; the moon in the next connects with the heart; the sky links up with the senses; the waters of the sea links up with the body. The star that was naked becomes pure and free in the final stanza; the moon achieves ecstasy; the sky breathes soul-change and the ocean becomes enraptured in its aloneness. All because of the experience of the nearness of the spirit, the *Sālōkya*.

Now, the experience of *Sāmīpya*, is when the self starts seeing with the spirit-eye. Let us take a poem composed on 18/19-9-1939, entitled, *The Self's Infinity*:

I have become what before Time I was.
A secret touch has quieted thought and sense:
All things by the agent Mind created pass
Into a void and mute magnificence.

My life is a silence grasped by timeless hands;
The world is drowned in an immortal gaze.
Naked my spirit from its vestures stands;
I am alone with my own self for space.

My heart is a centre of infinity,
My body a dot in the soul's vast expanse.
All being's huge abyss wakes under me,
Once screened in a gigantic Ignorance.

A momentless immensity pure and bare,
I stretch to an eternal everywhere.

The opening line *I have become what before Time I was*, leads the reader away from the spatio-time-bound experience of the little self into the vastness of eternity. This union of the self, eternity and infinity is played out in the silence of the timeless being beyond all mutability. And this sonnet in rather conventional mode splits into the octet and the sestet at the point of intersection of the spiritual experience: *My heart is a centre of infinity*... Now from what actually happens within the structure of the poetic experience is the transference of the point of vision from the mere mortal to the spiritual. The poet signals this effect in the opening sequence itself:

A secret touch has quieted thought and sense:
All things by the agent Mind created pass
Into a void and mute magnificence.

The qualitative transformation also achieves a different dimension on account of the spiritual eye and self: this is definitely the experience of *sāmīpya* — seeing with the spirit-eye. In another poem, *Omnipresence*, composed almost during the same period on 17-10-1939 we can sense **the similar experience of *sāmīpya***.

He is in me, round me, facing everywhere.
Self-walled in ego to exclude His right,
I stand upon its boundaries and stare
Into the frontiers of the Infinite.

Each finite things I see is a façade;
From its windows looks at me the Illimitable.
In vain was my prison of separate body made;
His occult presence burns in every cell.

He has become my substance and my breath;
He is my anguish and my ecstasy.
My birth is His eternity's sign, my death
A passage of His immortality.

My dumb abysses are His screened abode;
In my heart's chamber lives the unworshipped God.

When the poet writes: *He has become my substance and my breath;/He is my anguish and my ecstasy...* he expresses this joy without much strain, not overburdened with words. Here we sense the presence of the human element still in terms of the experience of joy and anguish and of course that is what adds to the uniqueness of this short piece. In fact there doesn't appear to be much observable marked difference between the two states of *sālōkya* and *sā-mīpya*. There is only a qualitative expansion that seeps over the spiritual unity in the second stage. However, one could never state categorically that these experiences could be graded in terms of the lower and higher. Both are unique. On a similar note the next two stages of *sārūpya* and *sāyujya* are also to a great extent similar, with albeit slight differences in the scale of ecstasy (beatitude) and expression.

Sarupya. (becoming suffused with spirit)

All is abolished but the mute Alone.
The mind from thought released, the heart from grief
Grow inexistent now beyond belief;
There is no I, no Nature, known-unknown.
The city, a shadow picture without tone,
Floats, quivers unreal; forms without relief

Flow, a cinema's vacant shapes; like a reef
Foundering in shoreless gulfs the world is done.

Only the illimitable Permanent
Is here. A Peace stupendous, featureless, still,
Replaces all,— what once was I, in It
A silent unnamed emptiness content
Either to fade in the Unknowable
Or thrill with the luminous seas of the Infinite.
1933-1934 *Nirvana*

Sayujya. when all trace of difference disappears

If perfect moments on the peak of things,
These tops of knowledge, greatness, ecstasy,
Are only moments, this too enough could be.
I have assumed the rapid flaming wings
Of souls whom the Ignorance black-robed Nature brings
And the frail littleness of mortality
Can bind not always; a high sovereignty
Makes them awhile creation's radiant kings.

These momentary upliftings of the soul
Prepare the spirit's glorious permanence.
The peace of God, a great calm immanence
Is now my being's boundless atmosphere.
All parts are gathered into a timeless whole;
All moments last in an eternal Year.
29-9-1939 & 02-10-1939, *Moments*

If Poetry could ever be an index of the godward journey of the evolving soul then these poems definitely can stand testimony to being such. What strikes the *sahrdaya* at the very outset is the genuineness and the sincerity of the poet. I have always argued that Sri Aurobindo was essentially a poet who ceaselessly attempted to capture in many poetic voices the shades of transformation that his inner self underwent. His poems are the symbolic markers in these attempts. There is very little deliberation of cerebral intervention or attempts to craft new words for newer and newer experiences. What on the other hand appears to happen is that old and used words which would normally sound frayed and

discoloured due to overuse in other situations here reappear in renewed light and perhaps in their reborn states. States of being like *sālōkya*, *sārūpya* etc. are too subtle to submit themselves to ordinary expressions and only a genuine poet who is perfectly attuned to the *sound of sense* can rephrase them in different linguistic orders. Sri Aurobindo is such a type of poet who, when all is said, believed with all his strength in the power of words to reflect profounder levels of human experiences. For him the mantra was the ultimate solace for the evolving human mind in the ever widening dimensions of its spiritual journey. In the mantra, sound and sense merge and emerge in unison. Vision, experience and expression constituted the graphic trajectory of this journey. Inspiration and expression had to occur on a similar scale. Inspiration would hasten the vision while the word made possible the expression. A choice union of vision and the word comprised the mantra. Its dimensions were aspects of both the experiential and the existential. This is where what he termed integral yoga or purna yoga came in. After all, as he succinctly puts it in his *The Life Divine*, *all life is yoga*.

Sri Aurobindo has been considered by many negative critics as being too intellectual and highbrow to be a poet at all. But then in my view he is essentially a poet who does not deliberately try to be philosophical in his writings, simply because poetry and the poetic process of godward becoming are both two sides of the same paper for him: tear one and you tear the other. His is poetry of the spirit and the four states of intense spiritual experience as I have tried to show are qualitatively captured in their subtle variations and shades as only a major poet could. Craft he certainly has, and as for images and words he is bound by the unique nature of his preoccupations. Now, where words stagger under the heftiness of the expression music would step in with ease and élan. In many ways both Sri Aurobindo and Tyagaraja are attempting to capture the bliss of spiritual experience and unison. The touch of the divine alters the state of the mortal mind — words seek newer dimension of meaning and *raga* newer dimensions of *rasa*.

The question that has been tormenting me all along is how far the poet can reach before addressing that stasis of silence where words falter and fail — where pure music takes over and Laya, that formless quality of the force-field of the spirit becomes possible. Perhaps all art genuinely aspires to that condition of music of the *alaukika ananda*! As the poet has phrased it:

The peace of God, a great calm immanence
Is now my being's boundless atmosphere.

Notes On Authors

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

Deepti Tewari Sri Aurobindo and The Mother came into Deepti's life when she was a teenager. The vistas that opened forth then, stretch onwards yet. For more than three decades she has lived and worked in Auroville. Her primary aim has been to become serviceable to an Auroville embodying the consciousness that gave it birth. This journey of discovery has taken her variously through stints in the organisational structures of Auroville; coordinating and participating in seminars and workshops; representing Auroville both within India and abroad; contributing to learning teaching materials as also writing and editing *The Matrimandir Journals*. Exploring Sri Aurobindo's and The Mother's ideas about an education for a New Consciousness while teaching/working with teenagers and adults has been a major focus of the last 27 years.

Rick Lipschutz discovered the Integral Yoga after exploring other paths and has been a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother since 1997. For years a member of the Cultural Integration Fellowship who attended retreats at Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, he is now retired, doing sadhana and writing.

Sarani Ghosal(Mondal), Dr. is Assistant Professor in Business Communication, DSMS, Durgapur, West Bengal. She has worked on *The Poetry and Poetics of Walt Whitman and Sri Aurobindo* for her Ph.D and completed one spell of her post-doctoral UGC project on *Paolo Coelho and Sri Aurobindo* from the Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, HP.

Subha Mallick Born in 1942, she graduated with Honours in Sanskrit from Presidency College, Kolkata, obtaining the Vidyasagar Gold Medal. She has a number of publications in Bengali, notable among them being *Meghduta*, *Ishopanishad*, *Bidur*, and *Kathopanishad O Sri Aurobindo Anudhyan*. Besides her literary activities, her other interests are music, recitation of Sanskrit hymns and acting and directing of Bengali and Sanskrit dramas.