

ISSN 2278-2117

Śraddhā श्रद्धा

Śraddhā



श्रद्धा



(Vol.5, No.1)



15 August, 2013

15 August, 2013

Courtesy: Nirmal Sethia Charitable Trust



He imposed upon dark atom and dumb mass
The diamond script of the Imperishable,
Inscribed on the dim heart of fallen things
A paeon-song of the free Infinite

.....
And the message of the superconscient Fire.

Savitri, 4th rev.ed, 1993. p.232

Śraddhā

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

Vol.5 No. 1

15 August, 2013



Sri Aurobindo Bhavan
8 Shakespeare Sarani • Kolkata 700 071

Publication Details

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

Annual Subscription : Rs 150.00 **Single copy** : Rs. 50.00 Those wishing to receive the journal by post may please send an additional Rs. 100.00

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

For overseas readers : Annual subscription :US\$ 45 inclusive of postal and bank charges for hard copy; **US\$ 20** for soft copy

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

All Rights Reserved

No matter appearing in this journal or part thereof may be reproduced or translated, in any form, without the written permission of the publishers except for short extracts as quotations. Views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the journal. Readers with different viewpoints are requested to write direct to the contributors. Editor, **Śraddhā**, will be pleased to provide the necessary contact details. All correspondence may be addressed to

Śraddhā

Sri Aurobindo Bhavan
8 Shakespeare Sarani
Kolkata 700 071

Editor: Arup Basu
Phone: 98302 58723
E-mail : arupbasu99@yahoo.com , arup.mbe@gmail.com

Published by
Sri Aurobindo Centre for Research in Social Sciences
Sri Aurobindo Bhavan
8 Shakespeare Sarani
Kolkata 700071
Phone : 2282 3057, 2282 2162, 2282 1819

Printed by
Basab Chattopadhyaya
Shilalipi
16 A Tamer Lane
Kolkata 700 009
Phone 22414580

Editorial

At a time when bizarre changes are taking place in the life of the nation, when we live 'between a collapsing past and an indeterminate future', it is at such times like these, times of great, bewildering change and transition and conflict that we turn to Sri Aurobindo, a born revolutionary, 'a towering figure on our political, literary, intellectual and, above all, spiritual landscape, not only for India but for the entire humanity' (Karan Singh, *India and the World*). Not only did his political writings and activity galvanise the entire nation, particularly the youth of India, they also set a clear sense of direction and laid down proper guidelines to show the nation the path to ultimate freedom and liberation from the stranglehold of foreign rule.

Sri Aurobindo's concept of spiritual nationalism was based on certain key basic concepts. For Sri Aurobindo, 'the nation was not only a political construct, it was in fact a divinity. It was Bhavani Bharati, Mother India, a living goddess. And it was a divinity into which one had to be prepared to offer everything as a sacrifice so that one could be freed from bondage imposed by foreigners, a great and holy yajnya, as he put it for national emancipation. Everything that was done at that time was done as an offering to the divine. That is what made a tremendously powerful impact upon the younger generation.... He was the first thinker in India, who had a clear appreciation of the role of the masses, and the role of the proletariat. This was in 1893, long before the Marxist-Leninist revolution in the Soviet Union. According to him the proletariat may appear to be docile and immobile, but whoever succeeds in understanding the proletariat and arousing them will be master of India's destiny. This was a very important concept, because sometimes the freedom movement has been called "bhadrloka movement" or elitist movement. Among the radical group, Sri Aurobindo was the first person to take the movement out of the drawing room and conference room on to the streets, minds and hearts of the Indian people'. (Ibid)

Noted international French journalist, François Gautier, rues the fact that Sri Aurobindo is hardly known in his own country. He further goes on to say that 'no journalist ever mentions this extraordinary yogi, whose sayings of one hundred years ago are still one hundred per cent relevant today. Not only is he absent from schools and universities, ... he is branded a 'terrorist'. Shame on India!'

To Gabriela Mistral, the Chilean poet and the first Latin American Nobel Laureate 'Sri Aurobindo is no visionary. He has always acted his dreams ... So from individual self-discipline he has gone to the life of humanity. *The Psychology of Social Development, Ideals and Progress* and *The Ideal of Human Unity* should be carefully considered by all those who are busy preparing blue-prints for the future'. And in the great French writer and Nobel Laureate, Romain Rolland's prophetic utterance, one hears the forecast that "as in the past China was spiritually conquered by a great Indian, so in the future too she would be conquered by another great Indian, Sri Aurobindo, the Maha-Yogi who, 'is the bringer

of that light which will chase away the darkness that envelops the world to-day' ”.

It is interesting to read what Sri Gopalkrishna Gandhi, former Governor of West Bengal, has written on Sri Aurobindo in the foreword to the book entitled '*Sri Aurobindo's Uttarpada Speech: a centennial commemorative volume (1909-2009)*' published by Uttarpada Sri Aurobindo Parishad. He says “The world is one now in a way which it was not some decades ago. But, for Sri Aurobindo, it always was one. There was a unity in everything that he saw... Every word of Sri Aurobindo's August 14-15 speech reads like a script that is contemporary, written today and is also timeless. A script which can be said to be of tomorrow, of 10 years from now, 100 years from now. He has himself said it is no coincidence that the date of birth of our country and the day on which he arrived happen to share the date and month... Let us dedicate ourselves, remembering that every Indian of all denominations and creeds is the symbol of the unity which Sri Aurobindo said is yet to come to us. Let us in our lives become that unity.”

At the beginning we spoke of Sri Aurobindo being a born revolutionary. Nolinikanto Gupta in his usual, luminously simple way goes further and views the revolutionary 'even as an iconoclast'. He states that 'Sri Aurobindo in his stride was always transgressing and overflowing the borders, ... for nothing short of the supreme and complete and integral truth satisfied the urge of consciousness in him; ... This urge towards the supreme reality, this transcendence, did not mean for him a rejection of the domains passed through: it is a subsuming, that is to say, uplifting the narrower, the lower status, integrating them into the higher: ... In the scheme and pattern of human existence in the hierarchy that is collective life, Sri Aurobindo sought to express the play of supreme Truth, express materially that which works always in secret and behind the veil. The Supreme Reality is not merely the supreme awareness and consciousness, but it is a power and a force; ... a mode of force which is not only a force that knows but creates, not only creates but transforms. ... This is the force which Sri Aurobindo has disclosed and put at the disposal of mankind. This is the force he has set free that is creating a new world — reorganising and remoulding, through a great travail indeed, our ancient sphere that will cradle the earth of the golden age'. (Nolinikanto Gupta, *Collected Works*, vol.5, pp.5-6). This is indeed the greatest boon that the earth can ask from the Supreme, the Highest. Little wonder then that the Mother has said that 'Sri Aurobindo does not belong to the past nor to history. Sri Aurobindo is the Future advancing towards its realisation'. (Mother, *CWM*, vol.13, p.7)

Even as matter for this number was being made ready to be sent to the press, news arrived from the Ashram of the quiet passing away of Samir Kanto Gupta, our very dear and much beloved Ranjuda, the eldest son of Nolini Kanto Gupta. He probably represented the last link in the long chain of great sadhaks in the Ashram of yesteryears. Much like his father, Samir Kanto, too, was proficient in several Indian and foreign languages, notably the classics, Greek, Latin and Sanskrit. A man of few words, he wore his learning and wisdom lightly. In his writing, one could discern the stamp of the Roman hand behind, that of his father. His writing style is simple and direct, very much like the man he was, unadorned and economical to the utmost degree, often verging on the epigrammatic. It is lean and poised and restrained, shorn of all verbosity and pedantic perambulations yet possessed of a balance and harmony with a peculiar sinuous rhythm all its own, thus giving an inherent strength and a Gallic clarity to the entire structure which, no doubt, were a product of his early training in the classics and his love and mastery of the French

language. Transparent and clear, his words flow in a cool, limpid stream that could express deeply contemplative ideas and mirror the calm grandeur of the distant heights as well as reveal hidden layers of great depths of a close intimacy and gentle warmth. At the end of a long life's journey, Samir Kanto has at last found the long sought true resting place in the lap of the World Mother. The Mother has taken to her breast her chosen child.

We take pleasure in publishing in this issue the earliest draft of *Savitri* by Sri Aurobindo which he started as early as August 1916. We are grateful to Anurag Banerjee, Founder of Overman Foundation, for permitting us to reproduce this from their website. This would not have been possible but for the kind permission initially granted by Sri Manoj Dasgupta, Managing Trustee, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, to the Foundation to publish it online on their website. We take this opportunity to express our grateful thanks to the Ashram Trust. We thank both the Editor, *Mother India*, and the Clear Ray Trust, the sole copyright holder of Amal Kiran's (KD Sethna) works, for permitting us to reproduce the article by Amal Kiran entitled '*August 15: its world significance ...*' which first appeared in *Mother India* on August 15, 1950. Our grateful thanks to Carel Thième for graciously allowing us to reprint the article by Georges van Vrekhem from his book '*The new spirituality*' recently published by Stichting Aurofonds. We also owe a deep debt of gratitude to Aster Patel for making available to us from the collection of his private papers the article by Indra Sen. We thank the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for permitting us to reproduce short extracts, drawing upon the works of the Mother and Nolini Kanto Gupta and the photograph of Sri Aurobindo from the Ashram catalogue of photos with a few lines from *Savitri*. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgement and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry.

A friend and a well-wisher of *Śraddhā* has pointed out some minor inaccuracies in the references to the Gita's slokas cited in Anilbaran Roy's article '*The Advaita of the Gita*' appearing in the April'13 issue. These should now read

- Ch.8, Sl. 9 in place of 9.9
- Ch.8, Sl.11 " " 9.11
- Ch.15, Sl.7-9 " " 7.9

We regret the errors and are grateful to our friend for pointing this out.

Contents

Earliest Draft of <i>Savitri</i> (1916)	Sri Aurobindo	9
August 15: its World Significance Pointers in Modern History	Amal Kiran (KD Sethna)	31
The Adwaita of the Gita	Anilbaran Roy	41
Vedic hermeneutic of Sri Aurobindo	Krishna Roy	48
The Mother Image in Sri Aurobindo	Prema Nandakumar	54
The Divine Mother	Debashish Banerji	61
The Crisis in philosophical pursuit What is more wonderful 'The Ashram' or <i>The Life Divine</i> ? (A Dialogue with Dr. S.K. Maitra)	Indrasen	80
What is human knowledge? A reflection based on the work of Sri Aurobindo	Matthijs Cornelissen	85
The New Spirituality or the Aurobindian Revolution	Georges Vrekhem	115
The Soul That Makes Us Matter	Rick Lipschutz	120
On Reading Sri Aurobindo: Blindness, Insight, Outlook and a Perspective	Murali Sivaramkrishnan	125
Notes On Authors		137
Index To Authors And Articles In <i>Śraddhā</i> August 2012 – April 2013		139

Cover : *Country of the Mind* by Giles Herdman

श्रद्धावाँल्लभते ज्ञानं
Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Earliest Draft of *Savitri* (1916)

Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo had started working on the earliest draft of *Savitri* in August 1916. Nirodbaran, who has portrayed how *Savitri* reached its final form in his *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, writes about this draft:

“The draft exists in two sections. The first comprising Book I and a few pages of Book II... Book I is complete, Book II unfinished. The spelling of the three chief characters is: Savithri, Uswapathy, Suthyavan. In the first Book, after a short description of Night and Dawn, there is a very brief account of the Yoga done by Uswapathy, then Savithri is born, grows up and goes out, at Uswapathy’s prompting, to find her mate. She finds Suthyavan. In the meantime Narad comes down to earth and visits Uswapathy’s palace. There is a talk between the two; Savithri returns from her quest and discovery, and a talk takes place among the three.” (pp. 173-174, 1995 edition)

SÂVITHRÎ

BOOK I

In a huge forest where the listening Night
Heard lonely voices and in the large hush
Was conscious of the sigh and tread of things
That have no sound for the rich heart of day,—
For now her phantom tribes were not abroad,
The panther’s eyes glared not, the tiger slept
Prone in his lair of jungle or deep grass,—
Startling the wide-browed dreamer Dawn arose.
Lain in her darker thoughtful sister’s robe
She pushed away the loving cloak that sealed
To rest her brilliant and imperious eyes
And waved the dim kind guardian from her side.
Raised were the wonderful lids that open heaven.
Vague for a while with sleep lightened her gaze.
Smiling the ever-youthful goddess rose,
Voluptuous in a purity divine,
Cast free her drifting robe of magic light,
And pressed her rosy fingers delicately
Upon the flushed cheek of the pallid world.
Flocking upon the ruddy verge her locks
Made splendid clots of morning gold, windlifted

To enrich the hues of space; and lucid limbs
Of secret spiritual beauty formed
Glimmered divinity through every veil.
Once she half-looked behind for her great sun,
Then thoughtful turned to her immortal work.
And Sâvithrî woke also in a world
That opened joyful eyes to life again
And rapturous heard the voices and the stir
Of morning. Not to joy she rose; for fear
Awoke with her and trembled at the dawn.
Sighing she laid her hand upon her bosom,
Nor knew why the close lingering ache was there,
So quiet, so old, so natural to its place,
Till memory came opening like a bud
Her strong sleep-shrouded soul. She gazed within
And saw the dumb white statue of pain erect
Within its temple waiting like a god
Daily oblation of her unwept tears.
Then all the cruelty of thought returned,
And lifting up wide beautiful heavy eyes
She gazed upon the bright and careless Dawn.

This was the day when Suthyavân must die.

Daughter of silence, Sâvithrî: her birth
Was like a glorious dawn long planned in heaven,
By obscure earth resisted long. Three years
Her father lived in vigils and in fasts
Like a still mind that gathers in its rays,
Hushing the waves of sense to a wide sleep.
Forced to look upward through its transient veils
Life in his members sank controlled and awed
By the strong gaze of immortality.
He dwelt among the hastening multitudes
Companioned only by his wide-winged spirit
Seated within in an eternal calm.
Plunged from this fretful surface into depths
Of being where the thought sinks large and pale
Like a tired god into mysterious seas,
Repressing speech and wasteful act he held
Man's hidden strength safe from life's troubled
hands
And Nature motionless in a silent soul.
Thus all himself he made an offering pure
Held up by silence priestlike to the skies
And cast it at the burning Mother's feet—
Heart of truth's mighty musings in far heavens
On things withdrawn, immortal Sâvithrî,
The goddess born of sacrificial fire
Who rises chanting from an unseen sun
So rose she upon seven flaming tongues,
Uplifted the world's vast rhythms in her limbs,
A body of music and an anthemed voice
Heard in the spaces that become the soul
Of God-rapt listeners. "Ask," she cried, "the hope
For the blind light that strives concealed on earth
With death and the original darkness; I give
For earth, to help the patient mother's life.
That to enlarge and with divine attempt
Amplify new-sky, planting a tent of God
In desert space thy immortal kind was born."
He asked for children beautiful and bold,
Eyed like the dawn and rapid like the seas,
Wise as the Flame that broods within the world.
"A flower from its burning heart profound,
In one I give thee all," the Word replied,
"I give thee more than all that thou hast prayed,

Ray of my suns, a daughter. The ages dumb
Intended long her fiery birth." She hushed,
Music that ceases in the ear of trance
Casting eternal cadences behind,
And vanished into her intenser skies
As disappears a flame in endless light,
Immortally extinguished. Then released
His soul drew back into the speed and noise
Of the vast business of created things
Out of its rapt abysm. He resumed
His burden and was strong for daily deeds,
Wise with the thoughts that skim the fathomless
surge
Of Nature and wing back to hidden shores.

Now turned the year upon its cycle sweet
And the cool happy winter ceased in spring
Rich with the instinct of God's sensuous love
Revealed in beauty. Over all the land
The proud asoca bloomed in crimson fire,
The kingshook blushed upon her bridal boughs,
The mango-blossom fed the liquid voice
Of the love-maddened cuckoo and the bee
Murmured in fragrance. Then a child was born
Who looked upon the world with tranquil eyes.
They named her Sâvithrî because her birth
Sprang from that power. They said, "A flame is
born
Of sacrifice, a silence in the noise
Of earthly things reveals the secret Thought,
Love armed with strength comes down to help the
world."
Reared sweetly by her father's bright-eyed queens
She grew like a young tree in silent bliss
Self-gathered that receives the shocks of earth
With wordless passion. Bathed in another light,
Firm, quivering inwardly with mystic rain,
Proud of the ravishing storm's immense assault
The tree in other calms and tempests lives.
The shadowy touches of these outward things
It only knows as shapes of powers within.
Through a soft quiet joy her childhood moved
Like a small bird that with rich-coloured breast
Sings to himself upon a pleasant bough.
Escaping from this sweet serious bud a strong

And radiant woman flowered. Deep slumbrous fire
 Was in the long-fringed glories of her eyes,
 Behind her brows there sat a noble soul
 Of vision that looked forth on earth through light
 And like a nectarous moon her passionate heart
 Loved all and spoke no word. Thus as she grew
 Like a young palm-tree lonely by a lake,
 Her name was heard upon the wondering earth,
 The sons of kings beheld her from afar.
 But none dared seize her glory; all forbore
 To embrace a flame too searching for clay-bound
 hearts
 Earth fashions for her daily uses small.
 Sealed up in vessels of a coarser make
 By brief-lived duller warmths inured, they shrink
 From souls too swift and great; only they bear
 The trivial grosser touches of the world,
 Seize not its hidden fearless energies,
 Clasp not its raptures that desire the strong.
 Therefore the gods are few in mortal forms.
 But on a morn when summer still was young
 And the last cuckoo cried among the leaves,
 While Uswapathy listened to the morn,
 Out of the shadows of the white alcoves
 Came Sāvithrī to his side burning in silence
 Like a young torch of incense and of flames.
 She bore her body like the sob of bliss
 Of earth's mute adoration towards heaven
 Awakened in beauty's living form. He saw,
 Pensive, her sweetness woven of golden fire,
 Carved like a nectar-cup for thirsty gods.
 Then took the father on his knees the child;
 Lifting her face he gazed down questioning
 Into the wonder of her long veiled eyes,
 Deep pools of thought and love as yet unstirred,
 That marvelled still at life and saw things far.
 There conscious of pure brooding depths he
 spoke,—
 Those sister queens so willed who passionate
 watched
 Their nursling with a tremulous delight,
 Enamoured of her firm tender ways and words,
 Her laughter, music of tranquility,
 Her lustrous eyes waking in sweet large night,
 Her limbs that were linked poems made of gold

And her slim moonbeam feet. "O child," he said,
 "Though sixteen years have ripened in thy brow
 Thy life dreams still, shut in its own pure bud
 Unburst by winds and ardent light. Fragrant
 Thou bloomest like a lone forgotten flower
 No hand has plucked to lay before the god.
 The heavens perhaps guard thee for some great
 soul
 Or too proud-missioned from a divine dawn
 Thy light repels the common sons of men.
 Go forth and bear the torch of a sweet quest,
 Thy heart. For somewhere surely arrived on earth
 Waiting unknown thy perfect comrade lives
 Kept for thee by the recompensing gods.
 Bird of the spaces, soul, I set thee free;
 Venture into the world and find thy mate
 Winging across far lands." She went, obeying,
 Like one who understands a form of words,
 But waits to see their secret meaning dawn.
 Her chariot rolled not among cities thronged,
 Nor sought the clamorous markets of the land,
 Nor sojourned in the palaces of kings;
 But through green musing woods, past rough-
 browed hills,
 Over wind-trod pastures and in happy groves
 Glided its course like a swift lonely hope
 Aware of a sweet mystery withheld
 Among its dreams. Still were there remnants left
 Of old primæval spaces where one heard
 The sweet and dumbly murmuring voice of earth
 In the great passion of her sun-kissed trance
 And quieted the all-seeking mind could feel
 The unwearied clasp of her mute, patient love
 And know for a soul the mother of our forms.
 Vague-hearted, listening to a murmur long,
 Rhythm of an immenser wordless thought
 That gathers in the silence behind life
 Like one who waits some sudden revealing stroke,
 Through such bright scenes, her kindred spaces,
 led
 By the veiled guardians of her deathless past,
 She saw her road in her instinctive mind.
 There the king-sages from their labour done
 Lived happily with birds and beasts and dawn
 And evening, watched with the bright constant

stars,
 Seeking the soul of things with boundless love,
 Or sojourned inly with a voice profound
 And a surprising light. Some sat aloof,
 Pale hermits with the tiger-skin for robe.
 Others with wives and children who grew built
 Among these silent mighty influences
 Into the towers of manhood they must be,
 Unripe for burdens yet and wars, lived sparely
 On the raw forest-fruits, kindled the flame
 And chanted morn and eve the mystic's hymn.
 They dwelt like spirits from Time's dull yoke
 released,
 Once more as infants pure, their radiant thoughts
 Expecting silence. Mid these haunts of peace
 Welcomed by the great mild ascetics, sweetly
 Cherished by the calm bright-eyed women pure,
 Resting on plains or among mountains large
 Through hushed tranquillity of forest nights
 And when the first cried of the woodland woke,
 Watching high dawn break through the giant hills,
 Swift-wheeled she journeyed; so far-roaming came
 By river-banks and spaces lapped in gold
 Into the country of the Shalwa kings
 And on its borders solitary and grand
 Saw woodland verges trodden by wild deer
 And wandered over by the peacock herds.
 Cool-perfumed and with pleasure-burdened feet
 The morning breezes faltered among flowers;
 Light flooded heaven's regions, all the land
 Life flooded. On green earth, in sapphire skies
 The free hare bounded and the shrill kite wheeled;
 Doves cooed untiring in the easeful shade,
 The snow-white cranes toiled clanging through
 the air
 And flame-winged wild-drakes swam in silvery
 pools.
 Her chariot journeyed echoing through a wide
 Uncultured earth strewn with deep glades divine
 That screened their sheltered murmurs from the
 sun.
 Primaeval peace was there and in its bosom
 Held undisturbed wild life of birds and beasts:
 Man the artificer had not arrived,
 Nor formal labour claimed for dull great cares

Fields tenanted by sunlight and the rain
 And pastures of the free life of the earth.
 But now to a Nature more remote, self-hidden
 From all but its own vision deep and wild,
 Attracted by the forest's sombre call
 Her chariot hastened, skirting prouder glades
 Where the green stragglers lingered in the light
 Behind immenser seas of foliage, rear
 Of a tremendous solitude of trees.
 Here in a lifting of the vast secrecy
 Where plunged a narrow cleft, a track ran hewn
 To screened infinities from a farewell space
 Of sunlight, she beheld kingly youth
 Magnificent in the morning of his force,
 Clad in a rough robe sewn of forest bark,
 Taming a wild horse to his gentle hand.
 Still by its inner musings sealed from life,
 Aware of Nature, vague as yet to man,
 Her wandering gaze the splendid beast admired,
 Not yet the master creature. Then it woke.
 Half-turned to her over its tangled mane
 She saw, she knew, as if oft seen before,
 Eyes and a face rich, noble, high and swift
 Like the gods' morning. She cried out like a bird
 Who hears her mate upon a distant bough
 And by her musical bidding seized and stilled,
 Hooves trampling fast and crashing chariot ceased,
 The unwilling horses pawing yet for speed.
 But Suthyavân who heard the liquid voice
 Wedding the summer air stood marvelling:
 Himself, his task, his victory forgot,
 He left the rapid creature to its will.
 It seemed to him vaguely as if the sweet call
 Were to the chariot-horses of his life
 Turning their speed towards a glorious goal.
 He came, they met, wide wondering eyes gazed
 close
 Into bright eyes and deep, their comrade orbs.
 Touched by the warning finger of sweet love
 The soul can recognise its answering soul
 Across dividing Time. Upon life's ways
 Absorbed wrapped traveller, turning, it recovers
 Familiar splendours in an unknown face
 And thrills again to the old immortal love
 Wearing a new sweet body for delight.

But the mind only thinks, "Behold the one
 For whom my life has waited long unfilled!
 Behold the sudden sovereign of my days."
 Love dwells in us like an unopened flower.
 Roaming in his charmed sleep mid thoughts and
 things
 The child-god is at play; but through it all
 He lingers for the touch that he shall know
 And when it comes, wakes blindly to a voice,
 A look, a smile, the meaning of a face.
 He seizes on some sign of outward charm
 To guide him by the groping mind obscured,
 Desires the image for the godhead's sake
 And takes the body for the sculptured soul.
 Her heart unveiled, his now to meet her turned.
 Attracted as in heaven star by star
 They wondered at each other and rejoiced.

First Suthyavân: "Who art thou, virgin bright?
 My mind might dream perhaps and my heart fear,
 Risen on a morning of the gods thou drivest
 Thy horses from the Thunderer's luminous worlds.
 For they have wandered in the silent hours
 And lingered in the slumbrous noonday woods
 And know that gods from heaven walk abroad.
 If such thou art, pause once before thou fade
 Like a bright thought too glorious for our hold.
 But if thy heart was made for human love,
 My eyes grow glad to know and my bosom rejoices
 That mortal sweetness smiles between thy lids,
 Thy heart can beat beneath a human gaze,
 This golden body dally with fatigue
 And the sweet taste and joy of earthly food
 Attract thee. From thy journey cease; come down.
 Close is my father's woodland hermitage.
 There follow me. Though rude and poor our life,
 The woods are round it and the heavens above
 Look down at a rich secrecy and hush.
 The forest gods have taken it in their arms
 And brightly apparelled it in green and gold."
 And the girl, musing, "I am Sâvithrî,
 Princess of Madra. Who art thou? what name
 Musical on earth? What trunk of ancient kings
 Has flowered in thee upon its happy branch?
 Why is thy dwelling in the pathless wood

Far from the deeds thy glorious youth demands?"
 And he: "King Dyumathsen in Shalwa reigned
 Through all the tract that from beyond these tops
 Turns looking back towards the southern heavens.
 But the bright gods recalled the gifts they gave,
 Took from his eyes their glad and helping ray
 And led the uncertain goddess from his side.
 He sojourns in the deep and solemn woods.
 Son of that king, I, Suthyavân, have lived
 In their huge vital murmur kin to me,
 Nursed by their vastness; Chitrâshwa too they
 name me;
 For the early child-god took my hand to limn
 The bright and bounding swiftnesses that stray
 Wind-maned in our pastures. So my mind
 approached
 Before I lived in its wide natural haunts
 The dumb great animal consciousness of earth
 Now grown so close. Gold princess Sâvithrî,
 High is my life and happy I find my state
 Possessing royally the earth and skies;
 But I have seen thee; these seem not enough:
 New rich deep things felicitous I desire;
 And heaven and earth are in a moment changed.
 O, if thou art the source, draw nearer yet
 Down on this sward disdaining not our soil,
 For here are spaces emerald to thy tread,
 Descend, O happiness. Let thy golden feet
 Enrich the rough floors on whose earth we dwell."
 She said: "My heart turns to my father's house
 And yet will stay here on this forest verge.
 Now of more wandering it has no need."
 Down came she with a soft, bright, faltering haste,
 Her gleaming feet upon the green-gold sward,
 And like pale brilliant wandering moths her hands
 Claimed from the sylvan verge's sunlit arms
 Bright comrades of the summer and the breeze
 And twined a natural garland deep and pure
 Fit for their love. This with glad unshamed eyes
 Upraised in hands that trembled with delight
 Lingering around the neck of him she chose,
 She hung,—such the fair symbol of those days,—
 Upon his bosom coveted by her love.
 Nor with that equal bond ceased satisfied
 Her heart, but as before a sudden god

She bowed down to his feet and touched the hem
 Of his coarse raiment with her worshipping hands.
 He took them in his own; the sweet first touch
 Of all their closeness through long intimate years
 Feeling each other for the soul behind,
 Joined them for bliss upon his bosom. They parted,
 She to her father's rich and sculptured halls,
 He to the cottage rude she hoped for, thatched
 With leaves, built of hewn forest-boughs, where
 lingered
 In toil and penury of their fallen state
 His parents bearing patiently their days.
 Thus were they wedded and the knot was bound.

Attracted by the golden summer earth
 Nârad the heavenly sage from Paradise
 Came harping through the quivering lustrous air.
 Rapturous and drunken with the wine of God
 He poured upon the world his mighty chant
 Casting the harmonies of his heaven-born voice
 Unwearied. By the sweetness of his song
 Earth the dumb sufferer was awhile appeased
 And all heaven's kindled regions shook, alight
 With his heart's ceaseless joy. He sang the name
 Of Vishnu and the secret of the stars
 And the beginnings of the conscious world.
 He hymned Delight and Love that knows not death:
 He sang the rapture of the Heart divine
 That calls our spirits and of discords healed
 And pleasure that shall die in a white bliss
 And sin delivered from itself by love
 And immortality surprising earth.
 And as he sang, the demons wept with joy:
 They dreamed of the defeat for which they hope
 When with their chosen dreadful labour done
 They shall return to him who sent them forth.
 So harping, singing came the man divine
 To men obscured on earth. The glory down
 Like a persistent streak of lightning fell,
 Nearing, until the rapt eyes of the sage
 Looked forth from luminous cloud and, strangely
 limned,
 His face, a beautiful mask of antique joy,
 Appeared from light, descending where arose
 King Uswapathy's palace to the winds

In Madra, flowering up in delicate stone.
 There welcomed by the strong and thoughtful king
 Who ceased from common life and care and sat
 Inclining to the high and rhythmic voice,
 Seated on sacred grass the heavenly seer
 Spoke of the toils of men and what the gods
 Strive for on earth, and joy that throbs behind
 The marvel and the mystery of pain.
 He sang to him of the lotus heart of love
 With all its thousand luminous buds of truth
 That quivering sleeps veiled by apparent things.
 It trembles at every touch, it strives to wake
 And one day it shall hear a blissful voice
 And in the garden of the spouse shall bloom
 When she is seized by her discovered lord.
 Even as he sang, came with a voice of hooves
 As of her swift heart hastening, Sâvithrî.
 Changed with the halo of her love she came,
 Her radiant tread glimmering across the floor,
 A happy wonder in her fathomless eyes.
 And happily her stately head she bowed
 Before her father and her shining gaze
 Saw like a rose of wonder and adored
 Sweetness and glory of that Son of Heaven.
 But Nârad casting on her from his eyes
 Celestial the unwounded light of heaven
 Griefless, "From what wild border, Sâvithrî,
 Turns back thy wheels' far quest with wonderful
 earth
 Satisfied, singing of sweet haste to bliss
 As one who brings hushed treasure for his soul,
 Rapt burdens and rich secrets from some shrine
 Where sits a godhead mystic in the stone?
 What divine floods bathed pure thy pilgrim limbs
 And burdened heart? or as from marvellous lands,
 Verges of wonder and horizons strange,
 Landscapes of mystery, rivers of delight,
 Flew once the Bird who from the flaming kings
 Of pain ravished the ambrosia for the gods,
 Exultantly—so fleest thou bright-winged back
 Rejoicing with some flushed and heavenly fruit
 Seized in the dangerous woodlands of desire?
 Such light is seen beneath thy mortal lids."
 Then Uswapathy, "An unknown face one seeks
 Among the indifferent visages of earth,

Known to the secret sense our clay conceals:
 And when it opens, even such light can dawn!
 For we are seekers of our hidden suns.
 To find its own lord since to her through earth
 He came not yet, this sweetness ventured forth.
 Now she brings back her dedicated soul.
 Reveal, my child, the name thy heart has learned.”
 Shining she answered, “Suthyavân, an exile
 In the huge and desolate forests, is my lord.
 My father, I have chosen, this is done.”
 And Uswapathy wordless for a space
 Answered his child, “What thou hast chosen and
 done,
 The silent god within thee shall approve.
 In the rich commerce of this mystic world
 Where all things given wonderfully return,
 Life for its offering, bare of every claim
 The heart has prostrated before the adored
 Satisfied with its privilege to love.
 Dimly it knows, descended from the skies,
 Its sweet lost fortune by that gift restored,
 Deep price at which the costly worlds were born
 Self-giving the great merchandise of God.”
 Sâvithrî answered not. Her happy eyes
 Hooded with light from an immortal source
 And finding hidden glories on the earth
 Smiled at thought whispering, confident of bliss.

But Nârâd now, the seer, lifted his voice
 That sang the first thoughts of the new-born gods,
 Turning on her the rapt celestial eyes
 Bare to whose gaze Time toils, his unseen works
 Detected: “Wilder-sweet thy curves, O life,
 Following the stream of Time through the
 unknown
 Than sealed thought dreams of! Wandering soul,
 thy wings
 Strike hidden goals. A god’s tremendous touch
 Seems pain unbearable to mortal nerves,
 But high that agony climbs, the flower of flame
 In whose fierce seed is the sweet tree of heaven.
 Endurance first the ethereal kings trod out
 Pacing the measures of the dateless road;
 Serene rose next equality from the stars
 Weaving her vast and rhythmed walk; thrilling

Their large third rapturous stride discovered bliss.
 But blind and swift the great-maned life of earth
 Alarmed by grief swerved from their dreadful path.
 She dulled the pang to her children, heeding not
 In the fond passion of her mother mind
 That they who toil self-given into the hands
 Of her great sorrows and arise grow gods,
 Possessors of the eternal joys unseen,
 The master souls who are for ever glad.
 By pain there works a spirit from the clod;
 By pain eternal Night gave forth the suns;
 By pain the wise Immortals knew and chose
 The leaders of the dark and mighty march,
 The swift and radiant who shall help the world.
 From sojourn in some high preparing skies,
 From rapture in the worlds of flame and light
 Obscured they come, down on the yearning earth,
 Conscious of their lost heavens. Soul who hast
 lived
 Guarded in thy sweet happy heavenly self
 From life’s great hands,—but now the gods have
 touched,—
 Awake by sorrow, daughter of the sun.”
 But high the King cried back to the bright seer,
 “Ominous thy thoughts are, Nârâd, to our hearts
 Which only ask brief joy for their brief life.
 Flame not too high beyond the mortal’s ken.
 What soul aspires to grief or uncompelled
 Would taste of torture? If from joy to joy
 Chanting man climbed, then might we grow to
 gods.
 Too endless is the sad and stern ascent,
 Too slippery and precipitous the path.
 Rather if the thought silent in the wise
 That knows its wisdom vain to help mankind
 Close not thy lips, our blinded will succour,
 That it may see the pitfall and the escape.
 Because to our footsteps light has been denied,
 Like children travelling to an unseen goal
 In night-hung paths in forest or morass
 We fearfully retrace some happy steps,
 We call to each other at some doubtful bend
 Guarding from winds some flickering torch of hope.
 We wander. If the mist could once be rent,—
 Chased never by the reason’s pallid light,—

Which from the first was settled round our way,
The dire immortal bows that ring our walk
Stringless would fall and Fate to Will be bound.
O Will is God concealed and Fate his bride.
But now in her immense and passionate mind
Shaping unrulèd the cycles of the stars,
With thoughts eternal, violent, large of pace,
She takes the little centuries in her stride
And holds him hooded in her mighty hands.
She knows without him all her strength were vain.
Two powers toil and meet in every field,
She clasps him bound lest he desert her arms,
She hides him in her breast to guide the suns."
But Nârâd still with that celestial gaze:
"Why vainly must thou ask for light in front?
Safe doors cry opening, but the doomed pass on.
None can renounce the chain his soul desires
Until a will eternal has been done.
Man by his nature to great grief is drawn;
For a mysterious Power compels his steps
And Life is stronger than the trembling mind."
With troubled heart King Uswapathy heard;
He reined his rearing thoughts to make reply:
"Still must man seek for light and quest in front,
Chained to his passion on the labouring earth.
Yearning to clasp an enemy of her heart
Is cruellest grief for woman's subject life,
A bitter think to love! Or two may cling
United yet some natural fault in him
Turn even their close daily tenderness
A cherished suffering and a tortured joy.
Which of these swords shall pierce my child, O
sage?"
But Nârâd smiling with immortal lips:
"Fear not such coarser trembling shall be struck
From spirits who are harps the gods have made.
Gentle as the soft bud the spring desires,
Pure like a stream that kisses lonely banks,
Like a hill high-gazing where a fruited grove
Has made a murmuring nest for southern winds,
Calm and delightful is young Suthyavân.
The Happy in their sweet ether have not hearts
More wide and blissful than this forest boy's.
His nature deep and true lives with the god
In common things and that large-eyed communion

Has learned by which man's veiless mind wakes
free,
Griefless, uplifted; its wonderful domains
Grow luminous fields thronged with the tread of
gods.
Alas, if death into the elements
From which his gracious envelope was built,
Shatter this vase before it breathe its sweets,
As if earth could not keep a divine thing!
In one brief year when this bright hour flies back
Through Time, the shrouded night surrounds his
soul."
In haste the father cried aloud, "O girl,
Around a fated head thy wings have flown.
Mount, mount thy car and travelling through the
lands
Choose one more happy for thy fruitful couch.
Let not the obscure hand seal up too soon
The sweet perennial fountain of thy joys.
Not with this boy thy virgin life shall flower,
But the long glory of thy days lies dead
And vain the promise of the flaming gods."
But Sâvithrî replied with steadfast eyes
That saw the forest verge and Suthyavân;
"Once I have chosen, once the garland fell.
Whether for death or life, for joy or tears,
Two hearts have joined and shall not be divorced
By human wills or by the gods' strong hands."
So spoke she from her sweet and violent soul
Awakened to dangerous earth; but Uswapathy
Made answer to her from the father's heart:
"My daughter, who in this frail world belongs
To whom? Who is the husband? who the child?
Are they not shadows in thy dreaming mind?
The body thou hast loved, dissolved, is given,
Lost in the brute unchanging stuff of worlds,
To indifferent mighty Nature who shall make it
Crude matter for the joy of others' lives.
But for our souls, upon the wheel of God
For ever turning they arrive and go
Vain atoms in the whirling cycles vain,
Married and sundered in the magic round
Of the great Dancer of the boundless dance.
Thy emotions are but sweet and dying notes
In his wild music changed compellingly

From hour to hour. To cry to an unseized bliss
 Is the music's meaning. Caught, the rhythm fades,
 The sense has fled! only coarse-fibred joys
 Are given us that abase with useless pain.
 Sated the lax heart loathes its old desires;
 Love dies before the lover. None belongs
 Even to his nearest, but all to one far Self
 Constant, alone and hushed who cares for none.
 O child, obey not then thy clamorous heart's
 Insistence, thinking thy desires divine.
 Live by a calmer law. Strengthen thy life
 By work and thought, give succour to thy soul,
 With rich utilities help others' days,
 So shalt thou grieve to abiding peace."
 But Sāvithrī replied with steadfast eyes,—
 Calm now her heart and tender like the moon.
 "Now have I known my glad reality
 Beyond my body in another's being;
 I have perceived the changeless soul of Love.
 How then shall I desire a lonely good,
 Or slay, aspiring to white vacant peace,
 The hope divine with which my soul leaped forth
 From flame eternal, rapture of one vast Heart
 And tireless of the sweet abysses of Time
 Deep possibility always to love?
 This, this is first, last joy, against whose throb
 The riches of a thousand fortunate years
 Feel poverty. What to me are death and life
 And other men and children and my days,
 Since only for my soul in Suthyavân
 I treasure the rich occasion of my birth
 And sunlight and the emerald ways he treads,—
 If for a year, that year is all my life.
 Once only can the die for ever fall
 And, being thrown, no god can alter more
 Its endless moment. Once the word leaps forth
 And being spoken sounds immortally
 For ever in the memory of Time.
 Only once can my heart of woman choose.
 For what my heart has seen, my lips can speak
 That only and my servant body do.
 This is the yoke that God has laid on me
 And on the road He traced my life must run."
 She spoke and Nârad smiled and rising high
 Sprang like a fire into his roseate heavens

Chanting the anthem of triumphant love.
 So was it as the heart of Sāvithrī
 Tender and adamant decreed. Her father
 Journeying with brilliant squadrons and a voice
 Immense of chariots bore her from her bowers
 Of golden beauty to the rude bare hut
 Of Dyumathsena in the dim-souled huge
 Inhuman forest far from cheerful sound
 Of man's blithe converse mid his crowded days.
 Leaving behind their glittering companies
 The king and his two queens with thorns assailed
 And stumbling feet on the faint gloomy path
 Reached the rough-hewn ascetic hut and gave
 Their cherished nursing to the blind old king
 And that poor labour-worn and ageing queen
 To be their daughter and their servant there
 Through the hard strenuous days. With tearful eyes
 And a dull burden on their hearts they blessed
 The brief-lived husband of her fatal choice,
 Then went back to their life of vacant pomp
 Empty of her. There for one year she dwelt
 With Suthyavân and with his parents sole
 In the tremendous wood amid the cry
 Of crickets and the tiger's nightly roar,
 Defenceless to the forest's whisper vast
 And sunlight and the moonlight and the rain.
 For now the grief she had trod down seized on her;
 And though she served all diligently, nor spared
 Strict labour with the broom and jar and well
 And gentle personal tending and the piled fire
 Of altar and kitchen, no task to others allowed
 Her woman's strength might do, not with these
 things
 Her heart was, but with love and secret pain
 She dwelt like a dumb priest with hidden gods.
 Her spirit like a sea of living fire
 Possessed her lover, clinging—one vast embrace
 Around its threatened mate. Her quivering passion
 Intolerant of the poverty of Time
 Strove to expend whole centuries in a day.
 Ever her mind remembered Nârad's date
 And, trembling sad accountant of its riches,
 Reckoned the insufficient dawns between.
 So feeding sorrow and terror with her heart
 She lived in dread expectancy: or else

Fled from it vainly into abysses of bliss
 To meet worse after-sorrow; for then she felt
 Each day a golden page torn cruelly out
 From her too slender account of joy. She uttered
 No moan, but by her natural silence helped
 Lived lonely in the secret clutch of tears.
 Often she yearned to cry, "O Suthyavân,
 O lover of my soul, give more, give more
 Of love while yet thou canst to her thou lovest;
 For soon we part and who shall know how long
 Before the great wheel in its monstrous round
 Restore us to ourselves?" For well she knew
 She must not clutch that happiness to die
 With him and follow seizing on his robe,
 Travelling our other countries, voyagers glad
 Into the sweet or terrible beyond,
 Since that poor king and queen would need her
 long
 To help the empty remnant of their life.
 Strong she pressed back the cry into her soul
 And dwelt within silent, unhelped, alone.
 And still she knew that only surface seas
 Were spume to these loud winds; a greater spirit
 Calm-winged and watching all to every pain
 Assented largely in its strength and joy.
 Nor would she once have given tortured days
 Half hell, half heaven, of terror and delight
 For all the griefless bliss that Time could give
 Without him. Suthyavân with the dim answer
 Of our thought-blinded hearts perceived her clasp
 Of love and anguish round him, vaguely knew
 Some doom behind, and what his days could spare
 From labour in the forest hewing wood
 With his strong arm or gathering sacred grass
 Or hunting food in the far sylvan glades
 Or service to his father's sightless life
 He gave to her and strove to increase brief time
 With lavish softness of heart-seeking words
 And all the inadequate signs that love must use.
 All was too little for her dreadful need.
 Yet grew they into each other ever more
 Until it seemed no power could rend apart
 Since even the body's walls might not divide.
 For when he wandered in the forest, still
 Her conscious spirit walked with his and knew

His actions as if in herself he moved.
 He, less aware, thrilled with her from afar.
 Grief, fear became the food of mighty love.
 Tortured more fiercely, more her soul dilated
 Till measureless it grew in strength divine,
 An anvil for the blows of Fate and Time,
 Unslayable like the gods. Last grief became
 Calm, dull-eyed, resolute as if awaiting
 Some unknown issue of its fiery struggle,
 Some deed in which it might for ever cease
 Victorious over itself and death and tears.
 Fast the days fled. The rains rushed by; autumn
 Hastened his pace serene; winter and dew
 Their glories moist or cold ended too soon;
 Spring bounded by armed with the cuckoo's plaint,
 Piercing her heart with beauty of his flowers.
 Then summer like a stately king came in
 In opulent purple and in burning gold.
 She hated not his mornings and his eves,
 But rather besought that they would linger out
 Their careless glories, though he seemed to her
 Indifferent doom in heartless splendour clad
 Who hid with his bright hands the death of joy.
 Swiftly the fated day came striding on.

Now it was here in this great golden dawn
 By her yet sleeping husband lain she gazed
 Into her past like one about to die
 Looks back upon the sunlit fields of life
 Where he too ran and sported with the rest,
 Lifting his head above the huge dark stream
 Before he plunges down. She lived again
 The whole year in a swift and eddying race
 Of memories. Then she arose and service done
 Bowed down to the great goddess simply carved
 By Suthyavân upon a forest-stone.
 What prayer she breathed, her soul and Doorga
 knew.
 Perhaps she felt in the dim forest huge
 The infinite mother watching over her child,
 Perhaps the shrouded Voice spoke some still word.
 At last came to the pale mother queen
 And spoke: "For one full year that I have served
 Thee and the aged king and my dear lord
 I have not gone into the silences

Of this great forest that enringed my thoughts
 With mystery nor in its green miracles
 Wandered, but this small clearing was my world.
 Now has a strong desire seized all my heart
 To go with Suthyavân holding his hand
 Into the life that he has loved and touch
 Herbs he has trod and know the forest flowers
 And hear at ease the birds and scurrying life
 That starts and ceases, rich far rustle of boughs
 And all the mystic whispering of woods.
 Release me now and let my heart have rest.”
 She answered, “Do as thy wise mind decrees,
 O calm child-sovereign with the eyes that rule.
 I hold thee a strong goddess who has come
 Pitying our barren days, so dost thou serve
 Even as a slave might, so art thou beyond
 All that thou doest, all our minds conceive
 Like the strong sun that serves earth from above.”
 So the doomed husband and the wife who knew
 Went with linked hands into that solemn world
 Together. Suthyavân walked full of joy
 Because she moved beside him through the green.
 He showed her all the forest’s riches, flowers
 Innumerable of every colour and hue
 And soft thick clinging creepers green and red
 And strange rich-plumaged birds, to every cry
 That haunted sweetly distant boughs, replied
 With the shrill singer’s name more sweetly called.
 He spoke of all the things he loved: they were
 His boyhood’s comrades and his playfellows,
 Coevals and companions of his life
 Here in this world whose every mood he knew.
 Their thoughts which for the common mind are
 blank,
 He shared, to every wild emotion felt
 An answer. Deeply she listened, but to hear
 The voice that soon would cease from tender
 words
 And treasure its sweet cadences beloved
 For lonely memory. Little dwelt her mind
 Upon their sense; of death, not life she thought.
 Love in her bosom hurt with the jagged edges
 Of anguish moaned at every step with pain
 Crying, “Now, now perhaps his voice will hush
 For ever.” Even by some vague touch oppressed

Sometimes her eyes looked round as if their orbs
 Might see the dim and dreadful god approach.

But Suthyavân had paused. He meant to finish
 His labour here that happy, linked, uncaring
 They two might wander free in the green deep
 Primeval mystery of the forest’s heart.
 Wordless but near she watched, no turn to lose
 Of the bright face and body which she loved.
 Her life was now in seconds, not in hours
 And every moment she economised
 Like a pale merchant leaned above his store,
 The miser of his poor remaining gold.
 But Suthyavân wielded a joyous axe.
 He sang high snatches of a sage’s chant
 That pealed of conquered death and demons slain,
 And sometimes paused to cry to her sweet speech
 Of love or mockery tenderer than love.
 She like a pantheress leaped upon his words
 And carried them into her cavern heart.
 But as he worked, his doom upon him came.
 The violent and hungry hounds of pain
 Travelled through his body biting as they passed
 Silently and all his suffering breath besieged
 Strove to rend life’s strong heart-cords and be free.
 Then helped, as if a beast had left its prey,
 A moment in a wave of rich relief
 Reborn to strength and happy ease he stood,
 Rejoicing, and resumed his confident toil
 But with less seeing strokes. Now the great
 woodsman
 Hewed at him, and his labour ceased. Lifting
 His arm he flung away the poignant axe
 Far from him like an instrument of pain:
 She came to him in silent anguish and clasped,
 And he cried to her, “Sâvithrî, a pang
 Cleaves through my head and breast as if the axe
 Were piercing there and not the living branch.
 Such agony rends me as the tree must feel
 When it is sundered. Let me lay my head
 Upon thy lap and guard me with thy hands.
 Perhaps because thou touchest, death may pass.”
 Then Sâvithrî sat under branches wide,
 Cool, green against the sun; not the hurt tree
 Which his keen axe had cloven, that she
 shunned,—

But leaned beneath a fortunate kingly trunk
 She guarded him in her bosom and strove to soothe
 His anguished brow and body with her hands.
 All grief and fear were dead within her now
 And a great calm had fallen. The wish to lessen
 His suffering, the impulse that opposes pain
 Was the one mortal feeling left. It passed;
 Griefless and strong she waited like the gods.
 But now his sweet familiar hue was changed
 Into a tarnished greyness and his eyes
 Dimmed over, forsaken of the clear light she loved.
 Only the dull and physical mind was left,
 Vacant of the bright spirit's luminous gaze.
 But once before it faded wholly back
 He cried out in a clinging last despair,
 "Sāvithrî, Sāvithrî, O Sāvithrî,
 Lean down, my soul, and kiss me while I die."
 And even as her pallid lips pressed his,
 He failed, losing last sweetness of response;
 His cheek pressed down her golden arm. She
 sought
 His mouth still with her living mouth, as if
 She could persuade his soul back with her kiss;
 Then grew aware they were no more alone.
 Something had come there conscious, vast and dire.
 Near her she felt a silent shade immense
 Chilling the noon with darkness for its back.
 She knew that visible Death was standing there
 And Suthyavân had passed from her embrace.

BOOK II

So she was left alone in the huge wood
 By Death the god confronted, holding still
 Her husband's corpse on her abandoned breast.
 She measured not her loss with helpless thoughts,
 She rose not up to face the dreadful god,
 But over him she loved her soul leaned out
 From a far stillness. There into some heaven
 Of birth and silence lifted all that here
 Is hope and sorrow and trembling passion, changed,
 Losing their natures and what was once her heart
 Became a hushed eternity of love.
 Not in her body they grew. A strain delivered
 Vibrant great chords of Force by Nature tuned
 For her eternal music yet unheard

Which the stars dream of listening as they wheel.
 So one day all our nature's sins shall find
 Their strong redemption; slain they shall ascend
 Into the purity from which they erred,—
 Discords redeemed to help a music large,
 Transfigured, lifted up on fiery wings.
 Her mortal being seized by dreadful hands
 Felt the last agony of passionate change
 That was its quivering into godhead. It grew
 A high and lonely ecstasy of will
 That left her like a mighty eagle poised
 In the void: thought perished and her mind seemed
 slain.
 But from a growing secrecy of light
 The greater spirit in some world within
 Griefless above her, yet herself, unveiled
 Its frontal glories and miraculously
 Outlined its body of power. Leaned from above
 Ancient and strong as on a wind-free summit,
 Calm, violent, fiery-footed, puissant-winged,
 Over the abyss one brooded who was she.
 Sole now that spirit turned its mastering gaze
 On life and things as if inheriting
 A work unfinished from her halting past
 When yet the mind, a passionate learner, toiled
 And the crude instruments were blindly moved.
 And like a tree recovering from the wind
 She raised her noble head. Fronting her eyes
 Something stood there unearthly, sombre, grand,
 A limitless denial of all being
 That wore the wonder of a shape. The Form
 Bore the deep pity of destroying gods
 In its appalling eyes. Eternal Night
 In the dire beauty of an immortal face
 Pitying arose, receiving all that lives
 Into its fathomless heart for ever. Its limbs
 Were monuments of transience and beneath
 Brows of unwearying calm large godlike lids
 Silent beheld the writhing that is life.
 The two opposed each other with their eyes,
 Woman and universal god. They seemed
 Two equal powers that stand unconquered, left
 The last huge-purposed among trivial things,
 Scanning each other in the eternal lists
 Like vast antagonists before they meet

In world-wide combat to possess alone.
 Then to her ears silencing earthly sounds,
 Forbidding the heart-strings with its iron cry
 Arose a sad and formidable voice
 That seemed the whole adverse world's. "Unclasp,"
 it said,
 "Thy passionate influence and relax, O slave
 Of Nature, thy grasp elemental. Wrap no more
 This spirit's body in the abandoned robe
 That with its texture coarse concealed the gods.
 Entomb thy passion in its living grave,
 Confess thy days an error and endure
 The inevitable end of hope and love."
 It ceased, she moved not, and it spoke again
 Lowering its mighty key to human chords,
 "Woman, thy husband suffers." Sāvithrî
 Renounced the lifeless body from her clasp.
 Softly she laid it down on the smooth grass,
 As oft she had laid her living husband's head
 When from their couch she rose in the white dawn
 Called by her daily tasks. So now as called,
 Unknowing to what work, because her spirit
 Above watched flaming silent still, she rose,
 Waiting whatever impulse should arise
 Out of the eternal depths and cast its surge.
 Then Death the King leaned boundless down, as
 leans
 Night over tired lands, and as if freed
 Out of a physical dream, leaving uncared for
 His mind forsaken of that poor dead earth,
 Another Suthyavân arose and stood
 Between the mortal woman and the god.
 He was or else he seemed a shape of light
 Found shadowy to the feeling out of mind
 Which missed the warmth of bright material suns.
 Thus each sees what transcends his conscious touch
 And dreams things greater than himself are dreams:
 Therefore heaven's shapes are distant to our view,—
 The gleam of hopes we hardly dare believe,
 Far luminous symbols of a truth unseen
 Kept for a happier sense in higher worlds.
 So now her senses, though rebuked, believed
 The dead corpse real, this a silent shade.
 Still for a while was that bright Suthyavân,
 Between two realms he stood, not wavering,

But in a quiet strong expectancy
 Like one who, sightless, listens for a command.
 But now he moved away. Behind him Death
 Went slowly like a shadowy herdsman dark
 Behind some wanderer from his mournful herds.
 And Sāvithrî followed her husband's steps,
 Planting her human feet where his had trod,
 Into the silence of that other world.
 At first they seemed to her still on earthly soil
 To journey strangely with unhuman paces
 Through a thick stress of woods. For though to her
 vision
 Only were offered in a spaceless dream
 The luminous spirit gliding stilly on
 And the great shadow travelling behind,
 Her senses felt a vague green world of trees
 Surround them and in troubled branches knew
 Uncertain treadings of a fitful wind,
 Earth stood aloof yet near; it offered her
 Its sweetness and its greenness mid a dream,
 Its brilliance suave of well-loved vivid hues,
 Sunlight arriving at its golden noon,
 The birds' calling or the sweet siege of cries:
 She bore dim fragrances, far murmurs touched
 But then the god grew mighty and remote
 In alien spaces and the soul she loved
 Lost its consenting nearness to her life.
 They seemed to enlarge away, drawn by some great
 Pale distance, from the warm control of earth
 And her grown far. Now, now they would escape!
 Then flaming from her body's nest alarmed
 Her violent spirit soared at Suthyavân,
 As in a terror and a wrath divine
 A winged she-eagle threatened in her young.
 So with a rush of pinions and a cry
 She crossed the borders of dividing sense.
 Her trance knew not of sun or earth or world,
 She knew not of herself or Sāvithrî;
 All was one boundless grasp of unnamed force
 And absolute possession,— quivering, seized
 Its prey, joy, origin, Suthyavân alone.
 But when her mind awoke once more in Time,
 Compelled to shape the lineaments of things
 And live in borders, the three moved together
 Alone in a new world where souls were not,

But only living moods. A strange, still, weird
Country was round her, strange far skies above,
A doubting space where dreaming objects lived
Within themselves their one unchanging thought.
Weird was that road which like fear hastening
To that of which it had most terror, led
Phantasmal between those two conscious rocks
Sombre and high, gates brooding, whose stone
thoughts
Lost their huge sense beyond in giant night.
Nearer they grew like dumb appalling jaws,
Waiting upon her road cruel and still,
The muzzle of a black enormous world.
And where the shadowy marches now he touched,
Turning arrested luminous Suthyavân
Looked back with wonderful eyes at Sâvithrî.
Then Death pealed forth his vast abysmal cry:
“Let not the dreadful goddess move thy soul,
Its time-born passion dreamed the strength of
heaven,
To enlarge its vehement trespass into worlds
Helpless, where it shall perish like a thought
Safe only in its stumbling limits poor
Where he can crown himself mock sovereign.
Dare not beyond man’s faltering force, but waking
Tremble amid the silences immense
In which thy few weak chords of being die.
Impermanent creatures sorrowful foam of Time,
Your transient loves bind not the eternal gods.”
His dread voice ebbed in a consenting hush
Which grew intense, around, a wide and wordless
Whisper and sanction from the jaws of Night.
The woman answered not. Her naked soul
Stripped of its girdle of mortality
Against fixed destiny and the grooves of Law
Stood up in its sheer will, the primal force.

So like arrested thoughts upon a verge
Where light begins to cease, they stood; vast Night
Beyond desired her soul. Then Sâvithrî
Compelled her foot towards the yawning mouth
And danger of the ageless waste. Moulding
Their grander motion on her human tread
They stirred. All as in dreams went gliding on.
So was the balance of the world reversed;

The mortal ruled, the god and spirit obeyed:
For she behind was leader of the march
And they in front were followers of her will.
They entered the dumb portals of the past,
They left the rock-gate’s doubting walls behind;
The twilit vestibules of a tenebrous world
Received them where they seemed to move and
yet
Be still, nowhere advancing, yet to pass,
A dim procession in a picture dim,
Not conscious forms. Then huge and growing night
Cavernous, monstrous, in a strangling mass
Silent, devoured them like a lion’s throat,
The dumb spiritual agony of a dream.
The thought that strives in things failed there,
unmade:
They ended, all their dream of living done,
Convinced at last that they had never been.
Huge darkness closed around her cage of sense
As round a bullock in the forest tied
By hunters closes in no empty night.
She saw no more the dim tremendous god,
Her eyes had lost their luminous Suthyavân
But not for this her spirit failed. It knew
More deeply than the bounded senses can
Which seek externally and find to lose,
Its object loved, as when on earth they lived
She felt him straying through the glades, the glades
A scene in her, their clefts her being’s vistas
Offering their secrets to his search and joy,
Because whatever spot his cherished feet
Preferred, must be at once her soul embracing
His body, suffering his tread. Slow years—
Time vacant measured itself by anguish long,—
Like one who walks resisting a black dream
Through an unreal darkness empty and drear
She lived in spite of death, stifled with void
As in a blindness of extinguished souls.
Then tardily a reluctant gleam drew near
Like promise of life to those who lie forgotten
By Nature, cast into her naked night.
The black and writhing gloom widened its coils,—
For now it felt its giant reign attacked—
And suffered shrinking from the approach of hope:
But tyrannous still in its huge soulless strength

Writhing and coiling ruled her struggling lids
 Which slowly conquered back their brilliant right.
 One felt once more the treading of a god
 And out of the dumb darkness Suthyavân
 Her husband grew into a luminous shade.
 Death missioned forth once more his lethal voice:
 "Hast thou beheld thy source, O transient heart?
 Knowing from what the dream thou art was made,
 Still dost thou always hope to last and love?"
 The woman answered not. Her spirit repelled
 The voice of Night that knew and Death that
 thought;
 She knew the mighty sources of her life
 And knew herself eternal without birth.
 Then the dire god inflicting on her soul
 The immortal calm of his tremendous gaze:
 "Yet since no victory in heaven's order is lost
 And thou hadst strength to journey on unslain
 Through the brute void which never shall forgive
 The primal violence that fashioned thought
 Forcing the immobile vast to suffer and live,
 Thou hast a claim upon the living gods.
 The gods who watch the earth with unmoved eyes
 And lead its giant stumblings through the void,—
 They gave to man the burden of his mind,
 And forced on his unwilling heart their fires
 He shall not quench, their storms he may not rule.
 Troubling his transience with their infinite breath,
 They gave him hunger that no food can fill.
 He is the cattle of the shepherd gods.
 Therefore he feels incurable unrest
 Nor knows his cause nor wherefore he was born.
 The gods who hope by him to live for ever,
 They gave the wisdom that is mocked by Night,
 They breathed the courage that is met by Death—
 He planning travels still his obscure road,
 Tireless his journey that foresees no goal.
 Not easily shalt thou, O soul, prevail
 Nor lay thy yoke upon eternal Death,
 Nor yet thy ancient longing flame fulfilled
 The hopes which shake the order of my worlds.
 Yet since I am law and life and its rewards
 Take from me natural boons which death-bound
 hearts
 Can soar at." But she spoke, she answered now:

"Why speakest thou of the order of thy worlds
 And offerest boons of which thou art the lord?
 All I can take in my own strength, O god,
 For I have come who am your kindred birth.
 Yet that thy words may not have breathed in vain
 Since they are flames of the eternal Truth
 I bind thee by its Will thou canst not break,
 Not for my own joy but the soul I love,
 To give on earth whatever Suthyavân,
 My husband, waking from the forest's charm
 And from his long pure childhood's solitude
 Desired and had not for his beautiful life."
 Death swayed his dreadful brows in vast assent,
 "I give indulgent to the dreams I break
 Such close of life as transient men desire
 To his blind father. Rich morns and fortunate eves
 I give and the brief kingdom he has lost,
 To see with gladness of his unsealed gaze
 Bright forms of grandsons, beautiful, brave and
 wise,
 And gather them into ungroping arms
 And see again the cheerful light of earth.
 For that this man desired. Back to thy world
 Return swift-footed lest to slay thy life
 The great laws thou hast violated, moved,
 Open at last on thee their dreadful eyes."
 The woman answered, "Me thou shalt not slay,
 Neither with seas nor with celestial flame;
 They have no strength to make my being vain:
 For in me the invincible goddess lives.
 And neither can my mortal purpose fail,
 Nor my immortal spirit be destroyed.
 My soul exceeds the laws whose might thou
 vauntst.
 My will too is a law, my strength a god
 And trembles not before their awful gaze.
 Out of thy shadow, give me back again
 Into earth's flowering spaces Suthyavân
 In the sweet transiency of human limbs
 To do with him my burning spirit's will.
 Else where thou leadst him me too thou shalt lead.
 Long I pursued him through the tracts of Time,
 Parted and found, breaking the bars of life.
 Now I behind him seek whatever night
 Or dawn tremendous." And to her replied

A voice of puissance and tremendous scorn,
 The almighty cry of universal Death.
 "Frail creature with the courage that aspires,
 Hast thou the wings or feet to tread my stars
 Which I have made before thy thoughts were
 formed?
 I, Death, created them out of my void
 And all that lives within them I made for food
 And Love and Strength and Wisdom for my prey.
 I, Death, am god and Hunger is my name.
 Mortal whose spirit is my wandering breath,
 Whose transience was imagined by my smile,
 Go clutching thy poor gains to thy hurt bosom
 Scourged by my pangs. Turn yet before attempting
 Forbidden luminous spaces thou perceive
 Lightnings unknown and from the wrath of God
 Terrified flee like a forsaken deer
 Sobbing and hunted by the shafts of heaven."
 And Sāvithrî made answer, scorn for scorn,
 The mortal woman to the dreadful Lord:
 "Who is this God, imagined by thy Night,
 Contemptuously creating worlds disdained,
 Who has anger and treads down high-aiming souls?
 Not He who has built His temple in my heart.
 The God I adore flames here within my breast,
 He has wed me,—to His kiss I bore the worlds.
 Who shall prohibit or hedge in His course,
 The Wonderful, the Charioteer, the Swift?
 Equal my strength behind my husband's steps,
 Whether I press the sword-paved courts of Hell
 Or over luminous flowers in Heaven I walk.
 The wings of Love have power to fan thy void,
 The eyes of Love gaze starlike through the night,
 The feet of Love tread naked all the worlds."
 But Death made answer to the human soul:
 "O seeker of heaven, by thy earth obscured,
 What is thy hope? to what dost thou aspire?
 This only is thy keenest earthly joy
 For a few more years to please thy faltering sense
 With honey of physical longings and embrace
 The brilliant idol of a fugitive hour.
 And thou, what art thou, soul, thou glorious dream
 Of brief emotions made and fluttering thoughts,
 A dance of fireflies speeding through the night
 Or dragon-wings upon the inconstant stream?

Wilt thou claim immortality, O heart,
 Crying against the eternal witnesses
 That thou and he are endless powers and last?
 One endless watches the inconscient scene
 Where all things perish, as the foam the stars.
 One is for ever! There no Suthyavân
 Changing was born and there no Sāvithrî
 Claiming her ancient joy from grief. There Love
 Came never with his fretful soul of tears.
 No gaze, no heart that throbs, It needs no second
 To aid Its being and to share Its joys,
 But lives apart immortally alone.
 If thou desirest immortality,
 Be thou alone. Sufficient to thy days
 Live in thyself. Forget the man thou lov'st;
 Think him the wandering vision of a dream."
 But Sāvithrî replied for man to Death:
 "O Death who reasonest, I reason not;—
 Reason that doubts and breaks and cannot build.
 I am, I love, I will." Death answered her:
 "Know also! Knowing, thou shalt cease to love
 And cease to will, delivered from thy heart.
 Then shalt thou rest for ever and be still,
 Consenting to the impermanence of things."
 But Sāvithrî replied for man to Death:
 "When I have loved for ever, I shall know.
 I know my being is a flame self-lit;
 I know that knowledge is a vast embrace;
 And man was born beneath the monstrous stars
 Dowered with a mind and heart to conquer thee.
 For one who lives in us, came masked by death."
 Death swayed his awful brows and ceased from
 speech;
 Through the long fading night by her compelled,
 Gliding half-seen on their unearthly path,
 Phantasmal in the distance moved the three.
 But not for long the darkness' reign endured.
 For as they moved all widened, all grew pale.
 The dismal twilight brightened now its hues
 And soon the sorrow of the Night was dead.
 Into a happy misty twilit world
 Surprised by a blind joy with gripping hands
 She slipped,—vague fields, vague hedges, rainy
 trees,
 An air that dared not suffer too much light

And scenes dim-hearted in a drifting haze
 Vague cattle white roamed glimmering through
 the mist;
 Vague spirits wandered with a bodiless cry;
 Vague melodies touched the soul and fled pursued
 Into harmonious distances unseized
 Wishing no goal for their delightful steps.
 Through vague ideal lands strayed happily
 Or floated without footing or else paced
 Led by a low far chanting as of gods
 Forms and half-luminous powers. In this sweet
 chaos
 A strange consistency of shapes prevailed;
 A victory of initial light was born,
 A spirit of purity and elusive presence
 Of faery beauty and ungrasped delight
 That sweeter seemed than any ecstasy
 Earth or all-conquering heaven can quivering seize.
 Their bold formations are too absolute;
 Carved by an anguish of divine endeavour
 They stand up sculptured on the eternal hills
 Or quarried from the living rocks of God
 Win immortality by perfect form.
 They are too clear, too great. This only touched
 The flying feet of exquisite desires,
 Strange sweet beginnings of perfection, first
 Happy imaginings of a heavenly world,
 Which rest in a dim passion of pursuit
 Thrilled with their first far joys that will not cease.
 All in this world was shadowed forth, not limned,
 Like shapes of colour in a tinted blur
 Or fugitive landscapes of suggested forms,
 A glimmering Eden full of faery gleams.
 Here in its magic lanes that fled her feet,
 Past vanishing hedges, hurrying hints of fields,
 Assailed by sweetness of its voices dim,
 Treading she found no end. Then turned the god
 And cried, "Into a void eternity
 Escapes this world, for never has it lived.
 Shadowing out glories it shall never seize
 It builds up images illusion feeds
 With cloudy colours and aerial hues
 To escape from the coarse cruelty of things.
 Hope begets hope, the old bright vainness new,
 Cloud gratifies happy cloud, phantom by phantom

Sweetly is chased. O child of earth, behold
 Thy infinite seeming of desires enjoyed!
 Vainly thou torturest, vain soul of man,
 The hour's delight to reach infinity's
 Long void and fill its gulfs. Chastise thy heart
 With noble knowledge and unhood to see
 Thy nature raised into clear living heights,
 The Heaven-bird's view from unimagined peaks.
 But if thou give thy spirit to a dream
 Soon harsh necessity will smite thee awake.
 Coarse, fleeting are the happiest human things.
 Thy passion is a sensual want refined,
 Thy love a hunger and one day shall cease
 By bitter treason, or wrath with cruel wounds
 Separate, or thy unsatisfied will to others
 Depart, when first love's joy lies stripped and slain.
 Purest delight began and it shall end.
 Then shalt thou know thy heart no anchor swinging
 Thy happy soul moored in eternal seas.
 How can the winging aeons clamp their flight
 To one, a helpless wanderer like thyself? Ah, cease!
 Vain are the cycles of thy brilliant mind.
 Renounce, forgetting hope and joy and tears,
 Thy passionate nature in the bosom profound
 Where Love lies slumbering on the breasts of
 peace."
 And Sāvithrī replied to the dim god:
 "Another language now thou usest, Death,
 Melting thy speech into harmonious pain.
 But I forbid thy voice to slay my soul.
 Allowed by Heaven and wonderful to man
 Passion sweet fiery rhythms chants to Love,
 And when the strains are hushed to high-winged
 souls,
 Into empyreans vast its burning breath
 Survives beyond, the core of heavenly suns,
 A flame for ever pure. Surely I know
 One day I shall behold my great sweet world
 Put off the dire disguises of the gods,
 Unveil from terror and disrobe from sin.
 One who has love and lover and beloved
 Is the sweet cause of all our bitter griefs.
 From the bright vision of his soul a Child
 Eternal built himself a wondrous field
 And wove the measures of a marvellous dance.

There in its circles and its magic turns
 Attracted he arrives, repelled he flees.
 Bearing a sweet new face that is the old
 His bliss laughs to us or it calls concealed
 Like a far-heard, unseen, entrancing flute
 From moonlit branches in the throbbing woods
 Tempting our angry search and passionate pain.
 In the wild devious promptings of his mind
 He tastes the honey of tears and puts off joy,
 Repenting, and has laughter and has wrath,
 And both are a broken music of the soul
 That seeks out reconciled its heavenly rhyme.
 He for my heart was always Suthyavân.
 Has he not lain in wait for me through lives
 Unnumbered, in the thickets of the world
 Pursued me like a lion through the night
 And clasped me like a happy ruthless flame
 And touched me like a soft persuading breeze,
 Sometimes with wrath and sometimes with sweet
 peace
 Desiring me since first the world began?
 And if there is a happier greater God,
 Then let him wear the face of Suthyavân
 And let his soul be one with him I love,
 So let him seek me that I may desire;
 Since one heart only beats within my breast
 And one God sits there throned. Advance, O Death,
 Beyond the phantom beauty of this world,
 Of its vague citizens I am not one,
 Nor has my heart consented to be foiled.
 I cherish, god, the fire and not the dream.”
 So on they journeyed still through happy mists,
 And faster now all fled as if perturbed,
 Escaping from the clearness of her soul.
 Then Death cried high,—a vaguer, brighter form
 He bore now like a night that smiles at dawn:
 “Because thou hast the wisdom to transcend
 Both veil of forms and the contempt of forms,
 Arise delivered by the seeing gods,
 Rest in thy freedom satisfied alone
 Nor seek for others’ joy they have not won:
 Let each soul to its rapture be enough.
 Though thou art strong by the dread Goddess
 moved
 Cease, mortal, to compel the deathless powers.

Highest wisdom find that guards its strength and
 knowledge
 Unused, unspoken lest the world should perish
 By wisdom and be overthrown by power,
 Dragged like a ship by bound leviathan
 Into the abyss of his stupendous seas.
 For far too swift the aeons would stumble on
 If strength were given to imperfect souls,
 If veiless knowledge smote the unfit brain.
 Therefore God hid His face and seemed to err.
 Aim not at dangerous swift-foot victories,
 Sheltered by smallness only such steps desire
 As earth can bear in her frail denser moulds.
 If thou art strong with the dread Goddess filled,
 Use not thy strength like the wild Titan souls,
 Touch not the ancient lines, the seated laws;
 Respect the calm of great established things.”
 But Sâvithrî replied to the vague god:
 “What is the calm thou vauntest, O Lord, O Death?
 Is it not the dull-visioned tread inert
 Of monstrous energies chained in a vast round
 Soulless and stone-eyed with mechanic dreams?
 What were earth’s ages if the grey restraint
 Were never broken and glories sprang not forth
 Bursting their obscure seed nor man’s slow life
 Leaped hurried into sudden splendid paths
 By divine words and human gods revealed?
 I trample on thy law with living feet
 For to arise in freedom I was born.
 If I am mighty, let my force be unveiled
 Equal companion of your dateless powers
 Or else let my frustrated soul sink down
 Unworthy of godhead in the original sleep.
 I ask not, I demand, O gods of Time,
 My will immortal.” He replied, “Yet choose
 Another turn than this that thou pursuest.
 Art thou so strong and free? Then canst thou take
 Thy pleasure upon wayside flowering fields
 Yet falter not from thy proud journey’s goal.”
 And Sâvithrî: “Even such my choice, O Death.
 What liberty has the soul which feels not freedom
 Unless stripped bare and cannot kiss the bonds
 The Lover winds around his playmate’s limbs,
 Nor choose his tyranny crushed in his embrace,
 Smiling in golden chains, most bound, most free?

To seize him better with her boundless heart
 She accepts the circle of his limiting arms.”
 “Prove yet thy absolute force to the wise gods
 By choosing thy own joy; for self desire
 And yet from self and its gross chain be free.
 Know fear of bondage for thy last fine snare.
 Show me thy strength and freedom from my laws.”
 And Sāvithrî to Death: “Thus can I take
 Who claim upon the flowering fields of life
 My earthly pleasures, never mine but his,
 Or mine for him. Fulfil on the sweet earth
 Whatever once the living Suthyavân
 Desired in his heart for Sāvithrî.”
 Death bowed his sovereign head and made reply:
 “Long days I give of thy unwounded life,
 Daughters of thy own seed in heart and mind,
 Fair hero sons and sweetness undisturbed
 Of union with thy husband dear and true
 And thou shalt know in thy life’s house where
 love’s
 Oneness shall reign of many gathered hearts
 Felicity of thy surrounded eves
 And happy service to the heart’s desired
 And loving empire over all thou lov’st.
 Win easily by love all fruits
 Which hardly with great labour high-tasked souls
 By difficult virtue ripen tilling earth.
 Return, O woman, to thy conquered world.”
 But Sāvithrî to Death, “Thy gifts resist.
 Void are thy words if lonely I return.”
 Then Death sent forth once more his angry cry
 As chides a lion his escaping prey.
 “What knowst thou of earth’s rich and changing
 life
 Who thinkst that one man dead all joy must cease?
 Hope not to be unhappy till the end!
 For grief dies soon in the tired human heart
 And other guests the vacant chambers fill.
 Rich as a holiday painting on a floor
 Traced for a moment’s beauty love was made.
 Or if a voyager on the eternal trail,
 Its objects fluent change in its embrace
 Like waves to a swimmer upon infinite seas.”
 But Sāvithrî replied to the vague god,
 “Give me back Suthyavân, my only lord.

Thy thoughts are vacant to my soul that feels.”
 Death answered her, “Try then thy soul, return.
 Soon shalt thou find appeased that other men
 On lavish earth have beauty, strength and truth.
 And when thou hast half forgotten one of these
 Shall wind himself around thy heart that needs
 A fellow heart. Then Suthyavân shall fade,
 A gentle memory pushed away from thee
 By new love and thy children’s tender hands
 Till thou shalt wonder if thou loved’st at all.
 Such is the life earth’s travail has conceived.”
 But Sāvithrî replied to eternal Death:
 “Thou mockst the mind’s and body’s faltering
 search.

For what the immortal spirit shall achieve
 I have discovered, nor such trials need.
 For now at last I know beyond all doubt
 The great stars burn with my undying fire
 And for its fuel life and death were made.
 Life only was my blind attempt to love;
 Earth was its struggle, heaven its increase,
 And when transcended both shall join and kiss
 Casting their veils, a deathless birth is ours.
 Earth shall seize all that heaven strives to give
 Nor anything be lost the soul has seen.”

But as she spoke the body of Death was changed.
 His darkness and his soul-destroying might
 Abolishing for ever and disclosing
 The mystery of his high and violent deeds
 Epiphanies of immortal life arose.
 Her senses thrilled in a sweet rapturous world,
 Twilight and mist were ended. Perfect heaven
 Smiled down from undreamed sapphire, sincere
 gold
 Of sunlight lavished strong riches on the eyes
 That suffered without pain the absolute ray
 And saw immortal clarities of form.
 Perfected all the images of earth
 Were thoughts the senses could live in glad,
 unbound
 The soul could use for freest joy of form;
 Creations large of God’s victorious mind,
 They dwelt like living scenes sublimely born
 In a calm beauty of creative joy,

Orchards and valleys, gleaming lakes and hills,
 Pastures and woodlands of celestial bliss
 And villages and cities of delight
 Where luminous lived the nations of the blest.
 Above her rhythmic godheads whirled the spheres,
 Around her melodies and enchantments flowed:
 From the glad bosom of a griefless world
 Songs thrilled of birds upon unfading boughs,
 Music not with these striving steps of sound
 Aspired, that labour from our human strings,
 From every note claimed richer ecstasies
 For a changed bliss that kept each sweetness old.
 For ever faultless instruments were heard
 And high-eyed chantings inexpressible,
 Strains trembling with the secrets of the gods.
 From marvellous flowers imperishably sweet
 Immortal fragrance filled the unquivering air:
 To live was sweetness and to breathe was song.
 And on a sense made pure to seize all tones
 And to feel on untired intensest things
 Heaven's subtleties of touch unwearying forced
 More vivid raptures than the mind can bear.
 What would be suffering here was mighty bliss.
 Delivered from the limits of her mind,
 Grey limping judgment dead, the sight unbarred
 Entered the mysteries of the Artist's craft.
 She saw all Nature wonderful without fault.
 These were the decorated doors of worlds
 Nobler, yet as felicitously fair.
 There every thought like a sweet radiant god
 Climbed strong without endeavour to the sight
 Of the All-blissful; feelings were waves of light,
 Rose from each other in a tranquil surge.
 Deep, candid, a sweet-natured wisdom grew
 The bright beneficent sunlight of the soul,
 Or sheer wild rounds inviolably pure
 Swayed linked in moonlit revels of the heart
 Knowing their riot for a dance of God.
 Calm seers and poets heard the absolute thoughts
 That now come travellers pale deformed with toil
 From their large heavens to our clouded minds,
 Spent in their journey, changed with broken wings,
 Seized perfect words that here are frail sounds
 caught
 By difficult rapture on a mortal tongue.

The strong who stumble and sin grew clear, great
 gods.

And where she stood in ever-flowering groves
 Carolling thrilled response to united hearts
 She saw the clasp which is denied to earth,
 Felt a rapt candid passion of the soul
 And viewed the unending joys of veiless love.
 Then spoke the god, a figure sweet, august
 And on his lips the smile that wear unmasked
 The immortal secret helpers of the soul.

[The short piece is a part of the projected Epilogue.
 It is taken from the second of the two exercise books
 containing the first fair copy.]

Concluding Passage

“Because thou hast rejected my great [1] calm
 I lay upon thy neck my mighty yoke
 And hold thee without refuge from my will.
 Now will I do by thee my glorious works
 Giving thee for reward and punishment
 Myself in thee a sweetness and a scourge.
 Unsheltered by dividing walls [of mind] {2},
 Naked of ignorance' protecting veil
 And without covert from my [3] radiant gods
 Thou shalt be hunted through the world by love.
 No form shall screen thee from divine desire,
 Nowhere shalt thou escape my living eyes.
 A vision shall compel thy coursing breath.
 Thy heart shall drive thee on the wheel of time;
 Thy mind shall urge thee through the flames of
 thought,
 To meet me in the abyss and on the heights,
 To feel me in the tempest and the calm
 And love me in the noble and the vile,
 In beautiful things and terrible desire.
 My fiercest masks shall my attractions bring,
 Music shall find thee in the voice of swords,
 Beauty pursue thee through the core of flame.
 The pains of hell shall be to thee my kiss,
 The flowers of heaven persuade thee with my
 touch,
 The [myriad] {4} forces of my universe
 Shall cry to thee the summons of my name.

Thou shalt know me in the rolling of the spheres,
 Thou shalt meet me in the atoms of the whirl.
 Delight shall drip down from my nectarous moon,
 My fragrance seize thee in the jasmine's snare,
 My eye shall look upon thee from the sun.
 Mirror of Nature's secret spirit made,
 Thou shalt not shrink from any brother soul
 But live attracted helplessly to all,
 Drawn to me on the bosom of thy friend
 And forced to love me in thy enemy's eyes.
 Thou shalt drink down my sweetness unalloyed
 And bear my ruthless beauty unabridged
 Amid the world's intolerable wrongs,
 Mid the long discord and the clash of search,
 Thou shalt discover the one and quivering note
 And be the harp of all its melodies
 And be my splendid wave in seas of love.
 Insistent, careless of thy lonely right,
 My creatures shall demand me from thy heart.
 All that thou hast shall be for others' bliss;
 All that thou art shall to my hands belong.
 I will pour delight from thee as from a jar
 And whirl thee as my chariot through the ways
 And use thee as my sword and as my lyre
 And play on thee my minstrelsies of thought.
 And when thou art vibrant with all ecstasies
 And when thou liv'st one spirit with all things,
 Men seeing thee shall feel my siege of joy,
 And nearer draw to me because thou art.
 Enamoured of thy spirit's loveliness,
 They shall embrace my body in thy soul,
 Hear in thy life the beauty of my laugh,
 Know thy thrilled bliss with which I made the world.
 This thou shalt henceforth learn from every thought, [5]
 That conquering me thou art my captive made,
 And who possess me are by me possessed.
 For ever love, O beautiful slave of God.
 Cast from the summits of thy visioned spirit,
 Return to life with him thy soul desired,
 In whom I lay in wait for thee at first,
 Satisfied in him of oneness and convinced
 And gather to thee myriad unities
 With all my endless forms and divine souls.

From thy beginning in earth's voiceless bosom
 Through life and time and will and grief and death
 I have led thee onward to the golden point,
 From which another sweeter gyre shall start."

The measure of that subtle music ceased.
 Down with a hurried swimming floating lapse
 Through unseen worlds and bottomless spaces
 forced
 Sank like a star the soul of Sâvithrî,
 [...] {6} mid a laughter of unearthly lyres,
 She heard around her nameless voices cry
 Triumphant, an innumerable sound
 And bore the burden of infinity
 And felt the stir of all ethereal space
 Pursuing her in her fall implacably sweet.
 A face was over her which seemed a youth's
 Crowned as with peacock plumes of gorgeous hue
 Framing a sapphire, whose heart-disturbing smile
 Insatiably attracted to delight.
 Often it changed, though rapturously the same,
 And seemed a woman's dark and beautiful,
 Turbulent in will and terrible in love,
 A shadowy glory and a stormy depth,
 Like a mooned night with drifting star-gemmed
 clouds.
 Eyes in which Nature's deaf ecstatic life,
 Sprang from some Spirit's passionate content,
 Missioned her downwards to the whirling earth.
 Like a bird held in a child's satisfied hands,
 Her spirit strove in an enamoured grasp
 Admitting no release till Time should end.
 Like a flower hidden in the heart of spring,
 She kept within her strong embosoming soul
 The soul of Suthyavân drawn down by her
 Inextricably heavens in a thronging flight
 Soared upward past [her] as she fell; then near
 Came the immense attraction of the earth;
 Till in the giddy proneness of the speed
 Lost, overcome, sinking she disappeared
 Into unconsciousness as in a pool,
 Like one descending from a breathless height
 Into the wonder of abysmal depths.
 Above her closed the darkness of great wings
 And she was buried in a Mother's breast.

Fragment of Epilogue

“I am the Madran, I am Sâvithrî,
Thy slave and lover, thy delight and friend,
Thy prone possessor, sister of thy soul
And mother of thy wants. O thou my world,
My god, O earth and heaven my arms embrace,
Whose every limb my answering limbs desire,
Whose heart is key to all my heartbeats! This
I am and thou to me, O Suthyavân;
No gladness lost, but everything fulfilled
Divinely. Let us go through this new world
Which is the same, for it is given back
And it is known, a playing ground of God
Who hides himself in bird and beast and man
Sweetly to find Himself again by love,
By oneness, absolute in us for ever.

Now grief is dead and serene bliss remains.
Let us go back, for eve is in the skies.
[Thy father waits who will not eat of food
Unless he knows us seated at his side.] [7]
Lo, all these beings in this wonderful world!
Let us give joy to all, for joy is ours!”

*

[1] Alternative: far

[2] These two words cancelled without substitution.

[3] Written over “the”, or vice versa.

[4] This word cancelled without substitution.

[5] Marginal alternative: thy heartbeats.

[6] Blank in Manuscript.

[7] Square brackets in the original.

(We are deeply grateful to Anurag Banerjee, Founder, Overman Foundation, for allowing us to reproduce here the earliest draft of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* (1916) for which he received permission from Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust to publish it in its online forum.)

August 15: its World Significance Pointers in Modern History

Amal Kiran (KD Sethna)

August 15, India's Independence Day, has in modern history associations both spectacular and profound. We may say that this date marks the very birth of the power by which international politics was gigantically rocked into the manifold commotion that gave shape to our modern world. For, though it is the French Revolution that brought modern history into being, the forces that exploded in 1789 could never have found a firm organised life if there had not arisen the military colossus we call Napoleon Bonaparte, gathering up the new France into a scourge of God and lashing out at the Europe united to crush her, and shattering the entire balance of the old world to the sound of the mighty mantra plucked from the heart of the Revolution – *La Marseillaise*. Through the personality of Napoleon revolutionary France let loose the spirit of modern times – Napoleon who was born on August 15 in 1769.

It is a far cry from this great Corsican to Hitler. But though Hitler cannot compare with him in stature and though he differs also in being an instrument of the dark forces of racialism and totalitarian tyranny rather than a medium, however flawed and self-willed, of liberty, equality and fraternity, he too precipitated a continent-wide clash of arms and was intensely influenced by the Napoleonic fury. Not only did he start in 1941 his campaign against Russia in the name of Napoleon and on the very day Napoleon had marched against Tsar Alexander I; he also fixed in 1940 the 15th of August as the day on which he would complete his conquest of Western Europe by broadcasting from Buckingham Palace the collapse of Britain. The fall of Britain would have signed the death-warrant of the whole world outside America. August 15 was meant to be the end of World War II, with a decisive victory of the forces intent on putting the clock back and establishing on earth the reign of the Asura, the Titan, over the evolving God in humanity. But instead of a resounding triumph, August 15 found Britain still full of fight and on that day the largest toll so far was taken of the Luftwaffe – 180 German planes shot down in British skies! We might indeed designate it the turning-point in the Battle for Britain.

August 15 can also be considered the beginning of peace after World War II, though not the peace Hitler had intended to initiate on that day; for Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945. And, seeing that peace once more broken by North Korea's invasion of the South and what was in appearance a civil war but really the first violent stroke by Communism in its plan of world-conquest, burst on us and America undaunted by terrible

disadvantages rushed into the carnage in order to save civilisation, we are led to ask whether again this date has a meaning. To get the answer we do not have to search long. The hostilities were preluded in early June by a propaganda campaign by the North Korean radio, relayed by Moscow, demanding the unification of Korea on the Communists' terms. The word "peaceful" was thrown about, but the suggestion was everywhere that peace hung on unconditional kowtowing by the Southern Government to the diktat of Communism. On June 21 the same radio station spoke further of unification, ostensibly peaceful yet proceeding according to such a plan that within a certain fixed period the goal would inevitably be attained. There was an ominous ring here – and four days later the Communists were on the march across the 38th Parallel. As usual, Communism had talked peace while intending war. But what attaches a peculiarly significant interest to the talk is the time limit announced for the disappearance of the America-sponsored South Korean regime which, for all its imperfection, was yet democratic in essence. The exact words of the broadcast were: "All measures connected with the peaceful unification of our country shall be completely carried out by August 15 of this year." Yes, once more the day expected to be the beginning of the end of the democratic spirit on earth by armed might was August 15!

The Democratic Ideals and Our Independence Day

Surely a date of momentous implications for the values of civilisation has been chosen by India to celebrate her independence. Why did she select this particular date? There seems to have been no conscious assessment of whatever import it bore by the year 1947 in which the last British soldier left Indian soil. But behind the conscious thought of individuals there is the working of that invisible yet potent being which is the national Soul or genius. Every country has such a soul and every true patriot feels directly or indirectly its presence. In terms of the wide yet demarcated body of land in which one takes birth and grows and dies, in terms of the large mass of people who are bound together by geographical limits, in terms of a long history behind that mass, in terms of a culture subtly single in the midst of all variety of province and language – in diverse terms separate or combined is felt the national soul. And always a personification is made of it, a great presiding spirit is envisaged, a Mother-being that is the true secret life of the country's collectivity as well as physical expanse. No matter how rationalistic we may be, the moment we are patriots the heart in us intuits this Mother-being and with the dream of its more-than human loveliness and on the supporting breath of its super-animation we move to the exertions and the heroisms that ordinarily lie far beyond our powers. When a country's collectivity is disposed to occult insight the national soul is most clearly grasped by the patriot heart; thus in Ireland and in India we find the intensest response to the superhuman presence constituting the nation. Especially in India with her endless history of rishi and yogi and bhakta and avatar, patriotism is at its roots a religious fervour, and the most creative of its many forms has been the one with which it started on its career of revolt against British rule – the one which found its most puissant expression in the upsurge

of Bengal during the partition of this province by Lord Curzon and which went to its fiery work with that open acknowledgment of the national soul, the worshipping cry of *Bande Maataram*, “I bow to you, O Mother.” This cry rang throughout the many decades of the country’s toil for freedom and even now when superficial purposes have sought officially to replace Bankim Chandra’s inspired anthem, replete with the very essence of Indianness, by the more deliberate, more cosmopolitan composition, *Jana Gana Mana*, the outleaping apostrophe to the Goddess that is India has not lost its appeal – still in a myriad bosoms the flame of occult recognition burns – through the officially secular mind itself of those in charge of the government the Mother, though often obstructed, works secretly her will. In the instance of a country like India the outwardly unconscious choice of a date like August 15 for the Independence Day must be traced to no fortuitous concourse of atoms in the brains of her Ministers but to the deep design of her national soul.

How shall we state this design? On the data already mentioned, we should say that India is meant to be the arch-representative of the ideals with which the modern age broke on the world. Liberty, equality, fraternity – these are intended to be embodied most vividly by India. They have never been materialised in the full sense because either their true order has not quite been understood or else, if it has been understood, the ultimate connotation of them has been elusive. The French Revolution and its Napoleonic consolidation laid the stress on liberty. Indeed this was not unnatural, for it was liberty that was most denied in the days before the taking of the Bastille. The fall of the Bastille, the throwing open of the doors of the State prison symbolised the animating principle of the whole terrific movement which swept away the “divine right” of kings and the shackles of feudalism. That is why up to now the Revolution is celebrated on July 14. But, in the sphere of social life, liberty, though precious and indispensable, does not always make for either equality or fraternity. The only equality and fraternity it automatically goes with are a common status in the eyes of the law – at least in general. For the rest, it may bring in an immense latitude for competition and a chance for the best-placed, the strongest, the most skilful, the least scrupulous to get the upper hand. The remedy sought for this latitude is economic equality, and democracy which is government based on the individual’s freedom of action as well as of thought has been opposed by collectivism which is government founded on equal association in labour and a common profit-sharing. Collectivism may not be altogether reprehensible in theory but in practice it becomes a rule by force, an iron levelling-down, a rigid regimentation: liberty suffers enormously and a dictatorship is created steam-rolling both social and intellectual life. Fraternity suffers too, for where liberty is not guaranteed there is always the Secret Police and no man can trust his neighbour and all live in fear and suspicion. If a choice is to be made between the dangers of democracy and those of collectivism, the former are far preferable since the mind is left free by them and the mind’s freedom is a greater progressive force than the artificially secured welfare of the body. Besides, as we observe strikingly in America, such welfare is not impossible to democracy, what is needed is planned economy and not necessarily collectivism. Also, a degree of fraternity can be and often is brought about, for the principle of liberty is not in itself averse to but, if properly developed, consonant

with the principle of “live and let live” – tolerance, kindliness, mutual respect, diversified harmony. Again, by its allowing the mind of man to go unfettered, it gives *Lebensraum* not only to the cult of altruistic humanism and to idealistic art and philosophy but also to the religious, the spiritual, the mystical drive towards realising a single Selfhood of the cosmos or a single Fatherhood of the world and, as a result, a spontaneous compassion that takes all universe into its embrace and establishes a natural link of love, as if the entire creation were one family of brothers. It is because democracy is not exclusive, as a collectivist dictatorship is, of such possibilities of inner and outer growth that the formula of the French Revolution, for all its shortcomings, is a valuable step in human history and those countries that have erected their political and social order on some form or other of its teachings are the true friends of India and, despite their remnants of colonialism, their fight today against Communist tyranny is her fight as well. Her hitting upon August 15 as her Independence Day is a sign from beyond the outer surface of her life, a pointer from her national soul, that her place is in the vanguard of democracy and that her mission is to fulfil what the democratic peoples of the West are still fumbling after.

Our Independence and Sri Aurobindo

The way to fulfilment is by stressing neither liberty nor equality but fraternity. Given genuine fraternity, liberty and equality follow. More than any other country India is equipped for building the democratic order on a fraternal basis. For, above all countries it is she who has lived for the only fraternal basis which can last and carry a superstructure of authentic freedom and justice: God-realisation. And as soon as we speak of God-realisation being India’s master quest no less than being the one means of fulfilling the ideals of democracy we come to be on the look-out for a yet profounder reason for our national soul’s predilection for August 15. What we expect to find is the identity of this date with some occasion closely linked to not only our own struggle for independence and for the triumph of the democratic ideals but also the sense of a presiding Goddess with which our nationalism is so powerfully charged and the direct concrete experience of the one yet multiple Divine Reality that has been the lodestar of the Indian consciousness down the centuries. If we could discover the identity we should know with redoubled certitude that the date of our Independence Day was due to no accident nor dictated by mere convenience but decided by the national soul. And by exploring the precise historical circumstances of the identity we should be able to learn where to seek correct guidance for the future and how to rise to the height of our destiny.

There is no traditional festival from the past on this date. With none of our political leaders in the forefront at present is it particularly connected. But on August 15 falls the birthday of Sri Aurobindo. Our Cabinet had not noticed it at all when they fixed the Day of Independence. Though to celebrate it people in their hundreds from all parts of India had been gathering together in Pondicherry for several years before the end of British rule, there was no thought in the minds of our Ministers to give it importance by making the Independence Day coincide with it. This is sad proof of the imbalance of values in contemporary India, the dearth of vision in our leaders. All the more remarkable, therefore,

is their striking upon just this date for the happiest and most meaningful political event for us in modern times. And all the more clinching as well as heartening is the evidence that the national soul, the great Mother with whose dear and majestic name we launched the struggle for freedom, was not slumbering but from the forgotten depths of our being was still pointing a luminous finger. For Sri Aurobindo answers to all the expectations we have enumerated: his life singles him out for association with the coming into its own by a country like India.

It was as a leader of Nationalism that Sri Aurobindo first caught the public eye. Although educated in England and bringing a rich assimilation of all European culture, he stood out as an incarnation of the true Indian genius. In him the culture of this hoary land sprang vibrantly to life and when he plunged into the political arena at the time of Bengal's partition by Lord Curzon and took up the leadership of the fight against foreign rule, he brought something more than patriotic vehemence, something more than democratic idealism. He came burning with the consciousness of India as the mighty Mother – the occult insight into the superhuman being that is the national soul was like a fire in his breast and every word he spoke carried the same incandescence home to his hearers. The old milk-and-water psychology of prayer, protest and petition he transformed almost overnight into the dynamic of a will intoxicated with the vast wine of the national soul's super-vitality. A Presence greater than human individuals was felt by all who followed Sri Aurobindo in those dangerous days. And it was because this Presence was made a reality in the land that the Swaraj movement took on the aspect of Fate: the Shakti who had sustained Indian culture through millenniums and endowed it with a living continuity from a past beyond that of Egypt or Greece or Rome to a present in which Memphis is but a wonderful memory, Periclean Athens no more than a mass of magnificent ruins and the Rome of the Caesars only the windswept and grass-covered Coliseum – the perpetual Shakti tore the veil between the inner and the outer and with her fiat gave the struggle for independence an inevitability of success. Under Her inspiration Sri Aurobindo, in eight effective years, laid down the broad lines of the whole future of Swarajism, lines from which, in spite of all changes of personnel and programme, India never essentially deviated.

Nor is this all that Sri Aurobindo the politician did. Through the quick-shifting drama of his political career the countless constructive ventures in journalism, the innumerable practical acts of patriotic policy, the agitations, the arrests, the house-searchings, the legal attacks and counter-attacks, the sensational climax in the yearlong detention as under-trial prisoner in Alipore Jail and the subsequent court-scenes with Eardley Norton, the most brilliant criminal lawyer in India as Crown Prosecutor, Chittaranjan Das shielding Sri Aurobindo by a case for defence worked out through feverish months at the cost of his own health and the loss of a lucrative practice, Mr. Beachcroft sitting in judgment over a man who had been with him at Cambridge and had beaten him there to second place in Greek and Latin – through all the dramatic vicissitudes of those eight years ran not only the occult insight of genuine patriotism but also the mystical vision of the aspiring Yogi. Sri Aurobindo brought to his work the full reality of the Being hailed by Bankim Chandra in *Bande Maataram*. The national soul felt by historical India is not merely the presiding

genius of the human collectivity in the land bounded by the Himalayas and by rivers and seas. The distinguishing mark of the Indian consciousness is the realisation, from age to age, of the Eternal, the Infinite, the Absolute. Essential India is the long procession of seers and saints from Vedic antiquity up to our own day. Hence the national soul, the Mother of these myriad knowers and lovers of God, must be herself a face and form of the Divine and wrapped in the atmosphere of the Supreme Being must she be envisaged and invoked. That was the message of Bankim Chandra's song and of Sri Aurobindo the politician, that was the core of the Aurobindonian Nationalism which made this song the throbbing life-blood of Bengal and, through Bengal, the entire sub-continent.

None, in the political field, before or after Sri Aurobindo can be put on a par with him in fusion of spiritual energy with patriotic fervour. Is it not, therefore, in the fitness of things that the Independence Day of a country whose chief glory has been God-realisation should coincide, in spite of all the predominantly political character of this day, with the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's birth? And would it not be purblind on our part to miss a signal so pregnant with meaning and fail to see our future bound up with his presence in our midst – our future of true self-growth political as well as cultural and of leadership among the nations on the path of human evolution towards Godhead?

We cannot yet declare that the scales have been shed from our eyes. But increasingly the darkness thins and more and more there are openings and through them the country is yearning to come into contact with the Wisdom and Power round which an Ashram of spiritual aspirants has grown to many-sided creative activity in Pondicherry. Every year many hundreds from all quarters of India and even from abroad join the eight hundred residents of the Ashram to celebrate the birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo. The name of their Master is on the lips of seekers in Europe and America no less than India and the time is not far off when the whole modern mind will gravitate to the Aurobindonian philosophy of Supermanhood.

Sri Aurobindo and the Modern Mind

All the more eagerly will the gravitation occur because of three factors. Sri Aurobindo brings a philosophy not in the sterile intellectual manner that has been traditional in the West heretofore. His philosophy is not an abstract logic-spinning from a few principles of thought mixed with a few data of ordinary observation. It is only the intellectual elucidation and systematisation of concrete and direct experience of realities lying beyond the mere mind: it is but a mental picture of what is realised by the inmost consciousness in its Yogic penetration of the subliminal and the supraliminal. Modern man is rather impatient with the old purposes and methods of philosophising: when he wants to go further than physical science he is more a psychologist than a metaphysician and this turn – enlightened increasingly by research in what is termed extra-sensory perception – is likely to be attracted by a metaphysics based totally on Yoga which is after all a super-psychology seeking to grip fundamental truth by breaking out from our present narrow limits of consciousness and widening forth to be one with the inmost stuff of existence. Of course, there are many obstructions in the modern mind, especially the incubus of nineteenth-

century scientific materialism which, though theoretically neutralised by the new physics, could still be in actual life a haunting influence opposed to Yogic philosophy. But the general trend of the present age, as it develops further, will approach such philosophy more and more gratefully.

Parallel to the line towards super-psychology is the drive initiated in the last century by Nietzsche with the formula: “Man is something to be surpassed. Lo, I teach you the Superman!” Nietzsche’s idea of the Superman was much coloured by the science of his day and it was at best a titanic heroism aggrandising man’s physical nature by means of an iron will laughing at natural obstacles and subduing both the ordinary self and the common world in order to intensify the life-gusto and fit it for extraordinary exertions. Now that the general climate of thought has changed considerably and we have beheld with startled gaze the Nietzschean dream come almost true in the Herrenvolk of Hitler and are facing another version of it in the aggressive challenge of Stalinist totalitarianism, the idea of the Superman cast deep into the modern mind by Nietzsche is showing signs of becoming subtler and purer and less egoistic, more inclined to values like “sublimation” and “integration of personality”. In short, it is getting orientated, however slowly and stumblingly, in the direction of the Aurobindonian *Weltanschauung*.

The Superman, for Sri Aurobindo, is man surpassing himself by a triple change of consciousness. The human being has to discover his own true soul. Usually we take the life-force to be the genuine psyche or else we discern the mind-energy as master of both life-force and body and label it as soul. Sri Aurobindo says that even what we know as body, life-force and mind are not all that works physically, vitally and mentally as the individual. There are occult realms of physicality, vitality and mentality through which the individual can put himself into contact with universal reality. Our hidden statuses in these realms are more deserving of the name “soul” if by that name we mean nothing beyond the mind-life body combination. But in fact there is in the profundities of our being a distinct psychic individual, a spark of divinity whose ordinary manifestations in us are disinterested search for truth, selfless leaping of ethical idealism, pure desire to create beauty and whose clearest expression is the aspiration towards the Eternal, the Deific. This Immortal within the mortal, this inmost Initiate of God-communion, whose channels are mind and life-force and body and who passes from birth to birth in an evolving universe, has to be realised in full constant experience. The second change of consciousness is the realisation of the single Spirit of all existence, the one Being who has become all things – an infinite Self that is everlasting peace, an infinite Nature that is everlasting power. And this Spirit is to be experienced not only as a cosmic splendour but also as a supra-cosmic trinity of Existence, Consciousness and Delight. The third change of consciousness is what Sri Aurobindo defines as the realisation of the Supermind. The Supermind is the Spirit in its creative poise, the Spirit massing together its inexhaustible reality of oneness and manyness into a harmony of archetypes, as it were, and projecting from that harmony a gradation of world on world and relating itself to these emanations as their Lord and Lover. It is when the Supermind, which holds the divine original of the

world not only in essence but also in formulation, is realised, with the transcendental Existence, Consciousness and Delight as its base, the Universal Self and Nature as its one instrument and the inmost soul as its other medium, that man reaches a Supermanhood most dynamic for world-uses.

And because Sri Aurobindo's Yoga puts so much emphasis on such dynamism, modern man in quest of his soul will be drawn the quicker towards the Aurobindonian *Weltanschauung*. Whatever we may outgrow of Nietzsche's gospel, whatever Titanism of it we may reject, the note he struck of energy, of the Will to Power is in its root-significance an inalienable part of modernism's this-worldly formula of "Here and Now". In this connection the last of the factors making for gravitation of the modern mind to Sri Aurobindo comes most aptly for comment. The quest for the soul today, via the concept of the Superman, is not out of rapport with important elements of the Christian or any other religious ideal of the past, but it is yet a cry for some new perfection. In the first place, that ideal split existence into two irreconcilable or at least disparate orders – the natural and the supernatural – and world-life was seen as only a transition from the one to the other: world-life had no justification in its own rights and the more the super-natural was admitted into it the more was the natural relinquished and effaced. Secondly, man was regarded as a fixed being, a creature set forever in form and function, with horrible lower reaches and splendid higher ranges between which he could move but beyond which he could never go to an entirely new pattern of world-life. There was, in the old religious ideal, no sense of evolution. With the advent of the evolutionary concept into science the supernatural, if believed in, promises to be deemed no contradiction of the natural but rather its concealed reality, a perfection to be grown into and flowered forth, a greatness which need not demand the effacement of our present smallness but should organically adapt it. And a possibility is grasped of evolving a new species as much other than man as man is other than the animal, a different and better poise of the whole organic entity with an intenser level of general consciousness. A half-serious half-fantastic play on the notion of this possibility is the neo-vitalism of Bernard Shaw, the development of the Nietzschean *nisus* into the hopes and dreams of what Shaw has termed Creative Evolution. The evolutionary concept also underlines the value of the outer instrument of the inner vitality: if the natural is not to be effaced by the supernatural and if a new species may be evolved, then surely the external basis and vehicle of the greater and intenser consciousness calls for extreme attention, since without its keeping pace with the inner progress there will be no secure establishment of the fruits of that progress and a decline will sooner or later set in.

All these ideas floating in the mind of modern man are rarely quite definite and are often ineffective or misdirected. But when the light of Sri Aurobindo's Yogic philosophy will fall upon them, they will get definition and quicken to their true objectives. They will reveal themselves as vague approximations to what Sri Aurobindo brings and offers. We might even say that to a considerable extent they are the responses created by the Aurobindonian vision itself – faint echoes of his inspiration in the mental spaces of the

contemporary world. On the whole they and this inspiration are both the presence of the Divine Word of the *Zeitgeist* – the former the tenuous peripheral vibration, the latter the dense central note of the mantra of the Godhead ascending from His concealment below in the darkness and descending from His mystery above in Eternity’s gold and Infinity’s blue. In a luminously positive and comprehensive form, with a flexible yet undeviating technique of integral development, Sri Aurobindo’s Yogic philosophy catches up the truth of evolution. His Yoga is not just a soar into the Spirit’s sky, with a connecting line kept between that amplitude and the individual existence here until the hour of the body’s death. He declares that evolution lacks its total sense if there is not a descent of the higher consciousness together with an ascent of the lower. Those evolutionary terms, mind and life-force and matter – what is their fulfilment if the Divine Being from whom they have emanated carries only a sojourning soul through them and never grants them through that soul a deific destiny of their own – a mind not fumbling for knowledge but seizing it with a lightning flash, a life-force not enslaved by petty desire and incapable of coping with the challenge of circumstance but large and blissful and sovereign in its steps, a body not subject to disease and age and accident but full of radiant health, possessed of automatic immunity? This question has never been answered in the past. Perhaps it was never even precisely put. But there has been a dream of some *elixir vitae*, a cry for the kingdom of heaven on earth, a vision of the perfect human form pre-existing as a *karana sharira* or causal body in the empyrean of the Supreme Consciousness. What has not been there is the intuition that if all has come from the Divine into an evolutionary universe all must have an inevitable divine consummation and that in the Supermind, where the original truths and archetypes glow for ever, dwell both the plan and the power of transforming integrally the whole being and nature of man. In world-work the Supermind is Sri Aurobindo’s speciality: possessing it in full, bringing it down for embodiment, organising its multi-creative energy on earth, he has laboured at the beginnings of a completely new pattern of world-life, a new species with no more the mind in charge, no more the mind permeating what is below it, but with the Supermind as the head and front and converting into its own terms of truth-consciousness the entire rhythm of man’s existence. The *karana sharira*, the causal body whose stuff is God’s infallible and incorruptible light, is sought to be made one with the *sukshma sharira*, the subtle body of our psychological activity, and finally with the *sthula sharira*, the gross body that is our physical life. This oneness is the authentic next step of evolution fulfilling the urge towards perfection which is the distinguishing sign of man who is “something to be surpassed”, the urge so long broken up by his ignorance into conflicting ideals, so long foiled of earthly satisfaction and therefore diverted to losing its visionary acuteness in some ineffable Beyond.

By the oneness here and now of the three instrumental formulations of the Spirit Sri Aurobindo promises a different earth inhabited by a growing number of men made both inwardly and outwardly perfect and effecting ever-novel discoveries of the infinite Divine in art, philosophy, science, politics, society-structure and industry.

When the procession of disciples and pilgrims offers garlands to Sri Aurobindo and

the Mother on August 15, it is to the vision and power of supramental creation at work amidst us that the offering is done and in that gesture lies the seed of man's birth into integral Godhead. Hence the birthday of Sri Aurobindo is the supreme festival of progressive humanity, the portent which the Asura dreads most and would strive most to nullify. It gives to the occasion of India's celebration of her Independence and to the strange occurrence of this date at more than one critical juncture of modern history their ultimate world-significance.

(This article by Amal Kiran, which was first published in *Mother India* on August 15th 1950, has been reproduced here with the kind permission of the present Editor of *Mother India*. Our grateful thanks also to the Clear Ray Trust, which holds the sole right of Amal Kiran's works, for its permission to reprint this article in **Śraddhā**)

The Adwaita of the Gita

(Continued from the previous issue)

Anilbaran Roy

Man has to rise above the narrow egoism of the ordinary human life and consciousness, and here comes in the importance of Shankara's experience of the silent, impersonal Self, the *nirguna* Brahman, which sits, *udasinavat*, above all the change and activity of the world. All this is Brahman, says the Upanishad ; all this is Vasudeva, says the Gita, — the supreme Brahman is all that moves or is stable and his hands and feet and eyes and heads and faces are on every side of us (13 13, 14). But still there are two aspects of this All, — his immutable eternal self that supports existence and his self of active power that moves abroad in the world movement. It is only when we lose our limited ego personality in the impersonality of the self that we arrive at the calm and free oneness by which we can possess a true unity with the universal power of the Divine in his world movement. As Shankara regarded the *saguna* or personal aspect of the Brahman as illusion, so Ramanuja regarded the *nirguna* or impersonal aspect as a blank void and non-existent. Missing this impersonal aspect of the Divine, Ramanuja had to conclude that the Jiva is essentially different from the Divine; for it is in this impersonality that the Jiva is one with the Divine and all existence. The impersonal Self is the one self of all creatures. Imprisoned in personality we can get at a limited union by sympathy or by some relative accommodation of ourselves to the viewpoint and feeling and will of others. To be one with all and with the Divine and his will in the cosmos we must become at first impersonal and free from our ego and its claims and from the ego's way of seeing ourselves and the world and others. And we cannot do this if there is not something in our being other than the personality, other than the ego, an impersonal self one with all existences. To lose ego and be this impersonal self, to become this impersonal Brahman in our consciousness is, therefore, the first movement of this Yoga.

The Gita's description of this process, as summarised in the concluding chapter, seems at first sight to be nothing but the austere *Jnana Yoga* of Shankara, by which man has to renounce life and work, and merge himself in the silence of the Eternal (18.51-53). But the Gita insists that "there must be no abandonment of the active life for a life of pure meditation; action must always be done as a sacrifice to the supreme spirit (18.56). This movement of recoil in the path of *Sannyasa* prepares an absorbed disappearance of the individual in the Eternal, and renunciation of action and life in the world is an indispensable step in the process. But in the Gita's path of *tyaga* it is a preparation rather for the turning

of our whole life and existence and of all action into an integral oneness with the serene and immeasurable being, consciousness and will of the Divine, and it preludes and makes possible a vast and total passing upward of the soul out of the lower ego to the inexpressible perfection of the supreme spiritual nature, *para prakriti*."

This decisive departure of the Gita's thought is indicated in the next two verses. "When one has become the Brahman, when one neither grieves nor desires, when one is equal to all beings, then one gets the supreme love and devotion to Me. By devotion he comes to know Me, who and how much I am and in all the reality and principles of My being ; having thus known Me he entereth into That (Purushottama)" (18.54, 55). "But in the narrow path of knowledge *bhakti*, devotion to the personal Godhead, can be only an inferior and preliminary movement; the end, the climax is the disappearance of personality in a featureless oneness with the impersonal Brahman in which there can be no place for *bhakti*: for there is none to be adored and none to adore; all else is lost in the silent immobile identity of the Jiva with the At- man. Here there is given to us something yet higher than the Impersonal, here there is the supreme Self who is the supreme Ishwara, here there is the supreme Soul and its supreme nature, here there is the Purushottama who is beyond the personal and impersonal and reconciles them on his eternal heights. The ego personality still disappears in the silence of the Impersonal, but at the same time, there remains even with this silence at the back the action of a supreme Self, one greater than the Impersonal. There is no longer the lower blind and limping action of the ego and the three *gunas*, but instead the vast self-determining movement of an infinite spiritual Force, a free immeasurable Shakti. All Nature becomes the power of the one Divine and all action his action through the individual as channel and instrument. In place of the ego there comes forward conscious and manifest the true, spiritual individual in the freedom of his real nature, in the power of his supernal status, in the majesty and splendour of his eternal kinship to the Divine, an imperishable portion of the supreme Godhead, an indestructible power of the supreme Prakriti, *mamaivansha sanatanah, para prakritir jivabhuta* "

"We have always to keep in mind," says Sri Aurobindo, "the two great doctrines which stand behind all the Gita's teachings with regard to the soul and Nature, — the Sankhya truth of the Purusha and Prakriti corrected and completed by the Vedantic truth of the threefold Purusha and the double Prakriti of which the lower form is the Maya of the three Gunas and the higher is the divine nature and the true soul-nature." Let us note here briefly how the different schools of Vedantic thought have interpreted these basic ideas of the Gita. Shankara says in his commentary on the 4th sloka of the seventh chapter that Aparakriti is the Maya Shakti; Para Prakriti according to Shankara seems to be a misnomer; for Prakriti is the power of creation, and all creation is by Maya or Aparakriti. Shankara interprets Para Prakriti as the Jiva or *Kshetrajna* which enters into the world created by Maya. Jiva or *Kshetrajna* again is really Brahman, Brahman associated with Maya or Avidya. Thus Shankara practically ignores Gita's clear distinction of the twofold Nature, Para and Aparakriti. The Lord says in the Gita that it is by his own Prakriti, *swam prakritim*, that he creates the world. This certainly refers to Para Prakriti, of

which Apra Prakriti is only the lower mechanical form made up of the three *gunas*. The Gita does not identify Para Prakriti with Jiva, as most commentators have done. "The supreme Nature, *para prakriti*, is the infinite timeless conscious power of the self-existent Being out of which all existences in 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 Jiva. We must be careful not to make the mistake of thinking that this supreme Nature is identical with the Jiva manifested in Time in the sense that there is nothing else or that it is only nature of becoming and not at all nature of being; that could not be the supreme Nature of the Spirit. Even in time it is something more; for otherwise the only truth of it in the cosmos would be nature of multiplicity and there would be no nature of unity in the world. That is not what the Gita says: it does not say that the supreme Prakriti is in its essence the Jiva, *jivatmakam*, but that it has become the Jiva, *jivabhutam*; and it is implied in that expression that behind its manifestation as the Jiva here it is originally something else and higher, it is nature of the one supreme Spirit. The Jiva, as we are told later on, is the Lord, Ishwara, but in his partial manifestation, *mamaivansha*; even all the multiplicity of beings in the universe or in numberless universes could not be in their becoming the integral Divine, but only a partial manifestation of the infinite One. In them Brahman the one indivisible existence resides as if divided, *avibhaktam cha bhuteshu vibhaktam iva cha sthitam*. The unity is the greater truth, the multiplicity is the lesser truth, though both are a truth, and neither of them is an illusion." (*Essays on the Gita*)

As regards the distinction between the two Purushas, *kshara* and *akshara*, Shankara has shown the same clumsiness of interpretation. He begins the commentary on sloka 16 in the fifteenth chapter by saying that the Akshara Purusha is Maya Shakti, and ends it by saying that it is really the abode of Maya. If Akshara Purusha be Maya, then it becomes identical with *apara prakriti*, and Gita's distinction becomes meaningless; we may note here that other commentators of the Gita have identified Akshara Purusha with Para Prakriti; but nowhere in the Upanishads or the Gita Prakriti has been called Purusha; if on the other hand Akshara Purusha be the abode of Maya Shakti, then it becomes identical with Ishwara, as Shankara has conceived him; but in the very next sloka the Gita says that Ishwara is other and higher than the Akshara Purusha, and he is called Paramatman. Here the Gita clearly says that Ishwara is supreme Atman, that is, supreme Brahman. Again in the thirteenth chapter (sloka 19), Shankara says that Prakriti and Purusha are the two Prakritis of Ishwara, *prakritim purusham chaiva ishwarasya prakriti tau*. This is to confound utterly the clear and precise distinctions made by the Gita as the basis of its integral Yoga. The two Purushas, Kshara and Akshara, of which the Gita speaks, are described in the Upanishadas in one place as two birds, in another place as two unborn; they refer to the two statuses of Purusha, as distinguished from Prakriti. "To these two the Gita, developing the thought of other passages in the Upanishads,¹ adds yet another, the supreme, the Purushottama, the highest Purusha, whose greatness all this creation is. Thus there are three, the Kshara, the Akshara, the Uttama. Kshara, the mobile, the mutable is Nature,

Swabhava, it is the various becoming of the soul; the Purusha here is the multiplicity of the divine Being; it is the Purusha multiple not apart from, but in Prakriti. Akshara, the immobile, the immutable, is the silent and inactive self, it is the unity of the divine Being, Witness of Nature, but not involved in its movement; it is the inactive Purusha free from Prakriti and her works. The Uttama is the Lord, the supreme Brahman, the supreme Self, who possesses both the immutable unity and the mobile multiplicity. It is by a large mobility and action of His nature, His energy, His will and power, that He manifests Himself in the world and by a greater stillness and immobility of His being that He is aloof from it; yet is He as Purushottama above both the aloofness from Nature and the attachment to Nature." (*Essays on the Gita*)

Shankara in his commentary on the fifteenth chapter of the Gita, sloka 16, says that the two Purushas, Kshara and Akshara, are two aspects of Brahman associated with Maya. When Brahman appears as the world of change and multiplicity, it is the Kshara Purusha; and Brahman as the abode of Maya which creates the illusion of the Kshara is the Akshara Purusha. This would tally with the Gita's description if we regard Maya to be the Prakriti of the Gita. The Lord when he identifies himself with the workings of his prakriti and seems to change with its changes, he is the Kshara; and when the Lord remains dissociated from Prakriti, but supports the world-play by his immutability and silence, he is the Akshara; but these two are only two aspects of the Purushottama, which exist in him simultaneously. In one place the Lord says that he is the foundation of Brahman, that is, of the Akshara Purusha (14.27). Shankara could not go so far, and had to interpret the meaning of the Gita in his own way to support his position that the silent, inactive Brahman is the supreme Reality. What Shankara means by Purushottama or Ishwara is really the Lord of the Gita in the Kshara aspect; and what he means by the highest *nirguna* Brahman is the Gita's Lord in the Akshara; Shankara had no vision of the Gita's Purushottama and Para Prakriti.

Ramanuja was greatly influenced by the Gita's conception of a supreme Person as the highest reality, and regarded devotion and surrender to this supreme Person as the highest *sadhana* and *siddhi* for the Jiva. But he also failed to reach the integral vision of the Gita, as he could not appreciate the impersonal aspect of the Divine in which it is one and identical with all creatures. So the devotion of the Gita is not merely the relation of a servant to his master, as Ramanuja conceived it, but it includes all personal relations, and finds its highest fulfilment in the love and devotion of a lover to his beloved, which has its basis in the realisation of essential identity, — the One becoming the many to taste his own love in infinite ways. This aspect of devotion, developed in the Puranas, found remarkable expression in the *sadhana* and realisation of Sri Chaitanya, the great exponent of *achintya-bhedabheda*.

Ramanuja also has not the Gita's vision of Para Prakriti; he identifies Para Prakriti with the world of souls, *chit*, and Apra Prakriti with the world of matter, *achit*. The souls, according to Ramanuja, are many who are different from one another and from the Divine; but Para Prakriti, according to the Gita, is one which formulates herself as many souls. Ramanuja missed this principle of unity of the souls and their essential identity with the

Divine. According to Ramanuja, Akshara and Kshara refer to souls liberated and bound respectively. But, as we have seen above, the two Purushas of the Gita do not refer to individual souls, bound or liberated, but to two statuses of the Divine Purushottama. Souls which take the poise of Kshara, and identify themselves with the play of Prakriti, and enjoy the gunas born of Prakriti, are bound; and when they withdraw themselves from the play of Prakriti into the silence of the Akshara, they are liberated: this is what Shankara means by Mukti, and the Buddhists by Nirvana. But that is not the highest status of the soul according to the Gita; that will be reached when the soul, rising above narrow egoism through the impersonal immutable Self or Akshara, will take the poise of the Purushottama, *madbhava*, and with the silence and liberation of the Akshara within will associate with the play of Nature not as slaves of her *gunas*, but as masters like the Purushottama himself, and as luminous instruments of his will in the world.

In one essential point all the schools of Vedantic thought so far considered have agreed to differ from the Gita; according to all of them this world is a bondage for the soul, one must renounce it in order to attain the true goal, though they differ among themselves about the nature of this *mukti* and the practical *sadhana* that will lead to it. This agreement has arisen from their conception of the origin of this world, which according to them is a creation of Maya consisting of the three *gunas* which keep souls bound to this life of ignorance and suffering. But why has God or Brahman created or allowed the creation of this world of suffering and ignorance? Shankara escapes this question by saying that there is really no creation, and no suffering, it is all a dream, an illusion, which is to be dispelled by true knowledge. Ramanuja and others do not regard the world as an illusion; so they explain suffering by *anadi karma*; men suffer on account of their past karma and are released by the grace of the Divine. But this is only shifting the question, for whence comes this karma which is the root of so much suffering? By karma the Gita means *visarga* or the creative movement. But how does the Divine who is all-bliss and all-powerful, tolerate this creation of evil and suffering? Some say it is a sport of the Divine, *Lila*; others say that there is an inconscient or *achit* principle outside the Divine which is really responsible for all this imperfection and suffering. The Gita, however, does not take refuge in any of these explanations which really explain nothing or assert limitation in the limitless infinite One. The Gita also regards this worldly life as full of suffering, *anityam asukham lokam*, but it does not on that account want to escape from this world in search of bliss in Vaikuntha or Goloka or of nirvana in a silent featureless Brahman or Shunyam. The Gita regards the present life of the world as a deformation and a lower play and wants to have it transformed into its true nature in which it is divine. The world according to the Gita is not essentially evil, not a creation of Maya or Aprakriti (this is only the lower mechanism of creation), but a creation of Para Prakriti; and this Para Prakriti is identical with the Divine Himself. "Speaking first of the origin of the world from the point of view of the active power of his Nature, Krishna assevers, 'This is the womb of all beings,' (7-6), and in the next line of the couplet, again stating the same fact from the point of view of the originating Soul, he continues, 'I am the birth of the whole world and so too its dissolution; there is nothing else supreme beyond Me.' Here then the supreme Soul,

Purushottama, and the supreme Nature, Para Prakriti, are identified; they are put as two ways of looking at one and the same reality. For when Krishna declares 'I am the birth of the world and its dissolution,' it is evident that it is this Para Prakriti, Supreme Nature, of his being which is both these things." Yet there is a difference, for the Lord says, "My supreme Prakriti," *prakritim me param*; but the relation between the Lord and his supreme Prakriti is not one of substance and attribute, as the Bhedabhedins would have it; the difference is only of aspects. Brahman in his aspect of dynamism is Prakriti. "The Spirit is the supreme Being in his infinite consciousness, and the supreme Nature is the infinity of power or will of being of the Spirit, — it is his infinite consciousness in its inherent divine energy and its supernal divine action." Sri Ramakrishna graphically described it thus: "When the snake is still, it is the Purusha *bhava*, then Prakriti remains merged as one with Purusha; and when the snake is moving, then it seems that Prakriti is working apart from Purusha. Fundamentally it is one substance, *abheda*," "Water is water whether it moves or remains still."

Para Prakriti is of the nature of *sat, chit, ananda*, so the world originated from it is essentially *sachchidananda*; as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, the world is saturated with the *rasa* of Sachchidananda. This divine nature of the world is now hidden, it has to be manifested. There is nothing really inconscient or *jada* in this world; even the most material atom is the *sachchidananda* Divine, who remains self-limited and self-withdrawn to create conditions for the manifestation of divine life under material conditions. The Ananda which is all the while behind the world movement has to be brought to the front, that is the whole meaning of terrestrial evolution and human life. The very nature of the Divine is *ananda*, and there can never be any element of suffering in him; what appears to us as suffering, is really *ananda* as deformed and distorted by our egoistic ignorant nature; with the transformation of our nature, the whole of life will be full of light and peace and power and joy. If the Divine has consented to undergo suffering and ignorance in the Jiva, it can only be for the purpose of transmuting all this suffering into the stuff of some new ineffable *ananda*, and establishing divine life under terrestrial conditions.

And is not this after all "the real Advaita which makes no least scission in the one eternal Existence? This utmost undividing Monism sees the one as the one even in the multiplicities of Nature, in all aspects, as much in the reality of self and of cosmos as in that greatest reality of the supracosmic which is the source of self and the truth of the cosmos and is not bound either by any affirmation of universal becoming or by any universal or absolute negation. That at least is the Advaita of the Gita." The Gita holds up the old Vedantic knowledge of the Upanishads constantly before us; but it is its superiority to other later formulations of it that it turns persistently this knowledge into a great practical philosophy of divine living.

In this way the Gita made a great, perhaps the greatest synthesis of Aryan spiritual culture. In its turn it became the starting point of various schools which differed in their emphasis on different aspects of its teaching. Now, again, the urgent need is being felt of a new and higher synthesis, and a broad foundation of it has been laid by Sri Ramakrishna.

There is a tendency to identify the Ramakrishna school of thought with the Adwaita and Mayavad of Shankara; but that is certainly not justified by the life and teaching of the Master himself who went far beyond the Shankarite Totapuri in his spiritual realisations. Where Shankara ends, Ramakrishna begins. Shankara had a vision only of the silent and inactive aspect of the Brahman; Ramakrishna saw beside that its active aspect, the Shakti, which he found to be identical with Brahman. Swami Vivekananda, though a critical student of the philosophy of Shankara, seems to have been deeply impressed by Shankara's spiritual experience of the eternal silence. But Ramakrishna saw silence and activity as two aspects of the same Reality. Let us quote here some of his own revelatory words on the Brahman and the Shakti:

"In one aspect he is *nitya*, the Eternal, in another he is *Lila* or the world-play. It is he who has become Jiva, Jagat and the twenty-four *tattwas*. When he is inactive we call him Brahman. When he creates, preserves, destroys, we call him Shakti. Brahman and Shakti are identical — water is as much water when it moves as when it is still."

"Perfect knowledge and perfect devotion are the same thing. By '*neti, neti*' we arrive at Brahman knowledge; after that we take up again what we had renounced."

"Both the roof and the staircase are made of the same stuff, brick and mortar. The world of soul and matter is made of the substance of Brahman."

"That which is Brahman, that is Kali (*paradevi Shivabhinna*). He who is Purusha is Prakriti; we call him the World-Mother."

"At first Brahman and Shakti seem to be two: after realisation of Brahman, there is no duality. Abheda One. There is no two in that One. Adwaitam."

"Hazra would not believe that Brahman and Shakti, Shakti and Shaktiman were *abheda*. I prayed to the Mother, 'Hazra is trying to upset the view held here. Either make him understand this, Mother, or remove him from this place.' The very next day Hazra came and said, Yes, I admit."

This Mother of Sri Ramakrishna is not the ignorant, inconscient, illusory eternal principle of the Mayavadins. She is the supreme conscious Power, *chinmayi*, and the world she creates is pervaded by her consciousness; all things are *chinmaya*, conscious, even the most material. The world is a manifestation of *chit shakti*, so it is real, true. But Brahman is the truth, — higher *Satyasya satyam*. "I take both," said Ramakrishna, "otherwise there is something lacking."

Ramakrishna admitted Mayavad as one of the spiritual paths, but as a path which was dry and difficult, though it might be suited to some particular temperaments. He himself regarded the path of devotion and surrender to the Personal Divine as the easiest and at the same time the highest path. In all this he interpreted the true teaching of the Gita. On the basis of the Adwaita of the Gita, Sri Ramakrishna made a synthesis of Vedanta and Tantra, which has opened up immense possibilities for the divinisation of human life on earth.

¹ *Purushah akshwrat paratah parah*, — although the Aksharah is supreme, there is a supreme Purusha higher than it, says the Upanishad.

(Reproduced from *The Calcutta Review*, Oct. 1940, pp.37-46)

(Concluded)

Vedic hermeneutic of Sri Aurobindo

Krishna Roy

The title of this present article 'Vedic hermeneutic of Sri Aurobindo' may sound inappropriate at first, as the term 'hermeneutics' was not so prevalent at the time of Sri Aurobindo as it is nowadays; yet if we ponder deeply we will realise that though the term 'hermeneutics' was not so common during that period, yet the spirit and the processes implied by the term were very much present in the thoughts of Sri Aurobindo.

Now I shall explicate the meaning of the term 'hermeneutics' briefly. The term 'hermeneutics' comes from the Greek verb *hermeneuein* which may be translated either as description, explanation or as translation — all of which involve interpretation in some form or the other. Hence 'hermeneutics' implies both the act and the art of interpretation. This act of interpretation is both perennial and universal. From time immemorial men are interpreting nature, texts, others and even himself in some ways. Hence, interpreting ancient scriptures, either written or oral, from different perspectives, can be noticed even in ancient India. This has happened even in the case of the Vedas.

As we all know the Vedas are the foundation of Indian culture — its literature, philosophy and religion. These Vedas are regarded as orally transmitted knowledge or *Sruti*. The Vedas are mostly comprised of hymns or verses, composed in Sanskrit language. The Sanskrit language has a very special characteristic, e.g., the roots from which the Sanskrit words originate often have multiple meanings. As an example we may mention the different implications of the word Veda itself; coming from the root *bid*, the word Veda means (as we all know) knowledge or *jnana*; the root *bid* has many allied implications; it also means *vicharana* or judging and hence the word Veda means that through which the ultimate reality has been judged is Veda; the verb *bid* also implies being or existence and as such the word Veda implies that in which the ultimate truth is present. The root *bid* may also refer to gain and hence the word Veda would mean that through which we gain the ultimate knowledge is Veda. Similarly many Sanskrit roots have multiple implications giving various shades of meaning to the words, coming from those roots. This has been the case with the words and sentences consisting of the four Vedas and in order to comprehend the true meaning and implication it is often necessary to consult the *Vedangas*, specially *Nirukta* or etymology, compiled by Yaska, for here we can find the compilation of all the various meanings of the Sanskrit words. In *Nirukta* and *Nigahantu* we can find the etymology, giving various meanings of the obscure and symbolic words of the Rk Vedic hymns. Thus *Nirukta* and *Nigahantu* explain the Vedic hymns primarily from the philological perspective.

The four Vedas are constituted of many *Riks*, *Mantras*, *Suktas* etc. That which comes from the heart of the Rishis or sacred souls is called a *Rik*. Sometimes *Riks* are regarded as synonymous with *Mantras* or hymns. In the Vedas we find many *Suktas*; literally a *Sukta* means a good message. Each *Sukta* comprises of many *Riks*; e.g. the famous *Purusha-Sukta* is composed of many *Riks*. These Vedic *Riks*, *Mantras*, and *Suktas* are not written by *Rishis*; they are seen as revealed to them. Hence the Vedic hymns are regarded as eternal (*nitya*) and impersonal (*apaurusheya*).

The Vedic verses and hymns, consisting of words having multiple meanings have received various interpretations from different interpreters. In ancient India such acts of interpretation were known as *bhashya*, *tika*, *vartika* etc. All these various stages of interpretation seek to delve out the inherent secret and proper meaning of the Vedas. Such acts of interpretation have to follow certain rules or principles, which are necessary to make an interpretation proper and authentic. Such rules were also present in ancient India and in Jaimini's *Mimamsa-Sutras* they were known as *nyayas* and in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and in *Samhitas* by Caraka and Susruta, they were called the *tantrayuktis*. It is interesting to note that in his interpretation of the Vedas, Sri Aurobindo also suggested some such principles, which he considered useful for any proper interpretation.

It is well known that one of the primary objectives of Sri Aurobindo was to explore and explicate the secret messages of the Vedas. He was conversant with all the different commentaries available in his days; yet he was not fully satisfied with those interpretations; he was in search of some deeper and richer interpretation that will reveal the tacit yet true messages of the Vedas. Among the many classical commentaries of the Rk Veda, the *bhasyas* by Yaska and Sayana are specially noteworthy. As early as Fourth Century B.C., Yaska in his famous compendium *Nirukta* discussed the various meanings of Vedic words with reference to their etymology. Such philological interpretation prevailed till in the Fourteenth Century A.D. Sayanacharya offered a full-length *bhasya* or commentary of the Rk Veda. Sayana focussed primarily on the rituals and sacrifices, mentioned in the Rk Veda. Such ritualistic interpretation has been accepted by many Indian and Western interpreters. Many famous foreign interpreters like Max Müller, Geldner and others were influenced by such ritualistic interpretation and developed their explications of the Vedic verses along that line. It has to be admitted that during the earlier part of his career, Sri Aurobindo too was interested in those commentaries, while in the later period he realised that such ritualistic interpretation did not convey the true meaning and significance of the Vedic messages. Gradually he studied the interpretations offered by Dayananda Saraswati, Parama Siva Aiyer, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and others. With the development of his Yogic experience and enlightened intelligence Sri Aurobindo realised that there must be some inherent, tacit implication of the Vedic hymns, that has yet to be explored. In pursuance of that project of deciphering the true meaning of the Vedas, Sri Aurobindo discussed the various implications of the Vedic *suktas* and *mantras* in his *The Secret of the Veda, Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, as well as in some other articles.

Through his yogic experience and illuminating vision Sri Aurobindo realised that the Vedas contain messages which were highly significant and deeply spiritual. Sri Aurobindo

was acquainted with most of the available interpretations of the Vedas and as I have already mentioned, he was not fully satisfied with any of these. He admitted the importance of some interpretations as giving relevant clues for understanding the Vedas properly — yet he felt that something remained hidden or unexplored and he himself endeavoured to unfold those tacit dimensions of the Vedas. Hence, his aim was not merely to negate any of the existing interpretations but to supplement another positive and constructive one which would be complementary to them.

Sri Aurobindo wanted to offer a 'hypothesis' that the Vedic verses or hymns had two different implications — one for the ordinary people like us and the other for those who were genuinely interested, the 'initiates', as he called them. In his *The Secret of the Veda* Sri Aurobindo wrote "The ritual system recognised by Sayana may, in its externalities, stand; the naturalistic sense discovered by European scholarship may, in its general conceptions be accepted; but behind them there is always the *true and still hidden secret of the Veda*,— the secret words, *ninyā vacāmsi*, which were spoken for the purified in soul and the awakened in knowledge."¹ Hence he held that only those who possessed the mind with high intelligence and were accustomed to unfold the mystical apprehension of reality would be capable of understanding the true import of the Vedas, which was not merely ritualistic but contained deep spiritual messages. Sri Aurobindo wanted to exemplify this through his extensive discussion of the Vedas in his *The Secret of the Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*.

It is true that in his discussion on of the Vedas, Sri Aurobindo was primarily concerned about the hymns of the Rk Veda and explained and interpreted them in such a way that their deeper significance could be understood by us, yet he held that the same method and processes were equally applicable to other Vedas as well.

One of the criticisms that the Vedas often face is that the Vedic verses are abstruse, ambiguous and incoherent. Sri Aurobindo provided an answer to such criticisms by explaining the deeper meaning of the verses and exploring the 'real thread' between the verses which would help to understand the Vedas as meaningful, organic whole. Sri Aurobindo accepted the importance of Sayana's interpretation as it was 'indispensable for opening the antechambers of Vedic learning', yet he knew that Sayana's ritualistic interpretation had 'put a seal of finality on the old misunderstanding which could not be broken for many centuries.'² Sri Aurobindo wanted to remove such misunderstandings or misconceptions and endeavoured to bring back the glory and significance of the Vedic verses. In pursuance of that goal, he first resorted to philology, i.e. he tried to explain the various meanings of the Vedic words from their etymology and then to select the appropriate one according to the context. In addition to this philological method, Sri Aurobindo also used in his hermeneutic of the Vedas the psychological method. He discovered that profound psychological thoughts were lying neglected so far, amidst the Vedic *mantras* and *suktas*. Such psychological implications mostly differed from their ritualistic interpretations given by Sayana. As for example he mentioned that Sayana translated one of the key Vedic word *Rtam* mostly as 'sacrifice' and occasionally as 'truth'; whereas from the psychological perspective *Rtam* refers to the Truth, which was and is the central theme

of all spiritual interpretations. Similarly by *dhi* Sayana referred to 'thought', 'prayer', 'action' and even to 'food' on different occasions, but the psychological interpretation would always imply thought or understanding and nothing else. In the Rk Veda *Usha* or dawn has been described as *gomati asvavati*; if we accept the ordinary naturalistic interpretation of *go* as cow and *asva* as horse then the meaning of that verse would be ridiculous; on the other hand, the psychological interpretation of *go* as light and *asva* as energy would reveal the true meaning of that clause as the dawn imparting both light and energy to us. Similarly, by *Agni* we should not merely refer to ordinary fire or fire for ceremonial sacrifice; it refers to 'the luminous guardian of the Truth'. Moreover, the mentioning of the goddess Saraswati does not refer to the river but to the source of inspiration that 'illuminates all our thoughts'. Thus, in opposition to the prevailing ritualistic interpretation Sri Aurobindo suggested psychological interpretation. In this context he held in *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* "The Gods constantly stand out in their psychological functions; the sacrifice is the outer symbol of an inner work, an inner interchange between the gods and men, — man giving what he has, the gods giving in return the horses of power, the herds of light, the heroes of Strength to be his retinue,.. "3

I have mentioned earlier that hermeneutics implies both the art or the method of interpretation and the actual act. We find that in his *The Secret of the Veda* Sri Aurobindo developed the art of interpretation, e.g. how for proper interpretation of the Vedas we have to take the help of both philological and psychological methods. While understanding a Vedic word we must consider its etymology and select the appropriate meaning that would reveal the psychological meaning explicitly. Sri Aurobindo emphasised that no interpretation of the Vedas could be authentic which was not situated upon sound philological basis. In this context he mentioned: "A firm and not a fluctuating sense, founded on good philological justification and fitting naturally into the context wherever it occurs, must be found for each of the fixed terms of the Veda".4 Sri Aurobindo further suggested some regulative conditions for removing bias, presuppositions, imaginations and such other subjective preconditions of the interpreter. If the interpretation of the Vedic verses are done 'scrupulously' and carefully, Sri Aurobindo held "they are found to illuminate what seemed obscure and to create intelligible and clear coherence where there seemed to be only confusion; if the hymns in their entirety give thus a clear and connected sense and the successive verses show a logical succession of related thoughts and if the result as a whole be a profound, consistent, antique body of doctrines .. "5 Such discussion of the pre-conditions for Vedic interpretation remind us of similar discussions by many Western hermeneuticians who suggested many such conditions for ensuring the authenticity of the interpretation.

The application of those principles can be found in Sri Aurobindo's second book on Vedic interpretation namely *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. In this book we can find Sri Aurobindo's novel and insightful interpretation of the hymns of the Rk Veda. Here he first mentioned the common ritualistic meanings of the hymns and then he offered his own creative psychological interpretation. It is generally known that the Rk Veda gives us the details of various rituals and sacrifices being performed by men but Sri Aurobindo

considered those sacrifices to be symbolic only. In this context he held: "the elements of the outer sacrifice in the Veda are used as symbols of the inner sacrifice and self-offering; we give what we are and what we have in order that the riches of the divine Truth and Light may descend into our life and become the elements of our inner birth into the Truth, . . . Our sacrifice is a journey, a pilgrimage and a battle, — a travel towards the Gods and we also make that journey with Agni, the inner Flame, as our path-finder and leader."⁶

We may mention here some of Sri Aurobindo's ingenious and insightful interpretation of the Vedic hymns as illustration. The various meanings of the famous *Riks* of *Madhuchchhandas* are mentioned below:

*Agnimīle purohitam yajñasya devamṛtvijam,
hotāram ratnadhātaman* 11 1 11

The ritualistic interpretation of the above Rik states: I praise Agni, the Purohita of the sacrifice, the god, the Ritwik, the Hota who holds very much wealth.

Sri Aurobindo's psychological interpretation states: "I seek the God-Will, the Priest set in front of our sacrifice, the divine offerer who sacrifices in the order of the truth, who disposes utterly the delight."⁷

*Agniḥ pūrvebhirṣibhirīdyo nūtanairuta, sa
devān eha vakṣati.* 11 2| II

Sri Aurobindo has translated this Rik as follows: "The God-Will is desirable as to the ancient sages, so to the new, for it is he that bringeth here the gods".⁸

*Agnina rayisnavat posameva dive dive,
yasasam viravattamam* 11 3 11

The ritualistic translation of the above Rik is: "By Agni one attains a wealth daily increasing, famous and most full of men". Sri Aurobindo's psychological meaning goes as follows: "By the God-Will one shall enjoy a felicity that shall increase day by day, victorious, fullest of hero-powers".⁹

*Agne yam yajñamadhvaram viśvataḥ paribhūṣasi,
sa id deveṣu gacchati* 11 4 11

The ritualistic interpretation of this Rik goes like that: O Agni, the unhurt sacrifice that thou encompasseth on all sides, that goes to the Gods. Sri Aurobindo's psychological interpretation states: "O God-Will, whatsoever sacrifice in the path thou encompasseth with thy being on every side, that indeed arrives to the Gods".

*Agnirhotā kavikratuḥ satyaścitraśravastamaḥ,
devo devebhirā gamat 11 5 11*

The ritualistic literal translation goes like that: "Agni, the priest, who sets in motion the knowledge (or work), true in his fruit, very varied in his fame, may he come with the gods". Sri Aurobindo interpreted the above Rik from psychological perspective and states: "The God-Will, Priest of our offering, true in his being, with the will of the seer, with richest variety of inspired knowledge, may he come to us divine with the powers divine".¹¹

These are some of the examples of Sri Aurobindo's innovative and creative interpretation of the Vedic hymns which we notice in detail in his *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. Hence we may sum up by reiterating that in his *The Secret of Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, Sri Aurobindo pursued both the art and the act of interpretation and as such his endeavour is a significant hermeneutic of the Vedas, which aims to reveal that there is a Truth deeper and higher than the truth of outward existence, a Light greater and higher than the light of human understanding which comes by revelation and inspiration, an immortality towards which the soul has to rise.

References

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, Sri Aurobindo Ahsram Press, Pondicherry, SABCL, vol.10, p. 6.
2. *ibid*, pp. 20-21.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, Sri Aurobindo Ahsram Press, Pondicherry, SABCL, vol.11, p. 10.
4. *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, vol.10, p.32.
5. *ibid*, p. 33.
6. *Hymns to Mystic Fire*, SAVCL, vol.11, p. 18.
7. *op cit*, p. 460.
8. *ibid*, p. 461.
9. *ibid*, p. 462.
10. *ibid*, p. 463.
11. *ibid*, p. 464.

The Mother Image in Sri Aurobindo

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prema Nandakumar

3.Wake-up Call from Bhavani Bharati

Sri Aurobindo spent fourteen years in Baroda. A good portion of it was given over to his work outside like political activism. Nevertheless, this was a time of laying the foundations for his Indic studies. He entered the service of the Gaekwar of Baroda in 1893. If he had received a psychological shock of being denied closeness to his mother even after returning to India, it has not found recordation. In any case, Sri Aurobindo seems to have been a silent person, though very eloquent when he faced a class or a public audience.

His early poems were understandably light-stepping, inspired by his studies in Greek mythology. The title is revelatory. Myrtilla is well chosen. Derived from the myrtle tree which has fragrant leaves, it is also seen as a symbol of victory. There are several legends that connect the tree with Venus. In one of them, the thick foliage of the tree helped Venus cover her nakedness when she was on the Ionian island of Cytheraea. So the tree became her favourite and has always been associated with love and strengthening that emotive power. Indeed the Greeks worshipped Venus as the Goddess of Love and called her Myrtilla. Naturally the two young men, Aethon and Glaucus tell each other how they found themselves in love. A typical theme for a young boy in his late teens:

“Since in the silver mist
Bright Cymothea’s lips I kissed,
Whose laughter dances like a gleam
Of sunlight on a hidden stream
That through a wooded way
Runs suddenly into the perfect day.
But what were Cymothea, placed
Where like a silver star Myrtilla blooms?”(*Songs to Myrtilla*, SABCL, vol.5, p.5)

Love, yes. But the glory of motherhood is heard in Sri Aurobindo’s writings as the *adhar sruti*. Motherhood that is holy because it bears tragic losses all the time yet proceeds to fashion new workers who bring out the glory and good in man. Soon after Sri Aurobindo’s return to India, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee passed away. At that time he wrote two elegiac poems of which *Saraswati with the Lotus* is brief and wholly poignant.

“Thy tears fall fast, O mother, on its bloom,
O white-armed mother, like honey fall thy tears;
Yet even their sweetness can no more relume
The golden light, the fragrance heaven rears,
The fragrance and the light for ever shed
Upon his lips immortal who is dead.” (Ibid,p.26)

We can hardly believe that Sri Aurobindo’s earliest prose writings belong to his late teens! *The Harmony of Virtue* written when he was eighteen is to be “an explanation of the cosmos on the foundation of the principle of Beauty and Harmony.’ It is influenced by Plato’s works and remains unfinished. Necessarily in all the work which deals often with religious beliefs, God is referred to only as ‘he’.

The anxiety and inquisitive questioning on the nature of ‘harmony’ is a pointer to his search for what it was that jarred the harmony of his mother’s personality. He does not feel despondent when he finds that Nature has managed to achieve perfection in the matter of the human being.

“Then if the human will, prompted by Nature or her servant, False Reason, has marred the universal harmony, may not the human will prompted by Right Reason who is also the servant of Nature, mend the harmony he has marred?”

After coming to India, Sri Aurobindo was drawn more to the mother-idea that pervades the nation’s psyche. It was a contrastive situation that he found in his native land. In Britain he was no stranger to the problems women had in the matter of citizenship. When he left England, women had not won the right to vote and only in 1894 could they vote in local elections, that too, only if they owned property. Nor was woman worshipped as a goddess. The west had now no place for its Greek goddesses. Christianity was of course God-centric. On the other hand, India may have been enslaved by the British, but here women were given a very high status by the community. He must have been electrified by Swami Vivekananda’s words:

“Now the ideal woman, in India, is the Mother, the mother first, and the mother last. The word woman calls up to the mind of the Hindu, motherhood, and God is called Mother.”

His readings in Indian literature gave him further insights into the concept of motherhood according to the Indian ethos. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s portrayal of women was a revelation. He would write of the Bengali novelist:

“The social reformer, gazing, of course, through that admirable pair of spectacles given to him by the Calcutta University, can find nothing excellent in Hindu life, except its cheapness, or in Hindu woman, except her subserviency. Beyond this he sees only its narrowness and her ignorance. But Bankim had the eye of a poet and saw much deeper

than this. He saw what was beautiful and sweet and gracious in Hindu life, and what was lovely and noble in Hindu woman, her deep heart of emotion, her steadfastness, tenderness and loveliness, in fact her woman's soul; and all this we find burning in his pages and made diviner by the touch of a poet and an artist.”(SABCL,vol.3,p.93)

Such has been the impact of India's gracious motherhood upon him that Sri Aurobindo takes it up even in his poetry criticism. In an essay, *The Sources of Poetry*, written in his early years at Baroda, he moves a little away from the western image of Pegasus gifted by Greek inspiration:

“In India we have the same idea; Saraswati is for us the goddess of poetry, and her name means the stream or ‘she who has flowing motion’. But even Saraswati is only an intermediary. Ganga is the real mother of inspiration, she who flows impetuously down from the head of Mahadev, God high-seated, over the Himalaya of the mind to the homes and cities of men.”(SABCL,vol.3,p.105)

Such a mature insight into aesthetics need not surprise us for already Sri Aurobindo was discovering the amazing world of Kalidasa's works where women are to the fore. He finds a “constant and instinctive perfection” wherever Kalidasa deals with women characters. Lacking an “insight into feminine character”, the west generally produced bad women, “the Clytemnestras, Vittoria Corombonas, Beatrice Joannas”. Very few like Shakespeare or Racine show this “instinctive insight into women” and even they do so but occasionally. On the contrary, consider Kalidasa.

“The *Agnimitra* is a drama of women; it passes within the woman's apartments and pleasure gardens of a great palace and is full of the rustling of women's robes, the tinkling of their ornaments, the scent of their hair, the music of their voices. In the *Urvasie* where he needs at least half the canvas for his hero, the scope for feminine characterisation is of necessity greatly contracted, but what is left Kalidasa has filled in with a crowd of beautiful shining figures and exquisite faces each of which is recognisable. These are the Apsaras and Urvasie is the most beautiful of them all.”(SABCL,vol.3,p.276-77)

The feminine in the Indian ethos has caught Sri Aurobindo and plunged him into a superior poetic imagination that would give us great poems in the future. Meanwhile, in this work on Kalidasa he takes up the subject of the birth of the apsara maids and the very natural way in which the Sanskrit poet describes girlhood and womanhood. In *Shakuntala* we get to have a “noble and strong portraiture”. The in-depth readings in ancient works of Sanskrit gave Sri Aurobindo an important insight into the status of a nation's women. Whether in Greece or in India, there were two groups of women. One was woman as daughter, wife, mother. She was bound by ties of marriage to a single male. The other belonged to the courtesan (*Ganika*) class that traced its genesis to heavenly damsels like Rambha, Menaka and Tilottama. The Sangam ethos of South India had the same division

and the latter were known as *Parattaiyar*. Generally, it was portrayed that the courtesan class was accomplished in studies, art, music and dance and hence men were drawn to them. Did this mean the married woman was an ignorant, superstitious domestic animal? Sri Aurobindo writes:

“The class of Hetairae was as recognised an element in the Hindu society as in the Greek, but it does not appear to have exercised quite so large an influence in social life. As in the Greek counterpart they were a specially learned and accomplished class of women, but their superiority over ladies of good families was not so pronounced; for in ancient India previous to the Mahomedan episode respectable women were not mere ignorant housewives like the Athenian ladies, but often they were educated though not in a formal manner.” (SABCL, vol.3, p.296)

They remained at home and received training in art and music, studies that included philosophy or mathematics. The Indian genius was for perfection in women and hence the wife at home (*kulavadhu*) was not obtuse nor the courtesan (*Ganika*) voluptuous. Such insightful comments draw him to seeing woman as Mother Goddess in the brief essay, *The Brain of India*. Cogitating on the origins of the Tantra path of yoga, he finds the Bengali attachment to Kali, the Mother of special interest.

“The Bengali has always worshipped the Divine Energy in her most terrible as well as in her most beautiful aspects; whether as the Beautiful or the Terrible Mother he has never shrunk from her whether in fear or in awe. When the divine force flowed into him he has never feared to yield himself up to it and follow the infinite prompting, careless whither it led. As a reward he has become the most perfect *ādhāra* of Shakti, the most capable and swiftly sensitive and responsive receptacle of the Infinite Will and Energy the world now holds.” (SABCL, vol.3, pp.327-28)

These words written not long after the passing of Swami Vivekananda are significant. Did the Swami’s life and work give Sri Aurobindo a clue into the psyche of the Indian that extols womanhood? Swami Vivekananda had written in ‘*Kali, the Mother*’:

“For Terror is Thy name,
Death is in Thy breath.
And every shaking step
Destroys a world for e’er.
Thou ‘Time’, the All-destroyer!
Come, O Mother, come!

Who dares misery love,
And hug the form of Death,
Dance in Destruction’s dance,
To him the Mother comes.”

The Cambridge-educated scholar had now become an activist votary of the nation as the Mother Goddess, ready for loving misery, hugging Death and extending his wrists for the manacles of the British Government. He would soon be writing a poem in the same vein when cast into the Alipore Jail:

“I sport with solitude here in my regions,
Of misadventure have made me a friend.
Who would live largely? Who would live freely?
Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.

I am the lord of tempest and mountain,
I am the Spirit of freedom and pride.
Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger
Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side.” (SABCL, vol.5, p.39)

The Baroda days of Sri Aurobindo are very important for this would be the transformative time for his approach to the mother image that would culminate in the epic Savitri. The essay, *The Brain of India* itself is for an integration of the impetuous Shakti-impelled energy of the Bengali with the calm and comprehensive deliberations that are the marks of other Indians like the Madrasi and the Maratha. However, Shakti has to come to the forefront first, to enable India to rise again. Explaining the inevitability of the Kurukshetra War, Sri Aurobindo noted in the essay, *The Greatness of the Individual*:

“Those who are commissioned to bring about mighty changes are full of the force of the zeitgeist. Kali has entered into them and Kali, when she enters into a man, cares nothing for rationality and possibility. She is the force of Nature that whirls the stars in their orbits lightly as a child might swing a ball, and to that force there is nothing impossible. She is *aghṭanaghaṭanapatiyasi*, very skilful in bringing about the impossible. She is the *devātmasaktiḥ svaguṇair nigūḍhā*, the Power of the Divine Spirit hidden in the modes of its own workings, and she needs nothing but time to carry out the purpose with which she is commissioned. She moves in Time and the very movement fulfils itself, creates its means, accomplishes its ends.” (SABCL, vol.3, pp.354-55)

Call this approach traditional, religious or spiritual, at the time when this was being written the people of India were looking forward to freeing their motherland from foreign domination. At the same time, it had to be understood that this power will be in action only for an appointed time. For the Kali-force is not a continuous experience. Hers is the inspiration conveyed through her chosen vessels. The conclusion in the essay flashes straight into our understanding.

Those who are swept forward by Kali within them and make no terms with Fate, they alone survive. The greatness of individuals is the greatness of the eternal Energy within. (Ibid, p.356)

The invocation of Kali for energetic inspiration to take up great works is planted so deep in Sri Aurobindo's psyche that even a work like *Conversations with the dead* written in a lighter vein turns to the Kali image. Songs of bridal, love and laughter as the one by Turiu invoking Leda are countered by Uriu the other character in the second 'conversation'. Goddess Tanyth is invoked by Uriu in a hymn where the East takes over completely:

"Tanyth, terrible Mother! laced with a garland of skulls,... thou that drinkest the blood of the victim upon the altar loud with death-shriek mighty and merciless Mother! Tanyth, thou in the shock of the fighting, with the raucous cry that rises high and drowns the crash of the car and the roar of the battle, — blood-stained, eager and terrible, pitiless, huge and swift, — wonderful, adorable Mother!"(Ibid,p.477)

There is pleasure in love and its ways but there is also an Ananda in the dance of death! Such is the philosophy of Uriu.

"Mother, arise, Tanyth the terrible! shake the world with thy whisper, loom in the heavens, madden men's hearts with thirst of blood, the rapture of death and the joy of the killing. We will give thee thy choice of the captives, women and men to fall and to bleed on thy altar.

Tanyth, lady of death, queen of the battle! there is a joy in the clash of death that is more than woman's sweet embrace, a pleasure in pain that the touch of her lips cannot give us; lovelier far is the body torn by the spears than her white limbs covered with shining gems. Tanyth's skulls are more than the garland upon thy breasts, O Leda."(Ibid,p.478)

There is plenty of such internal evidence as to why Sri Aurobindo became the architect and the activist of the Bande Mataram Movement. His *Bhavani Bharati* is a sataka (100 verses) in which he records a vision of India's Energy asking him to wake up and drive away the foreign hordes.

"As I lay sunk in the comfort of my couch and my mind wandered on the roads of Spring, I thought of my people, of poetry, of wife and enjoyments, pleasure and possessions.

I shaped my delight into elegant verse in lyrical stanzas of sensuous passion; I sang of the smile on my beloved's face and of the revered and most sacred feet of the Mother."(*Bhavānī Bhārati*, Sri Aurobindo Society,2003, pp.1-2)

One can find the young householder, husband of sweet Mrinalini, the scholar, the poet of *Love and Death*. But what use all this poetry and hailing the Mother's greatness, if it were not transformed into activism? In the vision, Sri Aurobindo is woken up by the touch of Kali's dreadful hand. It is a dreadful vision of Kali, not unlike the cosmic vision of Krishna in the Gita, the *viswarupa* devouring entire worlds. Kali's call has no frills.

“Arise! Give!” She reveals herself with a few preliminary words that inject self-confidence in the listener. “I am the mother, O child, of the Bharatas, the eternal people beloved of the gods, whom neither hostile Fate nor Time nor Death has power to destroy.”(Ibid,p.12) However, who are these educated Indians who have sold their souls to a foreign culture and become slaves in their own motherland?

Arise! Awake! Leave your ritual fires, for you are the incarnate lustre of Krishna, the Supreme. Go forth consuming your enemies with the fire that dwells eternal in your breast. (Ibid,p.18)

For the young man who had feasted on western philosophy and history, one who had immersed himself in the literature of English, Greek, Latin and French, the impact was tremendous. We can understand the transformation through the prism of *Bhavani Bharati* who says:

O poet and sensualist, hear the word of the Mother: adore Kali the Terrible, my son, the fierce Chandi. Verily you shall see her, the mother of the Bharatas, striking down her foes mightily in the thick of the fight.
Summon forth to battle the ancient tribes of the Bharatas. Let there be victory; fear not. Lo, I have awakened! Where is the bow, where the sword?... (Ibid, pp.30-31)

Sri Aurobindo has recorded those moments which made him see life and reality as he should, and that he was not following a mirage when he had taken up the ancient texts of India for study. What had been said in those Upanishads and epics were no purposeless imagination. He was drawn to the *Kena Upanishad* as it reveals beautifully how energy flows into the human being from the Mother. The gods were proud that they had posited victories. But when Vayu and Agni realised that they could not move or burn up even a blade of grass without the infusion of energy from the Eternal they sent Indra to find out the nature of the Eternal Spirit. Indra went towards it.

He in the same ether came upon the Woman, even upon Her who shines out in many forms, Uma, daughter of the snowy summits. To her he said: “What was this mighty Daemon?”(*Kena Upanishad*,3rd part,verse12)

With the coming of Uma Haimavati in this Upanishad, we can say that humans recognised and realised the Mother-tattva in creation. For Uma explained the Prakriti tattva of brahman, the energy that moves the world.

She said to him: “It is the Eternal. Of the Eternal is this victory in which ye shall grow to greatness.” Then alone he came to know that this was the Brahman. (Ibid, 4th part,verse1)

For Sri Aurobindo the mother-idea was gaining such force that even stone became transparent to reveal the goddess within, Durga, rider on the lion.

(To be continued)

The Divine Mother

Debashish Banerji

I

The Divine Mother plays a central role in Sri Aurobindo's teaching, so it is not surprising that She also plays a central role in *Savitri*. Indeed, it is the power of the Divine Mother that is incarnated as Savitri. Prior to this incarnation, Aswapati, the father of Savitri, in his seeking for the solution to the riddle of Ignorance, reaches in consciousness to the supreme Divine Mother beyond the cosmos and at the gates of the transcendental Unknowable. His passionate dialogue with her results in her accepting to incarnate as his daughter, and sets into action forces that could transform human existence into a divine one. The Divine Mother, incarnating as Savitri, enters the relations of the world, participating in its play and eventually vanquishing Death. Thus, one may say, the whole of *Savitri* revolves around an act of the Divine Mother.

Who, then, is the Divine Mother and why is she given this central role by Sri Aurobindo? If we can think of a Divine, is it not more proper to think of something illimitable, infinite, an ocean of Consciousness that cannot be limited by forces and names? Indeed, this is one arche-structure in the human approach to God, one in which such relations as we experience are seen as meaningless in the absolutism of the Divine Reality. This approach implies that the world of name, form and relations in which we find ourselves, a world of finite realities and of temporal realities, a world with beginnings and ends, has no meaning to the divine existence and needs to be erased if we are to experience that Absolute.

But there are other spiritual approaches which see this world as an extension, emanation or embodiment of the Divine Reality. If the Absolute is transcendently infinite and thus eternally unborn, unmanifest, its possibilities may issue forth in perennial manifestation, eternity becoming dynamic as perpetuity or Time, yet leaving the infinity of the Unborn intact. This is the approach taken by certain schools that believe that this manifestation can be one in which one can enter into relation with the Divine in his body of qualities or *gunas*.

Most of these schools that treat the Divine in a personal form are schools of devotion in which the Divine Person can relate to us as persons or souls. The earliest Indian proto-philosophies, the Upanishads, give credence to both the impersonal and personal approaches to the Divine Reality, and later schools of Vedanta have interpreted the Upanishads variously to affirm one or other of these approaches. Based on these grounds,

in the theistic literature of India, such as the Puranas and Tantras, God is seen as an embodiment of the Absolute Consciousness, who enters into this world of relations and becomes all the relations within it as an act of manifestation. This bridging of the two realms, of the Absolute and the Relative, of Eternity and Time, of the Infinite and finite realities, is something that needs a primary or originary relationship within the Divine.

For the Absolute to become Relative, we need a “first relation” within the One, the Absolute conceiving of Itself as a Relative. This self-conception of the Divine One, is a two-ness, a duality within it, incomprehensible to mind but necessary to the origin of a cosmos. This relationship can be seen as one between the Divine Existence (*Sat*) and its own Conscious-Force (*Chit*). The Conscious-Force of the Divine mobilises itself as the Power (*Tapas*) by which this Infinite Reality becomes the innumerable possibilities of manifestation. This power is Ananda, manifest as the Love of the Supreme Beloved and the Supreme Lover. Supreme Delight (*Ananda*) intrinsic in Supreme Being (*Satchidananda*) manifests itself as Divine Love between the Two that are One. This can be seen as the event horizon of manifestation, the condition by which the supreme Conscious Being invokes itself and becomes this world. This originary relation is the personal reality of the Ishwara and Shakti in the Indian traditions.

In the world of relations, if we are to enter into relationship with this One Being, we have to realise our part in the one supreme relationship. In other words, that One Being has become all of us and is also related to each of us as part of that relationship. This is the way in which Vedanta sees the unity of the One and the Many.

From Sri Aurobindo’s viewpoint, if the Absolute can represent itself as a conscious Cosmic Being, then we as relative beings can respond to it through our consciousness. Because it is conscious it can respond to us with its consciousness. The one supreme, eternal, Conscious Existence is Infinite and therefore Impersonal, but it is also Personal. It is an impersonal Person, an infinite Person, that can approach us or reach to us with an infinite possibility of persons or personalities. This is what gives reality to all the Puranic or other gods seen as true embodiments of this supreme Existence.

What then of the Divine Mother? The Divine Mother implies not only a personal aspect of the supreme Existence but a Feminine aspect and a specific set of relations, a relation to a Father and to a Child. If the One conceives of itself as the Two-in-One, the paradox of the Unborn coming into manifestation requires a bridge, channel or passage that stands between the Transcendent Unknowable and the realms of the Unknown and Known. This birthing channel is the Divine Mother. We find the Divine Mother given prominence in certain spiritual approaches. In esoteric Catholicism or in Gnostic schools, we see the Divine Mother as the Virgin Mother of the child Christ, the Mother of God, who gives birth to the Unborn Reality in time in the form of the divine Soul in the cosmos. Thus the paradox of Eternity and Time is bridged by her. The Divine is yet ever Unborn though she gives it birth. This is why she is Virgin and known in esoteric Christianity as the Intercessor. She stands between the supreme Transcendent, the ever Unmanifest, Infinite Reality known as the Father and this world of the plurality of souls, each of whom represents a Birth of the Supreme Being as the embodiment (avatar of God), Christ.

In the Indian traditions, this cosmic prominence is given to the Divine Mother in the schools of spiritual thought and practice known as the Tantras. The Tantras do not see the manifestation as an illusion, they see it as a Reality, made up of the substance of the Divine Mother. According to the Tantric conception, the Supreme Being (*Sat, Ishwara, Prurshottama*) has its Conscious-Force (*Chit, Shakti, Para-prakriti*), which is calling it into Becoming as an act of Love. For this, the Conscious-Force first lays the ground by becoming the universal body of qualities and shaping in this medium the innumerable qualitative forms into which the Supreme Being is invited to take birth. These are all the individualised entities of this world.

The Shiva Puranas tell the story of the birth of the god Ganesha from the body-leavings of Parvati's bath. Parvati moulds her dermal residue into a puppet and calls on Vishnu to give it life. In a sense, this is the reality of all creatures in the cosmos. The Divine Mother has made her Substance the foundation of this cosmos, and has moulded the qualitative possibilities of all its beings out of this Substance. She has then called upon the Supreme Being to inhabit these moulds as a soul-essence. This qualitative blueprint with the soul essence is the soul personality, the psychic being. When considering the psychic being in *Savitri*, we saw how the Divine Mother has projected herself in specific qualitative combinations following the lines of her four principal manifesting Powers, into the innermost core of all creatures, formed as varieties of Her imagination.

In this way, the Divine Mother is present in all beings as the immanent divinity growing up into the fullness of their consciousness. Sri Aurobindo sees this as the very meaning of existence. According to Sri Aurobindo, the Divine Mother, bridging the Transcendent, the Cosmos and the individual entities, carries the cosmic manifestation in all its aspects as forms of relation with the Supreme Being. In his book, *The Mother*, he writes about the triple status of the Divine Mother, the fact that She is Transcendent, the Energy and Consciousness of the Supreme Being, in whom the Supreme Being resides or abides; She is Universal, the one who lays out her entire qualitative reality for the manifestation of the infinity of God as a play; and She is Individual, having given qualitative and material form to all creatures as their nature (*prakriti*) and also having become their innermost qualitative body as the psychic being, residing in union with the Unborn Supreme Being.

Sri Aurobindo's book *The Mother*, illumines the originary relations between the Supreme Being, the Divine Mother and the cosmic manifestation with all its entities. It also foregrounds the yogic practice we are meant to establish for bridging the individual and the Supreme through our relation with the Mother. He writes in Chapter VI :

There are three ways of being of the Mother of which you can become aware when you enter into touch of oneness with the Conscious Force that upholds us and the universe. Transcendent, the original supreme Shakti, she stands above the worlds and links the creation to the ever unmanifest mystery of the Supreme. Universal, the cosmic Mahashakti, she creates all these beings and contains and enters, supports and conducts all these million processes and forces. Individual, she embodies the power of these two vaster ways of her existence, makes them living and near to us and mediates between the human personality and the divine Nature.

The one original transcendent Shakti, the Mother stands above all the worlds and bears in her eternal consciousness the Supreme Divine. Alone, she harbours the absolute Power and the ineffable Presence; containing or calling the Truths that have to be manifested, she brings them down from the Mystery in which they were hidden into the light of her infinite consciousness and gives them a form of force in her omnipotent power and her boundless life and a body in the universe. The Supreme is manifest in her for ever as the everlasting Sachchidananda, manifested through her in the worlds as the one and dual consciousness of Ishwara-Shakti and the dual principle of Purusha-Prakriti, embodied by her in the Worlds and the Planes and the Gods and their Energies and figured because of her as all that is in the known worlds and in unknown others. All is her play with the Supreme; all is her manifestation of the mysteries of the Eternal, the miracles of the Infinite. All is she, for all are parcel and portion of the divine Conscious-Force. Nothing can be here or elsewhere but what she decides and the Supreme sanctions; nothing can take shape except what she moved by the Supreme perceives and forms after casting it into seed in her creating Ananda.

Towards the end of this passage, he writes:

The Mother not only governs all from above but she descends into this lesser triple universe. Impersonally, all things here, even the movements of the Ignorance, are herself in veiled power and her creations in diminished substance, her Nature-body and Nature-force, and they exist because, moved by the mysterious fiat of the Supreme to work out something that was there in the possibilities of the Infinite, she has consented to the great sacrifice and has put on like a mask the soul and forms of the Ignorance. But personally too she has stooped to descend here into the Darkness that she may lead it to the Light, into the Falsehood and Error that she may convert it to the Truth, into this Death that she may turn it to godlike Life, into this world-pain and its obstinate sorrow and suffering that she may end it in the transforming ecstasy of her sublime Ananda. In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of this obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of the Darkness and the Falsehood, borne to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon herself the pangs and sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since it seemed that thus alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and eternal Life. This is the great sacrifice called sometimes the sacrifice of the Purusha, but much more deeply the holocaust of Prakriti, the sacrifice of the Divine Mother.

In this passage, Sri Aurobindo brings out most clearly the nature of the power of the Mother, how and why she manifests, and why she is given the central place in his teaching, his yoga and in *Savitri*. It also throws light on the aspects of the Divine Mother that are present in *Savitri*. We find, for example, Aswapati calling on the Transcendent aspect of

the Mother, beyond the manifestation. She leans down from the Unmanifest and shows him the future. It is She who consents to incarnate as an individual in Savitri. In the passage above from *The Mother*, we see that the Mother is Transcendent but she is also Universal. It is she who has become this cosmos in all its processes and forms; the Supreme Being is being marshalled by her in this universe in a play in which the Divine Consciousness evolves individually and collectively from a self-forgetting to the fullness of its possibilities.

This is achieved by the cosmic Mahashakti, the universal forms and personalities of the Mother here. In *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo points out that the Mother works in the universe in four of her principal personalities and these are the powers or personalities of Wisdom and Vastness, known as Maheshwari, of victorious Power and Passion known as Mahakali, of Beauty and Harmony known as Mahalakshmi and of Skill in Works and the impulse towards perfection, the Mother who works by our side very patiently from moment to moment, to construct Divinity here, who is Mahasaraswati. In all these forms we find the Divine Love of the Mother, the passionate love of the saviour in Mahakali, the luminous love of the teacher in Maheshwari, the charming love of the Mother of opulence in Mahalakshmi and the skilful love of the craftsman and strategist in Mahasaraswati.

These cosmic powers also feature in *Savitri*. The Divine Mother has accepted and subjected herself to the Ignorance and these are the forms we encounter in *Savitri* as the Triple Soul-Forces. These powers are at work constantly and ceaselessly for the manifestation of the Divine here, but subject to the dividing Ignorance and Falsehood, they are unable to achieve a definitive Victory of the Divine or to transform the Ignorance, because they do not represent the integrality of the Divine Mother that Savitri brings as an incarnation or Avatar of the Supreme Shakti. This is the self-presentation of the Mother which Sri Aurobindo refers to as her individual aspect.

Of course, in an individualised form, the Mother has entered into each of us. It is she who is individualised in us as the psychic being, the soul personality. This represents the individual-becoming of the Supreme Mother – the Gita refers to it as *paraprakritir jiva-bhuta*. This is why our proper relationship to her is that of a child to its mother. But this qualitative individualised immanence is subject to evolution towards universality and integrality, and, in certain cases, the Mother represents herself in a more substantial way, qualitatively closer to her Divine or goddess forms. These are the human beings who stand head and shoulders above other human beings. They manifest to achieve something special for the divine manifestation. They are what Sri Aurobindo has called the Vibhutis. And further, on very rare occasions, the Divine Mother embodies her Consciousness in its integral entirety in a human body. This is the incarnation, the Shakti Avatar that we considered earlier.

Savitri is such a Shakti Avatar. She brings a power out of the Unmanifest to transform the Ignorance, to act within it in a greater way than the cosmic Mahashaktis can. We can ask what is this special power that the integral Divine Mother contains? What is the essence of this Mother power? We see it even in our relatively ignorant world as the love of the Mother for the child. This is perhaps the purest form of love that has been manifested

within the ignorant world. Love is also manifested here as the love of men and women, of siblings, of friends, and in manifold other relations in the world. All human relations are marked by the impurity of ego and possessiveness. At the same time any relation can rise to heights of sublimity and become the stuff of legend. However, it is in the relation between mother and child that the essence of love is most manifest in this world and that is the power of self-giving. The purity of love lies in its surrender and the reason that Savitri has such world-transcending power is because she brings an integral surrender into manifestation in her life.

We find that in the Indian tradition, this kind of surrender is represented in the supreme love between Krishna and Radha. This, indeed, is a figure of the eternal two-in-one, of the Ishwara-Shakti, the original Conscious Being and its own Conscious-Force. The Mother gives us the essence of this relation in her *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 chooseth 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.

It is this kind of surrender that Savitri represents and this Power of Love is what enables her ultimately to irradiate the last resistance of dead matter, Death itself. It is this kind of a surrender that was represented by the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's collaborator.

This is why we may see Savitri as the internal biography of the Mother just as Aswapati represents Sri Aurobindo's internal biography. We see that the Mother in her relationship with her children, with the creatures of the world and in her relationship with the Supreme Lord manifests this power of surrender. When Sri Aurobindo was asked what he felt when he met the Mother for the first time, he said that he knew that the supramental manifestation was possible, because he saw in the Mother an example of an integral surrender to the last atom of the body. This is the surrender that the Mother represented in her relationship with Sri Aurobindo and that she spoke of when she said 'I am Sri Aurobindo's Shakti alone and Mother to all my children'. The Mother had equally this attitude of integral surrender towards all her children, the sadhakas and sadhikas of the ashram and all who had accepted Sri Aurobindo's and her teaching. Beyond this, she was also equally surrendered to the evolutionary purpose of the Divine in the entire cosmos. This is why she is the Mother of the entire creation. As an incarnation of the Divine Mother, she surrenders herself to every being so that out of that sacrifice, the power of Love may effect a complete transformation of this world.

In another powerful and pregnant statement, the Mother has said, 'Without him I exist not, without me he is unmanifest'. The 'Him' over here is the Supreme Being. As the Mother saw Sri Aurobindo as an avatar, the 'He' in this statement equates the Supreme

Being with Sri Aurobindo. The Mother rests on the Supreme Being for her existence, but the Supreme Being rests on the Mother for his manifestation. This universe and all its creatures and the progressive movement of evolution towards divinity are an act of Love, of integral and perfect surrender that will ultimately irradiate the entire Ignorance and bring to birth the Supreme Divine. This is the Power that Savitri represents, the Power she demonstrates both in her relationship with the Supreme Being, in her relationship with Satyavan as the representative of humanity and in her relationship with all the beings in her life. She bears the life of the Avatar, the problems of the avatar, the humanity of the avatar, the divinity of the avatar. We find in *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo represents the life of the Divine Mother who has taken a human body and who bears the load that all divine incarnations of the Mother must bear, that also Sri Aurobindo's collaborator, the Mother, bore and we find in that sense this dual power of Love manifest in Savitri as an incarnation of the Divine Mother.

II

Savitri, Book III, Canto II, *The Adoration of the Divine Mother*.

In this canto, Aswapati has risen to the highest ranges of the Cosmic Manifestation and is on the verge of entering the Unknowable, the Supreme Unmanifest, *Avyakta Paratpara*, where he will know extinction. The world seems to him a complete illusion or a dream and all his aspiration for a world transformation has entered such a rarefied ether that he has forgotten the purpose of his journey. At this point, out of this infinite, unmanifest, unborn Reality there leans to him the face of the Divine Mother. Clearly, then, she is a Transcendental Being, emerging from the mystery of the Unknowable:

Even while he stood on being's naked edge
And all the passion and seeking of his soul
Faced their extinction in some featureless Vast,
The Presence he yearned for suddenly drew close. (*Savitri*, 4th rev.ed, 1993, p.312)

Thus, on the margin of what seems like a supreme Nirvana, there is the gathering together of a Presence and this Presence approaches him. He feels a Being, a Person and recognises it to be that for which he has yearned all his life.

Across the silence of the ultimate Calm,
Out of a marvellous Transcendence' core,
A body of wonder and translucency
As if a sweet mystic summary of her self
Escaping into the original Bliss
Had come enlarged out of eternity,

Someone came infinite and absolute. (*Ibid*)

What appears initially as a presence now takes on a form. Initially, Aswapati was face to face with the absolute impersonal where everything extincted itself, but out of this first comes a Presence, then a Form. But this form is an unimaginable form, a form that manifests the infinity and eternity of Bliss.

A being of wisdom, power and delight,
Even as a mother draws her child to her arms,
Took to her breast Nature and world and soul. (*Ibid*)

This presence now reveals its qualities to Aswapati. Not only is it a person, its essence is the Love that draws the entire manifestation into itself, embraces it with the passion that the mother has for her child.

Abolishing the signless emptiness,
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless hush,
Piercing the limitless Unknowable,
Into the liberty of the motionless depths
A beautiful and felicitous lustre stole.
The Power, the Light, the Bliss no word can speak
Imaged itself in a surprising beam
And built a golden passage to his heart
Touching through him all longing sentient things. (*Ibid*)

This Divine Mother's presence, this being that has poured its love into the manifestation and is pulling it back into itself images itself into a beam of pure Love and enters into the heart of Aswapati and through it, gives its answer to the aspiration of all the creation, because by now, that is what Aswapati holds in himself. The Master of Yoga, Aswapati's universalised being is one with the entire cosmos and all its creatures and the Divine Mother leaning from the Unmanifest contacts this entire creation through the heart of Aswapati in this experience.

A moment's sweetness of the All-Beautiful
Cancelled the vanity of the cosmic whirl. (*Ibid*)

This entire world that seems so meaningless in the Ignorance and Falsehood, through which all its creatures stumble as if in a dream and through which Aswapati himself has journeyed, cradling all his doubts and his experiences to the point of abolition, suddenly all is justified, everything glows with divine significance, because the Mother gives meaning to it. The cosmos is seen as the play and the house of God.

A Nature throbbing with a Heart divine
Was felt in the unconscious universe; (*Ibid*)

It is She, the Transcendental Divine Mother, who is in the depths of things, She is the Presence that has become the universe throbbing with her heart of Love.

It made the breath a happy mystery.
A love that bore the cross of pain with joy
Eudaemonised the sorrow of the world,
Made happy the weight of long unending Time,
The secret caught of God's felicity. (*Savitri*, 4th rev.ed, 1993, pp.312-13)

Sri Aurobindo has indicated earlier in *Savitri*, how all the pain in this world is the labour pain of the Divine Mother giving birth to God. It is this pain that is the form of Delight, Ananda, that the universe holds at its centre. This is the meaning of Pain and Aswapati realises this through his contact with the Divine Mother. Everything becomes significant and joyful because it is She and her Love that are at the heart of all things moving them towards the Divine.

Carrying immortal values to the hours
It justified the labour of the suns.
For one was there supreme behind the God.
A Mother Might brooded upon the world;
A Consciousness revealed its marvellous front
Transcending all that is, denying none: (*Ibid*, p.313)

She transcends all possibilities of Manifestation, yet everything is also only She. Aswapati experiences this at this moment, and knows why it is that She is the Divine Mother. She is not an impersonal essence, she is the very heart of this manifestation and holds it by the power of Love in her own heart.

The hidden Word was found, the long-sought clue,
Revealed was the meaning of our spirit's birth,
Condemned to an imperfect body and mind,
In the inconscience of material things
And the indignity of mortal life.
A Heart was felt in the spaces wide and bare,
A burning Love from white spiritual founts
Annulled the sorrow of the ignorant depths;
Suffering was lost in her immortal smile.
A Life from beyond grew conqueror here of death;
To err no more was natural to mind;

Wrong could not come where all was light and love.

The Formless and the Formed were joined in her: (*Ibid*, pp.313-14)

The Conscious-Force of the Supreme Being, the Personality of the Absolute Impersonal, the Love that is at the heart of all things and the Power that can completely overcome the last bastion of Ignorance and Falsehood, that can conquer Death is here. Aswapati knows that this is the Power that he must invoke within life, this that must incarnate; and this indeed, is what consents to incarnate as Savitri.

Further in this Canto, Sri Aurobindo pens one of the most glorious descriptions of the Divine Mother:

At the head she stands of birth and toil and fate,
In their slow round the cycles turn to her call; (*Ibid*, p.314)

She is like the magnet, the cycles of Time in their slow evolutionary movement have their focus fixed on her, and are guided by her Vision. She is the goal of Time, its telos, the Fullness of the body of manifest Divine Life in this evolving universe.

Alone her hands can change Time's dragon base. (*Ibid*)

Sri Aurobindo has referred elsewhere to this Black Dragon of the Inconscient, the immanent Evolutionary Force locked in sleep within Matter. But the Mother's transmuting touch can wake this dragon revealing to its heavenly origin as the Golden Dragon of the Superconscience, the Shakti of the Supreme Divine.

Hers is the mystery the Night conceals;
The spirit's alchemist energy is hers; (*Ibid*)

Alchemy is the process by which base metal is transmuted to gold. As Jungian psychology has interpreted in our times, this is a metaphor for the psychological process of transforming Ignorance to Divine Reality. The Mother's Energy here is the alchemical *prima materia* which effects transmutation.

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

She is the Source of all attraction, Supreme Love, that calls the depths of Ignorance towards herself. All moves irresistibly to Her. Aswapati realises that it is Her Supreme Attraction that holds the manifestation and its movement together.

All Nature dumbly calls to her alone (*Ibid*)

It is She who can quench every thirst; hence knowingly or unknowingly, all the wanting of Nature seeks her for its fulfilment.

To heal with her feet the aching throb of life
And break the seals on the dim soul of man
And kindle her fire in the closed heart of things. (*Ibid*)

There is an imprisoned divinity within all human beings, but it is locked behind the closed doors of the external nature. It is the power of the Mother that can break the seals 'on the dim soul of man,' releasing it as the true person in human life.

All here shall be one day her sweetness' home, (*Ibid*)

Throughout *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo occasionally shifts gears from the narrative or lyric mode and assumes a prophetic voice. This line is an example of such a glimpse into the future, the very meaning of the manifestation, as Aswapati understands it now in the revelation of the Mother. The cosmos exists to embody in its fullness the Divine Mother and her Love Supreme as a play of the divine consciousness, a *lila* on earth.

All contraries prepare her harmony; (*Ibid*)

Yet, things are far from this beatific realisation. Still, Aswapati sees that the cosmos evolves towards this consummation through all its contradictions. All the difficulties and dissonances of the earth become a challenge and an opportunity to manifest the fullness of her Supreme Harmony.

Towards her our knowledge climbs, our passion gropes;
In her miraculous rapture we shall dwell,
Her clasp shall turn to ecstasy our pain.
Our self shall be one self with all through her. (*Ibid*)

Through these lines, Sri Aurobindo also invokes all the cosmic Mahashaktis. It is because Mahalakshmi's Beauty and Harmony attracts and draws us that he says, 'all contraries prepare her harmony'. It is because Maheshwari's Knowledge attracts our ignorance that he says, 'towards her our knowledge climbs'. It is because Mahakali's passion attracts our will-to-power towards the fulfilment of the Divine Glory, that this is what "our passion gropes" towards. And in all these, it is Mahasaraswati's slow, patient journey to the Divine

not leaving anything behind that is at work in this universe, leading to the clasp of her Supreme Unity. It becomes clear to us that the Divine Mother invoked by Sri Aurobindo in these lines is the integral supramental Mother, origin of all the goddesses, Aditi.

In her confirmed because transformed in her,
Our life shall find in its fulfilled response
Above, the boundless hushed beatitudes,
Below, the wonder of the embrace divine. (*Ibid*,p.315)

In these lines, Sri Aurobindo invokes the Mother's dual status, one with the Unmanifest above, infinitely unvalled and open in our progress or evolution towards unknowable statuses and powers of the Divine; and a perfect unity with all manifest things, around and below us in the cosmos.

This known as in a thunder-flash of God,
The rapture of things eternal filled his limbs; (*Ibid*, p.315)

In one glimpse of the Supreme Divine Mother, *Paraprakriti*, Aswapti realises all these things instantaneously, as if by the Grace of her own Divine Sight (*divya drishti*). He sees what the Divine Mother represents, her transcendental integrality and her cosmic unity, tying together the relativities of the world, and this experience of the *Mysterium Tremendum* transfigures his body and soul with Divine Rapture. Aswapati is filled with the supramental Ananda.

Amazement fell upon his ravished sense;
His spirit was caught in her intolerant flame.

The still wonder of Mahalakshmi fills him with amazement; the golden passion of Mahakali inflames him with an ardent fiery bliss.

Once seen, his heart acknowledged only her. (*Ibid*)

No other love could suffice once he had beheld this Supreme Beauty and supreme Love.

Only a hunger of infinite bliss was left.
All aims in her were lost, then found in her; (*Ibid*)

It is as if all that he had yearned for, all the universal aspiration that he had contained in himself was swallowed up faced by the Beauty and Perfection of the Real-Idea that she presented, and then recovered transfigured and transvalued in the infinity of her harmonious Sweetness and Greatness.

His base was gathered to one pointing spire. (*Ibid*)

He became a single integrated aspiration, one coherent spearhead of the Divine Mother's manifestation. This line is also reminiscent of the upward pointing triangle of Sri Aurobindo's symbol, which represents the eternal cosmic aspiration, reaching up forever and invoking the response of the Divine Grace of the Mother to manifest ever-new powers of Felicity and Consciousness here.

The *darshan* of the Divine Mother results in this poise of integrated aspiration for Aswapati. It is a prelude to his colloquy with the Mother, invoking her to descend in an incarnation. As a result of this will come the response of the Divine Mother to Aswapati's longing, her consent to incarnate as Savitri and her promise to initiate the conditions for the Divine Life on earth, which is the message of the epic.

When Savitri is born, it is this aspect of the Divine Mother that incarnates in human form and Sri Aurobindo describes the experience of the Divine Mother in a human form. From her childhood, Savitri embodies the oneness of the supreme Mother and experiences her unity with all things in the universe. She becomes intimately aware and enters into identity with the subliminal unity that is present in Nature and in all its creatures. We find Sri Aurobindo's description of this in Book IV, *The Book of Birth and Quest*, Cantos I and II. Canto I is titled *The Birth of and Childhood of the Flame*..

There is a oneness native and occult
That needs no instruments and erects no form; (*Ibid*, p.356)

This is the essential Oneness of the Spirit that is subliminally always manifest and doesn't need any specific form to express itself, as it is the essence of Reality.

In unison it grows with all that is. (*Ibid*,)

It is always present in all that is manifest and is one in all things in their status and their dynamis.

All contacts it assumes into its trance,
Laugh-tossed consents to the wind's kiss and takes
Transmutingly the shocks of sun and breeze: (*Ibid*)

This experience of Oneness is present even within inert Nature. In all the acts of nature, the sunlight, the breeze, the movement of leaves, it is this conscious Oneness, which experiences itself and its interminable exchanges, the exchanges of the One in the One. This is the trance of the Divine Being within the waking world, *jagrat*.

A blissful yearning riots in its leaves,
A magic passion trembles in its blooms,

Its boughs aspire in hushed felicity.
An occult godhead of this beauty is cause,
The spirit and intimate guest of all this charm,
This sweetness's priestess and this reverie's muse, (*Ibid*)

Sri Aurobindo indicates the source of this Oneness and its experience in the cosmos to be the presence of the Divine Mother, whose Substance has become all things. She who is present sleeping and occult in the entire universe, is the cause of this delight of Oneness in all things here. This is what Savitri embodies and thus experiences spontaneously as a child, as an aspect of her own personality.

This at a heavenlier height was shown in her.
Even when she bent to meet earth's intimacies
Her spirit kept the stature of the gods;
It stooped but was not lost in Matter's reign (*Ibid*)

She experiences a primordial kinship and becomes like the things around her because of this occult oneness; yet something in her exceeds all things in stature, maintaining her divine consciousness even in her oneness.

A world translated was her gleaming mind,
And marvel-mooned bright crowding fantasies
Fed with spiritual sustenance of dreams
The ideal goddess in her house of gold.
Aware of forms to which our eyes are closed,
Conscious of nearnesses we cannot feel,
The Power within her shaped her moulding sense
In deeper figures than our surface types (*Ibid*)

Within her, an ideal world with its forces and beings lived; and the shaping power of her divinity made her aware of this world, bringing her closer to presences which are alien to humankind. A divine Being began manifesting in and through her. Sri Aurobindo has said that an avatar does not evolve as such, but progressively manifests his or her divinity. This is what we see happening with Savitri.

An invisible sunlight ran within her veins
And flooded her brain with heavenly brilliances
That woke a wider sight than earth could know. (*Ibid*)

The solar light takes its origin in the supermind. Even Savitri's physical being and its constituents partake of this supramental substance, causing a transformative action to expand her human capacities and wake new powers. One is reminded in these lines of Sri

Aurobindo's poem, *The Golden Light*:

Thy golden light came down into my brain
And the grey rooms of mind sun-touched became
A bright reply to Wisdom's occult plane,
A calm illumination and a flame.....

Outlined in the sincerity of that ray
Her springing childlike thoughts were richly turned
Into luminous patterns of her soul's deep truth,
And from her eyes she cast another look
On all around her than man's ignorant view. (*Savitri*, pp.356-57))

Savitri is not like other human beings, an ignorant consciousness growing towards knowledge but a knowledge-consciousness manifesting more and more of its innate reality within the Ignorance.

Towards the end of this passage, Sri Aurobindo describes the incarnation of the Divine Mother as a symbolic reality, the visionary symbols that are alive in her presence:

A scout of victory in a vigil tower,
Her aspiration called high destiny down;
A silent warrior paced in her city of strength
Inviolable, guarding Truth's diamond throne. (*Ibid*, p.358)

This is the aspect of Mahakali in Savitri, that waits its hour to give battle to Death. But she also is replete no less with the sweetness of Mahalakshmi:

A nectarous haloed moon her passionate heart
Loved all and spoke no word and made no sign,
But kept her bosom's rapturous secrecy
A blissful ardent moved and voiceless world.
Proud, swift and joyful ran the wave of life
Within her like a stream in Paradise.
Many high gods dwelt in one beautiful home; (*Ibid*, p.358)

She integrates all the godheads in her integral consciousness.

Yet was her nature's orb a perfect whole,
Harmonious like a chant with many tones,
Immense and various like a universe. (*Ibid*, p.358)

She carries a whole universe in her single being.

The body that held this greatness seemed almost
An image made of heaven's transparent light.
Its charm recalled things seen in vision's hours,
A golden bridge spanning a faery flood,
A moon-touched palm-tree single by a lake
Companion of the wide and glimmering peace,
A murmur as of leaves in Paradise
Moving when feet of the Immortals pass,
A fiery halo over sleeping hills,
A strange and starry head alone in Night. (*Ibid*, p.358)

All these sublime visionary symbols are evoked by Savitri even in her physical reality, bringing us close to the supreme Beauty of the Divine Mother.

In Canto II of the same Book, Sri Aurobindo dwells on an aspect of Savitri's growth where she is surrounded by human beings that feel her attraction, her wisdom, her power and her love but can't measure up to her. Though a child growing up in closeness and intimacy with her surroundings, she is only aware that she is much greater than all around her. She stoops towards them, but remains apart and lonely.

This passage also brings near to us the reality of the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's collaborator in the Ashram at Pondicherry. Surrounded by friends throughout her life, and by disciples in the ashram, her inner life remained invisible, hidden, lonely and unknowable to those who surrounded her. This is part of the unrecorded inner biography of the Mother as a Shakti avatar that Sri Aurobindo captures in *Savitri*, a rare glimpse into the inner life of the Mother. He writes:

A boundless knowledge greater than man's thought,
A happiness too high for heart and sense
Locked in the world and yearning for release
She felt in her; waiting as yet for form,
It asked for objects around which to grow
And natures strong to bear without recoil
The splendour of her native royalty,
Her greatness and her sweetness and her bliss,
Her might to possess and her vast power to love; (*Ibid*, p.362)

As a child on earth, Savitri seeks companionship, she looks for beings and things that will measure up to the consciousness and aspiration that is within her. But her splendour is too great and humankind is incapable of bearing it except in small doses. In opening this window to the life of the Mother or the Shakti avatar in general, Sri Aurobindo exploits a fact from Vyasa's *Savitri*, where it is Savitri's greatness and splendour as a princess

which intimidate other princes, who are afraid to woo her. This becomes the cause for Aswapati's asking her to venture forth to seek her own husband.

Earth made a stepping-stone to conquer heaven, (*Ibid*, p.362)

Savitri's very existence brings earth closer to heaven. Elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo says that her very birth founds a greater race, a race of supramental beings upon earth.

The soul saw beyond heaven's limiting boundaries,
Met a great light from the Unknowable
And dreamed of a transcendent action's sphere.
Aware of the universal Self in all
She turned to living hearts and human forms,
Her soul's reflections, complements, counterparts,
The close outlying portions of her being
Divided from her by walls of body and mind
Yet to her spirit bound by ties divine. (*Ibid*, p.362)

Savitri experiences those around her as inwardly united with her. She feels a deep identity with them. This is also how the Mother felt towards all the beings of the ashram and in fact towards all the beings of the earth. The Mother at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram gave a revealing talk on the "golden chain" that ties all her children to her forever, and elsewhere explained what she meant when she said "I am with you" in terms of the various forms of this inner unity. Savitri felt one with the beings in her surroundings and at the same time invited them to enter into relationship with her and grow into kinship with her.

Overcoming invisible hedge and masked defence
And the loneliness that separates soul from soul,
She wished to make all one immense embrace
That she might house in it all living things
Raised into a splendid point of seeing light
Out of division's dense inconscient cleft,
And make them one with God and world and her. (*Ibid*, p.362)

These lines provide us with a summary vision of conditions for the divine life, as described by Sri Aurobindo. In Savitri, we find an incarnation that can make such a life possible with Herself at the occult centre of this manifestation of unity in the cosmos. Yet, just as with the Mother at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, she finds the crippled limitations of human beings, their compromises with the Falsehood, their incapacity to measure up to her in a simple relationship.

Growing towards some largeness they felt near,
Testing the unknown's bound with eager touch
They still were prisoned by their human grain: (*Ibid*, p.363)

This is the tragedy of the human being in its ignorance. Even though we see the Divine, we cannot bear the Divine.

They could not keep up with her tireless step;
Too small and eager for her large-paced will,
Too narrow to look with the unborn Infinite's gaze
Their nature weary grew of things too great.
For even the close partners of her thoughts
Who could have walked the nearest to her ray,
Worshipped the power and light they felt in her
But could not match the measure of her soul.
A friend and yet too great wholly to know,
She walked in their front towards a greater light,
Their leader and queen over their hearts and souls,
One close to their bosoms, yet divine and far.
Admiring and amazed they saw her stride
Attempting with a godlike rush and leap
Heights for their human stature too remote
Or with a slow great many-sided toil
Pushing towards aims they hardly could conceive;
Yet forced to be the satellites of her sun
They moved unable to forego her light,
Desiring they clutched at her with outstretched hands
Or followed stumbling in the paths she made. (*Ibid*)

The tragic lot of human beings brought into relationship with the Shakti Avatar is further described in these lines. It is a supreme attraction, yet something that is too great to endure. Its invitation, its call, is a call of irresistible charm to an adventure that we could never have attempted without its presence; at the same time its demand is experienced as a burden which most of our nature rejects. This alienation of the human-divine contact has been captured by others too, from the human side. For example we have W. B. Yeats' superb sonnet *Leda and the Swan* in which the contact of Zeus in the form of a Swan is experienced by Leda as something full of terror and strangeness:

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

But in Sri Aurobindo's lines, one glimpses the experience of the divine incarnation as well, the divine in a human body, doomed to outrun its companions and never be understood or find even adequacy in its environment to the task it comes to inspire and fulfil. It is the experience of a burden, but also of an infinite Love, which alone can bear that crippling burden with Divine Joy.

(DVDs of the complete series of talks are available at a price from Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, 8 Shakespeare Sarani, Kolkata 700 071. For details, please contact Arup Basu, Editor, **Śraddhā** at **98302 58723**)

The Crisis in philosophical pursuit

What is more wonderful

'The Ashram' or *The Life Divine*?

(A Dialogue with Dr. S.K. Maitra)

Indrasen

Dr.S.K.Maitra was in his time a reputed teacher of philosophy in the North. He was a great scholar and had studied Hegel, the Neo-Hegelians, Nicolai Hartmann, Plotinus and many others a great deal. He had written too a lot. He was a calm, quiet person and had a most amiable disposition.

When *The Life Divine* appeared in book-form in 1939, he was thrilled with it. He saw in it, as though, the fulfilment of his philosophical dreams. He found in it a *Weltanschauung* he had longed for and hoped for. He soon wrote a series of articles on the subject, which later appeared as a book under the name *An Introduction to the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*. This book soon became popular. Later he published many comparative and critical studies on Sri Aurobindo, which too subsequently appeared in book-form. In his study entitled *Sri Aurobindo and Bergson*, he says, "If I am asked, who is the most creative thinker of the present day in the East?, I will unhesitatingly answer: Sri Aurobindo. If I am similarly asked, who is the most dynamic thinker of the present day in the West? I will equally unhesitatingly answer: Bergson. A comparison between Sri Aurobindo and Bergson, therefore, is a very interesting study, as it will reveal the fundamental resemblances as well as differences between two thinkers of the greatest creative power of the present day, one in the East and another in the West, the more so, as these resemblances and differences are, to a great extent, as I shall presently show, typical of the resemblances and differences between Eastern and Western thought".

His appreciation and admiration of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy were indeed profound. But, it is strange, he hardly felt drawn to his Yoga and his contact with the Ashram in Pondicherry was not much. *The Life Divine* was to him perfection itself and this he delved deep into while sitting in his professional chair in Benaras. This philosophical creation was a marvel to him. He wrote of it: "It is not an accident that... *The Life Divine* has appeared at a time when the world is passing through a crisis the like of which it has not witnessed before. The tremendous enthusiasm with which the appearance of the book has been hailed all over the world proves this. The message of the book is exactly what the world needs today. It is the most thought-provoking and thought-shaking book that has appeared in this century".

Once when he was on a visit to the Ashram, at one of our meetings, that subject spontaneously came up, "What is more wonderful, 'The Ashram' or *The Life Divine*?" He categorically affirmed, it was *The Life Divine*, the great philosophical writing. My feeling, on the other hand, was as categorical, that it was 'the Ashram', where divine living was being attempted as a practical proposition. We had warm regards for each other and we both felt amused and intrigued to find ourselves set in a rather sharp difference of opinion. But we both found joy in a clarification of the issue and, therefore, prepared ourselves to argue it out. The stage was thus pleasantly set for a discussion among two friends on a subject of deep mutual interest.

Prof. Maitra, was so deeply fond of *The Life Divine* that every opportunity of advocating and proving the great merits of it was heartily welcome to him. His entire background of philosophical study and learning bore out that this was the most outstanding creation which set a new standard in philosophical thinking for the West as for the East. He was, therefore, almost absolutely convinced of his position and was sure that he could demonstrate that *The Life Divine* was a better systematic philosophical creation than any other anywhere.

My background, while being similar to his, had yet a difference and I felt equally sure if not more, that the 'Ashram' was a creation of 'life', whereas *The Life Divine* was one of 'thought' (though thought of a new quality) and therefore, the former was really superior. But I kept this feeling to myself and wanted to proceed cautiously showing all consideration a guest deserved.

Now my background of philosophy had undergone a peculiar development. Quite within a few years of teaching philosophy I began to feel that I was talking of things, day in day out which I did not know of, I felt, I was talking of God, of Truth, of Reality, of Immortality of Man and a lot more and in fact, I knew nothing of these. My life as a teacher of philosophy was becoming increasingly unbearable. But I saw no way out. When I came to Pondicherry and made a contact with the Ashram and the Ashramites in December 1939, my first reaction was one of shock. I exclaimed, 'Oh, here people seem to be serious about God'. I could talk of God, year in year out, and never felt serious about Him, I said to myself. But here people refer most commonplace occurrences of life, a cold, taking tea, reading newspapers, meeting somebody to the Mother, to the Divine within, to the Supreme within, I repeated to myself again and again. I was shocked and shaken to the roots. I clearly felt, God could be a serious business of life and that was possible here. A way out of the crisis of philosophy dawned on me. This fact of my background was obviously relevant to the attitude I was taking on the issue, "What is more wonderful, 'The Ashram' or *The Life Divine*."

Dr. Maitra felt, as anybody would that the Ashram is after all a small thing, in a small town, in a corner of the country, whereas *The Life Divine* is a thing of world-wide impact, has impressed many minds all over and is likely to initiate new thinking on a large scale. So he was full of an obvious justification for his plea and he said. "I am surprised, my friend, you can surely appreciate the philosophical merit of *The Life Divine*, but you do not see what a wonderful thing it is."

I replied, "No, I do realise that, as it has given me a wonderful philosophy of life and existence. It has solved practically all my philosophical problems. I am now clear and satisfied on Evil, on individual Identity and Vedantic Oneness, on Progress and Evolution, Individual and Cosmic, on the relation of Western thinking and Eastern view of life, on World Progress, on the future of Man and many other issues. It has added new dimensions to my traditional Indian ideas of Karma, Rebirth, Other Worlds, Spirituality in the Essence, a Cosmic Spiritual Advance in place of Individual Salvation, even on Vegetarianism. I feel as an Indian, I am now confident and courageous to deal with the present situation of life, intellectual, moral, religious, national and international, and guide myself with clarity and hope for the future. I am, Dr. Maitra, deeply appreciative of what *The Life Divine* has contributed to my orientation of life and existence. But I am also painfully aware that this is all a little reshaping of my mind. My life as such does not follow this orientation of the mind and I stand divided and even this mental orientation stands handicapped. I am not able really to appreciate, appreciate with vivid feeling, the status of the Supermind and the Higher Destiny of Man so central in Sri Aurobindo's thinking. I can conceive of it, I can imagine it but not vividly sense and feel it. I am urged to grow up in my consciousness to be able to feel the reality of it."

Dr. Maitra felt delighted to hear this praise of *The Life Divine* and said, in response, "I am extremely happy to learn of your deep appreciation of the great clarities presented by *The Life Divine*. You have indeed dived deep in this great book and assimilated it too. We should then easily agree that this creation is really the more wonderful thing. 'The Ashram' is good in its place, there are many good people here, they have done some creative writing too. But still it stands no comparison with *The Life Divine*.

"You complain that your life does not follow your new mental orientation. But *The Life Divine* has given you a new mind. That is what matters. We want a new mind for humanity and this book is going to do it. That is all that we want".

I could not agree to the position taken up by Dr. Maitra. I argued, "Look here, Dr. Maitra, you know very well the epistemological position, of Sri Aurobindo and his dictum, "Our ways of knowing must be appropriate to that which is to be known." Now the new mind that has come into form in me is really not much of a new mind, it is yet the sane old self-centred mind, much swayed by emotional partialities and disturbances. It is just reorganised on certain points. It has not yet become inherently dedicated and committed to Truth, it is not dispassionate, it is not fully objective. And it cannot become so until my emotions and will too become dedicated and committed to Truth. And for the apprehension of the infinite Reality, should it not shed off, in some measure at least, its insistent habits of finite existence. Then alone will I have a new mind worth the name. For that is 'The Ashram' the small laboratory where a substantiation of the truths of *The Life Divine* is attempted. And how wonderful will it be if *The Life Divine* becomes "Life" lived, above and beyond a mental construction and representation that all philosophical ordinarily are.

Dr. Maitra became thoughtful, he could not disagree to what I said, yet the philosophical intellect in him asserted its independence and competence to act on its own and even deal with the Infinite Reality. It acted out of its old habit, and the secret and persistent action of will and emotions was just not recognised.

The discussion then took a new turn and he asked, "why do you, Dr. Indra Sen, in spite of such appreciation of *The Life Divine* regard 'the Ashram' as the more wonderful creation?"

"Dr. Maitra, I have all the joy and enthusiasm for this creation of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and I will certainly tell you how I feel about it. 'The Ashram' is no doubt a small thing, in a small town, in one corner of the country. But it is a laboratory for intensive work, with applications as wide as humanity itself. It is the indisputable evidence showing that the thought of *The Life Divine* is sincerely meant and sincerely believed in. And the measure of success already achieved here is the best support to the thought of *The Life Divine*. *The Life Divine* gives a view of life, 'the Ashram' shows the way of life which makes that view a reality. And just consider, my esteemed friend, the time and the energy bestowed on the Ashram by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry in 1910 and the spiritual work and the Ashram were taken up in 1926. Sri Aurobindo took 16 long years in self-preparation for the work he was to do. And then it needed the collaboration of the Mother, The Mother joined hands with him in 1920 and yet 6 more years were needed for the work to be taken up. Further, when the work was taken in hand Sri Aurobindo needed more exclusive time to attend to it and he withdrew from whatever external preoccupations he still had, the Mother attending to the work externally. And during the years that followed, on Sri Aurobindo's own admission the Ashram was always the first charge on his attention. Now what would you say, dear friend, has the Ashram not been Sri Aurobindo's main Work?"

"*The Life Divine*, on the other hand, was written during the years 1914 and 1920 along with many other important writings and was brought out in book form as late as 1939. How much time and energy did it command with Sri Aurobindo?"

"It undoubtedly embodies a marvellous vision and view of life and existence. It reconciles previous philosophies wonderfully. I remember an English philosopher coming to the Ashram with high appreciation of Sri Aurobindo saying, "I do not know any philosopher reconciling God and the world as Sri Aurobindo has done". But with all that *The Life Divine* is a book and a view and not 'Life' itself. 'Life' must always be more than thought. And it is 'life' that gives vitality to thought, I remember also a teacher of philosophy coming from Allahabad University and later writing in a letter, "I have understood Sri Aurobindo and the Mother more after going to Pondicherry than earlier. I must confess that a longer stay would have been more rewarding". When one sees a thought earnestly pursued one evidently feels the forces of reality in it and gets into a fuller identification with it.

"I wonder, Dr. Maitra whether all this meets your curiosity regarding the Ashram."

He silently assented, but after a little while he said, "The power of thought of *The Life Divine* is very great. I do not find in any Western philosopher, Plato or Plotinus, Kant or Hegel, Nicolai Hartmann or Bradley, the comprehensiveness, the satisfactoriness of answers, the sympathy with other thinkers, as I do in Sri Aurobindo. Among Indian philosophers of the past too, whose particular insights I admire, but none has this wideness, this depth, this height".

I said in response, "Dr.Maitra, your joy in *The Life Divine* is indeed great. But how is it that you don't feel the need of the way that must make it real? How can you remain satisfied with just thought? In the Indian tradition each philosophy, more or less, has needed a yoga to it. The Gita has a philosophical system but essentially it is a yoga-shastra. In the West, a system of thought has been normally sufficient by itself. A Bergson or a Bradley will not assume responsibility for showing that their view can be made real to life. But does such responsibility not give to the thought a sense of sincerity, an utter belief in what is affirmed?

"Dr.Maitra, you are so kind and considerate, so gentle and amiable, I make bold to say that you stand deeply committed to thought and thinking. 'Life' as the most important category of Truth which must be a dynamic act, does not commend itself to you.

"Let me make a confession to you. I too had long nursed that commitment and I thought of Reality as a system of Judgments. Reality was an ideational and verbal construction. It was only when through yoga a relative silence of the mind became possible that Reality as Light and Illumination and Unity became in a degree clear and vivid. Similarly a deeper immersion in my consciousness landed me deep within in a consciousness which carried the sense, 'oh, this is Real'. And in contrast then the normal functions of thought, feeling and will, became superficial and secondary. This touch of the Real lent a surprising clarity and certitude to ordinary workings of life. This feeling of the Real within myself, in course of time, led to a large universal Real, which rendered the general cosmic phenomenon really phenomenal as different from the universal Real. Then Bradley's title *Appearance and Reality* became wonderfully significant.

"All this had led me to the view that yoga is an extremely useful method of philosophy. It helps to get solutions which can otherwise always evade us.

"What do you say, Dr. Maitra, all this strikes you as strange? But this has brought to me a fair degree of fulfilment in my life of long philosophical pursuit and I look forward to complete joy in the pursuit".

Dr.Maitra said, "Well, this confession much impresses me. But you fill forgive me, I am a student of Hegel and to me philosophy is 'a thinking consideration of things'. Even spiritual facts I take conceptually, *The Life Divine* is a great conceptual edifice and I have found great joy in it and the same I seek to share with others. I am now inclined to consider 'the Ashram' more seriously, yet my joy consists essentially in *The Life Divine* of Sri Aurobindo and I admire it ever more as I read it again and again and expound it to others."

I said, "Dr.Maitra, indeed your joy of *The Life Divine* is exceptionally great and I wish you ever more of the same. I have certainly learned to admire it more, seeing your passion for it.. This discussion with you, Dr. Maitra, has been so pleasant. It has much helped to clarify my altitude on this issue which gives me great joy. Indeed, a gain for the future. Thank you."

(The above paper is from the private collection of the late Indrasen, kindly made available to us by his daughter, Aster Patel)

What is human knowledge?

A reflection based on the work of Sri Aurobindo

Matthijs Cornelissen

Introduction

The scientific and technological developments of the 20th century have expanded our understanding of the workings of the nervous system beyond anything previous generations would have thought possible, but at the same time the concentration on hard science seems to have led us away from a deeper understanding of the amazing miracle that is human knowledge. Though in the philosophy of science, positivism has been rejected long ago, and in psychology classical behaviourism is a thing of the past, their impoverishing influence is still pervasive throughout psychology.

It is true that psychology is now commonly defined as the science of behaviour and experience, but the addition of experience has been half-hearted: experience is either studied with the “objective” mindset inherited from the days of behaviourism, or lost in an unsophisticated use of subjectivity that tends to lack either depth or rigour. What is strikingly missing in contemporary psychology is a systematic effort to hone and perfect our inner perception, our sensitivity to what is going on deep within ourselves. And yet this inner realm is tremendously important, for it is ultimately from there that not only our motives and values come but even our basic intuition about what is true and real. While a tremendous collective effort has gone into the refinement of physical and mathematical instruments with which we can measure the outer physical reality, there is no comparable systematic collective effort to improve our inner instruments of knowledge. This is true even for research on meditation. The vast majority of such researches focus exclusively on the physiological states and processes that occur in the physical bodies of those who meditate (Murphy and Donovan, 1997) and as such they are about physiology rather than about meditation. Even in research which ostensibly deals with the subjective side of life, the type of experience addressed tends to be limited to what naïve subjects can report about themselves, and in much of modern psychology, it is not experience itself but statistically processed reports about experience that are taken as the actual data. As these reports are almost always based on unsophisticated self-observations, all such studies can provide is thus a kind of social demography of surface mental self-perceptions. Though this has its uses, it is not sufficient for the development of deeper insight in human nature. Any science that wants to make cumulative progress must look below surface appearances. We have done this with astounding results in the objective domain, but as a civilisation,

we have neglected the inner side of the equation and we are almost as inept at integrating the subjective and the objective aspects of reality as we were at the time of Descartes. Cataloguing and correlating phenomena that are either visible right on the surface (behaviour) or directly below it (through surveys based on naïve introspection), is not enough to develop a really meaningful and effective psychology.

The physicalist bias of mainstream psychology has gone hand in hand with a tendency to think of explicit representational knowledge of the outer world as the only type of knowledge that can be cultivated systematically, reliably, and profitably. This tendency seems to have been reinforced by the ease with which such representational knowledge can be rendered symbolically and processed digitally. This is so much part of our everyday experience that in ordinary parlance the symbolic rendering and the underlying knowledge are often equated and one commonly hears that computers can store and manipulate information, if not knowledge itself. Symbols are so conveniently and ubiquitously stored, manipulated and redistributed digitally, that many people are now under the impression that computers can actually think, and, worse, that humans think basically in the same way that computers process their “data”. Even though the extent to which the working of the mind differs from the way computers work is well known, the workings of the mind are commonly described in the language of computer science, even amongst cognitive scientists. History can be instructive and it is good to remember that not that long ago, when clocks were cutting-edge technology,¹ humans were commonly depicted as fancy clockworks driven by a homunculus, a tiny man lodged somewhere deep inside the machine. Mechanical clocks and homunculi have fallen from grace, but we still model our own nature on our latest technology.¹ There is no doubt that all this has its positive side. Our understanding of clockworks has helped us to understand the mechanical forces active in our musculoskeletal system, and computer science is telling us valuable things about the way the brain processes nervous stimuli. Moving from mechanics to informatics is, moreover, progress in the direction of more subtle aspects of reality. But heeding history, it seems wise to maintain a certain distance from our latest models of the human mind, and realise how little they actually disclose about the wonder that is human knowledge.

For many of us, the most important and memorable experiences are those that connect us to deep, inner realities. They occur even in the midst of a completely ordinary life: there is something extremely beautiful and deeply intriguing in simple things like our ability to hear a song in the distance, to see a tree swaying in the wind, to feel the warmth of the first sun rays on our skin in the morning, to look into the eyes of a child. These are cognitive events, but not of the ordinary representative type. How do we study these subtler moments of knowledge? How do we explore the utter miracle that is our subjective experience of ourselves and the world? These may seem questions suitable only for poets and dreamers, best left for Sundays, and unfit for practical men, but they may actually be crucial to our survival: Psychology will fail the coming generations if it doesn’t help us to develop a deeper insight into the more subtle aspects of human nature and the love and oneness that sustain us.²

It is in this area of subtle, subjective enquiry that the Indian tradition has perhaps made its greatest contribution to our collective understanding, and the rest of this paper will be mainly about the type of inner knowledge that the Indian civilisation has cultivated over thousands of years: why it must be there, how it can be found, and how it can be made more accurate and reliable. For my interpretation of the Indian tradition I base myself on the work of Sri Aurobindo (Arvind A. Ghosh, 1872-1950) who made a comprehensive synthesis of the Indian tradition in order “to feel out for the thought of the future, to help in shaping its foundations and to link it to the best and most vital thought of the past” (1915/1998, p.103). His unique combination of spiritual depth, intellectual rigour and clarity of exposition, combined with the astounding detail and precision with which he describes the psychological processes that help or mar our individual and collective evolution, make his writings an exceedingly rich store-house of insights in human nature and its development.

1. Four types of knowledge in the ordinary waking state

Sri Aurobindo locates the secret of human knowledge in depths of our being that may not be directly available to all of us, but there are links between the depths and the surface and at one place in his main philosophical work, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo distinguishes four types of knowledge that all occur within our ordinary surface awareness: knowledge by identity, knowledge by intimate direct contact, knowledge by separative direct contact, and separative knowledge by indirect contact (Sri Aurobindo, 1940/90, pp. 524-32). The first of these, knowledge by identity, or *atmavidya*,³ plays a central role in the Vedas and Upanishads, but is almost entirely ignored in contemporary science; aspects of the other three are known, respectively, as experiential knowledge, introspection, and the ordinary, sense-based knowledge of the outside physical world. Sri Aurobindo lists them, in harmony with the Vedic tradition, from the inside out: he starts with the knowledge of the Self, and ends with the knowledge of the outside world. I’ll discuss them in the modern sequence, starting with the outer world, and moving from there, slowly towards the deeper, inner realities.

1. Separative knowledge by indirect contact is the ordinary, sense-based knowledge that we have of the physical world around us. Sri Aurobindo calls it *separative* because it goes with a clear sense of separation between the observer and the observed. He calls it *indirect*, because it is dependent on the physical senses. A tremendous collective effort goes at present into the development of this type of knowledge, and as it is the bedrock of science and technology, it plays an ever-increasing role in our society. It is this type of knowledge that makes the continuous stream of ever more fancy gadgets possible, and perhaps as a result of this, there is an increasing tendency to think that this is the only type of knowledge that really works and is worth cultivating.

2. Knowledge by separative direct contact has a much lower status both in contemporary science and society. When applied to ourselves, it is known as

introspection, the knowledge we acquire when we try to look pseudo-objectively at what is going on inside ourselves. In this type of knowledge, the usual sense-organs are not needed and in that sense it is *direct*, but it is still *separative* because we try to look at what is going on inside ourselves “objectively”, that is, as if we were looking at ourselves from the outside. Psychology cannot do very well without introspection, as it is the simplest, and in some areas only way to find out what is going on inside one’s mind, but it is notoriously difficult to make it reliable. Classical behaviourism tried for many years to avoid it entirely, but at present psychology is making an extensive use of self-reports based on introspection. We will see later how the Indian tradition has tackled the difficulties inherent in introspection and we will discuss some of the methods it uses to enhance introspection’s reliability. I am inclined to think that these Indian methods are not only logically impeccable, but also indispensable if we want to take psychology forward.

3. Knowledge by intimate direct contact is the implicit knowledge we have of things in which we are directly involved. When applied to ourselves it is known as experiential knowledge. Sri Aurobindo calls it again *direct* because the sense organs are not required, and by intimate contact because one knows the processes that are taking place not by looking at them from outside, but by being directly with them. When I’m very happy, for example, I need not observe myself to find out whether I am happy or not. If I would look at myself in (pseudo-)objective manner, through introspection, I would say something like “Hey, I’m happy”, and this would imply a certain distance from the happiness. But I can also stay directly with the happiness, and exclaim, in full identification with my feelings, “What a great day it is!” If I do the latter, I also know the state I am in, but not in a representative, objective manner. I know then what I am as if from within, through a direct intimacy with the inner state or process⁴. It might appear as if the introspective mode of knowing oneself goes more with the mind, while experiential knowledge, knowledge “by being with”, goes more with one’s feelings and body-sense, but this is so only in our surface consciousness. Though knowledge by intimate direct contact does take place on the surface of our ordinary waking consciousness, it is much more typical for what Sri Aurobindo calls the *subliminal*, a part of our nature of which most people in their ordinary waking consciousness are hardly or not at all aware. In spite of its hidden existence, the *subliminal* has an all-pervasive influence on what people think and do. Freud discovered one dark corner of it, which he called the unconscious, but it contains also stretches of our being that are far more luminous and wise than our surface awareness. An interesting aspect of the *subliminal* is that its borders are kind of porous: it seems to offer the possibility of direct contact with the consciousness of other people and the subtle realities behind surface events. Though knowledge by intimate direct contact is in our ordinary existence mainly used to know ourselves, it can thus be trained to provide knowledge about the consciousness of others and our environment. Telepathy and many other parapsychological phenomena seem to be facilitated by knowledge by

intimate direct contact within the subliminal part of our nature. Knowledge by intimate direct contact is used in many forms of therapy and all kind of psychological training programmes, but it does not seem to have received the theoretical attention it deserves. **4. Knowledge by identity** is for Sri Aurobindo the first and most important of these four types of knowledge. In the ordinary waking state it is, however, hardly developed. The only thing we normally know entirely by identity is the sheer fact of our own existence. According to Sri Aurobindo, it does play, however, a crucial role in all other types of knowing. In experiential knowledge (type 3) this is clear enough, as here we tend to identify with our experience. In introspection (type 2) it is less immediately apparent, as we do not fully identify with what we see, but try to observe what goes on inside ourselves, in as detached and “objective” a manner as we can muster. Still, in introspection we recognise that what we look at is happening within our own being. In sense-based knowledge (type 1) the involvement of knowledge by identity is the least obvious, but even here knowledge by identity does play a role in at least two distinct ways: The first is that even though we normally feel a certain distance between ourselves and the things we observe “outside” of us, we still see them as part of “our world”, we feel some inner, existential connection between ourselves and what we see. The degree of this sense of connectedness may, of course, differ. On one extreme end, there are the mystics who feel in a very concrete sense “one with the world”; on the other extreme, there are forms of schizophrenia, in which hardly any connection is felt between one’s self and the world; the ordinary consciousness wavers somewhere between these extremes. The second manner by which knowledge by identity supports all other forms of knowledge is not through this existential sense of connectedness, but through the structural core of their cognitive content. According to Sri Aurobindo, the information the senses provide is far too incomplete and disjointed to create the wonderfully precise and coherent image that we make of the world. He holds that there must be some inner knowledge, some basic “idea” about how the world should hang together, that helps to create meaning out of the raw impressions, which our senses provide. According to the Indian tradition knowledge by identity can provide this as it is the core-element of all forms of intuition⁵, and, as such, the source of the deep theories about reality that guide our perception, the fundamental rules of logical thinking, a large part of mathematics, and the ability to discriminate between what is true and false, real and unreal. Once fully developed and purified, Sri Aurobindo considers it the only type of knowledge that can be made completely reliable. Within Indian philosophy it is known as the knowledge of the Self, *atmavidya*, which contains the largely subconscious link that exists between our individual consciousness and the cosmic consciousness that sustains the manifestation as a whole.

Mixed patterns

Before we can have a closer look at the possibility of developing true intuitive knowledge, we have to consider a few caveats which Sri Aurobindo himself mentions

about this division of four distinct types of knowledge. The first one is that these four types of knowing are not entirely separate or exclusive of each other. There are smooth transitions between them, and in daily life they often occur mixed up together. When I'm angry for example, something in me stands apart and still knows that I am what I am, that the world is what it is, and that deep, deep within, in spite of anything that happens, all is well (type 4, knowledge by identity). And yet, I'm also directly involved in getting angry. In fact, to some extent I become the anger (type 3, experiential knowledge). At the same time,⁶ part of me watches what is going on in myself semi-objectively. I observe that I don't think clearly, that I have a cramp in my stomach and that there is a nagging fear in me that things are going wrong (type 2, introspection). While all this is going on, I notice that I cannot speak very clearly, that my hands tremble and that the person I'm talking to looks nonplussed about what I'm so worked-up about (type 1, sense-based knowledge).

Not all knowledge is representational and intentional

A second issue is that of these four modes of knowing, only the first two are representational and intentional in the sense of being "about something"⁷. To realise that there are types of knowledge that are not representational, one need not rise to any extraordinary state of Samadhi or to some otherwise non-egoic consciousness. Even in perfectly ordinary states, when we feel happy to be alive, when we love the world, or just one special person in it, we know the state we are in, but the knowledge of this state is not representative, it is a knowledge embedded in our very being. We can subsequently take distance from that direct experience, look at it introspectively, and then describe what we then see in a third person, "objective" format: the result is then representative knowledge of the introspective type, which is indeed intentional, but the original knowledge was not about something at all, it was simply itself.

Not all knowledge is constructed

A third thing to note is that underlying the four types of knowledge there are three, closely related gradients. The first is the gradient from the surface aspects of the outer world to our own inmost essence. The second is the gradient from gross matter, via mind, to pure spirit. The third is the gradient from knowledge which is constructed with difficulty out of diverse elements, to knowledge which comes directly, spontaneously, simply because it is. I will discuss the first two gradients in some more detail in the other sections, but the third gradient deals directly with the very essence of what knowledge actually is, and it needs to be taken up at least tentatively before we can move on.

According to the cognitive sciences, what we know in our ordinary consciousness about our environment is the result of a fantastically complex mental labour combining new sense-impressions with earlier findings. This complexity is supposed to be there equally in the way the individual makes sense of his own life in the world and in the way science builds up our collective knowledge base. But if Sri Aurobindo and the Indian tradition are right, then not all knowledge is "constructed" in this complicated manner

and there is a second type of knowledge that comes to us in the form of ready-made intuitions. This direct, intuitive apprehension of reality is part of what Sri Aurobindo calls knowledge by identity, and he holds that it plays a far greater role in our individual and collective life than we realise. There is fascinating evidence of the amazing extent to which perception is guided by expectations⁸, and according to Sri Aurobindo these expectations are not only informed by past experience and present circumstances but also by a deep intuitive knowledge of how the world should be by its own, inherent logic.

According to the Vedic tradition, such inner knowledge can exist because it is a conscious energy (*chit-shakti*) that gives reality its shape and dynamism. Interestingly one can find implicit hints of similar ideas even in the language of science, where “applied” and “pure” scientists have very different attitudes towards knowledge. Technical people, who work in the field of applied knowledge, typically see themselves as *inventing* new ways to use knowledge; pure scientists don’t claim to invent, they claim to *discover* laws that have always been there. The technical man creates a new application; the pure scientist discovers a pre-existing truth and then tries to formulate it in the most elegant and useful manner. The difference between the two, however, is not absolute, and if we look closely we see that in almost all our cognitive processes, there are elements of both. All formulated knowledge is partly discovery, partly construction.

The physicalist bias of mainstream Western science makes it hard for it to comprehend from where the intuitive component of knowledge could possibly come. Hard-core physicalists like Daniel C. Dennett, for example, presume that this world is built entirely through dumbly mechanical or chance-driven processes (1994)⁹ and argues that complex entities can be reduced losslessly to their constituting components (“you are your neurons”). Within such a philosophical framework knowledge is ultimately based on sense-perceptions (“facts”), and there is no place for intuitive knowledge (except for the subconscious pseudo-variety). The Indian tradition, on the other hand, has no real problem with the existence of intuitive knowledge. In fact, the possibility of achieving a direct perception of the knowledge underlying reality is not only one of the ends aimed at by yoga, but also its historical and philosophical starting point: All authoritative texts on yoga, whether ancient or modern, are supposed to have been received through such a direct perception of truths behind reality, whether through *dristi* or *shruti*¹⁰. Given the present predominance of Dennett’s worldview, it becomes useful to consider how one might move from the narrower materialist’s view to the much more comprehensive, and yet, I think, perfectly coherent, Indian one.

The knowledge in things

When we say that science has discovered a certain law of physics, the phrase we use implies that the law existed beforehand, but if that is so, where was it before discovery, and what form did it have? It is clear that it cannot have had the same linguistic or mathematical form as it now has in the human mind, but the fabulous beauty, order and lawfulness of nature does suggest that there must be in matter at least some kind of built-

in order, which we could look at as a kind of subconscious know-how, not dissimilar to the implicit know-how humans have of complex skills like cycling. To recognise the inner structure of matter as a form of know-how, one might look at the knowledge-constituent of matter as a subconscious habit of form, a tendency to act in harmony with the basic *dharma*¹¹ of the physical entity in question: an electron “knows” how to behave like an electron, a hydrogen molecule how to behave like a hydrogen molecule, a rock like a rock, and a river like a river.

Interestingly, the information content needed to do so is not as small as it may appear at first sight. As matter makes no mistakes, every part of it needs to have the “know-how” required to act perfectly according to the laws that guide its movement. As the laws of physics are supposed to be interrelated and derivable from each other, this might well mean that in some extremely involved way, it has to be aware of all the laws that keep our universe together. What is more, as matter’s movements are influenced, to whatever small degree, by everything else that occurs in the universe, each part has to be perfectly aware, in however implicit a manner, of everything else that is going on. Together this amounts to a rather staggering kind of “subscient omniscience” which in a fully automatic fashion self-limits itself to the very simple set of dumb but perfect actions that are proper to each little part of reality. One could of course argue that even if this complete knowledge has to be there in every part, it is still far too implicit, far too “involved” to be extracted. In practice this may be true, at least for the moment, but it doesn’t change the basic principle, and thus the potential.

In the Vedic ontology the universe is a manifestation of consciousness, and it holds, like many ancient philosophical systems, that the knowledge that is implicitly embedded in the physical reality, is a reflection from realms of pure knowledge that exist permanently and inalienably, parallel to and in a sense “far above”¹² the physical world. More interesting for psychology, it holds that since our individual consciousness is in its essence still one with the consciousness that engenders the universe, there arises the possibility of aligning our own individual consciousness to the knowledge that is built-in in the very structure of the universe. In other words there is a possibility of genuine, spontaneous, and perfect intuitive knowledge and action, which can arise in us because the world and all that is in it is in its essence one with the essence of our own being¹³.

As discussed earlier in our discussion of knowledge by identity, the with-difficulty-constructed representational knowledge science consists of is in this context seen as a mixture of knowledge and ignorance, an attempt instigated and aided but also limited and distorted by our senses, that in this complex manner can arrive at a progressively more accurate reflection inside our brain-based individual mind-stuff of the basic knowledge structures that underlie the actual workings of the manifestation. Indications of such mixtures of sense-based and direct intuitive knowledge can be found in all fields of human endeavour: in mathematics and logic, in the sudden insights that lead to a new revolution in technology, and in lines of poetry that haunt the reader because of their unearthly perfection, their “inevitability” as Sri Aurobindo calls it.¹⁴ One could perhaps even find

traces of direct, intuitive knowledge in less momentous but highly satisfactory moments of “right action”, when one simply knows from within what is to be done at a given moment.

But before we can proceed to discuss how our access to this intuitive knowledge can be cultivated, we need to get clear on one more essential distinction. This is the distinction between ordinary introspection, in which one looks with one part of one’s mind at all the other activities that take place inside one’s nature, and the perception that occurs through a pure witness consciousness, *sakshi*.

Of birds and balconies

There is a common notion, equally widespread for example in contemporary consciousness studies as in classical *pramana*-based Buddhist and Indian epistemology, that one cannot at the same time observe the world, and be aware of oneself observing it. The standard logical argument against doing both at the same time is that this would lead to infinite regress: one observes that one observes that one observes, and so on, and on, and on. The simpler, but perhaps even more convincing, symbolical image is that one cannot stand at the same time on a balcony and walk in the street. So it is argued, and in ordinary introspection one can actually observe this, that one switches very quickly between looking at the outside world and looking at the memory of how one looked at the outside world just a moment earlier. One possible reason for the mutual exclusiveness of perception and self-awareness in our ordinary waking consciousness might be that they function through the same inner instrumentation: In the Indian terminology, it is the same *manas*, or sense-mind, which in our ordinary consciousness either looks at the outside world through the outer senses, or at the inner world through the inner senses. The *manas* may simply not be able to do both at the same time.

There is, however, a second way of observing oneself that actually can take place at the same time as any outer or inner action. This second type of self-observation can easily be confused with ordinary introspection, but it has a different character. The main difference is that it is not based on an activity by the mind, but on a direct apprehension of reality by a pure witness consciousness (*sakshi*). This second type of self-observation is depicted in the ancient Indian image of two birds, good friends, beautiful of feather, who sit in the same tree: one eats the fruit while the other watches (Rig Veda I. 164. 2). Here what watches is not the separative, ego-centric, and sense-mediated surface mind, but a deep, silent, non-egoic, all-inclusive, pure consciousness that allows the egoic actions (and even the egoic observations) to continue somewhere in its own infinitude without being perturbed by them. As there is no egoic centre and no boundaries to this background awareness, the question of recursion does not arise. The core issue here is that the consciousness that watches must be “pure” and utterly silent. If for some reason the “running commentary”, which is so typical of the surface mind, intrudes and one notices, “Hey, look, I’m watching what is going on from my deep silent inner self!” one obviously has lost it, and gone back to the ordinary, ego-based introspection.

In practice, these two different types of inner apprehension are not entirely exclusive

of each other, and there is a certain gradient between them. As one becomes gradually more settled in the deeper, inner silence, it is possible to arrive first at an in-between status of consciousness from which one introspectively observes what one is doing (type 2), and yet retains some intimate contact (of type 3) with a deep inner vastness of silent awareness (of type 4). In this state one is aware of the presence of pure consciousness as a kind of background for the superficial mental activity in which one is involved, but one identifies more with the mental activity on the surface than with the wider consciousness in the background. Only when one goes still deeper within, one begins to centre in that vastness itself. Then one sees, supports and sanctions from deep within the activities of the surface mind without losing in any way one's real "identity" (if that term still applies) as the all-including vastness. One is then a borderless infinitude in which one is aware through knowledge by identity (type 4) of the entire stream of events, including birds and people, streets and balconies, which peacefully continue to exist somewhere on the surface of one's being. It is this second way of watching in an absolute inner silence, which is claimed to produce knowledge by identity, not only of one's own innermost self, but, potentially, of anything in existence.

It may be noted that in spite of its 3D imagery, the street and balcony simile presumes a "flat" concept of consciousness in which exclusivity reigns: one can either observe oneself or the world, one is either the observing subject or the observed world, and so on. The image of the two birds, on the other hand, is based on a totally different multidimensional concept of consciousness and reality. Here the dichotomies that perplex our mind are easily resolved in a higher-order unity. In our interpretation of this ancient image, the tree inhabited by two birds represents the relation between the world and two major aspects or portions of our self. The tree-world of the first bird called Nara (man) belongs to the ordinary waking consciousness and is exclusive, enmeshed in time and causality. This bird "eats the fruits": he is fully engrossed in life and suffers the consequences of his actions. The world of the second bird, Narayana (the Supreme), is part of an all-inclusive consciousness, containing all time and all opposites within itself. Narayana watches in the Vedantic, non-dual sense of the *sakshi*, and remains unaffected by karma. Interestingly, and typical of the ancient, even-handed love for man and God, the birds are mentioned as good friends, and both as "beautiful of feather".¹⁵

If there is any truth in the distinctions and possibilities mentioned so far, then the next question is, how do we move from the superficial and often erratic knowledge provided by the observation of outer behaviour and ordinary introspection, to a more penetrating and reliable insight in the deeper layers of the mind.

2. Beyond introspection

Popular accounts of the history of Psychology generally assert that the rise of behaviourism was due to the failure of introspectionism, but one may wonder whether this is really all there was to it. There is something deeply puzzling, and actually rather

disturbing, about the sudden change that took place in American Psychology at the beginning of the 20th century. Before World War I, consciousness was at the centre of interest in almost all major psychological journals. Less than ten years later, even the word “consciousness” had disappeared from psychological discourse (Guzaldere 1995). A whole generation of psychologists, brought up on the lofty writings of William James (who was deeply interested in spirituality and Indian thought) suddenly pledged adherence to John. B. Watson, a man who in his first major publication advised his colleagues to look at their human subjects in the same way they watched “the ox they slaughtered”¹⁶. When one reads the first behaviourist manifesto and the subsequent writings of people like B.F. Skinner, it is hard to believe that so many psychologists, not only in the USA, but almost all over the world, followed in their footsteps¹⁷. But whatever may have been the deeper causes for this amazing shift in the professional ethos of Psychology, it is generally held that the immediate occasion that tripped the balance in favour of behaviourism was the failure of the two main introspectionist schools to come to an agreement on some of the basic issues they had tried to research. What really closed the door for introspectionism was that within the philosophical and methodological environment of the times, there was no indisputable way in which anyone could decide who was right. The problem was no doubt a genuine one, and introspection is indeed a far more complicated issue than its early protagonists realised. When William James embarked on his radical empiricism, he seems to have been, to an extent, saved by his personal sincerity and his exceptional intellectual acumen, but the Euro-American civilisation as a whole lacked the philosophical sophistication and practical know-how needed to turn introspection into a reliable tool of investigation. The real tragedy is not that these early psychologists encountered difficulties with introspection, these difficulties are there, but that they did not look beyond the confines of Euro-American thought to solve them. As a result, they fell headlong into the abyss of behaviourism, from which Psychology has still not fully recovered.

The Indian tradition has struggled with the core issues of epistemology and psychological knowledge since the very beginning of recorded history, and it has developed a very different and, I think, in several respects far more sophisticated and effective approach to arrive at reliable psychological knowledge than modern science. It appears to me that there is a significant qualitative gap between the marvellous internal coherence, comprehensiveness, subtlety and intricacy with which the Indian tradition has researched and conceptualised human nature and the way contemporary psychology is trying to do the same. The main difficulty with mainstream modern science is that it has uncritically accepted the ordinary waking consciousness as its universal standard: even where it has tried to study other types of consciousness, it has never seriously doubted the validity and applicability of the ordinary waking consciousness on the side of the observing, analysing and describing scientist.¹⁸ Confronted with areas where the defectiveness and self-contradictory nature of the ordinary waking consciousness are too glaring to be ignored it has simply raised its hands up celebrating agnosticism as if it were a virtue. As a result we are stuck with “anomalous” phenomena in parapsychology, an embarrassing inability to

arrive at a universally accepted interpretation of quantum-mechanics, an unexplained, and in all likelihood unexplainable “emergence” of consciousness out of the complexity of unconscious processes in the brain, and the imbroglio that arises when social constructionism and other reductionist epistemologies are applied to themselves. Worse than this, we have an official science of human nature, which cannot deal effectively and respectfully with experiences and inner realities that for the majority of mankind are of the greatest importance. The Indian tradition on the other hand has realised from very early on, that the ordinary waking consciousness is just one type of consciousness amongst many others, that some of these other types of conscious are far more perceptive, effective and harmonious than the ordinary waking state, and that with sufficient effort we human beings can learn to partake in these higher, more coherent and sensible types of consciousness. I don’t think it is exaggerated to say that compared to Indian psychology, Western psychology is still where astronomy was before the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo: just as Ptolemy took the little patch of the physical earth on which we stand as the centre around which the whole physical universe is turning, so contemporary science takes our ordinary waking consciousness as the measure of all things psychological. The Indian tradition on the other hand has taken full cognisance of the degree to which the consciousness of the observer determines the kind of world he can see and interact with, and has tried to perfect knowledge by improving the subjective side of the relationship between subject and object. In practice it has done this by following two, interconnected, but clearly distinct pathways: one, the re-centring of the observing (and participating) consciousness itself, and two, the perfecting of the human instrument of knowledge, the *antahkarana*. In the Upanishads the stress is squarely on the former, on what one might call the essential aspect. The *Kena Upanishad*, for example, which may well be one of the oldest texts devoted entirely to epistemology and cognition, begins straight with the core-question, “who is it that knows in knowing, lives in life, speaks in speech, sees in seeing, and hears in the hearing?” But as we in our technology driven society like processes but are scared of essences, I’ll start with the instrumental part, the purification of the instruments of knowledge.

3. Perfecting the inner instruments of knowledge

Sources of error

Over the long history of India’s thinking about these issues, many different descriptions of the mind’s difficulties have been given and many different solutions have been proposed to overcome them, but it is not too difficult to discern the common thread connecting them.

Sri Aurobindo describes the basic defects of the ordinary human mind as essentially of two kinds, *immixture* and *improper functioning*. (1955/99, pp. 298, 618). Both can best be understood in the context of Sri Aurobindo’s vision of an ongoing evolution of consciousness.¹⁹ Within this framework of a gradually evolving consciousness, he sees

these two basic defects of the mind as essentially due to the stickiness of our evolutionary past.

Immixture

Immixture happens when an earlier and more primitive form of consciousness interferes in a higher or later form. A typical example occurs when two people discuss a theoretical question.²⁰ Their minds are genuinely interested in finding out what is true, because the quest for truth is part of the basic *dharma* of the mind. But when the vital part of their natures interferes, things go haywire. The vital part of human nature is not concerned with truth. The natural tendency of the life-force, which we have inherited from the animal stage of evolution, is survival, self-assertion, possession. So when the vital part of the nature enters into the debate, the stress is no longer on finding out what is true, but on who will win the argument. If the vital part of our nature is sufficiently purified, it will obey the mind and enjoy whatever it offers: a pure vital nature will be happy if the truth has been found irrespective of who has won the argument. But if an unregenerate part of the vital nature dominates over the mind, it will insist on winning, even to the extent of tempting the mind to bring in false arguments.

Improper functioning

In harmony with the idealistic nature of his Vedic philosophy, Sri Aurobindo holds that for each part of our nature there are “Ideal” or proper ways of functioning, as well as improper ways. For the vital nature the proper functioning includes an equal, glad enjoyment of whatever happens. The mixture of happiness, pain and indifference, of desires and fears from which the ordinary waking state suffers, is the result of the gradual and as of now only partially completed evolution of the vital nature out of the totally involved nescience of matter. Similarly the ideal function of the mind is to receive in a complete passivity the knowledge that sustains the world and to express it in the physical life-form it inhabits. What the unregenerate mind does instead, again due to remnants of its slow emergence out of the stupor of matter and the ignorance of the life in which it grows up, is to strive after knowledge, construct it in an ever more complicated, but never fully satisfactory confusion.

One could summarise these two defects of the mind as the “noisiness” of the ordinary mind. Just as perfect joy can only be received in a heart that is wide, calm, and completely free of desire and attachment, so also true knowledge can only be received in a wide and calm mind that is completely free of mental preferences and distortions. The deeper one tries to enter into the recesses of one’s inner nature, the more imperative becomes the need for a complete silence of the observing consciousness. Just as fine physical measurements demand a vibration-free room, so also in psychology, to reach the deepest layers of one’s being, a silent mind is essential. To silence the mind is of such importance that Patanjali describes it as nothing less than the central objective of Yoga and Sri Aurobindo describes it sometimes as an essential step for deeper knowledge and sometimes as the

ultimate essence itself.²¹ If this is so, then how is it done, how do we purify and ultimately silence the mind?

The Purification of the mind

Most people who try to silence their mind soon realise that they have little control over their thoughts and that thoughts seem to come and go on their own. When one looks more closely, one sees that the vast majority of these mechanical thoughts that go on ruminating in one's mind are triggered by sense-impressions, and that they draw their energy from often trivial physical and social needs and desires. The latter issue we have already discussed: an absolute prior condition for silencing the mind is to avoid what Sri Aurobindo calls immixture of the unregenerate vital in the mind's workings. The necessity to overcome desires is mentioned in practically all spiritual traditions and is directly related to the two defects of immixture and improper functioning we mentioned earlier. As we discussed there, desire is itself a deformation of the vital's true nature, and its interference in the mind's workings is the main obstacle to direct and unbiased insight. The most obvious way to achieve silence in the mind is thus either to isolate the mind from the vital part of the nature, or, for a more lasting result, to quieten and purify the vital nature itself. Freeing the mind from negative vital influences is, however, not sufficient as the mind itself has its own defects. Sri Aurobindo mentions two that need to be overcome if we want to arrive at deeper and more reliable inner knowledge:

Freedom from the senses

The first defect of the ordinary mind is that it is too dependent on the senses, and that it gets triggered too easily by their input. To keep the mind detached from the senses is common enough in ordinary concentration (when you read a book, you don't hear the street noise), but more difficult when there is no obvious focus of attention to keep the mind engaged. Yet, this is needed to create the space for more subtle perceptions to enter our consciousness.

Freedom from the past

The second defect of the mind is that it is too anxious. This form of improper functioning is in essence the same as the main defect in the vital. The vital part of our nature is too anxious to be happy, and as a consequence it loses its inherent peace and joy and gets instead lost in a jumble of desires and fears (which are like desires in reverse). When the mind is too anxious it first grabs intuitions (or even sense-impressions) too eagerly, then builds all kind of unwarranted extrapolations on them, and finally it sticks too tenaciously to the little it has found. To continue to grow in knowledge, one should always remain quiet, accept what comes, and yet remain open to what comes next (Aurobindo, 1955/99, pp. 315-316). The solution is thus the same as for the immixture and the clinging to the senses: one should retain a perfect equanimity, detachment and a vast inner calm.

Silencing the mind

Sri Aurobindo describes several methods to silence the mind (e.g. 1955/1999, p.324). The easiest, most commonly advocated but perhaps not the fastest method, is to let the mind run its own course but to withdraw one's interest and sanction. If one manages to consistently refuse engagement in the thoughts that pass through one's mind, they slowly die out. The stress, however, is on the "if", and on the "slowly". The second method is to enter with the centre of one's consciousness into a realm of silence that pre-exists in an inner space deep within the heart or well above the mind.²² The third is to call this same pre-existent silence down into one's mind, heart and even body. The fourth is probably the most efficient, but also the most strenuous method. Here one distances oneself again completely from what goes on in one's mind, and then one stays on guard and systematically throws out every thought as soon as it enters into one's awareness. This is effective but it requires the ability to centre oneself in one's mental *purusha*, one's real, innermost Self on the level of the mind, and yet remain active. There are many other methods, but the core of most, if not all, is to distance oneself from the activities of the mind and vital and to watch whatever goes on inside one's nature as an absolutely disinterested outsider. This is not an ultimate truth or a stance that can remain: in due time one finds that everything, even outer things, are actually part of oneself, but it is an effective means to get rid of the partial, ego-based identifications. The feelings of "I'm me and not you", "I like this and not that", "I believe this and not that" are the effective cause both of our suffering and of our inability to see reality as it is.

4. Inner knowledge

If one would like to give a label to the ontology that underlies the theory of knowledge that I've tried to present here, then one could call it a strong form of *realistic idealism*. In philosophy there is a tendency to oppose idealism and realism, but Sri Aurobindo sees no inherent conflict between the two. He writes in *The Life Divine*, "The world is real precisely because it exists only in consciousness; for it is a Conscious Energy one with Being that creates it." (1990, p.22). In line with the Vedic tradition he holds that it is a conscious energy that manifests the world, and thus that knowledge is present throughout creation, even if largely implicitly embedded in the "habit of form" of material objects. Just as in a rock it is consciousness that gives that rock its particular form and qualities, there is also in man a very close link between our consciousness and the form and functioning of our body: the ordinary human consciousness identifies itself with its material substrate. Seen from this angle, the only difference between the rock and the human is that in case of the human being, the substrate includes an immensely complex nervous system capable of representing to itself a small stretch of the physical and social world around it. As a result our consciousness tends to identify with the centre of that representation, and especially with our individual memories, body-sense, feelings, desires, ideas, social roles, etc. But, interestingly, in man consciousness need not remain entangled in the workings of the body and the nervous system. It appears that once our little chunk of biologically embedded

consciousness is sufficiently individualised and self-aware, it can learn to free itself from its physical encasement.

The Indian tradition has found that once the consciousness emancipates sufficiently from the body, several forms of inner knowledge open up to it, that can be grouped under the last two of the four types of knowledge we discussed in the beginning of this paper, knowledge by intimate direct contact and knowledge by identity. As discussed earlier, these two are closely related: there is a gradient of intermediate forms of knowing in between them, and an increasing proficiency in one often, though certainly not always, leads to a more frequent occurrence of the other.²³ Still, for the sake of mental clarity it is good to distinguish them, if only because they belong to two entirely different epistemic realms: knowledge by intimate direct contact is still, just as sense-based knowledge and introspection, the result of a contact, however direct and subtle, between the self and something considered not oneself. As a consequence it is, in the radical language of the Vedic tradition, still considered to be a form of *avidya*, no-knowledge or ignorance. Knowledge by identity, on the other hand, is the pure faculty of knowledge, *vidya*, that is inherent in all being. In humans, it is to be found in its pure form only in the *purusha*, our silent, innermost Self. The aspect of knowledge by identity we will discuss in this section is the possibility to know as if from within things that ordinarily are not considered to be part of one's own individual self. According to the Indian tradition this is possible because in its very essence everything is one, is Brahman. The condition however is, and this is a difficult condition, that we must have disentangled our consciousness completely from the little chunk of nature we ordinarily identify with, our ego. From that absolute freedom it is considered possible to know everyone, everything, every event, with a total perfection, "in the way God knows it".

Two forms of knowledge by identity

I will discuss here two varieties of knowledge by identity. Within the inner realms of our psychological nature, one can distinguish an intriguing system of two intersecting dimensions, one reaching from the surface ego inwards to the soul, and one rising upwards from the subconscious below, via the physical, the vital and the mind in between, to the superconscious spirit and the Self above.²⁴ Along both dimensions one can find entry-points to the realms of direct inner knowledge, and, interestingly, they lead to different aspects of this knowledge, some primarily personal, others in the first instance impersonal. Before we go into more detail about these two dimensions, it may be useful to come back once more to the difference between constructed and direct knowledge.

Direct and constructed knowledge revisited

There are plenty of indications in ordinary life that direct, intuitive knowledge indeed does exist. A mathematician typically first "sees" the solution to a problem, and only then works out the logical steps that "prove" he is right. It is presumed that he has followed, unconsciously, the same steps of the proof to arrive at his first insight, but this is just a conjecture, which is far from certain. Similarly, an inventor, writer, composer typically first "gets" an idea and only then works it out. According to contemporary cognitive

sciences, the idea is actually constructed and only seems to pop-up in one's consciousness as a ready-made product because almost all the processing remains unconscious. But if one learns to quieten one's mind and attains to a state of sufficient clarity within, one can actually see how ideas arise. One discovers then that new insights sometimes do arise in the way modern psychology describes – Sri Aurobindo calls this “pseudo-intuition” because it imitates the real thing – but occasionally, and especially when the mind is silent, the real thing itself also happens. At such moments, one can observe how an unformed idea drifts into one's mind as if from another realm, and only subsequently gets clad, dressed-up as it were, in words and images that seem to be provided by the individual's outer mind, perhaps from a brain-based stock of material. It even happens sometimes that ideas “pop-up” completely formed, in “inevitable” words or images. It appears then as if all knowledge consists of a core of direct, intuitive material, clad in an outer casing provided by the senses, with a gradient in the percentage of direct and constructed knowledge. St. John of the Cross gives a vivid description of the fine distinctions between those different “degrees” of inspiration and of some possible causes of the variance between the proportion of descending and constructed material (Steele, 1994). He also describes how the descending idea may come direct from the highest and purest layers of consciousness one has access to, or how it may come from intermediary layers or even from active agents that can have distorted the expression to suit their own agenda.

In the surface consciousness that provides the experiential ground for most modern philosophical speculation, it may look as if reality is divided by an absolute dichotomy in gross, inconscient matter on one side, and our thoughts on the other (with, for those who believe in it, an extra-cosmic Divinity beyond both). But inner experience supports rather the idea that there is a smooth gradient between matter and pure spirit. Inner experience confirms the idea, which the Vedic tradition has in common with virtually all other spirituality-based schools of thought, that there actually is a whole range of worlds connecting the Absolute with the manifest world we all know. The Vedic tradition holds that the physical world is ultimately a condensation of consciousness, and it has worked out the transitions from the subtle to gross levels in great detail, for example in its description of the different worlds (or “births”), and the various sheathes of consciousness. These inner realities and their interconnections are extremely complex, and it is not easy to recognise the underlying structure and even more difficult to place different experiences correctly into the whole. As a result many different ways to bring some order into it all have been suggested, but for our present enquiry in the nature of knowledge, the simple distinction mentioned earlier between an inward horizontal, and an upward vertical dimension is particularly useful, both from a theoretical and from a practical viewpoint.

Knowledge from within

A first approach to inner knowledge is by an inward movement from the surface consciousness that characterises the ordinary waking state, through the subliminal intermediate layers of our inner nature, to our innermost, true being, the *purusha*. Though

ultimately there is only one Being, one Consciousness, one Self, the *paramatman* forever one with Brahman, transcending, supporting and inhabiting the manifestation in its entirety, the Vedic tradition recognises not only that every individual being also has its own Self, but that even within the complexity of each individual being, there exist different Selves on each of the various planes (*koshas*) of consciousness on which it exists. On each plane the *purusha* is our true Self, the silent witness, the support, and ultimately the master of our nature. Though the *purusha* is pure consciousness, and not affected by the *gunas* (the various qualities that characterise manifest nature) still the characteristic experience of the *purusha* differs according to the plane on which it is found. Though everywhere silent, vast, unaffected, on the mental plane it is the aspect of the witness that dominates, in the higher vital that of love and compassion, in the lower vital planes that of joy and strength, and so on. There are two forms or “instances” of the Self that stand out, one that stays eternally, immutably above the individual manifestation, also called the *jivatman*, and another, the innermost self that sustains and inhabits the incarnate being as a whole, the *chaitya purusha*, or *antaratman*. The former I will discuss further in the next section on “Knowledge from above”, about the latter I will discuss a few further points here. The *chaitya purusha* is found behind the heart *chakra*,²⁵ where, if one goes deep enough, one finds what has been called the inner oracle, the guide within, one's deepest, innermost soul, *antaratman* or *chaitya purusha*. Sri Aurobindo calls it the *psychic being*. In its own realm, in the depths of its own being, the psychic being is felt as a centre of true, self-luminous perfection; it is the source in us of our deepest aspirations, of true love, goodwill, compassion and a deep inner joy and gratitude. Sri Aurobindo describes it as a direct expression of the very being of the Divine immanent within us. It is the one part of us that can manage simultaneously to remain perfectly faithful to its own essential nature (*svabhava*) and yet be in a perfect, dynamic harmony with the manifestation as it unfolds from moment to moment in and around it. In terms of knowledge, the psychic being is the one part in us that is completely one with truth, and yet, as long as one lives in the surface personality, the guidance which the surface mind receives from the psychic being cannot always be perfect, for it reaches the surface consciousness through the intermediaries of one's heart and mind, and they can easily distort its messages. In terms of force also, deep inside the psychic being has the perfection of power inherent in its truth, but on the surface its strength cannot manifest easily or openly because there it allows itself to be bound by the limitations of one's instrumental nature. Only to the extent that the inner channels are clear and open, can its guidance be reliable and its action effective. Though it knows whatever one needs to know at any given moment, it is only when one's inner instruments of knowledge are pure enough that its gentle voice can be trusted to give the immediate and perfect guidance for the best possible action.

Knowledge from above

The other entry-point to direct knowledge is reached not by an inward movement, but by a movement of the centre of one's consciousness upwards, through the *sahasrara*, the

highest of the seven *chakras*, the seven centres of consciousness in one's subtle being. Through this *chakra* one opens up into the higher planes of consciousness and being, which, like a ladder, climb up into ranges that are felt as leading to the very origin of creation. These realms of higher knowledge are by their very nature impersonal. Though for most people the route through the heart is the most easy and natural, for some people this ascent is the easiest way to move out of the individual mind into the cosmic vastness.

An interesting difference between the inner and higher knowledge is that the knowledge that comes by going inside tends to be situational: it typically gives an indication for "right action", for what to do or what to say in the here and now. The knowledge one reaches by moving upward, on the other hand, tends to be more abstract and generic. Immediately above the mind one has, for example, a realm where one participates in comprehensive, global patterns of thought. If one concentrates on a philosophical issue while in that world²⁶ one immediately sees how a wide variety of related ideas hang together. To use a school-child's image, it is a bit as if one reads the pages at the end of a dream-quality schoolbook where all the answers are kept together in a perfectly contextualised manner: one sees not only the perfect answer to the question raised, but even the answers to a wide variety of related questions. Sri Aurobindo calls this world the Higher Mind. As it gives such an impression of impersonal, all-comprehensive perfection it can easily be mistaken for the Gnostic or "unitary" consciousness, but it is still very far below it: what one experiences here is not the Gnostic consciousness itself but only a more or less luminous shadow of it within the realm of the ordinary mind. Immediately above the Higher Mind there are realms where the relations between things and processes are not known in words or thoughts, but seen or felt as luminous images and presences. The higher one goes, the more the sense of perfection, unity and truth increases, but the more difficult it becomes to express what one experiences in words, because our ordinary language consists of words indicating dualities that are far surpassed in those higher realms.

There are two quite different ways in which one can make this upward movement. The first approach is a kind of jump, or at least a very quick climb, by which one moves more or less directly from one's ordinary consciousness to the Absolute by a systematic rejection of all thoughts and feelings that might arise in between. If one manages to do so, this is a very effective process and it can produce dramatic results in an amazingly short time. But the disadvantage is that this procedure leaves a gap between the consciousness in one's ordinary state and the higher state. One reaches the Absolute in some kind of trance or *samadhi* and one cannot carry a detailed memory of either the Supreme Reality or the intermediate layers back to one's ordinary state. What such experiences do leave behind, however, is the certainty of having reached a Truth and Bliss so absolute that compared to it, all the imperfections and sufferings of the ordinary world lose their relevance. The power and felicity of this experience may be one of the reasons why so many great saints and sages, in the West as well as in the East, have looked at the manifestation as a lesser aspect of the Divine or even as an unreal farce that needs to be surpassed and left behind

if one wants to reach the Divine in His/Her/Its absolute essence. Given how infinitely (literally!) more perfect the Absolute seems to be than anything in between, it is understandable that many great mystics have advised to forget about all lower experience and concentrate directly and exclusively on the highest.

Sri Aurobindo, however, takes the dynamic unfolding of the world as an aspect of the Divine that has as much importance as the static, absolute essence. He looks at our imperfect world simply as a “work in progress”. Sri Aurobindo’s stress on the value of life in the world is related to his vision of an ongoing evolution of consciousness of which he sees the next stage as the physical embodiment of *vijnana*, the Gnostic, supra-mental plane of truth-consciousness that according to him must be the ultimate origin of the manifest world. It may be clear that an organic embodiment of such an absolute truth-consciousness would require an extremely drastic transformation of human nature. To get a handle on the details of this process of transformation, a comprehensive understanding of all the intermediate layers of consciousness is required, which can only come through a second approach to the higher ranges of consciousness for which Sri Aurobindo found many references in the Vedas. In this approach one climbs slowly and meticulously, step by step, a kind of inner stairs that rises from below right up to the highest planes, delivering the detailed knowledge as one goes.²⁷

Though this goes beyond the immediate topic of this paper, it is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo insists for this approach to knowledge on a double movement, which is mentioned throughout the Vedas, but which in later times seems to have been forgotten except in some lesser known Tantric schools: one climbing from the ordinary mind, through all the intermediate layers of higher mind, illumined mind, intuition up to the overmind, and one descending, a “bringing down” of these higher capacities and powers back into oneself. One finds this movement mentioned throughout the Vedas as the request for the gods “to increase” in the person on whose behalf the Vedic sacrifice is made. If the Vedic gods are taken in their esoteric sense as the higher powers of the human mind, then it becomes clear how closely the Vedic image of a material sacrifice matches what Sri Aurobindo describes as a psychological process of ascent and integration: one has first to reach, connect with, and “realise” the higher faculties of Indra (the illumined mind), Agni (the will and aspiration), the Vayus (the barrier breakers), and many others, and then make them an integral part of one’s nature. Where Sri Aurobindo differs from the Vedas is that he seems to expand the range over which this process of ascent and integration can be made to work. At the high end, some of the Upanishads but especially the later Vedantic texts seem to jump directly from the Overmental plane of Indra – where there are still fights between gods and asuras (mental forces of good and evil) – to the plane of Ananda, the plane of perfect bliss and oneness. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, focuses on the Vijnana, the supra-mental link plane between the lower and higher hemispheres, where there is a simultaneous existence of perfect oneness and variety. At the low end, Sri Aurobindo tries to anchor this Gnostic plane in the physical reality, and to make it an organic part of our evolutionary, biological nature.

5. Yoga as research tool

If there is indeed, as the Indian tradition claims, a knowledge that can be apprehended directly from within without the necessity of mediation by the senses, then this has major consequences for the choice of the optimum methodology in psychological research. There where such direct inner knowledge refers to phenomena in the external world, one can indeed decide on the accuracy of the inner knowledge “objectively” by comparing the symbolic rendering of that inner knowledge with the symbolic rendering of sense information about the external events. But where the inner knowledge refers to inner states or processes, this may not be the appropriate way of verifying such knowledge. What we need there is not objectivity, but reliable subjectivity.

In our study of the outer world, progress is to a large extent made by using better and better instruments. What “better” means here depends to some extent on the field: in astronomy “better” might mean for example higher resolution, higher and more specific sensitivity combined with less noise and distortion. Wherever possible, the results are then corroborated with findings from others with different but equally reliable instruments. Where the quality of the findings cannot be ascertained through comparison with findings made by different observers, instruments and experimental pathways, the inherent logic of the instrument’s construction plays a major role in our assessments of their reliability. How does this translate to the inner domain? In the inner domain the instrument of choice is self-observation, which includes knowledge by intimate direct contact, knowledge by identity, and the pure witness consciousness (*sakshi*). Just as in the physical domain, the quality of the results in the inner domain can be ascertained on the one hand through corroboration by equally or better qualified observers, and on the other hand by the intrinsic quality of the instrument. The latter can in its turn be ascertained by what that specific instrument delivers in comparatively well-established fields of enquiry. The only difference is that in the inner domain, the instrument is not some physical instrument, but the inner instrument of knowledge, the *antahkarana*, of the researcher. The quality of this instrument depends on things like the amount of immixture and improper functioning; its freedom from ego, vital desires, mental preferences and physical limitations; its sensitivity, flexibility, and ability to move at will through different inner worlds and centres of consciousness; etc. Yoga, in its widest sense of spiritual discipline, is the method of choice to perfect the inner instrument of knowledge. It leads to a more comprehensive, impartial and harmony enhancing understanding of reality not only through the purification of the inner instrument, but also by raising the observing consciousness above its ordinary, corrupting and limiting involvement in the processes and entities that psychology is supposed to study. That it can indeed deliver is attested to by the incredibly rich Indian heritage in the psychological field.

In short, for the outer periphery of psychology, objective population surveys and behavioural studies may be appropriate, but for the core-territory, the legitimate heartland of psychology that consists of the deep movements of consciousness, what we need are

reliable subjective methods. For those subjective methods, self-reports are *not* the original data: they are at most part of the reporting. Even introspection, as defined in the beginning of this article, is in itself not the right research method to reach the deeper layers. The actual research consists of the processes that take place in the inner worlds themselves. They can only be ascertained by a silent witness consciousness in a deep inner self-observation. Subsequently this inner knowledge can be brought to the surface and shared with others, as long as we acknowledge that its veracity can only be ascertained by those who have access to the same inner worlds with the help of inner instruments of knowledge that are similar or better in quality. One could, perhaps, look at this as a reprehensible form of occult elitism, but it need not be. The situation might be close to that in physics where one cannot expect results unless one has a good grasp of mathematical and instrumental methods. I'm inclined to think that Yoga has a very similar role to play in the advancement of Psychology, as mathematics and physical instrumentation have in physics. It can improve the quality of the inner instrument of knowledge and make us more open to sources of direct knowledge. Which of the many entirely different methods and techniques of Yoga are the most suitable for incorporation into Psychology, is one of the major tasks for Indian Psychology to take up in the coming years.

6. Evaluation and Conclusion

When a little girl looks up to us, it is up to us whether we want to see that her dress is untidy, that her English needs correction, or that the heavens from which we all come are visible just behind the surface of those wide, wondering eyes. Even if we consider it our duty to tinker with the details of the outer manifestation of this subtle wonder, it still helps to remain aware of the deeper inner realities, however deeply buried in the background of our consciousness. At the very least, that inner connectedness will help us to avoid the worst forms of cruel insanity to which our human race is so amazingly prone. At its best, it may help to bring about a more harmonious world for future generations to enjoy.

If Sri Aurobindo and the Vedic tradition on which he builds are right, then direct, intuitive knowledge by identity forms the essential core of all our knowledge, and especially of our basic sense of truth, beauty, meaning, love, self, and reality. We may doubt whether we as individuals can ever hope to develop intuitive knowledge to the level of detailed perfection that Sri Aurobindo and the Vedic tradition assert to be possible. But even if there were only a remote chance that such a type of knowledge actually exists and that it can be cultivated, it would still be worthwhile to give it, both individually and collectively, much more attention than we presently do. The least the methods of yoga, especially *jnana yoga*, can contribute to Psychology are well-developed methods for the study of the subjective side of our psychological nature, methods that work through a systematic removal of the imperfections of introspection, and through a rigorous refinement of the inner instrument of knowledge (*antahkarana*) so that it can penetrate the deeper layers of consciousness that are described throughout the Indian tradition but that are not accessible in our ordinary mental states.

There is, however, another, and perhaps more important reason to pursue the systematic development of knowledge by identity and that is simply, that *if* it exists, it is the type of knowledge humanity needs most at the moment. All major human problems are problems of harmony,²⁸ and the kind of direct, intuitive knowledge we've discussed in this paper may well be one of the most direct ways to find that harmony back. After all, the core of the intuitive knowledge Sri Aurobindo speaks about is nothing else than the ancient *atmavidya*, the knowledge of the self²⁹ at a level where the individual self is consciously one with the cosmic Self, and through that, with the individual selves of all others. As such, it is the knowledge that reconnects us to our common source and that supports our communality as well as our essential individuality. As a result, the pursuit of knowledge by identity can provide answers to our deepest need for love and harmony, and it can give humanity the wisdom and power it so desperately needs to heal the many wounds and distortions that now mar both our individual human natures and our collective existence. So even if the chances of finding this knowledge were exceedingly small, the gamble would still be worth it. But, fortunately, the chance of finding this knowledge is not small at all.

Though mainstream science ignores and in her more dogmatic moments even denies its existence, intuitive knowledge has played a major role in all known civilisations. It is true that some cultures have held it to be something of a gift that cannot be cultivated, but there are many other cultures that have worked out methods to develop it, and in India, where spirituality has been the very foundation of the mainstream culture right from the beginning of known history, there are several highly sophisticated and intellectually rigorous systems of ideas on how it can be developed. So actually, collectively, we not only know that this knowledge is there, but we even know how to develop it.

At the end of his wonderfully detailed history of spiritual movements in the U.S.A., Eugene Taylor comes to the conclusion that we can expect over the coming years a growing influence of Indian ideas on the developing global civilisation, and especially a major shift in its basic epistemological assumptions, away from materialism and in the direction of Indian spirituality (1999, pp. 289-296). Taylor considers it an open question whether this growing reliance on spiritual knowledge will develop as part of science, or as an independent, parallel knowledge system that will gradually gain in prominence, as people begin to realise how much it can contribute to our understanding of human nature (ibid. p. 285). To what extent spirituality and science can and should merge or collaborate is a complicated issue, but there seems very little inherent reason why they should not join hands at least in some key areas. The almost complete separation of the knowledge systems of spirituality and science that we see at present seems to be little more than a highly unfortunate outcome of the peculiarities of European history. In individuals, the independent co-existence of incompatible knowledge systems is a sign of schizophrenia, and it is hard to conceive how this could be different for society at large. Even if a true integration³⁰ of spirituality with the presently dominant knowledge system of science will be hard to achieve, the least we should strive for is some form of active cooperation. What

form this cooperation should take is again difficult to say. In all likelihood psychology will see for a long time the co-existence of several competing knowledge systems rooted in a wide gamut of ideas and methods, that perhaps could be mapped in a three-dimensional space indicating their relative stress on physiological, social and spiritual factors. In the long run I expect, however, that there will be an increasing awareness of the value of spiritual knowledge, and of the interdependence between psychological insight and spiritual practice. If this is true and if we will indeed see an increasingly widespread recognition that yoga, and spiritual practice in general, leads to valid and reliable psychological knowledge of a quality that cannot be obtained otherwise, then we can foresee a time when yoga will be considered equally essential for the psychologist as mathematical proficiency for the physicist.

Within the field of psychology, but potentially elsewhere as well, science and spirituality are complementary quests for knowledge in need of each other. Science is by its very nature down-to-earth, progressive and self-critical, and without these three qualities, spirituality tends to become too otherworldly, it gets stifled in the encrustations of religion, or it floats off in some new-age vagueness. On the other hand, science also needs spirituality to complement itself. Till now science has occupied itself mainly with the objective, outer half of reality, but this outer half has no independent existence. Reality-as-we-know-it is a relationship: a relationship between what we see as ourselves and what we see as the world in which we live. To fully understand what happens in this relationship, we need to know both sides of it, the inside as well as the outside. If we concentrate too exclusively on the outside we lose out on the deeper meaning of life, on the treasures of the spirit, and if we concentrate too much inside we get an otherworldly spirituality that doesn't do justice to the love that sustains this beautiful creation. Only when we pay equal attention to both sides of the equation can we develop a knowledge and mastery that are fully in harmony with the marvel of the evolving manifestation. Only then may it finally be said of humanity that its tread "justifies the light on Nature's face."³¹

Acknowledgement

My entry point to the Indian tradition has been through Sri Aurobindo's work, and in this paper I've tried to give a faithful impression of Sri Aurobindo's ideas on knowledge in a language that is understandable and relevant for those who are engaged with contemporary psychology. In this attempt I've tried to stick as closely as possible to my own experience, and to be explicit about my philosophical presumptions and predilections. I'm aware that these different objectives are not fully compatible. The language of modern psychology is not really suitable to deal with the type of experiences on which Sri Aurobindo bases his ideas, and the limited nature of my own experience enables me to see and understand only a small corner of Sri Aurobindo's work. Still, I hope the result will be intriguing enough for the reader to give a serious thought to the ideas expressed in this paper and to turn for further clarification to Sri Aurobindo's own writings. The reader can safely presume that whatever is true in this paper is Sri Aurobindo's, and that whatever is not must be mine.³²

Recommended Reading (Beginner's Level)

- Sri Aurobindo, *Bases of Yoga*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
—— *Lights on Yoga*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
—— The four chapters of the “Introduction” in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
Matthijs Cornelissen, “Self and Personality in Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga: An overview of his terminology” in K. Ramakrishna Rao and Sonali Bhatt Marwaha (Ed.) *Towards a Spiritual Psychology*, Delhi: Samvad India Foundation.
A. S. Dalal (Ed.) *Our Many Selves*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
—— *Living Within*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.

Recommended Reading (Advanced Level)

- Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
esp. Part Two: “The Yoga of Integral Knowledge”
—— *The Life Divine*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
esp. Bk I, Chapter 1-3
Bk II, Chapter X “Knowledge by Identity and Separative Knowledge”
Bk II, Chapter XXV “The Triple Transformation”
Matthijs Cornelissen, “The Evolution of Consciousness in Sri Aurobindo's Cosmo-Psychology”, in Helmut Wautischer (Ed.), *Ontology of Consciousness: Percipient Action*, Boston: The MIT Press, forthcoming 2006.
A. S. Dalal (Ed.) (2001) *A Greater Psychology*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.

References

- Aurobindo, Sri (1910/2003). “A System of National Education: Some Preliminary Ideas”, in *Early Cultural Writings*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
—— (1915/1998). “Our Ideal” in *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
—— (1940/1990). *The Life Divine*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
—— (1950/1994) *Savitri*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
—— (1955/1999) *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
—— (1958/1970). *Letters on Yoga*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
—— (1933/1970) “The Riddle of the World” in *Letters on Yoga*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
—— (2003) *The Record of Yoga*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department.
Braud, William (Forthcoming) “Patanjali Yoga and Siddhis: Their Relevance to Parapsychological Theory and Research”. In K. Ramakrishna Rao & al.(Eds.) *Handbook of Indian Psychology*, forthcoming.
Camus, Albert (1942/1985), *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Gallimard
Cornelissen, R. M. Matthijs (2005), “Self and Personality in Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga: An overview of his terminology” in K. Ramakrishna Rao and Sonali Bhatt Marwaha (Ed.) *Towards a Spiritual Psychology*, Delhi: Samvad India Foundation.

——— “The Evolution of Consciousness in Sri Aurobindo’s Cosmo-Psychology”, in Helmut Wautischer (Ed.), *Ontology of Consciousness: Percipient Action*, Boston: The MIT Press, forthcoming 2007.

Coward, Harold (1985), *Jung and Eastern Thought*, New York: State University of New York Press

Dalal, A.S. (2001). *A Greater Psychology*, New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher and Putnam.

Dennett, Daniel C. (1994), *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Forman, Robert K. C. ed. (1990). *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Guzeldere, Guven, (1995) "Consciousness, what it is, how to study it, what to learn from its history" *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol.2, no.1 pp. 30-51

James, William, (1904/2005), “The Notion of Consciousness”, in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 12, no. 7, pp. 55-64.

Katz, Steven T. (1978). “Language, Epistemology and Mysticism,” in Steven T. Katz (Ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Mishra, Kamalakara, (1999), *Kashmir Saivism, The central philosophy of Tantrism*, New-Delhi: Satguru Publications.

Mohan, Krishna T. (2001) “Spirituality and well-being: an overview” in Matthijs Cornelissen (Ed.) (2001) *Consciousness and Its Transformation*, Pondicherry: SAICE

Moore, Charles A. K. C. *Bhattacharyya Memorial Volume*. Amalner: Indian Institute of Philosophy, 1958), p. 121, quote in Riepe

Murphy, Michael and Donovan, Steven (1997), *The Physical and Psychological Effects of Meditation*, Sausalito, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences.

Petitmengin-Peugot, C. (1999). The intuitive experience. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2/3, pp. 43-77.

Riepe, Dale. “The Indian Influence in American Philosophy: Emerson to Moore” in *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 17 no. 1/4 (1967) pp. 125-137. Retrieved on November 5, 2005 from <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/ew27053.htm#38>

Sheldrake, Rupert, (2005), “The Sense of Being Stared At”, in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 12, no. 6, pp. 10-49.

Simons, D. J., & Chabris, C. F. (1999). Gorillas in our midst: Sustained inattention blindness for dynamic events, *Perception*, 28, 1059-1074.

Singh, S.P (2004), “The Vedic Seer’s Quest for the Supramental Consciousness” in Joshi, Kireet and Cornelissen, Matthijs (Ed.), *Consciousness, Indian Psychology and Yoga*, New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilisations

Steele (1994) “The multistate paradigm and the spiritual path of John of the Cross”, in *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, vol. 26:1

Taylor, Eugene, (1999), *Shadow Culture, Psychology and Spirituality in America*, Washington, DC: Counterpoint.

Tart, C. (1972). States of consciousness and state-specific sciences, *Science*, 176, 1203-1210.

Footnotes:

¹According to Sheldrake (2005, p.38) a recent exhibition in the Science Museum in London presented the human mind as the flight-deck of an aeroplane, but without a pilot. An unexpected Buddhist influence?

²Sri Aurobindo wrote about this (in 1915), “The safety of Europe has to be sought in the recognition of the spiritual aim of human existence, otherwise she will be crushed by the weight of her own unilluminated

knowledge and soulless organisation.” In his next sentence he stressed the need for balance. There he said, “The safety of Asia lies in the recognition of the material mould and mental conditions in which that aim has to be worked out, otherwise she will sink deeper into the slough of despond of a mental and physical incompetence to deal with the facts of life and the shocks of a rapidly changing movement.” Now, in 2006, Asia is clearly waking up, but the danger of insufficient respect for the spirit is still real, and not only in Europe.

³In the part of *The Life Divine* on which much of this discussion is based, Sri Aurobindo does not explicitly state that the distinction he makes between “knowledge by identity” and “separative knowledge” is equivalent to the traditional distinction between *vidya* and *avidya*, but I think it is a safe assumption.

⁴There is also a dynamic aspect to this type of knowledge. Sri Aurobindo doesn’t mention it in this context, but logically this type of knowledge should include skills, the “know-how” to do things.

⁵In contemporary psychology it is widely held that intuition is constructed subconsciously and only appears to pop-up ready-made. Sri Aurobindo calls this pseudo-intuition. Intuition is used here in the original sense of true knowledge that is not constructed, but that comes to us at least partially “ready-made” from some inner or subtle source. Much of this article can be seen as an attempt to show that such direct knowledge actually exists and is worth cultivating systematically.

⁶“At the same time” may not be taken too literally. See the subsection entitled “Of balconies and birds”.

⁷In a state of pure consciousness there is evidently no distinction between subject and object, but not everybody agrees that such states are possible (Steven Katz, 1978, pp. 62-3). Even Jung, who is for many an early hero of the transpersonal movement in psychology, seriously thought that a state without ego, and thus without a clear distinction between subject and object, would intrinsically be an unconscious state. This seems to betray a somewhat surprising lack of understanding of the Indian tradition. For a brilliant discussion of Jung’s position vis-à-vis Eastern thought, see Coward (1985)

⁸In one experiment a video-clip is shown of two teams of six players, one team dressed in white, the other in black, who pass two balls on to each other in what looks like an informal volleyball training. The observers are asked to count how often a white player manages to pass on a ball to another white player without a black player intercepting it. In the middle of the clip an actor dressed up as a black gorilla enters the scene, stands still in the middle, waves his two hands at the audience, and then moves out from the other side. Even when one shows this video clip to large audiences, there is hardly ever someone who sees the gorilla. If at the end, one tells the audience to relax and watch the video once more without counting anything, just for the sake of seeing if there is anything special they missed out on the first time, nobody misses the gorilla, and most people have a hard time believing it is the same movie (see Simons & Chabris, 1999).

⁹ For a refutation of one of Dennett’s main arguments, see Cornelissen (2007).

¹⁰Sanskrit: *dristi*: supreme revelation, direct vision of truth; *sruti*: supreme inspiration, direct hearing of truth.

¹¹The Sanskrit word *dharma* is difficult to translate. It denotes truth in the realm of agency. As such it is often translated as (moral, social) duty and even as religion, but especially the latter is not satisfactory, as *dharma* has a strong connotation of something that is part of one’s essential nature and that as such goes beyond social conventions.

¹² Inwardly, subjectively, there is an interesting vertical dimension to our awareness of different types of consciousness: we tend to visualise the heavens above and the dark, subconscious realms below. We will come back to this later.

¹³Sri Aurobindo claims that it is actually possible to cultivate intuitive knowledge to such an extent that it can take over all ordinary mental functions and become one's normal way of knowing reality. We know from the diary Sri Aurobindo maintained during a few years of intense yogic practice, that he made this amazing claim not on the basis of literary exegesis or philosophical speculation, but on the basis of meticulously carried out experiments, of which he maintained a detailed day-to-day record. The "laboratory notes" in this *Record of Yoga* (2003) are full of examples of detailed knowledge even about trivial events in the outer, material world, that would be extremely difficult to explain as constructed on the basis of sense-impressions and memories alone. For an interesting study of yogic powers and parapsychology, see Braud (forthcoming).

¹⁴"Inevitable" is the highest "grade" in Sri Aurobindo's appraisal of lines of poetry in terms of their level of inspiration.

¹⁵This is significant as the Upanishads, from where this simile hails, are extremely terse; they are like mathematical formulas of the spirit, and there is never a word too many. Each word covers a world of meanings.

¹⁶The (in)famous passage Watson wrote in his influential *Behaviorism* of 1924 is well-known, but worth repeating:

"Human beings do not want to class themselves with other animals. They are willing to admit that they are animals but 'something else in addition'. It is this 'something else' that causes the trouble. In this 'something else' is bound up everything that is classed as religion, the life hereafter, morals, love of children, parents, country, and the like. The raw fact that you, as a psychologist, if you are to remain scientific, must describe the behaviour of man in no other terms than those you would use in describing the behaviour of the ox you slaughter, drove and still drives many timid souls away from behaviourism."

One might have expected that the dismissal of religion, morals and love as nothing but 'trouble', and the rather baffling presumption that his colleagues spend their days slaughtering oxen, would have been sufficient to drive any sensible human being away, but, strangely enough, this did not happen at all, which is shocking testimony to the utter darkness humanity went through during the last century.

¹⁷Reality can hardly have been that bizarre, but if taken literally, this means that people going for psychological help at the time basically had the choice between being slaughtered in the mind of a behaviourist, or being accused of all kind of sexual perversions by a Freudian. Seen from this angle, being looked at by a cognitive scientist as a fuzzy computer in need for re-programming could indeed be called progress! But still, poor souls.

¹⁸There are a few notable exceptions. One may think for example of the work on State Specific Sciences by Charles Tart (1972), or the article by Petitmengin-Peugot (1999)

¹⁹Sri Aurobindo looks at the Darwinian evolution as gradual emancipation of consciousness. He holds that just as life has developed in matter, and mind has developed in embodied life, still higher forms of consciousness are bound to develop in embodied mind. Sri Aurobindo looks at yoga as a concentrated attempt in the individual to achieve in a short period what Nature itself is working out in her own speed on larger scale.

²⁰This example is not from Sri Aurobindo but from the Mother (née Mirra Alfassa, 1878-1973).

²¹At the end of a passage where he describes several ways to silence the mind, Sri Aurobindo says: "In a complete silence only is the Silence heard; in a pure peace only is the Being revealed. Therefore to us the name of That is the Silence and the Peace."

²²The dimensionality of the "inner" or subtle experience of consciousness is an intriguing phenomenon that one finds mentioned throughout spiritual literature, and that consistently returns in experience. In

the “inner” experience, one can actually centre one’s consciousness at different vertical levels, and more or less deeply “inside”. We will come back to this in the next section.

²³I’m not aware of hard statistical data on this issue, but both tradition and personal experience tell that “enlightenment”, which is closely related to one’s capacity for knowledge by identity, tends to bring with it some degree of telepathic capacity, even though clairvoyants are certainly not always enlightened.

²⁴For more details see Sri Aurobindo’s *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine*. A short summary of the system can be found in Cornelissen (2004) and a more detailed account in Dalal (2001).

²⁵*Chakras*, Sanskrit: centres of different types of consciousness arranged one above the other in the subtle body. Though the idea that different types of conscious activity take place at different locations in the body has been worked out in much more detail in the Indian tradition, traces of it occur even in the English language, e.g.: “use your head” means “think better”; “open your heart” means “feel more compassion”; “follow your gut-feelings” means “follow your basic life instincts”.

²⁶I could have written “in that state” but at the risk of being accused of occultism, I have chosen consciously for “in that world” as the latter appears more accurate. In many contexts, “state” and “world” are interchangeable, but they don’t have the same connotations. “State” stresses that what one describes happens inside the mind of an individual and is dependent on its condition. “World” stresses the complexity and internal coherence of what one experiences, and it implies some kind of objective existence, though the latter can be apparent only (as in, “a dream world”). I’m inclined to think that what I describe here are indeed worlds, not just states. They seem to pre-exist independent of the human mind, though what one actually experiences is indeed dependent on one’s inner condition. According to Sri Aurobindo this is equally true for all worlds, even for the ordinary physical world: all worlds come about in an interaction between *purusha* and *prakriti*, self and nature, conscious being as subject and the same conscious being as object. They differ from each other in the type of consciousness on the subject and on the object side.

²⁷Sri Aurobindo describes these higher planes of consciousness with an exemplary and, one must add, rather rare intellectual discipline and “rectitude”. From his diaries and the autobiographical poetry he wrote during the same periods as his published writings, we know that he carefully avoided quoting the sometimes strong claims of classical Sanskrit texts, if he had not on the one hand fully understood their implications, and on the other seen them supported by his own experience. This, together with the detailed studies he made of our ordinary human nature as seen from the higher planes of consciousness with an eye on its transformation, make his work so exceedingly interesting for Psychology.

²⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 2

²⁹With “self” I mean here the eternal centre of one’s consciousness, the *atman*, or the *purusha* of the Indian tradition, not the western “self-concept”, which corresponds in the Indian tradition more closely with the *ahankara*, the constructed, socially determined egoic centre in the outer nature, with which the real self erroneously identifies.

³⁰It may be noted that integration is not the same as amalgamation. In amalgamation, the original substances lose their own qualities and get merged into a new, essentially amorphous substance. In integration, the differences of the various parts are carefully maintained and uplifted into a new, and more complex unity (like the various parts of a car, that find the fulfilment of their existence in their cooperation in the workings of the larger unit of which they are the constituents.) True integration is above all not constructed with the mind, but an offering, a taking up in the pre-existing higher oneness of the conscious existence of the Divine.

³¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p. 344

³²This may sound a bit too sugary, but it is almost certainly true. Over the years, whenever I thought I had found some error or lacunae in Sri Aurobindo's descriptions of life and yoga, either I was led soon after to an unmistakeable experience showing that he was right or I found that he had described somewhere in a few lines what had taken me months to discover. The more I understand of what he has done in the area of yoga and psychology, the more my admiration grows.

The New Spirituality or the Aurobindian Revolution

Georges Vrekhem

In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo quotes the triple statement of the Upanishads: “Brahman is in all things, all things are in Brahman, all things are Brahman”.¹ The Upanishads, the foundation of Vedanta, have been a living source of spiritual inspiration since they were formulated some three thousand years ago; yet the full scope of their significance was not put into practice until Sri Aurobindo dedicated himself to the implementation of their unadulterated message. In the meantime there had been Mahavir and the Buddha, Shankara and Christ, and a multitude of great saints and realised souls; but no religion or spiritual path teaches that Brahman, the Omnipresent Reality, is “this old man and boy and girl, this bird, this insect”² – and this shopping housewife, this jetliner, this cancer tumour and this self-immolating fanatic ... All spiritual paths and all churches point toward a hereafter, moksha, nirvana, and teach how to get out of this life or cycle of lives by what they suppose to be the shortest way possible. Matter is the anti-Divine, the body is a burden, a prison, a tomb. Individual escape out of this bad or illusionary sub-lunar world is the direct goal, after which all will be happiness and ecstasy in eternity. Yet to Sri Aurobindo, from the very beginning of his sadhana, “a solitary salvation leaving the world to its fate was felt as almost distasteful”.³ And he wrote about his Yoga: “Even the Tantra and Vaishnavism end in the release from life; here the object is the divine fulfilment of life”.⁴

In the course of his sadhana, he gradually became aware of the dimensions of the spiritual innovation to be brought about by him. Firstly, matter and the Earth were no longer seen as something despicable in which the soul had descended by some accident or other. The statement of the Upanishad “Matter also is Brahman” was to be taken literally, and the physical universe was seen as “the external body of the Divine Being”.⁵ He wrote:

“Earth-life is not a lapse into the mire of something undivine, vain and miserable, offered by some Power to itself as a spectacle or to the embodied soul as a thing to be suffered and then cast away from it: [on the contrary] it is the scene of the evolutionary unfolding of the being which moves towards the revelation of a supreme spiritual light and power and joy and oneness, but includes in it also the manifold diversity of the self-achieving spirit. There is an all-seeing purpose in the terrestrial creation; a divine plan is working itself out through its contradictions and perplexities ...”⁶

Secondly, the “evolutionary unfolding of the being” became more than a naturalist scientific theory, it became a spiritual fact directly significant for the effort of the Yoga. Much of our bodies, life forces and mental capacities is shaped by evolution. We carry the development of life on the Earth not only in our visible body but deep in ourselves, where the past continues to be present and must be overcome if we want to advance into the future. The chakras represent the earthly and therefore cosmic evolution in us and are hierarchically ordered from below upwards, toward the levels which are worlds of consciousness above our present human rationality, to be integrated in the bodies of the future. True, in Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga one has first to realise the psychic and overmental, spiritual realisations, but then, strengthened with these realisations, one has to descend into the nether regions of the subconscious, where the dark roots of humanity are.

Thirdly, Sri Aurobindo had the revelation of the Supermind, the divine Truth-Consciousness. This is the consciousness in which all is one and is experienced as one, in the timeless immensities as well as in the time-bound sub-atomic materialisations; it is the consciousness which eternally contains all in itself, manifests all out of itself and then takes all again into its bosom. This is the true “mind of God” behind the mysteries of the infinite and the infinitesimal, confounding present-day science because it is incapable of widening its vision beyond the physical realm. And Sri Aurobindo saw that this Truth-Consciousness, however high or far or deep beyond or present mind, was the only basis to realise the next step in evolution for which the time had come. “This knowledge first he had of time-born men.”⁷

Lastly, to work out his vision and his personal realisations of it, he had to establish a method which could be followed by others, a spiritual path which he called the “Integral Yoga”. For it had to contain the essence of humanity’s spiritual achievements in the past in order to integrate them into a vision of the future. In this spiritual undertaking, in the working out of this “new spirituality”, he and the Mother stood alone. Time and again they have compared their pioneering effort to hewing a path in the jungle, advancing through constant danger into the unknown. For the mighty Powers-that-be, hostile to any new spiritual acquisition or change, become merciless when their reign is threatened and their dominant position on the Earth might come to an end. “My gaping wounds are a thousand and one / And the Titan kings assail ...” wrote Sri Aurobindo in his marvellous autobiographical poem “*A God’s Labour*”.⁸

All this together was and is the Aurobindian revolution. “Revolution” is often nothing more than an overblown word. But if initiating a new step in the terrestrial evolution, based on the materialisation of a consciousness beyond our present mind and even imagination, and to be incorporated into a material being on the Earth – if this is not a revolution, then what is? It is but seldom realised that at the time of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother’s early lives the coming of the “superman” was felt by many to be necessary and even imminent. The name of Friedrich Nietzsche, whose thinking Sri Aurobindo was very familiar with, will come to mind. But there was also Marx’ new *homo economicus*,

there was the new atheistic and humanitarian man of Auguste Comte, the Freudian and Jungian new man, and several more. Those were indeed the decades of an intense reaction of discontent against the dry rationality of the Enlightenment. This reaction would lead to fascism, with its own ideal of the new man, the man of the deed, and ultimately to Hitler's ruthless superman, the "blonde beast".

Still the historical perspective should be extended much farther backwards in time. For if this was, and is, the moment of a new evolutionary creation which is the fulfilment of the evolutionary past and makes a quantum leap beyond it, it must mean that Nature had worked out all the preliminary stages on the Earth to their utmost possibilities. As the Mother said, there are long periods of preparation, but then there is the moment in which the evolutionary *saltus* happens. Today's humanity in upheaval is certainly significative of such a critical moment in its evolution.

The "procession" of avatars is well known in Hinduism and, as Sri Aurobindo remarked, pictures the successive evolutionary stages perfectly⁹. Sri Krishna declared in the *Bhagawad Gita* that the avatar comes at times when humanity is in crisis.¹⁰ The materialisation of a new step in the evolution, like every birth, is a time of intensest crisis, qua importance exceeding by far the "axis-times" as defined by Karl Jaspers. The beings of an established level of evolution are themselves incapable of piercing the ceiling of their species, of going beyond the highest stratum of their materialisation. Such a breakthrough can be effected only by a direct intervention from "above", materially incarnated in a being which in India is known as *avatar*. Sri Aurobindo argues in one of his letters that between the hominids and *homo sapiens* there *had* to be an avatar, in that case Lord Rama. If so, there had to be an avatar to initiate the still greater leap between *homo sapiens* and the supramental being – and we know the name of that avatar: Sri Aurobindo-Mother,

A single being in two bodies clasped,
A diarchy of two united souls.¹¹

For the first time in the history of humanity a complete, double-poled avatar incarnated representing He and She, the male and female principle on all levels of existence and manifestation.

The Divine takes on a material body in what could be called metaphorically an "avatatic field". This consists of a preparatory period leading up to his appearance. Then there is his presence on earth when he lays the foundations of the change he has come down to bring about, always against impossible odds because he has come to do the impossible. While the decisive change is taking place only a few humans are aware of his presence, and fewer still are aware of the implications of his work. When the avatar has left his earthly body a transitory period follows, often of great confusion. And finally comes the time of the accomplishment of the evolutionary or spiritual change, perceptible to all and having a permanent impact on the destiny of humanity as a whole.

We are in the transitory period between the presence of the avatar and the concrete

realisation of his purpose. Our strength is in our faith, unreasonable or maybe grotesque in the eyes of those who do not have the call to participate consciously in the Great Change. One of the key words of the Integral Yoga is “surrender” because, having dedicated our lives to the Work, we accept that the ultimate realisation – the transformation of the body -- will not be ours in this life. But to support our faith there is the presence of Sri Aurobindo and of the Mother – for the task of the avatar is not limited by his and her physical incarnation; and we can inwardly open to the supramental force, manifested in the Earth-atmosphere in 1956, and its deputy, the force descended in 1969 to enable the realisation of the overmental, transitional or intermediary being. Trying to become intermediary beings (“overwomen” and “overmen” – *surhommes*) is, according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the task given to us¹².

In the physical sciences it is a rule that a theory should prove its validity by making predictions that can be tested. Is Sri Aurobindo’s theory of the supermind only a grandiose illusion, or will humanity die out before anything like the apparition of the supramental being can happen on our planet? Sri Aurobindo has made predictions. In his writings in the *Arya*, later published in book form, one can read that:

1. India had to become free;
2. Asia had to awake;
3. humanity had to become one;
4. the Indian spirituality had to spread in the whole world;
5. the humans species would be succeeded by a new species of supramental beings.

It should be borne in mind that these predictions were made during the First World War and its immediate aftermath, when reasonable people could only consider them as chimaeras. In 1947, in a text to be broadcast on the occasion of India’s freedom, Sri Aurobindo summarised these predictions himself and called them his “five dreams”.

When one considers what has become of these “dreams” at present, one cannot but agree that all five have been realised to a considerable degree. Thus they may be held to be a rational justification of Sri Aurobindo’s previsions of the future. He wrote that a next evolutionary step is *inevitable*, a statement which, considering the evolutionary process, can only be doubted for fear that our Earth might not survive its present predicament. But the fundamental cause of this predicament is precisely the *Umwertung aller Werte*, the revaluation of all values required to create the new, as yet unknown ones. In this so-called post-modern period of a humanity caught in the vortex of its unification, Sri Aurobindo’s vision provides us with the interpretation of the apparent chaos.

Mentally conditioned by the physical sciences, few people still believe in miracles, but I know of two which are historically proven. The first is Joan of Arc, the young French village girl who, at the head of rowdy medieval armies, defeated the English, put her king on his throne, and told her judges frankly: *Je suis venue de par Dieu* – I have come from God. The other miracle is Auroville, the utopia of all utopias, which after forty years in quasi impossible circumstances and despite all ordeals, is still there – and growing.

References:

1. *The Life Divine*, p.139.
2. *Ibid.*, p.324.
3. *On Himself*, p.12.
4. *Letters on Yoga*, vol.I, p.100.
5. *The Life Divine*, p.6.
6. *Ibid.*, p.680.
7. *Savitri*, p.74.
8. *Collected Poems*, p.100.
9. *Letters on Yoga*, p.402.
10. *Essays on the Gita*, p.168.
11. *Savitri*, p. 295.
12. *The Mother: Questions and Answers 1957-58*, pp.190-91.

(This text was read on 17 February 2008, at the Sri Aurobindo Centre of Human Unity, Auroville, on the occasion of the symposium held to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Auroville. This article was later included in a recent book by Georges Van Vrekhem entitled *The New Spirituality* published by Stichting Aurofonds and has been made available to us by Carel Thième.)

The Soul That Makes Us Matter

Rick Lipschutz

[This article correlates the explosion of the atomic bomb and the emergence of the human soul. The little spark in our soul, set free, glows more brilliant by many powers than all the energy locked in matter that's been released by splitting the nucleus. The atom of science, when exploded, only blows everything apart. While the soul atom, come out from hiding and extending to the surface, has the innate ability to integrate all the fragments of a human into a being. In this new spiritual atomic age that is coming into being, we've started to see how the soul, come into its own, can attune our nature to its higher frequencies. We begin to partner with many powers that, though still they lie beyond us, now seem willing to collaborate substantially. They are moving us safely that missing step across an abyss, and luring all life on earth forward. Hands, our own with others, may have strength together to pull us out from dangers threatening to disintegrate this living process into its littlest pieces. Eventually, since it is the soul presence that has made matter what it is, the mysterious powers that produced our kind even may make soul and matter equal and one.]

We shattered the atom in a desert valley, blew it up into blinding bits.

We've seen the pictures. The nuclear device exploded near Alamogordo in the Jornada del Muerto — the journey of the dead man — an inhospitable valley in the New Mexico desert in 1945, has challenged us to our slender core. We face the spectre of responsibility over forces we hold not the sceptre to rule. How won't our species disintegrate but continue, move forward as everybody likes to say? Both the first nuclear test and the threefold divine nature we know by the same code name. Trinity changed that world forever.

But surface happenings, even brilliant ones “brighter than a thousand suns,”¹ reflect profounder truths. On this basis, I claim we have inside us a device, from which all other devices have been devised. Preposterous on the face of it: a superconscient nuclear device that can, that will, truly change the world for good. And the explosion it emits is more than a flash that fouls and a light filled with loathing. It's the blast that comes to stay. It is the very device which the will, embedded in the originating brightness, has devised, in order for spirit to directly intervene in this world, in ourselves. It is but a frail gleam growing toward omnipotent flame of grace. It is an undivided piece of the love that threw itself down, in the pre-evolutionary pit below us, and goes to work in silence like a garden till, free at last, it can take effect on the surface.

The released energy of the atomic nucleus is only a small surface phenomenon, in the

light of the energy contained within our own soul-atom, whose little secret is the radiance of ten million suns.²

Matter has long contained “that light, that dazzling light, that light and immensity.”³ Only now, it explodes with the force of another nature than the one we know. This gives us more than a hint that not only is the soul the source of any significance the world holds, at the root of any value we ourselves have: it is the soul presence that has made matter what it is and what it will be, and therefore the soul, assuming union with the splendour of its origin, has the potential to unfold in, and as, matter the all-powerful essence of the Maker.⁴

The only peaceful atom is the soul atom; the energy from its explosion alone transforms.

And it is every bit an atomic explosion when soul bursts into the foreground of this life, emerges to open daylight. It would seem for all the world there’s been a change of suns. Sudden is the bursting of the ancient veil. A vast sunshower of the soul changes the world we are in its essence, which is more than can be said for the shattering stunt responsible for putting Socorro on the map and moving Einstein to respond: “The release of atom power has changed everything but our way of thinking.”⁵ It’s not the atom but the mind that splits. Because, when soul comes to its own, everything can change. Our soul has the focus and may come forward with the intent to shake our ways up, make us novel in our means, new in our meaning, more brilliant than the colours that in a flash of summer morning took the mountains and the sky.

Two explosions with a crucial difference. On the route of the dead man, we see and hear:

“War making naught the sweet smiling calm of life,
Battle and rapine, ruin and massacre
Are still the fierce pastimes of man’s warring tribes;
An idiot hour destroys what centuries made...”⁶

That loud sharp clap is the No sound of nuclei shattered by “the riven invisible atom’s omnipotent force.”⁷

But the explosion of new life we feel when our soul finally surfaces: this is like controlled radioactivity. It’s the holy grail science hasn’t found. It’s conscious, transformative: a flower of light explodes in the centre of our being. Our being of light, round whom is growing a healing body of light, comes forward to stand in front: the being our soul is becoming. The person we actually are has not only a calm wisdom to guide our human nature, step by step, but also the sweet silent power to take up and begin to transform whatever in us we’re willing to hand over to the mysterious forces that produced our kind.⁸

“A solitary second can be the spark potent to explode a whole past.”⁹ What happens in that second?

“One is like an explosive that nothing can resist, and one bursts out from one’s prison

in a blaze of light.”¹⁰ Not the light we know, but full and rich, a fundamental radiance. “If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst forth at once in the sky, that would be like the splendour of the Mighty One.”¹¹ But the soul is a mighty shy one, still and quiet; even when bursting forth in light so intense it fills our being,¹² still it comes out of the quiet, like the burning bush. Though patient enduring effort often precedes emergence, this moving forward may be far from gradual. Something opens that nothing in the world ever prepared us for. Suddenly, forcibly our soul can burst through its veil, which might feel like detonation, but one that fills us with delight. It has a forceful sweetness to it, so you feel you touch some smiling substance of immortality, which once stabilised never leaves you. Or it does leave you stripped down to the divine spark. For some, no explosion’s necessary, no veil evident, only soul embracing surface life in quiet constant presence. Your life once immersed in the soul-presence forever changes: step, fall or parachute back, and you’re meeting in the endless moment where the part your soul first touched in you remains in that embrace.

I’m writing here, New Mexico, in the blowing dust. A few miles from the river of this place, stuck between extinct volcanoes and mountain ranges hazed from wildfire smoke, I’m in a stretch of valley not too awfully far from the site of that first, mesmerising explosion near the northern outer limits of the White Sands Proving Ground. That July morning the Jornada will be remembered by — the overclouding kept growing and, glowing, held hot skies. Golden-yellow. Orange-crimson. Purple-green. White-blue. Those colours eyes had to see for our minds to imagine. There are other eyes, on the face of our own internal desert, that enjoy the sight of that far more beautiful second blast, the one (or the Trinity site) inside ourselves; exploding forward with the exact force needed to make our world whole.

Too small words that mean so much, or nothing at all. Higher nature: so is it merely, hovering subtle and tenuous, above us, having no effect on our life? Far from it. The extension of the soul, its subtle form, is rich in texture; velvet soft, it can modify the vital substance of the emotional nature. Even this thin surface crust may be touched, respond to others in kind. So subtle is soul, it sees through subtlety. Nor is it all nuance: its nucleus carries with it stupendous force. The soul possesses “ineffable plasticity”¹³ like plasma. And at its core — the core of the supernature — you are at the centre of God, burning with the divine fire.

As I write these lines, orange flame, up to summer 2011 the largest wildfire in New Mexican history, licks at the edges of Los Alamos National Laboratory, crown jewel of our nuclear deterrence. We live in a fire, not in a dream. Before our open eyes we begin to see a white gold light in the Los Alamos of our soul.

The atom of science pales before the dynamics of our own soul-atom.

Notes and References:

1. From Robert Jungk, *Brighter Than a Thousand Suns: A Personal History of the Atomic Scientists*, trans. James Cleugh, Victor Gollanz, 1956. The phrase is based on the still-open dialogue of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

2. “If you are asked, ‘who are you in this physical body,’ the answer shall be, ‘I am the soul, in the form of an atom; this soul-atom has the splendour of a crore of suns.’” From public speech, 19th century Tamil saint, Swami Ramalingam. See T.R. Thulasiram, *Arut Perum Jothi and Deathless Body*, Vol. 1, Univ. of Madras, 1980, p. 215. This mysterious atom surely neither splits nor explodes. Not even full-on with nothing will it shatter. What it may do is wait, wait long, till all things are ready with us. It may then simply extend, in an effulgence, growing toward greater wholeness. But we are permitted to feel like a pyrotechnic device as we enjoy the dazzling light from the show of fireworks our soul has set off to celebrate its independence day. While, “for some, psychic emergence might feel more like a gradual dawn or the glimmering through of sacred starlight than an explosion — hushed, quiet, humble” (Lynda Lester, personal communication, 2012).

3. The Mother, *Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 3, see 30 October 1962, p. 400.

4. Its Maker is not the soul, but the force of that One we call out to by so many names. And that force alone answering the aspiration of the ages can make soul and matter equal and one. Its full-fledged form will be soul made flesh.

5. Albert Einstein, from letter published in Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, May 1946 (archives, website of the Educational Foundation for Nuclear Science). Einstein added: “I should have been a watchmaker.”

6. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, SABCL, Vols. 28-29, 1970, p. 440.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

8. Antoinette Lucie Avegno, my late beloved wife, said these seven words to me, early one morning in June, two months ago, in Pioneer Valley. What we were saying is forgotten. I only remember these words.

9. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1970, p. 356.

10. The Mother, *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 9, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1977, p. 136.

11. *Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, chapter 11, verse 12. J. Robert Oppenheimer, scientific director, Manhattan Project, recalled that this verse (with “I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds”) flashed through his mind as he watched the Trinity nuclear fireball. Dawn was still dark. Then it was white. The atomic age had come to a permanent start. Fireball became cloud forming a strange summer rain — jade green melted sand and sprinkling sheets of dust — insinuating into the grain of the Jornada del Muerto. Trinitite, a mineral new to the earth, was born on that hot wasteland of a Monday morning, July 16, 1945. The overwhelming flash startled a blind girl who was fifty miles away: Georgia Green, from Socorro. She was riding with family on a desert highway, on the way to a music lesson in Albuquerque. “What was that?” she said. The blasted Trinity gadget worked. Energy will do that. The secret laboratory on the mesa to the north had done well. Tales that cattle turned white or grey were told too often to be urban legend.

12. Wayne Bloomquist, *God Shall Grow Up: Body, Soul, and Earth Evolving Together*, Pondy Publishing, 2001, p. 32. “In mid-December, I suddenly came down with a fever....I perspired profusely for three days....My bedroom was...a sweat lodge....The third day...in the middle of the afternoon...an intense light suddenly filled my being....I had the sensation...I had become the light....I heard the words in my head, ‘Mother, I never knew I loved you so much.’ I...started to sob...the sweetest tears imaginable....I felt fine now...no fever or weakness....With that experience, my life took a 180-degree turn.” He reflects: “I had spontaneously thought of the Mother because my consciousness was already turned toward her....A Christian...would likely have a similar experience with Jesus.” A few seconds formed the bedrock of a life.

13. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vols. 22-24, 1970, p. 1113. The original letter to which Sri Aurobindo replied is found in Dilip Kumar Roy, *Sri Aurobindo Came To Me*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1952, p. 471. From the letter Dilip wrote: "...I experienced a velvety softness within and a feeling of ineffable plasticity which rapidly grew into something so concrete that I felt almost as if I could touch it with my fingers!...My restlessness was redeemed by peace and my darkness by a radiance which seemed too incredible to be true and yet too vivid to be dismissed as wishful thinking. And to me it seemed so utterly convincing because it seemed to descend, like an avalanche, from nowhere — to sweep me off my feet when I least expected it."

(This is a substantially much revised version of the essay which appeared in *Collaboration* in Fall 2012)

On Reading Sri Aurobindo: Blindness, Insight, Outlook and a Perspective

Murali Sivaramkrishnan

A Prefatory Note:

The subtitle of this piece would certainly recall the famed theoretical essay of the same name on the rhetoric of contemporary criticism by the American critic Paul de Man. However what follows is far from any hermeneutical exegesis or any interrogation into the protean fields of theory and counter-theory even in the Indian context. My intentions are merely only to gather together the con/text(s) of the Aurobindian texts as not-read by the ardent devotees, or on the other hand explicated by self-styled scholars and their collective blindness which could hamper any serious “reading” or “interpretative essay”. Even introspection is stilled into submission and converted into being mere un-self-reflective survey. Sri Aurobindo needs to be read and those possibilities of reading never should be taken for granted. No amount of prescription could lead one to the truth of the text. All reading calls for a verification of the text against oneself and other texts.

This is an initial outline for perspective and should not be misjudged as a finality: that would amount to mistaking the map for the territory.

For the ardent devotee who casually or intentionally visits the Sri Aurobindo Ashram the works of Sri Aurobindo appear as manna from heaven to be lapped up unhesitatingly and perhaps later conveniently forgotten during the demands and involvements of other things. He or she may pick up these works ranging from political treatises through philosophical speculations, to poetry and interpretative spiritual ideologies, and often browse through them as desired or directed by another friend or devotee and pass on. And but for the increasing number of interested tourists and inquiring novices the serious preoccupations of the Ashram and the larger discourses that have evolved round the significant works of Sri Aurobindo would have remained largely unnoticed. That there is an increasing traffic drawn toward his notion of man-making and his own version of evolving spirituality certainly speaks volumes for the significance of Sri Aurobindo in the present. Nevertheless the question remains: how is he to be read, and what are the larger issues which still cling on to his discourses which might go to hamper the quality of understanding or even further the process of spiritual enlightenment and reasoning? How is he to be read in the light of new emergent philosophies and theoretical engagements in an ever-changing and complex intellectual present? Of course another significant question

also surfaces side by side: why go to all these needless mind games, why not simply read him as many have always conveniently read him and allow the inner amplification of his own vision to do the other tasks? For the simple-minded this last option should certainly be enough but for the ardent seeker there is indeed a whole array of interrogations ensuing from an intense reading of Sri Aurobindo's version of spirituality.

Let us take these issues one by one. Because for the unquestioning reader nothing actually matters we will leave such a reader to his/her own fate. The situation of the inquisitive reader could be generally seen under two heads: those who have read only the works of Sri Aurobindo for the most and are drawn into his amazing vortex through and through, on account of the innumerable disciples and their coteries; and second, those who have read and assimilated a number of "other" stuff and are gravitating toward the master's superior brand of spirituality armed with queries and questions galore. Reading and re-reading Sri Aurobindo's own works for them then would be an act of enlightenment, and the second category of inquisitive readers would go on asking questions just like those early generation of ardent devotees who had the great fortune of the proximity of the master himself and his own direct presence in the answers delivered to them even otherwise.

Sri Aurobindo's works are indeed like a gold mine and they appear then as being endless and pure, exciting to the core. The delight is also equally endless. Little doubt that, however, unconditional swallowing of a text without placing it in a clear perspective or clarifying its various aspects critically amounts to no reading at all.

In fact, as the master himself points out, either the absence of a critical insight or the lack of inward vision would result in simple veneration or drastic dismissal. This also brings us to the situation of the self-styled unbeliever who dismisses the entire oeuvre of Sri Aurobindo as crass non-sense significantly because they are the products of a different generation, belong to a different order of discourse, and they revolve around spirituality which is decried in an age of commercial capitalism and market economy. To corroborate their dismissal they would also draw parallels with the simple-minded consumer mentioned earlier who claims to be "illuminated" and "blessed" on simply visiting the Ashram at Pondicherry, praying for a few hours at the Samadhi, or elsewhere, and browsing through a book or two from off the shelves. There are of course innumerable poetasters also who read and "interpret" Sri Aurobindo in order to pick holes in his arguments and proffer them as critical interpretations! They hardly matter in the long run. Spirituality and critical enterprise sometimes appear to run counter too. How does one resolve these issues?

Now to return to the inquisitive reader. The works of Sri Aurobindo — the texts as we have them now — are increasing by the day, on account of the archival research that goes into it. The secondary or interpretative scholarship also is increasing alongside. There are also enterprising scholars who engage with the works of Sri Aurobindo for securing a PhD degree for themselves. Many of them stray into the master's works for want of anything else or simply on account of writing on an Indian author in English (the resource materials are also fairly vast indeed!) The range of Sri Aurobindo is such that he could satisfy any

scholar in almost any field whatsoever. So then sociologists, historians, philosophers, literary theorists, psychologists, anthropologists, cultural theorists, Sanskriticians, Indic scholars, life scientists, cultural geographers — you name it, they are all there! There is nothing wrong, sinful, or clever about exposing the works of Sri Aurobindo to the inquiries of different disciplinary methodologies. This goes to prove the inexhaustibility of Sri Aurobindo's scholarship and contribution. But the moment some too enterprising devotee steps in and cautions the “unwary” and the “radical” thinker of stepping into mined territory, Sri Aurobindo scholarship suffers unduly.

For the most, even among those so called self-styled scholarly inquirers into Sri Aurobindo, one finds little or no scholarship apart from what gets reflected from the master's own skill and vision. I would like to classify these sorts of forays in general into two sets: as mere descriptive essays, and interpretative monographs. The first type usually ends up quoting Sri Aurobindo in large chunks and leaving the quotes as self-explanatory. The examiners also would find it easy to sanction degrees and diplomas to these “devotional” scholars and their dissertations unquestioningly. The second type would bring in some comparative elements quite tentatively and with great care for fear of crushing the master's words (quite unwarranted, no doubt!) and make sure that Sri Aurobindo's position is uniquely preserved even in the course of the textual arguments. These self-styled scholars then parade as arch Aurobindonians never ever casting a single glance at either Sri Aurobindo's works or their own (mis)readings ever afterwards.

Sri Aurobindo might be his own interpreter or rather his works could stand testimony to their own insights — but scholarship is indeed something more demanding than submissive commentaries, surreptitious asides, or supportive descriptions. Considering the fact that Sri Aurobindo himself was a master at critical thinking and encouraged anyone who came under his spell to further the intellectual realm, these self-professed Aurobindonians are wont to cause more damage than necessary. Sri Aurobindo certainly is a demanding intellectual, a radical mystic, who needs to be taken a little more seriously rather than left to defend himself in these so-called critical dissertations which are nowhere near to what he himself would have acceded to.

Over the last four decades after the birth centenary volumes (SABCL) were released, scholarship in and around Sri Aurobindo studies has certainly increased many folds. However, I am yet to come across evidences of critical writing of the level of a Sisir Kumar Ghose or a K D Sethna or a Srinivasa Iyengar. I, for one, had the good fortune as a young research scholar in the eighties to interact in person with these extraordinary giants in the field of Sri Aurobindo scholarship. K D Sethna impressed me with his amazingly broad sweep of influences and perspicacious brain. He never let go of his reading even after he came to settle in the precincts of the Ashram. Sisir Kumar Ghose on the other hand was a sort of peripatetic scholar who gravitated to Sri Aurobindo after a considerable stint with Aldous Huxley and later at Shantiniketan with the Gurudev. My conversations with him reminded me of dialogues with Aristotle or Coleridge or Harold Bloom. Srinivasa Iyengar had read, researched and taught English literature before coming

under the blinding light of Sri Aurobindo. His monumental biography is a piece of well-researched work that proffers a no-nonsense background to Sri Aurobindo studies. Above all this soft-spoken academic was as erudite as ever on several levels at the same time. What mattered in the case of these three early intellectuals and academics were that they kept a steady head in the face of critical inquiry. Sethna moved among the works of Sri Aurobindo with the eye of a classical scholar, Iyengar read and argued with the tenor of a comparatist, and Ghose brought metaesthetic dimensions to the entire discourse. Granted Sri Aurobindo is a visionary who sought yogic sanction in all his pursuits and thereby it might be mandatory for an equally ardent follower to practise yoga rather than intellectually engage with his teaching in order to reach that spiritual realisation which the less-fortunate scholar might only cerebrally conceive. So then, we need to keep in mind the fact that there are these two broad segments —the simple-minded devotee and the inquiring scholar. Four decades of Sri Aurobindo scholarship had produced perhaps a mere handful of significant works, free from mere rehash or simple citation, and even less genuinely concerned scholars.

As we have seen one of the biggest impediments in Sri Aurobindo scholarship had been the fact that the master's words themselves have been the most adequate explication of his vision. All one had to do was to put one's hand into the complete works or whatever, and pull out the gold vein — the rest will follow suit. For the unwary, no interpretation, no critical inquiry, no comparative reasoning — all it requires is the setting up of a string of citations and quotations, and parade them as one's own finding! How embarrassing! How unethical! The early scholars had their job well cut out — they had to read and interpret Sri Aurobindo in the light of critical and clearheaded thinking. The later scholars follow suit — the difference being the significant lack of critical reasoning. In Tamil they speak of grinding the already ground dough — in similar scale Aurobindo scholarship has deteriorated to mere rehash and thus lifeless and practically dead.

Citing the master's words themselves is one thing, but allowing someone else to speak on his behalf is another. For those schooled in English writing Iyengar and Sethna appear to offer the ultimate, and A.B Purani and sometimes Nolini Kanta Gupta, or Prema Nandakumar, could casually get thrown in. The worst form of torture is when some “spinelessly insightful” critics are paraded as having said this or written that when all they had done would have been to draw extensively from Sri Aurobindo's own writings. Isn't it silly and insipid to claim that one has quoted the master at length and thus arrived at academic Nirvana? Isn't it even more silly and stupid to cite such rehashed chunks as corroborative evidence? **Perspicacious readers like Sisir Kumar Ghose, Sethna, and Prema Nandakumar would have spent sumptuous hours battling with the master's words racking their brains out before making themselves bold enough for borrowing those as evidences of what they want to establish.** When seen along the likes of Homer and Dante and Shakespeare if Sri Aurobindo's poetry holds up on its own then certainly it is worth perusing. When compared and contrasted with a volley of writers and intellectuals who had lived alongside him Sri Aurobindo's works are worth enquiring into, that should

give us enough reason for delving in on our own. Either way mere rehash or sheer quotation should never compensate for direct encounter and inquiry. Political thought and action, historical reasoning and interpretation, philological exegesis and practice, philosophical inquiry and spiritual exploration, poetics and textual interpretation are all the characteristic strengths of Sri Aurobindo the visionary, and to neglect these in favour of citing someone who has merely lifted the master's own words as an authority, is to turn a blind eye to that critical inquiry which Sri Aurobindo himself stood for always. Of course it is not for all and sundry to interpret for oneself – that is a demanding task even for the demigods!

This brings me to the crux of my arguments: blindness, insight, outlook and finally a holistic perspective. In the early eighties when I was taking up my studies on Sri Aurobindo, Narasimhaiah (CDN), the doyen of Indian English scholars who established a unique centre for indigenous research in what came to be identified as postcolonial studies later (*Dhvanyaloka*, in Mysore) asked me quite derisively if I could cite some instances of poetry in the entire oeuvre of Sri Aurobindo. He himself had been brought up under the long shadow of New Criticism having studied at Cambridge with F.R. Leavis and other eminent scholars of his times, and went to question everything from the point of view of form narrative and practice. I had to resort to several instances from the poetry of Sri Aurobindo in order to convince the eminent professor that there could be other levels of poetry as different from the Eurocentric that he was quite familiar with. Such was the leniency of scholarship that resided in CDN that he was willing to listen and comprehend from a younger scholar — and accept many things which he would later argue about! Sri Aurobindo's poetry we had come to realise by then had another level that required a different set of responses. Later CDN would write of *Savitri*, "if poetry is a mode of meditation, *dhyanamantra* you would find it here" (CDN, 1987) What Sri Aurobindo's works demanded for a clearer appreciation was an approach that was non-Eurocentric and at the same time a little different from that prevalent in those times. And only those among the innumerable self-styled arch-defenders of an overtly Indian perspective who could evolve an outlook that deviated from the dominant modernist vision could gather the required sensibility for responding to his works. While poets as different in outlook as Kathleen Raine and V K Gokak could read new lines and evolving directions in Sri Aurobindo, Indian modernists like P Lal and Nissim Ezekiel dismissed his work as derivative and deplorable. The issue then would certainly have been not the text of Sri Aurobindo but the contexts in which they were hyped and re-presented by the discourse of the spiritual which had by then overtaken and wrapped up the works themselves. New Indian sensibilities demanded the shedding of all that was debilitating and undermining, and the over dramatisation of the spiritual in all its ignorance by the non-initiated led to the growing intolerance of the ostensible ornamentation of all that metaphysical stuff of unreason. The tremendous impact of west-centric modernist discourses wiped out whatever indigenous sensibilities still residually clung to the Indian mind. All reading was modified under the light of new scholarship, under new reason.

Blindness resulted. The Ashram and his followers were closing down. After the great

dawn of awakening that came to be recognised as the Indian Renaissance which never took off afterwards and was never even allowed to come to its logical conclusion, a great night of insensitivity descended. Scholarship in Sri Aurobindo studies came to mean only those sanctioned by the devout and the so-called saintly. The scribbles from the margin and from other discourses were silenced under the great arch of the Aurobindonians that was built of solid rock and guaranteed the faithful salvation and nirvana while the unfaithful rampaged on the outskirts as academics and intellectuals, forever kept away from following the silent pilgrim into the interior of supramental manifestation.

The film maker John Abraham a long time ago in a jovial mood told me that he had once explored the possibility of working on a documentary on Sri Aurobindo. After days of shooting in and around the Ashram in Pondicherry he moved over back home to the studio to develop the rushes of the film (remember those were good old days of the non-digital films!) Alas to his dismay he found all that he had shot had been overexposed in the “supramental glare of the Maharishi.”

These are of course apocryphal, however, they lead us into the heart of what matters. The discourses that have crystallised around the work of Sri Aurobindo demarcated territories of reverence and desecration. As the poet had phrased it: *The death of the poet was kept from his poems...* (and) *...the words of a dead man are modified in the guts of the living.* The works of Sri Aurobindo survived like Ishmael alone to tell the tale. They needed to be critically engaged with and their “truth” inquired into. But the first step in that direction had to be taken in the dark under the blinding light of the supramental! Well, too much of the sun can cause our too fragile sensibilities to warp and burn out. The followers of Sri Aurobindo’s brand of spirituality rose and fell with the tide and turn of birthdays and *darshan* days schooled and tutored under scrupulous Gurus who interpreted the master’s words suitably to the uninitiated. All that happened was a mere rehash of the words of the dead man. They were not allowed to germinate in the guts of the living for fear of the legendary doubts.

When someone speaks out there is a natural tendency to turn the blind eye. What is already known is always most welcome and what is interrogated and unearthed causes disturbances and so is neglected as irrelevant. The generally agreeable was the generally enjoyable. Insight was a laborious process that led to nowhere in particular.

Scholarship in Sri Aurobindo studies thus far had taken these directions: interpretative in terms of select texts and discourses specifically *recoursing* to acceptable readings. Comparatist perceptions like those afforded by Prema Nandakumar or Rhoda P LeCocq or Harold Coward had endeavoured to open up new directions in critical thinking but did not sustain sufficient support afterwards from elsewhere. Manoj Das, Rohit Mehta, Haridas Chaudhuri and Kishore Gandhi sought higher correspondences from Indic and non-Eurocentric directions, but the foundations they built up were rehashed by the next generation of scholars as dissertations and newer studies. The early generation of scholars had the guts to make new inroads while the later generation felt comfortable in sticking to the known and the predictable. There is an Arabian proverb that goes like this: *Traveller,*

there is no path; paths are made by walking. Now to break new wood one has to await the strayed reveller. However, the strangeness of the territory is such that even the castaways are camouflaged and submerged. In this mire of the spiritual to build a fire one needed to get away first. All fires have died out.

The living spirit of inquiry that Sri Aurobindo so carefully preserved and cultivated appears to be misplaced. Vision, experiment and experience had been the catchwords of the master both in his creative writing as well as in his philosophical inquiry (he was equally creative in both realms). But the quality of experimentation has begun to ebb away and along with it that special insight which is the inward eye of the initiate.

On Himself

I had no urge toward spirituality in me, I developed spirituality. I was incapable of understanding metaphysics, I developed into a philosopher. I had no eye for painting – I developed it by Yoga. I transformed my nature from what it was to what it was not. I did it by a special manner, not by a miracle and I did it to show what could be done and how it could be done. I did not do it out of any personal necessity of my own or by a miracle without any process. I say that if it is not so, then my Yoga is useless and my life was a mistake – a mere absurd freak of Nature without meaning or consequence. You all seem to think it a great compliment to me to say that what I have done has no meaning for anybody except myself – it is the most damaging criticism on my work that could be made. I also did not do it by myself, if you mean by myself the Aurobindo that was. He did it by the help of Krishna and the Divine Shakti. I had help from human sources also. (SABCL, vol.26, pp.148-9, 13-2-1935)

It was not any such thing [about the intellect] before I started the Yoga. I started the Yoga in 1904 and all my work except some poetry was done afterwards. Moreover, my intelligence was inborn and so far as it grew before the Yoga, it was not by training but by a wide haphazard activity developing ideas from all things read, seen or experienced. (Ibid, p.222, 13-11-1936)

The genuineness of the man and his single-minded commitment are so superhuman that we have hard time considering that Sri Aurobindo was human after all. Anything that appears to call for a little more effort than was normal we humans ascribe to the divine and thus turn our blind spots into auras of admiration and adoration. This is nothing but sheer marginalisation and isolation of the more enterprising among us. History reveals what we humans have done to such greats almost at all times irrespective of geography and culture. Thus what we achieve by our blindness is loss of insight and that profounder perception — that will to achieve.

However, as Sri Aurobindo asserts:

Impossible is our mask of things to be

Mortal the road to immortality. (*Sonnets from Manuscripts*, c.1934 – 1947)

We have identified several overlapping circles of discourse here. The primary one is that aura of *Supermind* which may or may not have descended. There are those determined disciples who would love to hang on to the nebulous godhead that lies like a nimbus round Sri Aurobindo. There remains little doubt that he was a guru of extraordinary powers and will. Few people have achieved what he did in his time. But disability to engage intellectually with his works amounts to indifference and insensitivity to the higher demands of spirituality. What he achieved was definitely through a solemn struggle — a product of cultural history that he himself was. The secondary factor which is no less significant is the one of his textual works which are also thereby clouded by “faith” and “belief” on one side and thereby placed in a unique position of unquestionable authority. On the other side as we have seen they inculcate blindness. Sanctified by the establishment of devoted believers whatever goes for interpretation is mere rehash of his own words. Any effort towards a critical vision or any element of debate and interrogation is viewed with sheer culpability and thereby corruption of the devotee’s mind. Many are the ardent devotees who flock to the works of this supreme master of Yoga – they genuinely seek solace and comfort from the travails and traumas of this world. Several are the seekers who do indeed find their desired peace. They do not wish to be disturbed. They are blissful and at peace. Let us leave them to their own fate. Then there are these arch critics of Sri Aurobindo who target his works and the entire discourse that has sprung around the ashram and mock and deride the devout followers: for them this collective act of worship around tombs and *samadhis* appears silly and absurd. Their prejudiced eyes and biased visions proffer them only darkness and murk. They are thus innately blind. Let us leave them also to their sorry fates. He doesn’t need us to defend him from the bulldozers of mockery and derision. His was a passion for the infinite and the beyond.

But there is an element of struggle and quest in Sri Aurobindo’s works which need to be taken quite seriously indeed. As we saw earlier he was a product of his times and the cultural and intellectual context of his becoming are there for us as leads to his process of thought and the formulation of his philosophy. We have to recognise that Sri Aurobindo was an intellectual and a philosopher — his works and words are ample evidences for this view. He was a poet and essentially one as he himself has vouched. In fact as I have argued elsewhere his system of belief can be understood and resolved only as an aesthetic circuit with the human seeker on one end and the Godhead of the Spirit at the other end. So then this system would also require to be seen in the light of cultural and historical scholarship. Sri Aurobindo’s life that is often recognised by many scholars as falling into three distinct phases begins with his European exposure and return to India and his political involvements leading finally to the withdrawn life of a seeker in Pondicherry. In all these three phases he had to encounter forces of decadence and degeneracy.

Let us take them one by one. His early upbringing by an anglophile father led to his over exposure to the aftereffects of the enlightenment rationality and an Anglo-Germanic philological heritage. His return to India was marked by a nagging self-doubt and an eagerness to identify with his non-Eurocentric self. This search for identity can be seen in

his early political writing — the plethora of linguistic and cultural contexts that were reeling under a unifying colonial yoke afforded him the perspective toward a holistic synthesis, which leaves in itself a Hegelian trace. He was an activist and sought direct confrontation with the authority of the establishment. There are interesting exchanges between Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi. Sri Aurobindo's withdrawal into French Pondicherry after his activist political stint reveals his desire for a synthesis of the intellect and the all-enfolding spirit. He could envision the larger framework of cosmic action wherein the smallness and pettiness of little minds petered into insignificance. He was single-minded in his pursuit of the spirit and a holistic transformation was his genuine desire. He was like the Buddha in that not until all life was on its way to be transformed will he let go, and individual nirvanas meant little for him. He devised a philosophy of spirituality and also evolved a map for the initiate to follow suit. The discourse that evolved later around all these contours is even now hanging like a smoke-screen and his individual intellectual trajectory is almost already well lost. Much like an Upanishadic seer that he was, he insisted his followers to engage with their own yogic experiences as he himself had done. He had of course many sides to his personality: the political thinker, the activist, the seeker, the yogi, the philosopher and the poet. Whatever preoccupations he went through he never let go of the last — that of the poet. Poetry afforded him the unique blending of inspiration and expression. The search for the mantra or that perfect unison of *sabda* and *artha*, sound and sense meant the quest for the ultimate unison of inspiration (vision) and expression (word). 'I used *Savitri* as means of ascension' he wrote in a letter.

"I used *Savitri* as a means of ascension. I began with it on a certain mental level, each time I could reach a higher level I rewrote from that level... In fact *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative"

He wrote and reworked on the *Savitri* manuscript till his passing — the first canto alone had undergone thirteen revisions. Poetry for him worked as an index of the evolving human consciousness. His works are thus to be seen as maps of spiritual reading. To read them as holy words of the master is to behold their outer skeletal structure and like holding on to the shells of meaning. Let those ardent devotees clutch them for what they are worth but the master himself would have avowed that the not-so-simple minded at least trudge the narrow road of spiritual seeking and not be left in the blind alleys of adulation. Perhaps one of the major reasons for the intellectual stasis that is profoundly felt in the Sri Aurobindo circles today is on account of this blindness that withholds any possible insight. For the literary minded there is virtually god's plenty in Sri Aurobindo's works to spur them into comparative discussions and interrogations. For the philosophically inclined Sri Aurobindo has carved out new and newer niches of trajectories to be explored. For the spiritual minded the Integral Yoga that he has so painfully evolved in his own spiritual quest marked by eclecticism is left to be experimented upon and explored further.

Kishore Gandhi had experimented with the ideas of spiritual evolution in his works very much like the author of *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*. KD Sethna had ushered in comparative scholarship through his vast reading and Ghose had made new inroads with his metaesthetic. He had also drawn attention to the repeated misuse of the high-sounding Aurobindonian as an adjective and even suggested Aurobindian as a more modest alternate term instead. Haridas Chaudhuri and Frederic Spiegelberg tendered a forum for a dialogue and a symposium. Even in my own modest early book, *The Mantra of Vision*, I had attempted a holistic vision of the master Yogi and his creative work from an Indian perspective. Even in my later essay, entitled “Towards a Spiritual Aesthetics of the Environment: Quality, Space, and Being in Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri,” published in the US based journal, *ISLE Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, Vol. 18. Issue 2 (Spring 2011) pp. 302-322 — I had visualised a unique perspective in terms of ecological dimensions and thus pioneered a new dimension in Sri Aurobindo criticism. In *Savitri Bhavan*, the poet and visionary Shraddhavan appears to have given a new direction to re-reading Sri Aurobindo while in the collective enterprise of SACAR under the direction of Ananda Reddy, serious interest in Sri Aurobindo scholarship appears to be flourishing. Their occasional seminars and workshops favour some sort of self-reflexivity. Many years ago Sreenivasa Iyengar and Prema Nandakumar had set Sri Aurobindo’s writing in the intellectual perspective and larger framework of Indian writing in English to be explored and furthered by the next generation of scholars. Alas, the genuine scholar like the genuine devotee is a far cry in the present. Our times are marked by amazing changes and advancement in science and technology, the world we live in the present is definitely much more “advanced” than the times of Sri Aurobindo when the imperial and colonial forces held potent and powerful sway over all and everything. The market economy of the capitalist present and its itinerant scholarship grounded on claims to information that is universally accessible have blinded the already blind human eye further. The dismissal and de-valuation of meta-narratives of the last century have laid claim to a territory of panoramic ignorance. Knowledge is doubted and wisdom is sidelined. Information has risen to the centre stage. And ignorance is prided as wisdom it has indeed become folly to be wise and remain so. Had he lived on beyond his times, Sri Aurobindo would have charted out new directions in the present. He would have been like the child in the story yelling out that the emperor is truly naked. However, his residual presence and urgency of intellectual inquiry have been erased and silenced. His works are rehashed and his words echo down the long corridor of forgotten memory and a misplaced past. Nevertheless, the eternal eye that would have led the inquirer forward is not yet completely closed though. There is a tiny fraction of opening. So then all is not yet lost. What is required is a critical temperament and a truth-seeking perspective that would not wither in the face of opposition and inclement weather — an outlook that does not succumb to the comfort and convenience of the commonplace and the mediocrity. The grand narratives of yester-years might be ignored by the postmodern present that prides in the here and now, however, profound questions relating to truth and meaning, the nexus of mind and matter, the

interrelationship of nature and human nature, are bound to be tenaciously pursued by those minorities who chance to reflect on their own selves and identities. Perhaps, then, like in the *Dantesque* vision there would arise the spirit of the master himself to lead the genuine seeker even through *Inferno* and *Purgatory* to *Paradiso*. Sri Aurobindo realised early enough that his was a superhuman struggle, to redeem the true spiritual identity of all human kind, he also realised that he had to explore his own inner self continuously and ceaselessly in order to chart out his map for generations to follow suit. His works are genuine asseverations of both these aspects. For the convenience of the present day scholarship he genially assents to being ripped apart as a poet, a philosopher, a political and social thinker, a man of Indian Renaissance, a spiritual yogi who chartered the direct pathway for the divinisation of the human being, and a literary critic. In the contexts of contemporary criticism this could be termed as *dismemberment* and *dehumanisation* because the organic unity of the man and his work is dislocated. What usually happens when such piecemeal readings are indulged in is that sloppy mis-readings are flaunted as original findings! Believe me, there are research scholars who bring up amazingly imaginative topics like *Sri Aurobindo and Paulo Coelho*, simply because they find that the latter speaks about the mystical, and magical. There are others who lapse into “spiritualism” without even recognising the terminological distinctions of the term or its historical connotations. For the unwary, *magic*, *meta-magical themes*, *mysticism* and *spirituality* are just terms which are mutually interchangeable. The true spirit of critical enquiry has petered into shallow and superficial research — the requirements of the present also appear to be thus merely skin-deep. Now, like HG Wells’s tale of the valley of the blind, all of us are made to believe that to be blind is truly natural and thus made to turn quizzically toward one suitably endowed with sight and vision. *Whither is sped the visionary gleam? Where is it, the glory and the dream?*

In one of his remarkable poems Sri Aurobindo has written:

Who was it that came to me in a boat made of dream-fire,
 With his flame brow and his sun-gold body?
 Melted was the silence into a sweet secret murmur,
 "Do you come now? Is the heart's fire ready?"

Hidden in the recesses of the heart something shuddered,
 It recalled all that the life's joy cherished,
 Imaged the felicity it must leave lost forever,
 And the boat passed and the gold god vanished.

Now within the hollowness of the world's breast inhabits —
 For the love died and the old joy ended —
 Void of a felicity that has fled, gone forever,
 And the gold god and the dream boat come not. (*The Dream Boat* 1930, revised 1942)

Is it too much to ask to keep the heart's fire ready to be able to greet the dream boat? But first we need the strength enough to dream and to recognise the boat as it comes into our sight. Having misplaced it we end up dancing absurdly round in circles. The simple-minded get saturated with contentment and become complacent. Once our outlook gets changed and our doors of perception are cleansed the voice of Sri Aurobindo would reach us clear and undisturbed. And the seeker in us will be awakened to pursue that action from where we left off.

Notes On Authors

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

Anilbaran Roy (3.7.1890—3.11.1974) was born in the village of Guir in the district of Burdwan in Bengal to Nabakumar Roy and Chandibala Devi. A student of Scottish Church College and St. Xavier's College of Kolkata, he obtained his M.A. degree in English and Philosophy and Bachelor of Law degree from the Calcutta University. He was a remarkable scholar who excelled not only in subjects like Physics and Mathematics but also in languages like Sanskrit, French and German. He worked as a professor in Hetampur College of Birbhum and Christian College of Bankura. In 1921 he resigned from his services and joined the Non-Cooperation Movement started by Mahatma Gandhi. He was also elected as the Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. In 1924 he was in charge of the Corporation Elections which was initiated under the New Law. He also played a pivotal role in organising the Swaraj Party established by Chittaranjan Das and Pandit Motilal Nehru.

He was introduced to Sri Aurobindo's works during the peak of his political career. In 1924 he was arrested and imprisoned at the Alipore Central Jail and Berhampore Central Jail respectively. After his release from prison in 1926 he left for Pondicherry following the instruction of Sri Aurobindo and spent 40 years in Sri Aurobindo Ashram during which he engrossed himself in the Integral Yoga. He was acclaimed as the best exponent of the Gita as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo. *'The Message of the Gita'* edited by him was taught at the University of Cambridge. In 1935 as a mark of protest against a defamatory book penned by Miss Mayo he wrote the book *'Mother India'* with Sri Aurobindo's approval. His other notable works include *'Srimad Bhagavat Gita'*, *'Gitar Bani'*, *'Purushottam Sri Aurobindo'*, *'Sri Aurobindo O Bartaman Jagat'*, *'Songs from the Soul'*, *'India's Mission in the World'*, *'Sri Aurobindo and the New Age'*, *'World Crisis'*, etc. He also translated Sri Aurobindo's *'Essays on the Gita'*, *'Uttarpara Speech'* and *'Yoga and Its Objects'* into Bengali.

In 1966 he returned to Bengal to spread the message of Sri Aurobindo after spending forty years in the Ashram. He worked to abolish the partition of India and unite the nation on the lines of provincial self-government as preached by Sri Aurobindo. He started the publication of a Bengali weekly named *'Swarnayug'* and an English monthly named *'Light of India'* and edited both the journals. He also established the *'Sarva Sewak Sangha'* to spread the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Krishna Roy was a Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy at Jadavpur University. Along with Sm. Indrani Sanyal, she was one of the co-founders of the Centre for Sri Aurobindo Studies in the Jadavpur University. Her areas of interest include phenomenology, hermeneutics, social and political philosophy and contemporary Indian thinkers. She has published and edited several books. At present, she is associated with the Centre for Indological Study and Research at Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata.

Indra Sen (13 May 1903 – 14 March 1994) was a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, psychologist, author, and educator, and the founder of Integral Psychology as an academic discipline. Born in the Jhelum District of Punjab (now part of Pakistan), he grew up in Delhi when his family moved there. From a young age he was interested in the spiritual quest. He completed a Master's degree in both Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Delhi.

On 5 December 1928 he married Lilawati, and they had two children. To further his studies, he enrolled at the University of Freiburg, in Germany, and obtained a Ph.D. in Psychology. He also attended the lectures of Martin Heidegger and taught Indian Philosophy and Sanskrit at the University of Koenigsburg. At this time, his main interests were Hegel's philosophy, and Jung's psychology. He later returned to the University of Delhi. In December 1933 he met Jung when the latter visited Calcutta for the Indian Science Congress. Sen went on to become President of the psychology section of the Indian Science Congress, and was also a recipient of the Eastern-Western psychology lecture award of the Swami Pranavananda Psychology Trust.

In 1934, he first travelled to Pondicherry, and he met Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. After a number of visits, his wife became a devotee of The Mother. In 1945 Dr Sen resigned from the University and moved to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, where his family had already been staying for two years. In following years, through numerous lectures, published writings, and personal contacts, he presented Sri Aurobindo's work to academia and universities, where it became well known for the first time.

In a series of professional papers published from the mid-1930s through the '40s and '50s, he coined the term Integral psychology, to describe the psychological observations contained in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga psychology and philosophy. He also was concerned with the formulation of integral education as presented in the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

These papers were published in 1986 by the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in book form, as *Integral Psychology: The Psychological System of Sri Aurobindo*. Another of Dr Sen's tasks was to develop three centres for the ashram under The Mother's supervision. One was at Jwalapur, near Haridwar, and the other two in the Kumaon Hills - "Mountain Paradise", an orchard, and "Tapogiri", a place for sadhana (spiritual practice). In all of Dr Sen's work, themes of integral and wholeness were very important, and he frequently used terms like "Integral Culture" and "Integral Man."

Index To Authors And Articles In Sraddha, August 2012 – April 2013

Authors

Amal Kiran (KD Sethna)	Nov'12, p.15
Amaury de Riencourt	Aug'12, p.35
Ananda Reddy	Feb'13, p.19
Anilbaran Roy	Apr'13, p.23
Anirvan, Srimat	Aug'12, p.12, Nov'12, p.18, Apr'13, p.10
Anita Chakraborty Goswami	Nov'12, p.76
Arabinda Basu	Apr'13, p.71
Barindra Kumar Ghose	Nov'12, p.11
Debashish Banerji	Aug'12, p.79, Nov'12, p.43, Apr'13, p.42
Deepali Gupta	Apr'13, p.107
Deepti Tewari	Feb'13, p.53
Jay L. Garfield	See under Nalini Bhushan & Jay L. Garfield
Joan Price	Nov'12, p.69
Kittu Reddy	Aug'12, p.25, Feb'13, p.69
Matthijs Cornelissen	Nov'12, p.118
Murali Sivaramakrishnan	Nov'12, p.102, Feb'13, p.116
Nalini Bhushan & Jay L. Garfield	Nov'12, p.84
Nolini Kanta Gupta	Apr'13, p.79
Pravir Malik	Aug'12, p.105
Prema Nandakumar	Feb'13, p.11, Apr'13, p.34
Ramesh Chandra Pradhan	Feb'13, p.43
Rick Lipschutz	Feb'13, p.111
Sachidananda Mohanty	Aug'12, p.145
Sanat Sen	Apr'13, p.85
Sandeep Joshi	Aug'12, p.45
Sarani Ghosal (Mondal)	Feb'13, p.93
Sethna, KD	See under Amal Kiran
Shraddhavan	Aug'12, p.160
Sri Aurobindo	Aug'12, p.9, Nov.12, p.9, Feb'13, p.9, Apr'13, p.7
Srinivasan, MS	Aug'12, p.41, Apr'13, p.95
Subha Mallick	Feb'13, p.37
Supriyo Bhattacharya	Aug'12, p.127
Usharanjan Chakraborty	Aug'12, p.53, Nov.12, p.141, Feb'13, p.82

Articles

- Adwaita of the Gita, The (Anilbaran Roy) – Apr'13, p.23
Arabinda Basu, Professor: a tribute (Shraddhavan) – Aug'12, p.160

Avatar (Debashish Banerji) – Nov’12, p.43
 Bringing Brahman down to earth: Lilavada in colonial India (Nalini Bhushan & Jay L.Garfield) – Nov’12, p.84
 Call to the youth of India, A (Sri Aurobindo) – Apr’13, p.7
 Future of religion, The: towards a new paradigm of religion for a globalising world (Srinivasan, MS) – Apr’13, p.95
 Gayatri Mandala (second sukta) – Vaishwanar Agni (Anirvan, Srimat) – Apr’13, p.10
 Genesis of Sri Aurobindo’s Superman, The (Sandeep Joshi) – Aug’12, p.45
 Georges van Vrekhem: an obituary – Nov’12, p.153
 Gitanuvachan, Pts.3 & 4 (Anirvan, Srimat) – Aug’12, p.12; Pts.5 &6, Nov’12, p.18
 Glorious Future, The (Sri Aurobindo) – Feb’13, p.9
 God and the world (Joan Price) – Nov’12, p.69
 How an Egyptian discovered Sri Aurobindo (Zackaria Moursi) – Nov’12, p.148
 Impact of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo on Indian freedom movement (Kittu Reddy) – Aug’12, p.25
 Involution and evolution (Murali Sivaramakrishnan) – Nov’12, p.102
 Last embodied “Darshan”, The (Amal Kiran) – Nov.12, p.15
 Law of the Way, The (Sri Aurobindo) – Nov’12, p.9
 Management – ‘Man a gem’ or ‘manage men tactfully’ (Deepali Gupta) – Apr’13, p.107
 Mother Divine in Devi Sukta, The (Subha Mallick) – Feb’13, p.37
 Mother image in Sri Aurobindo, The (Prema Nandakumar) – Feb’13, p.11, Apr’13, p.34
 New political system based on Indian ideals, A (Kittu Reddy) – Feb’13, p.69
 Om in *Savitri* and the world (Pravir malik) – Aug’12, p.105
 Ourselves (Sri Aurobindo) – Aug’12, p.9
 Penal labour, mystical longings and international vision: the Paul Richard story (Sachidananda Mohanty) – Aug.12, p.145
 Preparing for the winter journey (Zackaria Moursi) – Apr’13, p.116
 Primacy of the Divine Works, The: understanding Sri Aurobindo’s interpretation of the Gita (Ramesh Chandra Pradhan) – Feb’13, p.43
 Principle of the Integral Yoga, The (Arabinda Basu) – Apr’13, p.71
 Psychic Being, The (Debashish Banerji) – Aug’12, p.79
 Psychology: five major Indian contributions (Matthijs Cornelissen) – Nov’12, p.118
 Reason and religion (Usharanjan Chakraborty) – Feb’13, p.82
 Sad and the sublime, The: Sri Aurobindo’s early lyric poetry (Sarani Ghosal Mondal) – Feb’13, p.93
 ‘Secret face that is our own, The’: Nolini’s body of literature (Rick Lipschutz) – Feb’13, p.111
 Social progress through symbolism and individualism (Usharanjan Chakraborty) – Aug’12, p.53
 Sri Aurobindo and problems of human unity (Amaury de Riencourt) – Aug’12, p.35
 Sri Aurobindo: looking for the true Vedanta (Anita Chakraborty Goswami) – Nov’12, p.76
 Sri Aurobindo on the nature of love (Sanat Sen) – Apr’13, p.85
 Sri Aurobindo: the recluse of Pondicherry (Barindra Kumar Ghose) – Nov’12, p.11
 Tagore and Sri Aurobindo: how they met in their vision (Supriyo Bhattacharya) – Aug’12, p.127
 Towards a new science of society: an integral approach (Srinivasan, MS) – Aug’12, p.41
 Towards a spiritual mankind (Usharanjan Chakraborty) – Nov’12, p.141
 Triple aspect of the Mother’s work (Ananda Reddy) – Feb’13, p.19
 Triple Soul-Forces, The (Debashish Bnaerji) – Apr’13, p.42
 True voice of raga, The (Murali Sivaramakrishnan) – Feb’13, p.116
 Way of experience, The – a search for one’s psychic being (Deepti Tewari) – Feb’13, p.53
 What is to be done? (Nolini Kanta Gupta) – Apr’13, p.79