

ISSN 2278-2117

Śraddhā



શ્રદ્ધા



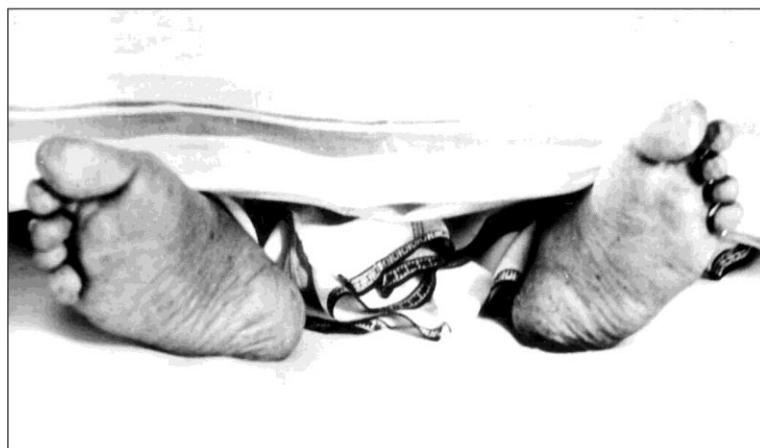
(Vol. 5 No. 2)

24 November 2013

Śraddhā શ્રદ્ધા



24 November 2013



Thy golden Light came down into my feet:
My earth is now thy playfield and thy seat
 'The Golden Light'

Śraddhā

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

Vol.5 No.2

24 November, 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 have the journal mailed to them 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 9836037601 / 033 65405390

Editorial

‘...and the lover of humanity ...’. This is how Chittaranjan Das described Sri Aurobindo while concluding his appeal in the famous Alipore Bomb Trial case in 1909. But few people know and even fewer realise the tremendous sacrifice Sri Aurobindo made for humanity and the world at large – the storms he had to weather, the numerous battles he had to wage, the tortures, the untold suffering and pain he had to undergo ‘to bring down the Supermind ... some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace in the earth-consciousness ... a higher spiritual light and power of a higher character which will make a radical change in the earth-consciousness’. (*Sri Aurobindo on Himself and the Mother*, 1953) He further goes on to say ‘It is only divine Love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness towards the Divine’. (Ibid) He very categorically writes in one of his letters ‘I have no intention of achieving the Supermind for myself only – I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (Moksha) nor supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth-consciousness and if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others. My supramentalisation is only a key for opening the gates of the Supramental to the earth-consciousness; done for its own sake, it would be perfectly futile’. (Ibid)

Amal Kiran thinks that ‘earth’s insufficient receptivity to the Aurobindonian gift of the descending Supermind’ is what occasioned this holocaust. “Something in the gross constitution of terrestrial creatures would not thrill to the Grace from on high, would not appreciate with a response deep enough the colossal work that was being done at a selfless expense of energy and with a silent bearing of ‘the fierce inner wounds that are slow to heal’... Sri Aurobindo, born to put his mission above everything else, could not but follow the course he did: His own master mission was the conquest of the very foundations of life’s imperfect structure through the ages. Not only to build a golden dome but to transform what he symbolically called the dragon base in the Inconscience from which the universe has evolved: this was Sri Aurobindo’s work. And it had to be done one way or another. There could have been a way of slow conquest, preserving his own body by a careful rational spirituality which would

run no deadly hazards for the sake of rapid salvation of the sorrow-burdened world. The way of revolutionary evolution, was to let his body admit an illness symbolic of the drive of the Inconscience from below and, after a limited though intensely significant contest, carry in an actual death its own godlike presence into the stuff of the Inconscience. Death was the glory-hole desperately blown into the massive rock of that stuff for the physical divinity of Sri Aurobindo to permeate in a direct and literal sense the darkness wrapped within darkness which the Vedic seers had long ago intuited to be Nature’s cryptic womb of lightward creation. By identifying his physical divinity with that primal Negation of the Divine, he has taken by surprise the central stronghold of all that frustrates and destroys, all that renders precarious the body’s beauty, frail the life-energy’s strength, flickering the mind’s knowledge and swallows up in its monstrous void the marvellous legacy left to mankind by the hero and the sage”. (Amal Kiran, *The Sacrifice of Sri Aurobindo*)

Nolini Kanta states that ‘It was his considerate deliberate decision to move out of the physical material scene and take his station just in the background from where he could move and direct things more effectively’. (Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works*, vol.5)

We conclude this discussion with these illuminating words of Srimat Anirvan, who in an article ‘*Sri Aurobindo and the Mystery of Death*’ writes ‘...the conquest of death is a problem that can be solved on a cosmic level alone. There must be a complete reversal of life-evolution on earth before this can be achieved. Sri Aurobindo saw this and launched into the bold adventure of tackling the cosmic forces. He has been ridiculed and abused for this and often branded as a heretic. There is no denying the fact that Sri Aurobindo is the first sacrifice in a noble cause. His passing very forcefully reminds one of the saying of the rishi of the *Purusasukta*: ‘The gods, as they spread the web of sacrifice, tied the Purusa Himself as the victim’. And if death, as the Upanishadic seers speak of it, is the concentration of a final illumination of the Heart, Sri Aurobindo’s departure has been like an explosion illuminating the horizon of the distant future and its impact on the living has been and will be far-reaching in its results’. (Anirvan, *Buddhiyoga of the Gita and other essays*, Biblia Impex Pvt. Ltd, 1983).

We are grateful to the Clear Ray Trust, the sole copyright holder of Amal Kiran’s (KD Sethna) works for kindly allowing us to reproduce portions of his article entitled ‘*The Sacrifice of Sri Aurobindo*’. We thank the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for permitting us to reproduce a few lines from the *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, vol.5 and the photograph of Sri Aurobindo taken from the Ashram catalogue of photos. Unless otherwise indicated, all

quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgement and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry.

Our sincere apologies for a few printing errors in our August issue. A list of them is appended herewith.

Errata:

Editorial, 2nd page, 4th line: published in place of pub;ished

“ , 3rd page , 21st line: Unless “ Unless

Contents: The article by Georges Vrekhem should read The New Spirituality

.....

The article by Murali Sivaramakrishnan and not Sivaramkrishnan should read On Reading Sri Aurobindo: Blindness, Insight, Outlook and a Perspective

Page 115: The title of the article should read The New Spirituality

Page 119, 2nd last line: published, not publisherd

Page 125, The author's name should read Sivaramakrishnan and the last word of the title should be Perspective

Page 139, 2nd line from top: Should be Śraddhā

Page 140, 4th line from bottom: Should read Debashsish Banerji

Contents

Divine Guidance behind Life	Sri Aurobindo	9
The Daring Attempt	Kishor Gandhi	12
Vedic India, Egypt and Mesopotamia: a Common Symbolic Grammar	Jean-Yves Lung	21
Time and Eternity in Sri Aurobindo's <i>Essays on the Gita</i>	R.C.Pradhan	33
The Mother Image in Sri Aurobindo	Prema Nandakumar	44
Soul and Nature	Debashish Banerji	53
<i>The Sapta Chatusthaya</i> story: How Sri Aurobindo's Yogic Agenda was fulfilled	Ashoke K Sen Gupta	75
Two Aspects of Yoga	Vikraman Balaji	101
Philosophy of Immortality and Rebirth	Arun Chatterjee	108
Maha-Europa: the World Mind	Michael Miovic	126
Bhartrihari's Century of Morals A Guide to the Art of Right Living	Sampadananda Mishra	142
The Celtic Twilight The Indian Journey of James Cousins	Sachidananda Mohanty	151
Notes On Authors		156

श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Divine Guidance behind Life

Sri Aurobindo

I can only state my own knowledge founded not on reasoning but on experience that there is such a guidance and that nothing is in vain in this universe.

If we look only at outward facts in their surface appearance or if we regard what we see happening around us as definitive, not as processes of a moment in a developing whole, the guidance is not apparent; at most, we may see interventions occasional or sometimes frequent. The guidance can become evident only if we go behind appearances and begin to understand the forces at work and the way of their working and their secret significance. After all, real knowledge – even scientific knowledge – comes by going behind the surface phenomena to their hidden process and causes. It is quite obvious that this world is full of suffering, and afflicted with transience to a degree that seems to justify the Gita's description of it as "this unhappy and transient world", *anityam asukham*. The question is whether it is a mere creation of Chance or governed by a mechanical inconscient Law or whether there is a meaning in it and something beyond its present appearance towards which we move. If there is a meaning and if there is something towards which things are evolving, then inevitably there must be a guidance – and that means that a supporting Consciousness and Will is there with which we can come into inner contact. If there is such a Consciousness and Will, it is not likely that it would stultify itself by annulling the world's meaning or turning it into a perpetual or eventual failure.

This world has a double aspect. It seems to be based on a material Inconscience and an ignorant mind and life full of that Inconscience: error and sorrow, death and suffering are the necessary consequence. But there is evidently too a partially successful endeavour and an imperfect growth towards Light, Knowledge, Truth, Good, Happiness, Harmony, Beauty, – at least a partial flowering of these things. The meaning of this world must evidently lie in this opposition; it must be an evolution which is leading or struggling towards higher things out of a first darker appearance. Whatever guidance there is must be

given under these conditions of opposition and struggle and must be leading towards that higher state of things. It is leading the individual, certainly, and the world, presumably, towards the higher state, but through the double terms of knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, death and life, pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering; none of the terms can be excluded until the higher status is reached and established. It is not and cannot be, ordinarily, a guidance which at once rejects the darker terms, still less a guidance which brings us solely and always nothing but happiness, success and good fortune. Its main concern is with the growth of our being and consciousness, the growth towards a higher self, towards the Divine, eventually towards a higher Light, Truth and Bliss; the rest is secondary, sometimes a means, sometimes a result, not a primary purpose.

The true sense of the guidance becomes clearer when we can go deep within and see from there more intimately the play of the forces and receive intimations of the Will behind them. The surface mind can get only an imperfect glimpse. When we are in contact with the Divine or in contact with an inner knowledge and vision, we begin to see all the circumstances of our life in a new light and can observe how they all tended, without our knowing it, towards the growth of our being and consciousness, towards the work we had to do, towards some development that had to be made, – not only what seemed good, fortunate or successful but also the struggles, failures, difficulties, upheavals. But with each person the guidance works differently according to his nature, the conditions of his life, his cast of consciousness, his stage of development, his need of further experience. We are not automata but conscious beings and our mentality, our will and its decisions, our attitude to life and demand on it, our motives and movements help to determine our course: they may lead to much suffering and evil, but through it all, the guidance makes use of them for our growth in experience and consequently the development of our being and consciousness. All advance, by however devious ways, even in spite of what seems a going backwards or going astray, gathering whatever experience is necessary for the soul's destiny. When we are in close contact with the Divine, a protection can come which helps or directly guides or moves us: it does not throw aside all difficulties, sufferings or dangers, but it carries us through them and out of them – except where for a special purpose there is need of the opposite.

It is the same thing though on a larger scale and in a more complex way with the guidance of the world-movement. That seems to move according to the conditions and laws or forces of the moment through constant vicissitudes, but still there is something in it that drives towards the evolutionary purpose, although it is more difficult to see, understand and follow than in the smaller and more

intimate field of the individual consciousness and life. What happens at a particular juncture of the world-action or the life of humanity, however catastrophic, is not ultimately determinative. Here, too, one has to see not only the outward play of forces in a particular case or at a particular time but also the inner and secret play, the far-off outcome, the event that lies beyond and the Will at work behind it all. Falsehood and Darkness are strong everywhere on the earth, and have always been so and at times they seem to dominate; but there have also been not only gleams but outbursts of the Light. In the mass of things and the long course of Time, whatever may be the appearance of this or that epoch or movement, the growth of Light is there and the struggle towards better things does not cease. At the present time Falsehood and Darkness have gathered their forces and are extremely powerful; but even if we reject the assertion of the mystics and prophets since early times that such a condition of things must precede the Manifestation and is even a sign of its approach, yet it does not necessarily indicate the decisive victory – even temporary – of the Falsehood. It merely means that the struggle between the Forces is at its acme. The result may very well be the stronger emergence of the best that can be: for the world-movement often works in that way.

(Reproduced with thanks and acknowledgement from *Next Future*, Dec 20, 2012, Sunlit Path)

The Fifth December, 1950

Sri Aurobindo has given up his body in an act of supreme unselfishness, renouncing the realisation in his own body to hasten the hour of the collective realisation. Surely if the earth were more responsive, this would not have been necessary.

12-4-1953

–The Mother

The Daring Attempt

Kishor Gandhi

Sri Aurobindo's passing away on December 5, 1950 was undoubtedly a great enigma not only to all people interested in his life and teachings but even to his intimate disciples. It was an event completely contradicting the expectations they had built up from their understanding of his life and work. He had repeatedly stated that he had come, or rather he was sent, to bring down the Supramental Truth on earth, that it was his sole mission to accomplish this descent and that his bringing it down first in himself was the condition of its realisation by others and its spreading more widely in the earth-nature. He had also often said in unequivocal terms that the advent of the Supermind was inevitable and that when it was fully manifested in human body it would overcome the present necessity of death and make the body immortal. Since the Supramental descent was inevitable and since he was to be its first and central embodiment on earth, everyone who had faith in him had not the slightest doubt that he would himself conquer death and become immortal in his supramentalised body.

To these expectations the news of his death came as a stunning shock. It was a most bewildering situation to face; everyone was confronted with the most poignant questions: if he on whom rested the central responsibility of manifesting the Supramental Truth and conquering death had to die, how could there be any certainty of this manifestation? If he could not conquer the difficulties standing in the way of Supramental descent, who else could do that? Everything depended on him; if he could not achieve the goal, what hope there was of its achievement after his passing away? How was it that he could not prevent his own death? Does his death not imply the failure of his mission?

Whatever may be the reason of his passing away, it must immediately be said that any explanation of it pointing to the failure of his mission betrays only

a complete ignorance of the Power guiding and governing it. For any conclusion about the final issue of his mission must ultimately rest on the nature of the Power that was directing and governing it and on no other consideration. His mission could only fail if there was any possibility of this Power being defeated for some reason or another.

Was any such possibility admitted by Sri Aurobindo? It is beyond doubt that he never admitted it; on the contrary, he made it absolutely clear that the Supramental Truth-Will that was guiding and governing his mission could never fail because it is the self-existent and self-determining Power of the Supreme Consciousness which by its very nature is a self-fulfilling Force overruling all conditions and circumstances. No other power can stand in its way; no situation can arise which can frustrate its aim. It carried within itself a self-effective dynamis from a transcendent source which no universal power or combination of powers can eventually withstand or defeat.

The possibility of failure of Sri Aurobindo's mission for any reason whatsoever is therefore entirely ruled out. An explanation needs to be found for so exceptional an event but it can never be that of the failure of the Supramental Will. If that Will is to manifest on earth, it is a foregone conclusion it will fulfil itself by its intrinsic Power.

The question, however, remains: If he had come on earth to accomplish the Supramental descent, why did he pass away without fulfilling his work? Surely there must be some intention behind so unusual a decision (for, undoubtedly, it was a deliberate decision on his part and not an irrevocable fate). What could be that intention?

It could be confidently presumed that whatever his intention, it could not be anything unrelated to the accomplishment of the great aim he had set before him. Since 1910 he had devoted his whole life single-mindedly to the one aim of bringing down the Supermind on earth and since that time every event of his life, great or small, had no other significance than that of helping this descent. His so-called death, too, must have a definite connection with this descent and can have no other purpose.

But then this becomes a most enigmatic puzzle: How could he help the Supramental descent by giving up his body when his existence in the physical body on earth was, according to him, the necessary condition and the central support for that descent? Surely his passing away seems to contradict his own statements about the essential condition for the success of his mission; it is a paradox, a most baffling paradox, the secret reason of which was known perhaps only to him. None else could fathom its mystery. This article is only an attempt to provide a few hints which may serve as pointers to the solution of this great

mystery; it does not claim to do anything more.

Since, as said before, Sri Aurobindo's decision to withdraw must have some definite relation to his work, some understanding of the nature of that work is essential before we can hope to find some significant clue to his decision.

The first important thing to bear in mind regarding the Supramental descent is that it is mainly being worked out in the inner earth-consciousness; for it is only after it is successfully accomplished there that it can manifest in the external earth-nature. Though the surface consciousness of man is not aware of it, it is a fact quite evident to the Yogic knowledge that all that happens on the external surface of life has its origin in the deeper inner consciousness; the powers that initiate, support and govern our life and its events have their secret source there. For example, if we consider the course of the earthly evolution we notice that the principles of Life and Mind descended and established themselves first in the inner earth-consciousness before they manifested in the external world. In the same way, the principle of Supermind has first to be brought down and securely fixed in the inner occult earth-consciousness before it can overtly manifest in the outer nature. In the external nature also a field has to be created and maintained both as a support of the inner work and a receptive sphere for the manifestation of what is realised in the inner field; but principally and centrally the stress of the new emergent principle is first in the inner consciousness. It is there that the link between the higher and the lower consciousness has to be firmly established and the new power has to be securely planted before it could manifest itself in the outer field. As the Mother says: "The work of achieving a continuity which permits one to go up and down and bring into the material what is above, is done inside the consciousness. He who is meant to do it, the Avatar, even if he were shut up in a prison and saw nobody and never moved out, still would he do the work, because it is a work in the consciousness, a work of connection between the Supermind and the material being. He does not need to be recognised, he need have no outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world."

It is for this reason that Sri Aurobindo, though he maintained an Ashram to serve as a link in the external world for his inner work, yet concentrated mainly on that inner work. It was a vast work carried on in the inner universal consciousness unknown to humanity. It was out of this necessity of attending single-mindedly to this inner work that he went into retirement in 1926 and it was for the same reason that even in his retirement he gave very little time to other work even of a very important nature. He gave over to the Mother the

charge of the external organisation of the Ashram and himself took completely to the inner work.

It was essentially a work of overcoming the resistance and opposition of the earth-consciousness to the Supramental Light that he was bringing down. It was a most arduous task in which every single step forward was taken only after a prolonged and acute struggle with opposing forces that had entrenched themselves in the earth-nature. As the work proceeded deeper and deeper into the subconscious and ultimately into the inconscient, the resistance and opposition also became more serious and acute. The only way to overcome it was by fighting it out with the Light and Force of the Higher Consciousness. It was for this reason that the process of Supramental descent was a constant battle and struggle between the light descending from above and the darkness opposing from below.

A very pertinent question here arises: if the Supramental Will, as said before, is in itself absolute and self-fulfilling, how could any lower power resist or oppose its action. It seems paradoxical to maintain, on the one hand, that the Supramental Will is invincible and, on the other hand, to say that it has to battle and struggle with opposing forces for achieving its aim.

But this would not seem so paradoxical if we realise, what Sri Aurobindo has repeatedly said, that though the Supermind in itself has the Supreme absolute Power which always automatically fulfils itself, yet in its dynamic action on the earth-consciousness it does not always put forth that absolute Power; for a long time it acts within self-imposed limits; it holds back its all-fulfilling Will and acts with a relative power in the actual play of world forces. To put it more systematically, the Supermind has three levels, three grades of its Truth-Will. It is only on the topmost level that it keeps its Imperative Will which is irresistible and all-accomplishing; on the two lower levels the Imperative Will is held back, kept behind a veil, so to say, and only its partial and relative action is put forth. For this reason even the Supermind seems to work as a limited power and has to bear the resistance and opposition of the lower powers of Ignorance in its manifestation on earth. If it had acted with its Imperative Power from the very beginning there would not have been this long and arduous battle; it would have been a spontaneous and instantaneous manifestation of Gnostic Life on earth. But this is not its way of working; it does not intervene in the evolutionary process as a miraculous power that accomplishes everything in an instant. Initially and for a long time it consciously adapts itself to the slow process of the earthly evolution and only gradually manifests its higher potencies of Truth-Will.

These higher potencies of Supramental Truth-Will become actually operative in the evolutionary earth-consciousness only when a necessity for them is actually

felt. When in the battle between the Higher Truth descending from above and the lower forces opposing from below, a crucial stage is reached when if a New Light did not intervene the whole evolutionary progression might succumb to darkness, then alone a New Light descends, defeats the dark opposition and maintains the upward progression. It is through a representative of the Divine — the Vibhuti — that this New Light descends in the less crucial stages; when the crisis is most acute then the Divine Himself intervenes as the Avatar and carries the evolution to a higher stage.

The point need not be laboured here that Sri Aurobindo was the Avatar for manifesting the Supermind on earth and carrying the evolutionary process to the supramental stage. All his inner work since his retirement in 1910 was concentrated on this single aim; since it was carried on in the deep occult ranges of the universal consciousness it was not evident on the outer surface, yet it was a work of vast proportions in which the higher and the lower cosmic forces were gripped in a tense battle with himself at its very centre. This work was slowly proceeding through extremely difficult stages and vicissitudes and not in a swift and easy manner because though he was in contact with the Supramental Consciousness, he did not have from the beginning the Highest Supramental Will at his command. If he was in possession of that Will there would have been no battle to fight and no vicissitudes to pass through. It was a limited Supramental Power that he had and it was with that Power that he was carrying on the struggle.

It is possible that in this struggle at the very centre of the earth-evolution a critical situation had arisen where the uprush of dark forces from the Inconscient was so tremendous that only the Imperative Will of the Highest Supermind could face and defeat it. The present supramental power at the disposal of Sri Aurobindo was perhaps not enough to meet this upsurge from the Dark Abyss. At this juncture it became necessary for him to bring down the Highest Power of the Supermind, for if he did not do so, the Powers of Darkness would engulf the earth and his work might perhaps be frustrated and the evolutionary march would fall back and sink into the bottomless pit below.

It is to a situation like this that Sri Aurobindo's passing away from the outer earth-scene has to be related. It is at some such crucial juncture affecting the very existence of the human race and the destiny of earth-evolution that he had to take the decision of leaving his body which simply staggered his followers.

If it is asked why it became necessary for him to leave his body to meet this situation, it can only be said that it was perhaps not possible for him in this critical period to fully concentrate on the inner work while remaining in his body. As he had to retire from all external contacts in 1926 for the sake of

concentrating on his inner work, so now a still more radical withdrawal was needed to call down the New Power. To invoke that Power, the utmost concentration of his energies was required. Perhaps his remaining in his earthly body was to some extent coming in the way of this full concentration. He had therefore to make a choice between remaining in his body and thereby admitting an element of uncertainty in a crucial situation or to give up his body and leave no scope for the slightest uncertainty.

Faced with these alternatives what other choice would he make but that of sacrificing his body so that humanity may be saved and the evolution of the earth-consciousness may take a step forward into Divinity rather than fall back into disruption and chaos. All through his life he had sacrificed everything for the sake of earth and humanity out of his boundless love for them; as he himself has said in a letter: "It is only divine Love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness towards the Divine." When the occasion arose demanding his very body, he willingly gave that up too so that the aim may be fulfilled. It was, in this sense, an act of supreme sacrifice in the highest interest of humanity at a crucial juncture of its destiny, even though humanity was not aware of it. By giving up his body he saved earth and humanity from falling into darkness and assured their upward progress into the Light.

It can thus be said that Sri Aurobindo's passing away, far from implying the defeat of his mission, rather signifies the assured success of that mission. This may seem to be a paradox, but it is one of those divine paradoxes by which the Divine Will sometimes works itself out in a critical situation.

A clear proof of the fact that Sri Aurobindo's work has not only in no way suffered but rather gathered strength and extended itself is available to anyone who compares the present condition of the Ashram with that at the time of his departure. In all spheres of its activities there has been a continuous growth and expansion; an ever increasing number of people from India and abroad is attracted by his teachings and drawn to his Ashram. His Presence is more livingly and concretely felt by all who are devoted or turned towards him than when he was physically present amidst them. His help, grace and compassion are so tangibly felt that to speak of his passing away seems to have only a shadowy reality. In everything and everyone he is now more dynamically present and active than before his passing away. Even behind the veil of the swiftly changing scene of world-events his hand seems to be controlling and shaping their course and destiny. To a far-seeing eye everything seems to be swiftly moving towards an aim in complete conformity with the goal of his mission and the great promise he had constantly held before us.

One may even hazard to go farther and say that his passing away not only signifies his withdrawal for the sake of concentrating in the inner universal consciousness for bringing down the Imperative Supermind for conquering the inconscient darkness, but something much more than that; it perhaps coincided with the actual descent of the Imperative Supermind in the inner earth consciousness; the New Light which would save the world and eventually usher in the New Era perhaps actually came down at the moment of his withdrawal.¹ For this reason his passing away perhaps actually signified the essential fulfilment of his mission. To understand this clearly we have to bear in mind that before any new Light or Power from above actually manifests in the external world it has first to be brought down in the inner earth-consciousness. Once it comes down and fixes itself there it is absolutely certain that in due time it will manifest in the external world. It may take long to do so, but the manifestation outward of what is realised within is assured. This is the law of all new manifestation on earth and it applies to the supramental manifestation also. One who is centrally responsible for bringing down the New Light in the inner consciousness, known as the Avatar according to the Hindu tradition, carries on his work silently in retirement, unknown to the world for whose sake he labours and when his mission is accomplished he quietly passes away from the earth scene. What he had accomplished in the inner field may not soon manifest overtly but once it is done, once the seed of New Light is securely planted in the occult womb of the earth, it inevitably sprouts up and grows into a full tree in the course of time.

It is possible that Sri Aurobindo passed away from the earth-scene because he had successfully brought down the highest Supermind in the inner earth-consciousness. Having completed this inner work he left it in the Mother's charge to manifest it in the external life of the earth. He thus made the Supramental Manifestation on the earth absolutely certain and then quietly withdrew himself.

But why did he withdraw? Was he not to be the first embodiment of the Supramental creation? Why did he not remain on earth to see the fulfilment of his work and be its leader and king? After a life-long travail of bearing humanity's cross why did he not stay to wear the crown of victory?

Here again the answer lies in a proper understanding of the role of the Avatar. The Avatar is Divine Himself appearing at each critical stage of the earthly evolution in order to save it from the upsurge of lower darkness and to put it effectively on a higher stage of its upward march by manifesting a New Light. Being himself the Supreme Divine, He has no personal need of realising

¹"A seed was sown in death's tremendous hour." *Savitri*.

anything. As He came on the earth-scene previously to bring down Life and Mind and Overmind in Matter and having brought them down passed away, so now He came to bring down the Supermind and after bringing it down, once again passed away. As He formerly arrived to create a new race of living beings and then of thinking beings on earth but had no need himself to remain on earth as a living or thinking being, so now too He came to create a new race of Supramental beings but had no need to remain himself on earth to become a Supramental being. Sri Aurobindo himself has made this clear in a letter (without, of course, directly stating that he was the Avatar): "I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (moksha) nor supramentalisation". If we understand this statement and also admit that he was the Supramental Avatar then we shall not be amazed at his passing away nor shall we consider it an indication of the failure of his mission but rather take it as signifying its secret success. His enigmatic withdrawal becomes intelligible only if we accept him as the Avatar and understand the purpose of the Avatar's coming on earth and his mode of action.

In saying that Sri Aurobindo passed away after completing his work of Avatarhood it is not implied that he will never again come back on earth. The Avatar does return on earth repeatedly but each time he comes to manifest a new divine possibility and to create a New Race. So though we can be sure that he will come back, we should also realise that when he does so his aim will be to manifest a higher possibility than that of the supramentalisation of the earth-consciousness.

Some hints of this New Manifestation beyond the Supramental transformation of the present physical nature are already available in his last writings¹ wherein he has considered the possibility of a new race of beings directly manifesting on earth in their divine bodies. He refers to the possibility of a new kind of birth by an occult method which could avoid the limitations and degradations involved in the present material process of birth by sex activity: "A soul wishing to enter into a body or form for itself a body and take part in a divine life upon earth might be assisted to do so or even provided with such a form by this method of direct transmutation without passing through birth by the sex process or undergoing any degradation or any of the heavy limitations in the growth and development of its mind and material body inevitable to our present way of existence. It might then assume at once the structure and greater powers and functionings of the truly divine material body which must one day emerge in a progressive evolution to a totally transformed existence both of the life and

form in a divinised earth nature."

In this passage we have a sufficient indication of what would be the further evolutionary step that Sri Aurobindo would attempt and realise in his next manifestation on earth. When this new step is taken it will create a New Race of Divine Beings in Divine Bodies which would be quite different from the New Race of the Gnostic Beings which the Supramental transformation of the present earth-nature will create on earth. The Supramental manifestation will come as a result of the transformation of the present earth-nature by the effective descent in it of the Supramental Truth; it has to take up the existing earthly mind, life and body with all their imperfections and limitations and make them perfect by a long and difficult process of change and transformation with the help of the Supramental Force. The race of the Divine Beings, on the contrary, will manifest on earth without any such need of long and laborious transformation; it will directly precipitate on the earth by an occult process with a perfect divine nature including a perfect divine body. It is this new daring attempt that Sri Aurobindo will make in his next manifestation on earth; he will be the first of that New Race of the Divine Beings, as the Mother will be the first of the New Race of the Supramental Beings on earth. Perhaps both these are parts of a complete Divine Manifestation on earth which Mother and Sri Aurobindo will jointly accomplish before long.

Lest this might seem to be a mere conjecture, we quote below an extract from a record of a sadhak's talk with Sri Aurobindo in 1924. In the course of this talk Sri Aurobindo made the following statement which speaks for itself: "I have faith in the truth of transformation of life...I may not be able to do it completely and a part may be left. But I shall be born again to complete it. I have complete faith that it will be achieved. The truth of sexual life also can be seen after the complete transformation of the body. The way of reproduction may not be the same as in ordinary life. I for one have put the sexual side completely aside so that I may make this daring attempt."

5-3-1 953

(Reproduced with due acknowledgement and thanks from *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, 1953)

¹ Vide, Sri Aurobindo, "*The Supramental Manifestation on Earth*."

Vedic India, Egypt and Mesopotamia: a Common Symbolic Grammar

Jean-Yves Lung

Ancient civilisations are veiled in mystery: clothed in rich symbolism and rituals, they produce in us a sense of exotic strangeness, if not of childish beliefs typical of pre-scientific eras; our modern mind doesn't respond any more to their symbolic suggestions. We had to wait for a poet, a yogi and a seer to turn his gaze on the ancient Vedic civilisation to be given a clue to the living meaning of such symbols. When Sri Aurobindo looked at the Vedas, he saw an underlying structure that gave the basic architecture of its symbolism: the double liberation of the Sun's radiant herds and of the Waters.:

The Angirasa legend [the liberation of the herds of Light] and the Vritra [the liberation of the waters] mythus are the two principal parables of the Veda; they occur and recur everywhere. They run through the hymns as two closely connected threads of symbolic imagery and around them all the rest of the Vedic symbolism is woven. Not that they are its central ideas, but they are two main pillars of this ancient structure.... this is a symbolism of the struggle between spiritual powers of Light and Darkness, Truth and Falsehood, Knowledge and Ignorance, Death and Immortality, ... that is the real sense of the whole Veda. (*The Secret of the Veda*, CWSA, vol.15. p.241)

When one looks at the mythologies of other ancient civilisations like Egypt and Mesopotamia, the same fundamental symbolic pattern appears, although disposed differently through features specific to each area. Even a rapid glance shows that if the symbolic vocabulary varies, the underlying symbolic grammar is strikingly similar:

In Vedic India, the gods come together, guided by the goddess Sarama, to deliver the radiant herds of Usha, the Dawn, out of the Pani's cave and recover the Sun from darkness; Indra, the god of illumined mind, kills the demon Vritra

who obstructed the flow of the Waters. Often enough these two events are correlated, as if each one was the condition of the other. The Rivers carry knowledge and inspiration, like the Sarasvati River, they are the solar waters from above, invited to flow into our human soil.

In Egypt the goddess Sothys (star Sirius) brings back the sun each year, and this return coincides with the fertilising flood of the Nile, which unifies the lower and Upper Egypt. The Flood is Hator, the Sun's daughter, brought back to Egypt by Thot, the god of knowledge.

In Mesopotamia, through Sumer, Akkad, Babylone, Assyria, the cylinder-seals show repeatedly the liberation of the god of Waters, Enki/Ea, as well as the recovery of the rising sun assisted by the goddess Ishtar (planet Venus). It shows also the coincidence of the two liberations: the Waters from above and from below flowing into each other while Ishtar uplifts the rising sun. Enki/Ea, god of the Waters is also the god of knowledge, of wisdom, and of skills, and the rivers carry discrimination in their flow.

With such a common signifier, it is likely that these three civilisations were referring to a common signified. The psychological and spiritual key given by Sri Aurobindo to unlock the door of Vedic symbolism might therefore help us to unlock as well the knowledge of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Ancient Egypt: The Flood of the Nile and the Return of the Sun

On the 18th of July, Sothys, the star Sirius, of the constellation of the Dog, reappears at the East, after having disappeared under the Egyptian horizon for seventy days. Ten minutes later, the Sun rises. This event occurs during the flood of the Nile River, which unifies physically the Upper and Lower Egypt.

Thus the 18th of July is the New Year and Egyptians used to offer each other little dogs in clay to celebrate the event.

The two Egypt, the Lower of the delta in the North and the Upper of the desert in the South, are represented by different symbols: To Upper Egypt belongs the vulture, a kind of amaryllis, and Seth, the god of violence and disorder. To the Lower Egypt belongs the Cobra, the papyrus, and Horus, the falcon-headed god who fight endlessly Seth for order and light. When the floods occurs, the vulture that comes from above and the cobra that crawls from below, Horus of light and Seth of chaos, are turned by the great flow into

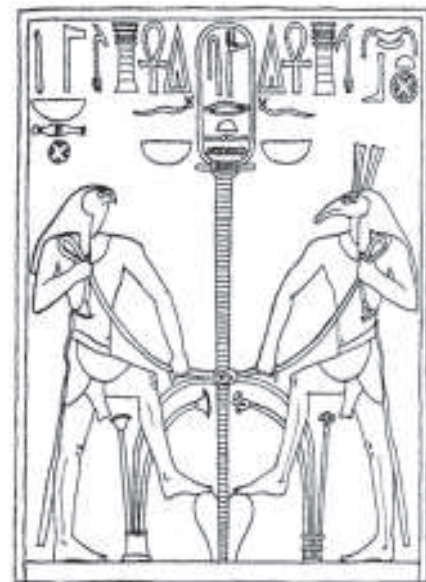


Sothys is the Goddess that goes into darkness to bring the sun back on the 18th of July

complementary forces for the holding of the *semataouy*, the pillar of unity.

The flood is Hathor, the Sun's daughter, Ra's very eye. She is living beyond the first cataract, under the form of a lioness a free life of unlimited wilderness on the high plateaus of the South.

The gods send Thot, the Ibis god of knowledge, of sacred writing and of the creative word, to bring her back to Egypt. He goes in search of her under the form of a baboon and, alluring her with captivating stories, attracts her back to the first cataract from where she flows again into Egypt as the flood. Then she becomes Hathor, the divine Cow who carries in her womb and nourishes the new birth of the Pharaoh. Thus, every year the Pharaoh is reborn by the Flood of the solar River.



Horus and Seth. Their body language expressed antagonism, but they hold together the Semataouy. Pillar of unity.



Thot as a baboon bringing Hathor back to Egypt



Hathor in the papyrus, symbol of the womb, nourishing the new Pharaoh to be born.



Here is the Newborn Pharaoh on the lotus. He is new born every year, through the recovery of the Sun and the Flood of the Nile unifying Egypt.

liberation of the Sun and Waters: the star Sothys finds the lost sun, as the Vedic Sarama finds the radiant herds hidden in the Pani's cave. Thot, the higher Mind, finds the way to have the solar Waters to flow again into the two lands, similar to the Vedic Indra destroying the obstructive Vritra for the release of the Waters.

Ancient Mesopotamia: The Cylinder-Seals

Ancient Mesopotamia saw several civilisations succeeding each other from the 3rd to the 1st



A Cylinder-Seal

Shamash, the Sun god, is helplessly imprisoned within the mountain. A god, who seems to carry a stick and a flame, awakens him, in the presence of Ishtar, Venus (right). Both Ishtar and Shamash have flames drawn around their body. On the left, Shamash is liberated, although still within the mountain, and masters a creature half animal-half human.



Shamash finally comes out. He steps victoriously on the vanquished mountain. He has flames around him and always carries a sort of 'saw' in his left hand.



Eski/Ea lives in his underground abode of waters, the Apsu. Two gods open the door for his coming out, maybe at the request of the other god on the left. Gods are recognisable at the horns they always wear.

millennium BC: Sumer, Akkad, Babylonia and Assyria. Beyond all changes they kept a remarkable unity of religious beliefs, which shows in their literature and on the cylinder seals. The mythology of Mesopotamia can be best seized through its cylinder-seals, which were made all through its long history. They celebrate recurrently mainly the god of waters, Enki/Ea¹, who is also the god of knowledge and wisdom, the sun god Utu/Samash, god of order and justice, the goddess Innana/Ishtar (planet Venus), goddess of love and war. They illustrate the recovery of the Sun out of the mountain and with the release of the waters.



Ishtar assists in the rise of Shamas the Sun, while Enki/Ea steps victoriously on the mountain with the free flow of the two rivers. Another god is present with a bow, and a lion. Consequently, the 'Tree of Life' grows on the mountain. Under Enki, either a goat, his symbol, or a calf, symbol of the new sun.



Ishtar uplifts the Sun in its rise, while the waters from above and those from below flow into each other. Two winged gods or priests bless the event (Assyria)

¹The first name is Sumerian, the second one Akkadian

The literature of Mesopotamia, confirms the importance of the flood in their mythology.

The liberation of the Waters in Mesopotamian Literature

The liberation of Waters is one of the great victories to be won in the Veda. Indra is the main actor in his fight against Vritra, the obstructing python, but Agni and Brihaspati are said also to contribute to the victory. In Mesopotamian myths, several gods are linked to the liberation of the waters, often linked to the destruction of *the Mountain*. Let us see what are the gods involved in this action.

The rising Sun god Utu/Samash, at the request of Enki, liberates the fresh waters from underground in the land of Dilmun (Bahrain):

At that moment, on that day, and under that sun, when Utu stepped up into heaven, from the standing vessels (?) on Ezen's (?) shore, from Nanna's radiant high temple, from the mouth of the waters running underground, fresh waters ran out of the ground for her.

Then, fertilised by Enki's semen, the waters bring abundance in the country. In this myth, we have the only connection, in Mesopotamian literature, of the rising sun with the release of the waters. But an indirect one is to be found with Ishtar, the morning star Venus.

Ishtar (Planet Venus)

*Pure Ishtar of the stars, light of the gods.
Morning who opens ways like the sun disc...
High Ishtar who precedes the cattle...
Wild cow rushing at the world...
Heavenly light penetrating between heaven and earth...
Without you no channel is dug, no channel is contained which brings life,
Without you no rivulet is dug...
Lady of the Battle who ceaselessly overturn the mountains...
(All the gods) kneel down before her; from her they receive her lights...
Of understanding, of know-how, of intelligence is her wisdom made.*

Here we find several elements put together: knowledge, light, the coming of the cattle (the sun's rays if we adopt the Vedic imagery), the victory over the mountain and the channeling of the waters.

Enki/Ea, Lord of the waters and master of all effectuating knowledge:

"When I touch heaven, a rain of abundance rains down

When I touch the earth, here is the flood”.

The necessary victory over the mountain is also evoked:

“In one glance, Enki, thou upset the Mountain”.

The Rivers, where Enki has established his seat, are themselves rich in knowledge:

(Thou) who created all, when the great gods dug thee, they put abundance on your side...Ea, king of the Apsi, built his abode in thy bosom, he gave you an irresistible flow. Ea and Asalluhi gave you fury, brightness and awe So that you pronounce judgments for the livings. River thou art great, river thou are majestic, river thou go straight (eshreti)Thy waters smoothly flow (shushuru).

The fishes are symbol of knowledge and expertise:

The seven sages, apkallu, creatures of Enki, holy carps who, as their master, Ea, have been given extraordinary ingenuity...

Carp from the sea, the seven apkallus, created in the river, to supervise the good working of the divine plans for heaven and earth.

Here, the link between rivers and knowledge is established.

Enki/Ea fertilises the Tigris and Euphrates, makes all the water converge into them.

The river beds had been dug by the gods but no water would flow in, until Enki's intervention or, according to another myth, before the god Ninurta had vanquished the Mountain. For it seems that the fight of the Mountain was done by Ninurta, “born in the Apsi” (Enki's abode) who fulfils many functions of Enki/Ea, but with an all-conquering fighting spirit. His epic is very reminiscent of Indic material.

This God, **Ninurta**, sometimes called **Ningirsu**, was created by the Mother goddess to destroy the Mountain.

He is born from a high thought...he opens the heaven, a tidal wave, bright as the sun.

He has to fight the demons on the Mountain:

O Heavenly Mountain-goat trampling the Mountain with his hooves.

After his victory, he brings the Tigris and Euphrates to flow down to the ocean.

Enki/Ea, the Ascending God of Mesopotamia.



Enki/Ea is at the same time a fish swimming in the waters and a mountain-goat. He is at the origin of the astrological sign of Capricorn.



Having climbed the mountain, he becomes winged and associated to the rising of the Sun, also winged.



Here, Enki stands on the mountain and climbs the 'Tree of Life' (or of evolution?).

From the seal-cylinders, we can derive some of Enki's characteristics as a god: residing first in the lower waters, he takes the form of a fish swimming up the stream towards the original source; as a mountain goat, he is the same ascending force climbing the mountain and the tree reaching out for its flowers; as a winged mountain-goat he has access to the sky itself, where the sun rises. He seems therefore to symbolise the hidden deity progressively awakening in the waters, then earth and sky, in an ascending movement. In his full awakening (which seems connected to the liberation of the sun at dawn), he pours the waters from above, whose streams join with the waters from below. It is significant that in Mesopotamian mythology, Enki/Ea is the god of wisdom, knowledge and know-how, and the god of all skills.

Connections with Agni

(The Vedic verses are translated by Sri Aurobindo)

All this is very reminiscent of the Vedic deity Agni, who is also connected with the waters and with knowledge, and is the link between men and gods. *He*

breathes in the waters (apsu), then becomes a galloping horse and then a swan in his ascending awakening towards the solar world.

He is also the son of the waters and of the trees, sometimes called himself a tree (*vanaspati*):

O Tree (or: Master of delight – vanaspate), release thy yields to the gods. III, 4,10, & VII, 2,10

O felicitous Fire, of thee are all felicities and they grow wide from thee like branches from a tree (VI, 13, 1).

O Fire, other fires dwell dependent on thee as on a tree its branches (VIII, 9,).

O felicitous Fire, of thee are all felicities and they grow wide from thee like branches from a tree (VI, 13,1).

Its flames are compared to branches to be climbed.

The man who knows the law of his workings that are steadfast for ever, climbs them one by one like branches. II, 5, 4.

The seven far-flowing rivers climbed from him like branches (VI, 7, 6).

He is associated with the rising of the sun, and compared to a pillar holding the sky or heaven:

New-born he stands up high like an arrow-shaft well planted and firm (IV, 6, 3).

He props up the firmament like a pillar (RV, IV.5.1).

Pillaring the high lifted light of the sun (at dawn) (RV, X.3.2).

He is nurtured by the seven rivers, born from them and setting them in movement, uniting the solar waters from above with the waters from below:

Thou goest towards the ocean of the sky... towards the waters that abide above in the luminous world of the sun and the waters that are below. (III, 22, 3)

(He) gathered wealth from the nether and upper ocean (VII, 6, 7).

Let thy fires that dwell in the waters joining with those that descend the slopes accept the sacrifice (III, 22, 4).

Agni is always presented as having an inner discernement or understanding, *dakshā*; he is called a thinker and a sage (*pracetas*, *vicetas*) and a knower (*vidvān*), sometimes, he is himself the guiding Thought, *pramatih*. As Enki, he is the intermediary and link between men and the gods, and disposes rightly the sacrifice, giving to each god its share. There are other similarities: As Enki, he is the craftsman, the doer and accomplisher of all works. As Enki, he knows the secret names of things.

Agni and the Goat

There is also a semantic connection of Agni with the goat and with an ascending curving movement: see the Sanskrit roots *ank*, to move in a curve, *anj*, to bend, go towards, request, worship; see the nouns *ankurah*, a germinating form, an offspring, *angārah*, charcoal, and *ajah* the goat, but also “the unborn”. We find the word associated with the image of Agni as a pillar in RV I.67.3: As the unborn (*ajar na*) he has held the wide earth, he has up-pillared heaven with his mantra of truth.

Enki/Abzu and Agni/apsu

The two key-words, *Enki* and *Abzu* or *Apsu*, are said by Jean Bottéro, the French Assyriologist, to be of unknown etymology. It is striking that they are very close to the Vedic *Agni* and *Apsu* (*in the waters*, locative plural of *apah*, the waters) and that the structural relation between *Agni* and *Apsu* is the same as between *Enki* and *Abzu*: Two hidden ascending gods with similar names seat in the watery abode designated with a similar word, both are associated to the sunrise and stand as a tree or a pillar. Considering that some mythological and psychological functions are also similar (particularly the link with knowledge and skill), it is very difficult to escape the hypothesis of a Vedic or maybe pre-Vedic input into the Sumerian civilisation.

This is reinforced by the fact that the Sumerians themselves considered that civilisation was brought to them from the East, maybe from the land of Dilmun (Bahrain), by seven wise fish-men swimming up the rivers from the sea, presented as Enki’s assistants or creatures².

Agni being a god of Fire and Enki of Water, one could object to their brotherhood. But we find in Mesopotamian mythology two gods of Fire: Girra (Fire) and Nusku (the lamp), both born in the Apsū and holding some of Vedic Agni’s specific characteristics: fire and light of the house, lit in darkness, presenting offerings to the gods, assisting the sun god, purifying, gods of light and warriors, always renewing themselves, and both sages and experts, as Enki their father. Moreover, Agni is closely related to the waters: First, he is *rājā apsu*, the king in the waters, (RV, X, 45, 5), like Enki. He himself is *like a river running in its channel and sends in his front the descending Waters* (RV, I.66.5) and connects the waters from above with those from below: *Thou goest towards the ocean of the sky... towards the waters that abide above in the luminous world of the sun and the water that are below. Let thy fires that dwells in the waters joining with those that descend accept the sacrifice. (RV, III.22.3&4).* And also *Thou art like a fountain in the desert to the longing man* (RV, X.4.1).

²In K.D. Sethna, *Karpasa in Pre-Historic India*, 1982

To take Agni as the name of the ritual fire only is to mistake the signifier for the signified. He is many things: a flame, a stream, a bird, a tree, a boat, a lion, a horse, a chariot, a craftsman, a thinker, a warrior, a sage and a knower, a seer and a will, often the seer-will (*kavikratu*), and he fulfils many functions: messenger, guest, priest of the call, bringer of the oblation, knower of all things born, friend and leader of the human people, fosterer, purifier, and none of these exhaust its reality, for he is said to have many names and to be manifold in its forms. But he is always connected with the truth, *satyam*, *ritam*, possessing the truth, *ritavān*, a feature that his *simili* Enki seems to have lost on the way, in Mesopotamian written literature (the oral tradition was lost).

What is common to both Agni and Enki is their representation of a hidden god awakening progressively to different planes of being (as fish, mountain-goat then winged goat for Enki, as fire, horse then swan for Agni) and represented as an ascending force. The outer symbols of water and fire are only images used to convey this underlying meaning. The common pattern is the outflowing or upflaming of the hidden deity, which is why both can be represented by a tree: The tree is a symbol of an ascending and unfolding movement linking the underground waters to the sun.

We find in the Vedic and Mesopotamian system of images a similar underlying structure: the liberation of the sun and waters is the main architecture. The fact that the symbolic vocabulary (the signifiers) is proper to each culture, implies that the initial input (the signified) has been reinterpreted in the terms of the Mesopotamian physical milieu, or that both cultures had a common origin, maybe referring to what the Vedas call the forefathers (see the similarities between the seven *Angirases* and the seven *Apkallu*, respectively servants of Agni and Enki).

This, of course, supposes that a Vedic or pre-Vedic culture was not brought to North India around 1500 BC by invading Aryans but was already in the area in the fifth millennium, when the Sumerian culture was in its formative phase.

Conclusion

Vedic, Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures have developed elaborate symbols around the liberation of the Sun and the release of the Waters, as the main structural elements of their myths. In the three of them we find a correlation between those symbols and the recovery of knowledge or the release of the flow of inspired knowledge, as if these events were the main quest assigned to man. Those victories occur with the help of the ascending force in man (Vedic Agni, Mesopotamian Enki), of the faculties of knowledge (Vedic Indra, Egyptian Thot, Sumerian Enki) and of a goddess (Sothys in Egypt, Ishtar in Mesopotamia,

Sarama in India), and the return of the Sun is linked to the unification by the Waters of our divided Nature. The fundamental similarity of structural elements is striking enough behind the veil of the diversity of names and images. The psychological clue given by Sri Aurobindo to interpret the Vedas seems to be working as well to open the door of Egyptian and Mesopotamian symbols, leading us to a deeper and more intimate understanding of these cultures of the same age, thus confirming what he wrote in 1914:

I hope also to lead up to a recovery of the sense of the ancient spiritual conceptions of which old symbol and myth give us the indications and which I believe to have been at one time a common culture covering a great part of the globe with India, perhaps, as a centre. In its relation to this methodical attempt lies the only originality of the “The Secret of the Veda”.

(*The Hindu*, 27 August 1914, quoted in *The Secret of the Veda*, p.596)

Time and Eternity in Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*

R.C.Pradhan

In this essay I would like to discuss the concept of Time and Eternity in Sri Aurobindo's masterpiece, *Essays on the Gita*. Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Gita is unique for its synthetic approach and its penetrating metaphysical insights. The *Essays* unfolds the divine drama of the universe which the Gita has attempted to bring out in the dialogue between Sri Krishna, the Divine Teacher and Arjuna, the Human Disciple. The universe is portrayed in the Gita as the divine *leela*, according to Sri Aurobindo, for the universe manifests the way the Divine works in Nature as well as in the human life. In this cosmic drama, God or the Divine is the sole actor who is in the universe as well as outside it and who is the goal of the cosmic process. The world which is alienated from God must return to it in the process of evolution. Thus Sri Aurobindo finds in the Gita the harmony between temporality and timelessness, between the historical and a-historical and between the immanent and the transcendent.

Time and the World: The Historicity of the Moral Crisis

What attracts the attention of Sri Aurobindo in the Gita is its emphasis on the battle of life which the human being faces in the world as symbolised by Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The very idea of a battle symbolises the idea of a crisis in the world — the moral battle between Good and Evil, that is, between the forces of the Dharma and their opponents. The battle of life imagery strikes Sri Aurobindo's imagination because it shows how critically man is poised in the cosmic process in which he is called upon to take weapons to defeat the forces of Evil and save the universe from the moral collapse. Sri Krishna, the Divine Being, leads man in this fight and ultimately wins the moral war by dint of moral and spiritual transformation in the human race itself. The moral war converges into a spiritual war against the destructive forces with the instrument

of Yoga which makes the universe re-established in the moral order. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The Gita, as we have seen, takes for its frame such a period of transition and crisis as humanity periodically experiences in its history, in which great forces clash together for a huge destruction and reconstruction, intellectual, social, moral, religious, political, and these in the actual psychological and social stage of human evolution culminate usually through a violent physical convulsion of strife, war or revolution¹.

The inevitability of such a crisis is acknowledged because of the fact that the universe is itself imperfect and not fully free from moral evil. Such a universe becomes easily morally corrupt because of the ascendancy of the forces of darkness. Sri Krishna in the Gita declares:

When the Dharma dwindles and the forces of moral evil are on the ascendancy, I, the Divine Being, recreate myself to save the moral order and destroy the forces opposed to it. I reincarnate Myself from time to time to establish the moral order².

This is a clear recognition of the fact that the universe needs divine intervention periodically to save the moral order and to protect humanity against the forces of evil. The world itself struggles to maintain the moral law intact such that humanity progresses towards a morally harmonious and spiritually stable life in the world. Sri Aurobindo takes this progress as an evolution towards the divine perfection through the instrumentality of Yoga.

The universe as portrayed in the Gita is burdened with moral degeneration because of man's own weakness such as weakness of will, ignorance and the *tamasika* nature of man. Man in a sense has fallen from his divine nature (*daivi sampat*) and has fallen prey to the dark forces (*asuri sampat*)³. The downfall in the moral order is due to man and hence there must be a change in human nature such that the moral order can be established on a firm foundation. Gita's aim is to restore the moral order through a transformation in human nature. Sri Aurobindo takes this as central to the Gita because, through spiritual transformation alone can the world be saved from the moral and spiritual crisis. Man must aspire to go beyond his present nature and divinise his being in absolute surrender to the Divine⁴.

Sri Aurobindo recognises the reality of time and the world because it is in the temporal world alone that the human beings face the battle of life and are

situated in the Kurukshetra of the inner psychological world. They are in deep crisis and are dogged by sorrow and suffering (*vishada*) and are in need of divine guidance. It is this existential aspect of life which makes the Gita a *yogasashtra*, that is, a doctrine of divine works that redeems the human soul from bondage, *maya* and moral deprivation. The human self is in the world of temporality and death and is in need of *mukti* or release. This can be accomplished by following the path of knowledge, works and devotion or surrender to the Divine⁵.

The Call of the Eternity

The Eternal Reality which is outside Time calls the temporal world back to itself because the temporal world is made in the image of Eternity. The world is itself a manifestation of the Divine Being, the *Sacchidananda* or the *Purushottama* which is not bound by the laws of Time and causality. Sri Aurobindo in a true Advaitic spirit calls this Reality the only Reality that is the source of the universe and every being in it. There is no reason for him to deny the reality of the world in Time because he takes it as axiomatic that the Supreme *Purusha* takes upon Himself the responsibility of bringing forth this universe of multiple forms from out of its own divine nature. The Gita says that the supreme Godhead manifests in His universal forms in the Eleventh Canto called “*Vishwarupadarshana Yoga*”. Sri Aurobindo explains the universal Form in the following way:

The Supreme Form is then made visible. It is that of the infinite Godhead whose faces are everywhere and in whom are all the wonders of existence, who multiplies unendingly all the many marvellous revelations of his being, a world-wide Divinity seeing with innumerable eyes, speaking from innumerable mouths⁶...

This Divine Form is all-pervading, all-consuming and is veritably the supreme image of the “World-Spirit” as “Time the Destroyer”⁷. This image of Time as Destroyer reveals the inner dynamics of the universe as a process of incessant creation and destruction. The World-Spirit is the Divine Being who has taken over the form of the universal Time as the Destroyer because in this form alone the process of destruction is revealed. That also reveals the reality of Time and the temporal character of all things that happen in the universe. The Supreme Spirit is the Destroyer and so there is no reason to believe that the Spirit cannot redeem the universe from destruction. Destruction itself is a moment in the universal chain of happenings which are directed by God or *Purushottama*.

Sri Aurobindo is committed to the idea that Reality is one, infinite and eternal. It is the source of the world and the Time in which the world unfolds itself in its multiple forms from the smallest of the atoms to the mightiest stars and galaxies. The world is unified into one cosmic existence which is anchored in the One Infinite Divine Reality. For Sri Aurobindo, the Gita exhibits this Universal Form by showing that The One is in Many and the Many is in the One. Sri Aurobindo writes:

This then is the keynote, the central significance. It is the vision of the One in the many, the Many in the One,— and all are the One. It is this vision that to the eye of the divine Yoga liberates, justifies, explains all that is and was and shall be.... It is the vision that reconciles and unifies⁸.

This sweeping vision of the cosmic existence makes for sure that all is rooted in one source, that is, one divine principle which at once divides itself into forms and also unifies all into One Reality. This grand metaphysical unification of the Many in the One is the beauty of the Gita’s metaphysical vision according to Sri Aurobindo .

Sri Aurobindo places the Eternal at the foundation of all beings in Time because the latter, through emanating from the Eternal, are placed within the boundary of time. The Eternal enters into the manifold existence of Time, because by this involution or descent, the Divine Being assumes all these forms and makes Himself manifest in the multiple forms. The Gita says:

From the Unmanifest arises all that is manifest at the dawn of creation and when the creation ceases, all return to the fold of the Unmanifest. All the beings come into existence and then dissolve into the Unmanifest. The Unmanifest of all that is manifest rests above all existence. He is the Supreme Purusha, the Eternal who never ceases to exist, even when everything else is destroyed⁹.

This is a glimpse of what the Gita envisions as the Supreme Reality. Sri Aurobindo has taken this vision as the groundwork of his own theory of Reality as the Divine Being who integrates all existence into one divine synthesis. This is his integral theory of Reality that harmonises and unifies all existence. In this theory, there is no antagonism between the temporal and the eternal, between the world and what is beyond the world, and between the immanent and the transcendent.

The Necessity of the World Creation

The question of the world creation poses no difficulty to the Gita's metaphysical vision as it keeps open the creation of the world as a divine possibility. The world comes into existence out of the divine necessity because of the fact that it is the nature of the Divine to make itself manifest in infinite forms. The Divine Reality, *Purushottma*, out of His infinite nature gives rise to the world or Nature. So there is the metaphysical co-ordination between the Divine *Purusha* and the *Prakriti* for making the world creation real. The latter is the *Maya* with its creative force which spins out the entire universe under the direction of the Divine Being. Thus the world creation takes place under the direction of the Divine Being because He is the source of all creation. Nothing begins to exist except through His Will and its functions in the form of the creative *Maya* or *Prakriti*. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Here then the supreme Soul, Purushottma, 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. 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 action¹⁰.

The supreme Nature which is the same as the Spirit gives rise to the *Apara Prakriti*, the lower Nature to make the universe manifest in Time. Time is part of this *Apara Prakriti* in that it is in Time that manifestation takes place. Without the intermediary of Time, the *Apara Prakriti* cannot make the world possible. Ultimately, it is the *Para Prakriti* which, though timeless, gives rise to Time. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

The supreme Nature, *parā prakṛtiḥ*, is then 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 Jiva¹¹.

What is indicated here is that it is the Timeless Reality which itself becomes the temporal reality of the world in the process of what Sri Aurobindo calls involution¹². This temporalisation of the Eternal takes place because of the

Divine Will as a matter of its own desire to make itself manifest. Otherwise, there is no other explanation as to why the world comes into existence, according to the Gita. The Gita is not committed, as perceived by Sri Aurobindo, to Sankara's idea that the world is *Maya*, an appearance (*vivarta*) due to *adhyasa*. Sri Aurobindo rejects the Mayavada of Sankara for the obvious reason that the world is a real manifestation of the Divine Being in Time. Time and the world are real for Sri Aurobindo because they are the manifestations of the Divine Will.

Why is the World Not Lost?

The Gita's main effort is to redeem the world from its utter alienation from God, from the darkness into which it has fallen and from the clutches of death and nothingness. The world is not completely away from God because God has brought it into existence out of Himself. But temporally it is alienated from God. There is a dividing line between the Jiva and the world, on the one hand, and the Divine Being, *Purushottama*, on the other. This dividing line is real as the Jiva is enmeshed in the cycle of birth and death, sorrow and suffering, and finitude and historicity. Human beings face the real world of acute darkness and death. They are “entangled with the unending desires and are swayed by the passions of attachments and frustrations and remain merged in the passion of possessing wealth beyond all ethics”¹³. This is how the Jiva in bondage moves within the cycle of death and suffering because of his unfulfilled desires. This is the man tormented by his desires and attachments who tells the story of the ephemeral world that moves away from God.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the Gita makes every effort to bring man and the world back to God by making him aware of his divine origin and his inner nature as a spiritual and moral being. This moral and spiritual path is laid down by the triple form of Yoga. The Gita is emphatic that the world is redeemable and that man can be awakened back to his own divine potentiality. Sri Aurobindo is optimistic about the future of man and the world because he believes that man can transform himself into a spiritual personality by what he calls the Integral Yoga. That is, he can tear the veil of ignorance which has bedevilled the nature of man. Sri Aurobindo writes:

It is a cosmic veil which the Godhead has spun around our understanding; Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra have woven its complex threads; the Shakti, the Supreme Nature is there at its base and is hidden in its every tissue. We have to work out this web in ourselves and turn through it and from it leaving it behind us when its use is finished, turn from the gods to the original and

supreme Godhead in whom we shall discover at the same time the last sense of the gods and their works and the inmost spiritual verities of our own imperishable existence. “To me who turn and come, they alone cross over beyond this Maya”¹⁴.

The discovery of the spiritual verities in our own existence and the existence of the world can make us come back to the Godhead out of which we are born. This being our ultimate destiny, it is no surprise that the world can be redeemed finally through God’s intervention as well as through human effort.

The redemption of the world is the theme of many other spiritual traditions such as Christianity, but it is more emphatic in the Hindu tradition to which the Gita belongs. In Christianity, God the Father sends his Son, Jesus, to save the world from the original sin. This is the only time God intervenes in world-history to save the world and man. But the Gita assures us of the fact that whenever the world falls into moral degradation, God incarnates himself repeatedly to save the world and establish the supremacy of the moral law or Dharma. Sri Aurobindo assimilates this assurance into the theory of the fabric of the cosmic existence in which God is constantly descending into the world to make it divinely transformed. The descent of the Divine Being into the world is an eternal process resulting in the constant effort of man to rise above his fallen existence because of ignorance.

For the Gita, as Sri Aurobindo sees it, the world is the distant image of God because it is the manifestation of the Divine Being who is present in all its manifested forms, both material and immaterial. The world reflects the divine light and manifests the divine energy. Therefore, the alienation of the world from God is relative and is based on the wrong understanding of the nature of the world. Human understanding or the *buddhi* gets clouded by ignorance and hence man feels that he is a Jiva without any higher spiritual nature. Hence he feels lost in the web of ignorance and hence is subject to the forces of darkness and death. Krishna in the Gita proclaims:

He who is devoted to me absolutely crosses the three *gunas* and attains the nature of Brahman. For I am the anchor of the Infinite Brahman, of the eternal Dharma and of the infinite Bliss¹⁵.

The spiritual journey of the Jiva towards the Godhead begins when he shakes off his servility to the three *gunas* which characterise the worldly existence, that is, when he realises that he does not belong to the world but to God.

The Spiritual Recovery

The aim of the Gita, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not merely an individual man’s *mukti* in the sense that the individual Jiva gets released from bondage by realising his oneness with Brahman, but something more. It is a spiritual recovery on a larger scale, that is, a transformation of the human race itself. In short, the aim is the divinisation of the world in the sense that the world is realised to be the manifestation of the Divine Being. Though the individual is the key player in the cosmic drama, it is the cosmos as the canvas on which the Divine makes Himself manifest. The spiritualisation of the cosmic existence alone can make the individual existence divinely transformed. Therefore Gita has to be understood against the background of the divine incarnation of Lord Krishna and His divine mission of making the world safe for the Dharma. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The highest message is first for those who have the strength to follow after it, the master men, the great spirits, the God-knowers, God-doers, God-lovers who can live in God and for God and do their work joyfully for him in the world, a divine work uplifted above the restless darkness of the human mind and the false limitations of the ego. At the same time, and here we get the gleam of a larger promise which we may even extend the hope of a collective turn towards perfection,— for if there is hope for man, why should there not be hope for mankind?¹⁶.

The message of the Gita is for the entire mankind and its spiritual uplift. It is not a mere passing message for a few moral and religious seekers but for all those who are willing to wage a spiritual war against moral depravity, evil and degeneration. It is a message against all the enemies of Dharma and for the God-lovers who are willing to be the divine instruments (*nimittamatram*) in the war against enemies of Dharma. In the words of the Gita:

By offering all works to me the indwelling Spirit, one must fight relentlessly without having any desire, attachment and regret¹⁷.

In this *dharmayuddha* or spiritual war, the individual must fight against the forces of evil by offering everything one has to God in the spirit of renunciation and detachment. That is the spirit of Gita’s Yoga. For Sri Aurobindo, Gita’s Yoga is a comprehensive way of spiritual life that renounces nothing but the ego and its deep ignorance and works in the spirit of a *karmayogi* who works not for himself but for God. This is not *sannyasa* in the ordinary sense of the term.

In the divine transformation which takes place because of the self-realisation of the Jiva, there appears the direct intervention of God in the life of man as the guide, friend and philosopher, as it happened in the life of Arjuna, so that the individual is not alone in this fight and that God is with him. This Yogic state is well illustrated by Sri Aurobindo as follows:

All must be given as material of that transmutation. An omniscient consciousness will take up our knowledge and our ignorance, our truth and our error, cast away their forms of insufficiency, *sarva-dharman parityajya*, and transform all into its infinite light¹⁸.

This transformation takes place at many levels such as material, vital, intellectual and spiritual. It is therefore called a total transformation which makes man worthy of God's works. That brings an end to all the problems of the individual ego arising out of ignorance. "This Yoga because it puts the soul of man into its right relation with God and world-existence and makes our action God's, the knowledge and will shaping and moving it his and our life the harmony of a divine self-expression, is the way to their total disappearance"¹⁹, that is, the disappearance of the problems of the ego. That is to say that the Yoga makes man the fit instrument of the Divine to work for the world which is ultimately anchored in God.

Why is the Gita Divine-Centric, not Individual-Centric?

Sri Aurobindo takes the Gita as primarily a divine-centric text and only secondarily an individual-centric text, because he believes that the individual, the world and history all derive their significance only from the Divine Being who is the source of everything. Though the Gita tells the story of the individual's spiritual evolution and transformation in the world and time, it is always from the standpoint of the Divine, that is, from the standpoint of the Eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*)²⁰. The standpoint of Eternity reveals that the individual human being is struggling in the world for his spiritual and moral elevation only at the direction of the Divine Being.

The human standpoint of it is subordinated to the divine standpoint because of the fact that human beings and their temporal history already bear the stamp of the Divine Being as their indwelling Spirit. In that sense, the human existence itself is a part of the cosmic history and cosmic Time which reflect the Divine Will. Therefore, the Gita is not concerned with the individual man's *mukti*, but is concerned with the larger question of how to make man the instrument of the Divine Being in the performance of the divine works. Man is supposed to be

the divine worker in the sense that he has to work for the world which is the field (*kshetra*) of the divine actions. "Therefore the liberated man is not afraid of action, he is a large and universal doer of all works, *kritsna-karma-krt*; not as others do them in subjection to Nature, but poised in the silent calm of the soul, tranquillity in Yoga with the Divine. The Divine is the lord of his works, he is only their channel through the instrumentality of his nature conscious of and subject to her Lord"²¹. Thus the divine worker becomes the protagonist of the Gita such that he, in the world and in time, is the torch-bearer of the Eternity. He is in the world deeply involved in the works, but all the while remembering that he is doing only God's works.

There could be an alternative way of interpreting Gita in which the Gita is concerned with the moral reformation of the individual by developing a code of virtue ethics²². According to this interpretation, all that the Gita is concerned with is the individual man's moral perfection and the three important ways such as the way of knowledge, the way of action and the way of devotion by which an individual can attain self-realisation and thus can lead a life of Truth, Non-violence, celibacy, non-attachment, and non-possession²³. This view of the Gita, if we consider from Sri Aurobindo's perspective, does not bring out the core meaning of the Gita because it fails to locate virtue ethics and the moral ideal of non-attachment (*anasakti*) in the larger context of the world and its metaphysical connections with the Divine. The Divine plan of the universe is kept aside in order to keep the individual life in the forefront. But the problem with this individualistic ethical approach is that it does not recognise the cosmic dimension of ethics and especially the spiritual foundations of ethics itself.

For Sri Aurobindo, the Gita is Divine-centric because its emphasis is on the way the Divine organises and orders everything and makes the whole cosmic plan work in unison. The Divine is the world-order itself of which man is a part. In this order there is Eternity as well as Time; there is God's Work and Will as well as the human works and the human will. There is divine necessity as well as human freedom all in harmony. Nothing is excluded from the divine order and so the Divine Will prevails upon the whole cosmos.

Concluding Remarks

Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* has brought out the true spirit of the Gita by laying emphasis on the supreme divine verities regarding eternity, temporality, man and the universe, and above all the Divine Being. It brings out the central argument of the Gita that man's total surrender to the Divine is the ultimate truth about man. The Gita makes the moral demands on man to make him ready for the performance of the divine works with knowledge and devotion.

The totality of man's being is laid at the door of the Divine for making man's being shine in the glory of the Divine Being.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2000), p.48.
2. *Bhagavadgita*, IV, 7-8.
3. *Ibid.*, XVI.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, p.31.
5. *Ibid.*, p.38.
6. *Ibid.*, p.379.
7. *Ibid.*, p.377.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
9. *Bhagavadgita*, VIII, 18-20.
10. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, p.269.
11. *Ibid.*, p.269.
12. Cf. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Parts I and II (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1973).
13. *Bhagavadgita*, XVI, 12.
14. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, p.277.
15. *Bhagavadgita*, XIV, 26-27.
16. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, pp.570-71.
17. *Bhagavadgita*, III, 30.
18. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, p.560.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 561.
20. Cf. Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (Dover Publications, Inc., New York).
21. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, p.179.
22. Cf. M.K. Gandhi, *Discourses on the Gita* (Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad) and Vinoba Bhave, *Gita pravachana* (Sarva-Seva-Sangha Prakashan, Varanasi, 1995).
23. *Ibid.*

The Mother Image in Sri Aurobindo

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prema Nandakumar

4. Infinite the Mother's Forms

We tend to speak often of Sri Aurobindo as a philosopher. But it is also true that Sri Aurobindo has said that he is not a philosopher. Professor Arabinda Basu has neatly explained the conundrum. Sri Aurobindo is familiar with the philosophical writings of the West, but he has not followed their methodology of studying philosophy as an academic discipline. He comes in the tradition of Indian philosophers who "saw" and recorded what they had seen (*darśana*). Hence, personal experience – termed yogic experience – becomes the moving life-force of the Indian philosopher. There is a turning point in the career of an Indian philosopher who has been nurtured in the life-giving springs of his tradition that personal experiences (*anubhava*) reveal pathways hitherto unseen.

Sri Aurobindo had clearly stated to a correspondent: "Neither you nor anyone else knows anything at all of my life; it has not been on the surface for men to see." When one reads his great works like *The Life Divine*, *The Supramental Manifestation* and *Savitri*, we know this to be the sterling truth about his life. What craters he must have plunged into to write lines such as these, blazing with spiritual heroism:

I made an assignation with the Night;
In the abyss was fixed our rendezvous:
In my breast carrying God's deathless light
I came her dark and dangerous heart to woo.
I left the glory of the illumined Mind
And the calm rapture of the divinised soul
And travelled through a vastness dim and blind
To the grey shore where her ignorant waters roll.
I walk by the chill wave through the dull slime
And still that weary journeying knows no end;

Lost is the lustrous godhead beyond Time,
There comes no voice of the celestial Friend,
And yet I know my footprints' track shall be
A pathway towards Immortality.ⁱ

Also, he must have experienced visions of a great new future for humanity, as if he were looking at his own palm. This is his '*darśana*', what he saw and experienced:

"There was no sob of suffering anywhere;
Experience ran from point to point of joy:
Bliss was the pure undying truth of things.
All Nature was a conscious front of God:
A wisdom worked in all, self-moved, self-sure,
A plenitude of illimitable Light,
An authenticity of intuitive Truth,
A glory and passion of creative Force."ⁱⁱ

Fortunately for us, Sri Aurobindo has also recorded a few experiences as they happened, without ensconcing them in third-person narratives. We can cull out from his works two such incidents. Taken together they bring the entire Vedantic *darśanas* of our ancients as a two-in-one experience. Sri Aurobindo had no sympathy for Sankara's Illusion (*adhyasa*) theory. However, for him Advaita was an experiential fact. He has noted down an experience of Advaita he had, significantly, when he went up the Takht-i-Suleiman (also known as Sankaracharya Hill) in Kashmir.

I walked on the high-wayed Seat of Solomon
Where Shankaracharya's tiny temple stands
Facing Infinity from Time's edge, alone
On the bare ridge ending earth's vain romance.

Around me was a formless solitude:
All had become one strange Unnamable,
An unborn sole Reality world-nude,
Topless and fathomless, for ever still.

A Silence that was Being's only word,
The unknown beginning and the voiceless end

Abolishing all things moment-seen or heard,
On an incommunicable summit reigned,

A lonely Calm and void unchanging Peace
On the dumb crest of Nature's mysteries.
(*Adwaita, SABCL*, vol.5, p.153)

It is easy enough to say that creation is a seamless One and the Brahman is soundless, colourless, formless. But it is quite another to experience this advaitic consciousness, this at-one-ment when the ego is completely dissolved in the Unnamable, as a salt doll in the ocean. Even if the experience is gained, it is present for only a moment. Presently the noises of the world break in to the meditative cave where the *Jeevatman* is totally subsumed in the *Paramatman*, an experience that has given us meditative statements like *Aham Brahmosmi* and *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma*. Though Sri Aurobindo has given a local habitation and name to the space where he had the advaitic experience (Sankaracharya's Temple, Kashmir), it was certainly not the only one of its kind. This '*advaitanubhava*' is seen in many stances in his poems and epic, *Savitri*.

If this is seeing all as One, the other Vedantic experience is the ability to perceive the One as the Many. Sri Aurobindo's experience seems to have led him to the Mother image. By nature and tradition he was immersed in the Divine Mother. Hailing from Bengal one is automatically tuned to the Mother idea, the Mother as Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati. One of the experiences occurred to Sri Aurobindo in Baroda. He recollected it much later, in Pondicherry, on 13th September, 1939. This is what happened when he was in Baroda. He had gone to Swami Brahmananda's Ashram in Karnali near Chandod a few times with K.G. Deshpande. Once, on his way back he spent sometime at Karnali going around the temples in the place because those who had come with him wanted to. When he was in front of a tiny temple of Kali, suddenly he realised that worshipping an image can also lead a person directly to the spiritual plane. He writes: "And when I looked at the image I saw the Living Presence there. For the first time I believed in the presence of God."

Almost a quarter century later, he gave us these lines of that Chandod experience recollected in the tranquillity of Pondicherry:

In a town of gods, housed in a little shrine,
From sculptured limbs the Godhead looked at me,—

A living Presence deathless and divine,
A Form that harboured all infinity.

The great World-Mother and her mighty will
Inhabited the earth's abysmal sleep,
Voiceless, omnipotent, inscrutable,
Mute in the desert and the sky and deep.

Now veiled with mind she dwells and speaks no word,
Voiceless, inscrutable, omniscient,
Hiding until our soul has seen, has heard
The secret of her strange embodiment,

One in the worshipper and the immobile shape,
A beauty and mystery flesh or stone can drape.
(*The Stone Goddess, SABCL, vol.5, p.139*)

What prompted him suddenly to write of the Mother Goddess? Why did the experience get released by the curtains of memory? The date of writing this sonnet is significant. Anxiety had begun to cover several spaces of the earth because Hitler's forces had invaded Poland on 1st September, 1939. On 3rd, Britain and France had declared war on Germany. Immediately, the Anglo-French Supreme War Council was formed to prepare the joint strategy for opposing Hitler. The Council held its first meeting at the historically famous Abbeville on the Somme River on 12th September 1939. The news would have reached Pondicherry the same day or the day after. What does the future hold for civilisation, Sri Aurobindo must have wondered. There were the days of political activism in Baroda. How faith had been the guardian angel in those times! How the Mother Goddess enshrined in a sculpture had assured him of the maternal love for her children! How the Bande Mataram song had led the children of India towards sculpting a new dawn! A memory that no doubt flashed now as Earth Goddess was once again on the verge of being hijacked by the asuric forces.

Perhaps our own self-imprisonment in the mental plane surrounds our self as a fog, but She sees, She knows. And She had looked at the young patriot. That look was not in vain! Mother India's children had proved that heroism was not a story that belonged to the Mahabharata times. The Alipore Bomb Case records contain the heroism of that age.

The faith had returned now and he recorded it in the sonnet. The days went

by and the information trickled in. September 29. Black Day! Russia and Germany had agreed to divide Poland. I would fondly think of the days in September-October, 1939 as days of travelling in the above-mental planes like Savitri for Sri Aurobindo, as she goes in search of her soul:

“As in the vigilance of the sleepless night
Through the slow heavy-footed silent hours,
Repressing in her bosom its load of grief,
She sat staring at the dumb tread of Time
And the approach of ever-nearing Fate ...”ⁱⁱⁱ

Travelling to the summits of being? Sitting still in yogic trance in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo was remembering the past and watching the future as well. The ashram group would have been conversing about Durgashtami for in 1939 Durgashtami was celebrated on 20th October. A striking image falls in place as Sri Aurobindo's yogic experience gets verbalised on the following day:

After unnumbered steps of a hill-stair
I saw upon earth's head brilliant with sun
The immobile Goddess in her house of stone
In a loneliness of meditating air.
Wise were the human hands that set her there
Above the world and Time's dominion;
The Soul of all that lives, calm, pure, alone,
Revealed its boundless self mystic and bare.

Our body is an epitome of some Vast
That masks its presence by our humanness.
In us the secret Spirit can indite
A page and summary of the Infinite,
A nodus of Eternity expressed
Live in an image and a sculptured face.
(*The Hill-Top Temple, SABCL, vol.5, p.154*)

So the news of the Nazi march shall not weaken the psyche of the human being. Inhumanity as unleashed by Hitler is not the truth. The very fact that the vast majority of human beings remain human is proof enough that in man resides the Goddess. She is a mother, she will not abandon her child. Why, she has a kindly eye for even the erring child! If her power is in us, the possibilities are

infinite. What seems impossible today, what appears an impossible task of stopping the onward march of Wotan's children can become a reality tomorrow for the power of the secret Spirit of the Mother in us will rise as the Mother of Sorrows, as the Mother of Might and ultimately as the Mother of Light.

When we meditate upon "*The Stone Goddess*" it is astonishing how the mother-image helped Sri Aurobindo at each turn, whether to gain self-confidence, or rouse the common man from his sleep or prepare a blueprint for political action. Almost one hundred years after, I hold on to the glass case which came with the 1972 Centenary edition in which the volumes stand straight as a disciplined army. Each book carries the passion and firmness of patriots like Sri Aurobindo. And here is the inspired poet-translator. As the twentieth century opened, Swami Vivekananda had been advising young men to draw inspiration from Bankim Chandra's Mantra of patriotism. The Sanskrit-rich Bengali was sublime, but could it be brought into the English language? Sri Aurobindo tried his hand, not once but twice. The Mother-image held him totally as he proceeded with a literal translation:

For thou art Durga holding her ten weapons of war,
Kamala at play in the lotuses
and speech, the goddess, giver of all lore,
to thee I bow!
I bow to thee, goddess of wealth
pure and peerless,
richly-watered, richly-fruited,
the Mother! (*Bande Mataram*, SABCL, vol.8, p.313)

What wonderful conceptions of the million facets of the Mother one finds in the Indian tradition! On his return to India Sri Aurobindo had begun studying the two great epics and Sanskrit poets. Wherever one turned, the Mother image seems to have caught the Indian's attention. All experiences are mother-experiences. Even the experience of night, for we have a *Ratri Suktham* to the Mother in the Vedas. Why, she is the *Kaala-raatri swaroopini*, the image of the Night of Dissolution! A simple, prosaic description is so poetic in Sri Aurobindo's translation. When he consciously chooses to translate Bankim's mother-image in lilting poetry, we have the very icon getting consecrated in our hearts.

Thou art Durga, Lady and Queen,
With her hands that strike and her swords of sheen,

Thou art Lakshmi lotus-throned,
And the Muse a hundred-toned.
Pure and perfect without peer,
Mother lend thine ear,
Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Dark of hue O candid-fair. (*Bande Mataram*, SABCL, vol.8, p.310)

The Mother-image set up by our elders in various forms would become a strong base for Sri Aurobindo's arguments in his political writings. Rapier-thrusts from his intellectual brilliance are a-plenty here. His very first essay tears to pieces the hypocritical utterances of those who led the National Congress – then barely a decade old. He had been in England for a long time and knew the weak spots very well, so he could not stand the adulation of British Rule, "the bare-faced hypocrisy of our enthusiasm for the Queen Empress". For himself, he had choice phraseology in his hand, this young man who could dismiss Gladstone as unprincipled and General Booth as "a vulgar impostor, a convicted charlatan, who has enriched himself by trading on the sentimental emotions of the English middle class."

But the Mother had not taken long to raise Sri Aurobindo to a level higher than the mind. In this plane Mother ruled with her inspirations. He was never one for seeking guidance from the western world and did not like the way many Indian politicians thought highly of political equations in England and sought guidelines from the Conservative or Liberal or Labour party agenda. He wrote sharply in the *Bande Mataram* (August 30, 1906): "India's hope lies not in English Liberalism or Labour, but in her own strong heart and giant limbs. Titaness, who by thy mere attempt to rise can burst these Lilliputian bonds, why shouldst thou clamour feebly for help to these pigmies over the seas?"

Titaness, the Durga-power of Mother India. Bankim's mantra which was strengthening the sinews of the Indian nation and giving a physical form to Swami Vivekananda's stirring words: "Strength is life, weakness is death." While writing his power-packed articles Sri Aurobindo's diction becomes encrusted and sometimes the passion in his appeal becomes irresistible and we also get immersed in the Mother-idea. "The Demand of the Mother" (*Bande Mataram*, April 11, 1908) is direct. Aspiration for freedom cannot be a trade. If we aspire for the Mother's help, mere singing Bankim's poem will not do. One has to act; here action means total surrender to the Divine Mother, Bhavani Bharati. She takes charge of the action from now onwards:

Our passion to see the face of our free and glorified Mother must be as devouring a madness as the passion of Chaitanya to see the face of Sri Krishna. Our sacrifice for the country must be as enthusiastic and complete as that of Jagai and Madhai who left the rule of a kingdom to follow the Sankirtan of Gouranga....The Mother asks all before she will give herself. Not until Surath Raja offered the blood of his veins did the Mother appear to him and ask him to choose his boon. Not until Shivaji was ready to offer his head at the feet of the Mother, did Bhavani in visible form stay his hand and give him the command to save his people.

Such is the constant presence of the Mother image in Sri Aurobindo's approaches. She is there, even if there be no such passion and the aim is only cutting criticism. For unmasking the ways of the Congress Moderates, he uses the parable of Sati with precise asides to the point. After giving in brief the legend of the destruction of Daksha's sacrifice by Mahadeva, he draws comparisons.

"There was a Daksha too in India which was called the Indian National Congress.", begins this extended simile. Daksha's daughter Sati is equated with "the young Indian Nation." Against Daksha's wishes this Sati married the Mahadeva known to all as the Destiny of India "with a fourfold Mantra, Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education as the sacred formula of union." Daksha did not like this mendicant Mahadeva "for the Destiny of India had long wandered in the wilderness with a beggar's bowl in his hand." Had he not come to the marriage with his rag-bag company, shouting "Bombom Bande Mataram"?

(*Bande Mataram*, SABCL, vol.1, pp.893-5)

So moves the fantastic study of the Indian National Congress. At the destruction of Daksha's sacrifice, he is also killed but revived with a goat's head stuck on his crown the wrong way, and the eyes of the Indian National Congress "were turned to the past and not to the future." And Sati? She had burnt herself in the sacrificial fire readied by the myopic Indian National Congress-Daksha. The present may seem anarchic. But Sati does not die. She will be born again. Sri Aurobindo, about to go to the Alipore Jail speaks in accents that are of a prophet: Mother Sati is for ever!

"For Sati will be born again, on the high mountains of mighty endeavour, colossal aspiration, unparalleled self-sacrifice she will be born again, in a better and more beautiful body, and by terrible tapasya she will meet Mahadeva once more and be wedded to him in nobler fashion, with kinder

auguries, for a happier and greater future. For the thing is written in the book of God and nothing can prevent it, that Sati shall wed Mahadeva, that the national life of India shall meet and possess its divine and mighty destiny." (Ibid)

This message is not confined to the followers of the Bande Mataram Movement which is generally bound to a time by historians. Sri Aurobindo is actually giving wholesome advice for all future generations when he gives them the hope that the Avatar of Sati Devi will manifest again to help India become the guru of the world. But this will not happen if we remain fear-ridden, lazy, self-satisfied in our brief personal successes within our own cocoons of family and groups. Mark the list of virtues the Indian has to develop to aspire and achieve the great future.

"Mighty endeavour"! I Am reminded of a passage in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Gulliver finds himself in Brobdingnag and there is an occasion when the King converses with Gulliver to know about life on earth. One hundred years of human history is enough for him to have a distaste for the going-on in our civilised society! He concluded (almost rightly!) that the civilisation of human beings as seen in a single century "was only a heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, banishments, the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice, and ambition, could produce."

As day after day they meet and converse, the king begins to wonder why Grildrig (Gulliver) is so fond of his fatherland for his people seem to be "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth." No! we can assure ourselves that India was certainly not like that in ancient times. Unfortunately it has come to think it is weak and incapable of great thoughts and deeds anymore. This negative feeling must be erased and we should be ready for initiating mighty projects. Pigmy thought should have no place in our life but a colossal aspiration to move forward and achieve our ideals: stop not till the goal is reached! Ah, and a readiness for self-sacrifice. Reading about the fellow-accused with Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Trial, we know that mighty endeavour, a colossal aspiration and complete self-sacrifice had indeed been there for a while and Sati had incarnated. India became free not long after.

References

- i. 'The Pilgrim of the Night'
- ii. *Savitri*, Book III, canto iii, p.324
- iii. Ibid., Book VII, canto ii, p.473

(To be continued)

Soul and Nature

Debashish Banerji

From a certain point of view, the central theme of *Savitri* can be seen as the struggle of human consciousness in a world where it is not master. The human consciousness finds itself as it were thrown into a world where all around it are a variety of automatisms. We find ourselves flowing with or struggling against the forces of this world, and we realise that these are forces of nature that are outside us but also inside us. By drawing back into a subjective impersonality of perception, one can start recognising these as universal forces acting from outside and inside us. There seems to be a gradation of such forces, including those that express forms of interested exaggeration. Finally, there is an aspect which we constantly struggle against as the limit of our resistance here on earth and that is the fact of death.

The fact of death faces us as the great leveller, the inescapable law of existence in this world, which Sri Aurobindo calls ‘the iron law’. This is partly why in the Indian tradition Death has been equated with Dharma, the Law-giver, because he stands to ensure the ultimate law of the material world. But he also stands to ensure the law of consciousness by challenging it with death.

The sense of being a conscious being in an unconscious world full of laws over which we are not master is something that, as rational beings, we naturally try to understand. We feel if we acquire the knowledge of the forces that are at work in the world, this can give us power. This is part of the struggle of being human – to acquire knowledge of the forces that drive the world and ourselves, to understand their operations and their logic and be able to develop mastery over them.

We find that we are faced with three principles in our embodied existence on earth. First, the body is a part of the body of the earth, what one might call the material principle, Matter. Matter faces us with the most determinable laws, at least at the macrocosmic level. It is predictable, bound by cause and effect. The study of the material principle becomes the aim of modern physics and

chemistry. To the material principle, there is an operation of fixity, and an operation of particularity. Matter exists in the form of particles, discrete entities governed by internal laws and acted on by external laws. The behaviours of these particles can be strictly determined, which bestows the property of fixity to the operations of Matter. Of course, at the quantum level, this particulate reality turns illogical but since our physical experience is at the macro level, all forms reduce themselves to forms of predictable inconscient matter.

Then we find the principle of life. We see this principle all around us, in plants, animals and human beings. The life principle is that which expresses itself as a conscious will in a physical form, a will that tries to maintain the form it inhabits through internal and external adaptation and replication. It attempts to enlarge itself through swallowing lesser wills, aligning with other wills, or giving itself to a greater will; and it seeks enjoyment through experience. Life is less easy to predict than the principle of matter. Yet we sense that these operations of the life-force are also governed by laws, the laws of life, laws that maintain life-forms and express themselves in their habits of possession, survival, enjoyment, experience.

Thus, this force of life is distinguished by us as an independent principle of our experience. This force of life is subject to the principle of matter. There is an interdependence between matter and life, forming a temporary conscious material substance. Death is the sundering of this interdependence in a form and the disintegration of its conscious material substance. Death is an unhappy experience to living things because living things have experienced the illimitable consciousness of life and when life leaves material things we are faced with an alien abjection, the horror of the other. This is one of the underlying factors driving the epic *Savitri*.

Beyond the force of life, there is the power of mind. Mind as a principle is even more flexible than life, and hence more unpredictable. It is more master of its circumstances because it can extend its power of intelligence towards the understanding of the laws of the principles of life and matter. It discovers these laws and creates specialised academic disciplines to research their implications. It studies even itself and discovers the laws of mind – the laws of reason, logic and the symbolic laws of the imagination. The ultimate amazement of the human mind, the source of its chronic amazement in the world, is that the world seems reasonable – in that, there is a sense of predictability about it. However, it also intuits that all may not be predictable. Yet, it seeks out the reason of the world so as to attain greater mastery over it.

Among the grey areas of mental predictability, we find again the temporary existence of the hybrid, mind-life-matter complex, matter conscious with will,

intelligence and something intangible, something which escapes prediction. But on earth, it is always Matter which is king, and Matter's primary property is "the iron law" of unconscious fixity and decomposition into particles. To the conscious part of the complex, this is experienced as the "dull gravitation" of *Thanatos*, the death wish. Mind too, cannot maintain any stable or eternal presence in matter, because the law of matter reduces itself to the property of Inconscience and mind and life have to leave it; they are only temporary inhabitants in any particular habitation of matter. Mind, even though it has a degree of freedom and control over life and matter, is yet not lord of life and matter. We also sense that mind sometimes deceives us and that we would rather be free of it. It fills us with worries, with rationalisations of our own desires, with evil thoughts which make us want to cause harm. We are conscious of these things and yet we don't have power over them. This adds its own quality to the struggle of consciousness in an unconscious world, a world where the Inconscient principle Matter is Lord.

In the early history of Indian philosophy, an approach to this struggle between Consciousness and Nature was initiated by a school known as Sankhya. According to Sankhya, there is a fundamental duality at the basis of cosmic existence. This is the duality of Soul and Nature or what Sankhya calls Purusha and Prakriti. Sankhya starts from the phenomenological premise that the conscious part in us is able to observe the subconscious and unconscious parts, it can deny existence to them through a withdrawal of will, but it cannot animate them with a creative will of its own. In Sankhya, Purusha is radically different from Prakriti, the unconscious or "nature" part. Sankhya's praxis is based on answering the question – how much of us is nature and what in us is conscious?

As we saw, the three principles of Matter, Life and Mind constitute our nature and all these principles operate within the boundaries of laws that animate automatisms. This is Prakriti. By an apophatic act of negating identity with these forms of automatism, we arrive at the pure conscious witness, Purusha. Sankhya approaches this by making a detailed enumeration of the constituting principles of reality (*tattvas*). It considers a primal nature or Prakriti as the principle from which the automatisms of our experience arise. At the base of this experience is a one-to-one correspondence between objective elements and properties (*bhutas*, *tanmatras*) and subjective senses and actions (*jnanendriyas* and *karmendriyas*). After enumerating these, it considers the processing unit of human experience, which it calls "the inner instrument" (*antahkarana*). This is the Sankhya conception of the mind, which it divides into a subconscient unorganised mentality (*chitta*), a sense mind (*manas*), the intelligence (*buddhi*) and the ego-sense (*ahamkara*). Once these constituents

of experience have been identified and enumerated, there is an unnamable residue of pure consciousness. That is the Purusha.

This division of Purusha and Prakriti, can be arrived at in practice through an applied psychology. We may carry out this meditation of distinguishing what in us is Prakriti and through this process of elimination, we may arrive at the pure witness poise of the Purusha. We find that we are able to watch all the principles and processes of nature within us, including that which we call ourselves (ego, *ahamkara*). On the other hand, the witnessing 'I' is none of these principles or operations of nature. I am not my body; not the forces of life, of emotion and will. I am not my sensations, my sense experiences or the various kinds of thoughts – worries, idealisms or ideologies – that are at work in my mind. I am something other than all these things, intangible and unnamable, a conscious witness, Purusha.

To know oneself free of nature is a great liberation. It grants a sense of freedom but it does not grant the sense of mastery. We are liberated because we are not influenced or affected by the powers of nature. But neither can we influence or control the powers of nature. Persisting in the poise of the pure witness (*saksi*), we develop an awareness that the movements of Prakriti, borrow their appearance of consciousness from the Purusha and depend on the default sanction of the Purusha for their continuance. We begin to realise that the Purusha can withhold this sanction with a silent will, causing the movements of Prakriti to stop. This awareness opens to us the Purusha's power of sanction, *anumanta*. But even as *anumanta*, we find that Purusha has only a negative power over Prakriti. It can put a stop to the movements of nature but it cannot create movements of nature.

Arriving at this point, we realise the radical duality of Purusha and Prakriti, as Sankhya assumed, along with the Purusha's freedom from Prakriti and its ability to stop the Prakriti's movements. This liberation of Purusha and stoppage of Prakriti is considered the goal of Sankhya. Patanjali's Raja Yoga, as summarised in his *Yoga Sutras*, sees this as the goal of yoga and refers to it as *citta-vritti-nirodha*, cessation of all tendency towards the movement of consciousness. In this condition all nature comes to a standstill and we are completely liberated as beings who are conscious witnesses of nature in us and outside us but without any activity. We wait for the body to fall off in death and we find ourselves persisting as pure witnessing subjects.

However, this liberation is achieved at the cost of the loss of worldly experience. We have lost the joy of life, our sense of power and our experience of delight. The primordial duality of Purusha and Prakriti is reduced in favour of Purusha by cutting the Gordian knot, and putting Prakriti to sleep. This is a world-negating solution.

An even earlier proto-philosophical approach in India was that of the Upanishads, also known as the Vedanta. Vedanta is not dualistic, it affirms a unitary and infinite Reality. According to it, Reality is one and infinite Conscious Being, with the cosmos as its self-presentation. This absolute consciousness, other than which there can be nothing, is called Brahman by this body of teaching. Interpretations of the Vedanta which rest on the empirical foundations of Sankhya, cannot find any reality in Prakriti or Nature; it is thought to be an illusion created by a power of hallucination within Brahman called Maya. Maya is a projective machinery within the One that incomprehensively creates the manifestations of nature as illusory images which our senses take to be real, due to a subject-object correspondence. An infinity of nature manifestations can result, and what we call human existence is one form of such a nature manifestation marshalled on the stage with Purusha, the individualised aspect of the Brahman, as the spectator. Nature is thus a cinematic act of Maya put forth in a way to engage Prakriti so as to seem real, but in truth unreal and a trap to make all beings suffer the illusion of reality of the play of Maya.

If this were true then we would have to admit that Brahman is impotent and not truly the one Reality there is, since it has no power over Maya. Like Purusha and Prakriti, Brahman and Maya would form a fundamental duality, not merely in our experience but in and as Reality. This would go against the foundational notion of Vedanta which posits a non-dual absolute existence. If Brahman was absolute, it would have to be integrally present in each of its powers, principles, aspects and emanations or subsidiary realities within it. Brahman would be integrally present within Maya too and Brahman would have to be integrally present in any creation of Maya, e.g. in any manifestation including our manifestation.

Still, the dualistic experience of consciousness and the world of automatisms in which it finds itself cannot be wished away since this is the nature of human experience. Vedanta approaches this duality by introducing the notion of different cosmic ontologies which are relative appearances or seemings, and which could mask the nature of reality, while the absolute truth of things would remain primordially One and Infinite. This absolute reality is termed by it Vidya, or Knowledge, since all is known within it as self-evident, by identity of consciousness. As against this, cosmic existence which appears to be dual is termed Avidya, since nothing is known by identity here, all is known only indirectly, through inference.

Sri Aurobindo approaches the equation between Purusha and Prakriti, and between Brahman and Maya from this Vedantic point of view. Of course, other Vedantic commentators (*bhasyakars*) before him had also taken this view, but

all of them held the distinction between Vidya and Avidya to be permanent. In our cosmic existence, that of Avidya, we seem doomed to a dualistic experience of consciousness and the best we can achieve is a radical separation of consciousness (Purusha) from its conditioning enclosures (Prakriti) and the realisation of liberation which results from this. A state of permanent non-dual experience would be possible only outside the cosmic condition or in states of deep trance in which cosmos was left behind and the ontology of Vidya was experienced.

Sri Aurobindo, however, believed that the division between Avidya and Vidya was temporary, a condition which could be overcome by invoking the consciousness of Vidya and effecting an intervention therefrom on the Avidya. It is such an intervention that is described in *Savitri*. In a way, this is the central theme of *Savitri*. Savitri comes as the Shakti of the Vidya consciousness that enters into the Avidya to transform it so that conscious being and automatic nature, or Purusha and Prakriti in it are not radically separate entities, but change to a poise in which Purusha discovers Prakriti to be its own creative will. Purusha is then realised as Ishwara (Lord) and Prakriti as Shakti (Power). All the automatisms of Prakriti are seen as creative choices of Purusha, no longer bondages, and open to change according to its undivided will. This transformation effects a change in the character of all that was experienced in the Avidya as a binding law, including “the iron law” of Death, the gravitation of Matter on Life and Mind, subjecting them to its Inconscience. This transformation, in its final result, the conquest over Death, is what Savitri represents and comes to effect in our world.

In his philosophical treatise, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo describes the unity of Brahman and Maya (and Purusha and Prakriti) in terms of the self-conception of Brahman. Brahman interrogates its own reality in the form of a self-conception through the power of its own consciousness, Maya. Maya is the power of Brahman to conceive of itself in an objectified form, giving shape to a cosmos in innumerable manifest forms. This Brahman and its power of consciousness take on the sense of duality for the practical purpose of creation, yet remain the same infinite Being. This co-existence of duality and absolute unity is the reality of Vidya, depending on the logic of the Infinite. To Infinity there may exist innumerable orders of infinity, there may exist also innumerable forms of infinity. Infinity views itself as infinity. The viewer of infinity is infinite, what it views is also infinite. Brahman-Maya, therefore, are two entirely independent infinite realities of the Absolute that are at the same time the one absolute Reality. This is possible in the logic of the Infinite.

In our experience in the Avidya, we find a different kind of logic at work –

the logic of the finite. Both Space and Time are experienced by us as finite or discrete properties through which we experience Reality. Here, one, two or many are each exclusive of the others. Two cannot simultaneously be One. In this subsidiary reality Brahman and Maya express themselves in individualised forms as Purusha and Prakriti, which are experienced as radically separate. That is why each of the two here seeks to assert its fundamental Oneness by reducing the other to itself or by erasing it. However, if the truth of Brahman and Maya is the truth in the Infinite, then there must be a truth of the individual person that corresponds to it in the infinite reality of the absolute Brahman and that is the personal aspect of Brahman-Maya.

Brahman, as conscious being and infinite impersonal principle of the cosmic existence is also a Person, what one might call an infinite Person. A Being can be approached as a Person and this Person, at the origin of all creations, is the lord, Ishwara. Its power of being, or its conscious-force of being in this personal key, is its consort, Shakti. So Brahman-Maya takes on the personal aspect of Ishwara-Shakti. Ishwara-Shakti then enters into a manifestation whose law based on the principle of Ignorance or *avidya*, makes them seem radically separate. Purusha and Prakriti are the separated appearance of the One Reality of Ishwara-Shakti which could be called the Two-in-One. Therefore, in the approach to Reality from our condition of being, that of conscious beings in an unconscious world, we need to transition from a condition of Ignorance (Avidya) to a condition of Knowledge (Vidya) where the duality of Purusha and Prakriti is re-integrated into the Conscious Being and Lord, Ishwara and its own Conscious Energy, Shakti, at play with it in all the varied manifestations of the universe. It is Ishwara-Shakti self-multiplied in all the individual beings of this world whose play is the truth of the cosmos. This play is represented by Savitri through her relationship with Satyavan and with all the other beings she encounters. The subjection of Satyavan to Death becomes the symbolic power of Avidya representing the laws of nature, over which Savitri must be victorious, to affirm the truth of Vidya in the Avidya, transforming it. Savitri demonstrates the power of Shakti, and the equation of Ishwara and Shakti. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo introduces us to these realities of Brahman, Purusha, Ishwara, Maya, Prakriti and Shakti and develops the relations of these powers:

If we remain absorbed in the Silence, the creative Consciousness and her works disappear into the Silence; Nature and the creation for us cease to exist or be real. On the other hand, if we look exclusively at the Being in its aspect of the sole existent Person and Ruler, the Power or Shakti by which he does all things disappears into his uniqueness or becomes an attribute of

His cosmic personality; the absolute monarchy of the one Being becomes our perception of the universe. Both these experiences create many difficulties for the mind due to its non-perception of the reality of the Self-Power whether in quiescence or in action, or to a too exclusively negative experience of the Self, or to the too anthropomorphic character of our conceptions attached to the Supreme Being as Ruler. It is evident that we are looking at an Infinite of which the Self-Power is capable of many movements, all of them valid. If we look again at it more largely and take account of both the impersonal and personal truth of things as one truth, if in that light, the light of personality in impersonality, we see the biune aspect of Self and Self-Power, then in the person aspect, a dual person emerges, Ishwara-Shakti, the divine Self-Creator and the Divine Mother and Creatrix of the universe; there becomes apparent to us the mystery of the masculine and feminine cosmic principles whose play and interaction are necessary for all creation. In the superconscious truth of the Self-Existence, these two are fused and implied in each other, one and indistinguishable, but in the spiritual-pragmatic truth of the dynamism of the universe they emerge and become active; the Divine Mother Energy as the universal creatrix, Maya, Para-Prakriti, Chit-Shakti, manifests the cosmic Self and Ishwara and her own self-power as a dual principle; it is through her that the Being, the Self, the Ishwara acts and he does nothing except by her; though his Will is implicit in her, it is she who works out all as the supreme Consciousness-Force who holds all souls and beings within her and as executive Nature; all exists and acts according to Nature, all is the Consciousness-Force manifesting and playing with the Being in millions of forms and movements into which she casts his existence (*The Life Divine*, SABCL, 1972, v.18, pp.355-56).

As we see here, in their superconscious origin, Self and Self-Power or Ishwara and Shakti are “fused and implied in each other, One and indistinguishable.” But for any kind of creation, the Self-Power of Self or Shakti of Ishwara becomes active and manifests “the cosmic Self and Ishwara and her own self-power as a dual principle.” It is the play of relations of these two that founds the reality of any cosmos. In our own cosmos, that of the Avidya, this duality is experienced as one in which the Shakti is active but the Purusha is asleep. We may try to reverse this equation, but find that Purusha in its waking is at best a witness, where Shakti is still active and Purusha is awake but impotent; or becoming further aware of Purusha’s power, we can put Shakti to sleep with Purusha awake, but we cannot realise Purusha as the creative master of Shakti. However, if we seek the highest poise of the Shakti, through

aspiration and surrender to Her Being and Will, She can raise us to the poise of Ishwara in the Vidya and we may realise the Power of the Vidya to transform the Avidya. Thus we see that it is the supramental Shakti that holds the key to the transformation of consciousness in the Avidya. Savitri is the embodiment of this Shakti, descended due to the aspiration and surrender of the yogi-king Aswapati; and her ministry on earth consists in transforming the “iron law” of material nature and releasing the soul of Satyavan from all subjection to the Avidya.

Continuing this passage, Sri Aurobindo indicates this transformative power of the Divine Mother:

If we draw back from her workings, then all can fall into quiescence, we can enter into the silence, because she consents to cease from her dynamic activity; but it is in her quiescence and silence that we are quiescent and cease. If we would affirm our independence of Nature, she reveals to us the supreme and omnipotent power of the Ishwara and ourselves as beings of his being, but that power is herself and we are that in our supernature. If we would realise a higher formation or status of being, then it's still through her, through the Divine Shakti, the Consciousness-Force of the Spirit that it has to be done. Our surrender must be to the Divine Being through the Divine Mother: for it is towards or into the supreme nature that our ascension has to take place and it can only be done by the supramental Shakti taking up our mentality and transforming it into her supramentality. Thus we see that there is no contradiction or incompatibility between these three aspects of Existence, between them in their eternal status and the three modes of Dynamis working in the universe, One Being, one Reality as Self bases, supports, informs as Purusha or Conscious Being experiences, as Ishwara wills, governs and possesses its world of manifestation created and kept in motion and action by its own Consciousness-Force, Maya, Prakriti, Shakti. (*The Life Divine*, SABCL, 1972, v.18, pp.356-57)

Interpretation

Savitri, Book I, Canto IV: The Secret Knowledge

In this passage, Sri Aurobindo dwells on the eternal duality of Brahman-Maya, Ishwara-Shakti, Purusha-Prakriti. At first, the world presents itself to us as a world of Avidya or ignorance where all things are separate and consciousness seems to be atomised in individual forms. But all these atomic portions of individual consciousness, are an appearance put on by the one supreme Conscious Being.

The Conscious being has multiplied itself into all these individualities and this self-multiplication is a result of the action of Conscious-Force on Conscious Being. The infinite Consciousness-Force of Conscious Being enters into relation with it, manifesting its infinite potencies in becomings. That relationship of the One with the One, due to its infinity, becomes an act of Love calling the Infinite Being forth into an Infinite Becoming.

An Infinite Becoming can have infinite possibilities and modalities of becoming. We are one such possibility which can be thought of as a systematic measuring of the One. All becoming can be thought of as a form of measurement of Being, a self-conception. In other words, any becoming is an answer to the question posed by Being to itself: “Who and/or what am I?” But this asking of a question is an act of consciousness, a self-objectification, and implies a duality within the One. Thus the question is really one asked by Self-Power to Self, by Maya to Brahman or Shakti to Ishwara. In Avidya, the creation in which we find ourselves, this question is asked in a specific form and implies a certain kind of measurement. On the one hand, Being becomes the objective infinite extension of Space; on the other, it becomes the subjective power of perpetual progressive experience, which is the essence of Time. It also becomes the quantification of the Infinite in terms of its infinite possibilities atomised into the forms of consciousness in which individuals experience themselves as separate beings.

Here is how Sri Aurobindo begins the passage.

All here where each thing seems its lonely self
Are figures of the sole transcendent One:

(*Savitri*, Bk I, Canto IV, 1993, rev ed, p.60)

There is only one Being, which has been multiplied by an act of self-consciousness into its infinite qualitative possibilities. This power of consciousness creates the ground of becoming. This is what we call Nature – Supernature (Chit-Shakti) in Vidya and inferior Nature (Prakriti) in the Avidya. Nature portions out the innumerable possibilities of Being, quantifies the unquantifiable into its discrete quantum realities. These are the individual experiencers and their experiences into which the One is self-multiplied. But because Prakriti maintains this appearance as the ground of Avidya with its will, it is experienced as a separateness in each individual monad. At the same time, the One, who remains outside the Avidya in a state of Vidya, experiences this condition as a multiple self-becoming.

Only by him they are, his breath is their life;
An unseen Presence moulds the oblivious clay.
A playmate in the mighty Mother's game,
One came upon the dubious whirling globe
To hide from her pursuit in force and form. (Ibid)

This is the artifice, the mechanism by which the One is made into the many, a game set up by Being's Consciousness-Force, who Sri Aurobindo refers to here as "the mighty Mother." She is the Mother because she is the Creatrix. She prepares the ground on which the one Being may be self-multiplied and through her action, all these possibilities of Being merge into separate finite forms of becoming. Thus the One has entered into a game as of hide and seek with his own Consciousness-Force, hidden in the heart of infinite atomised movements seeking the One. This is the ground of the play created by the Shakti in the Avidya or Ignorance.

A secret spirit in the Inconscient's sleep,
A shapeless Energy, a voiceless Word,
He was here before the elements could emerge,
Before there was light of mind or life could breathe.
Accomplice of her cosmic huge pretence,
His semblances he turns to real shapes
And makes the symbol equal with the truth: (Ibid, pp.60-61)

This One Being, in the play of Ignorance, must become its own opposite, that is, the semblance of Non-Being. In other words, this supreme Conscious being must involve itself in the appearance of its own non-existence. That self-involvement (a kind of self-oblivion) is the original act at the root of creation, the beginning of the measure of infinity, extending objectively as Space in Form; and progressing subjectively as Time in experience.

To speak of the infinite from the experience of the finite involves a foundational paradox, what the philosopher Jacques Derrida calls, adapting a Greek term, an *aporia*. To speak of a beginning of time given the reality of eternity, is a paradox. Therefore, what Sri Aurobindo means here is the presentation of an eternal recurrence, a beginning that is beginningless or that begins ever anew again at every instant, and an ending which cannot but be another beginning. In this appearance of a Beginning is an involution, as the tree is involved in the seed and the seed contains the tree which it manifests through time in its evolution. So it is that Spirit, in symbolic form, is self-involved

at the basis of its evolution in the Ignorance. In this self-progression, the One enters as seed into all its possibilities. Each individualised possibility of Being is thus a symbol shaped by its Conscious Force and inhabited by itself, which turns possibilities to realities because of Its reality within them.

He gives to his timeless thoughts a form in Time.
He is the substance, he the self of things;
She has forged from him her works of skill and might: (Ibid, p.61)

Consciousness-Force uses the eternal Self and Substance of Conscious Being to forge all its possibilities of Becoming.

She wraps him in the magic of her moods. (Ibid)

Because Consciousness-Force is the qualitative body of Being, She contains all its infinite qualities. Out of these qualities, she creates the forms of the manifestation and inhabiting these qualitative psychic complexes, Being experiences them individually. Thus, 'She wraps him in the magic of her moods'.

And makes of his myriad truths her countless dreams.
The Master of being has come down to her,
An immortal child born in the fugitive years.
In objects wrought, in the persons she conceives,
Dreaming she chases her idea of him (Ibid)

This is the Virgin Birth, Conscious Being born in the forms of its qualitative possibilities through the agency of its own Consciousness-Force (*chit-tapas*). She then fosters and evolves all these possibilities, seeking the truth of Being in a unique way through each of them.

And catches here a look and there a gest: (Ibid)

'Gest' here means 'gesture.' Sri Aurobindo continues his extended metaphor of the game of hide and seek here. In this game, Being flashes forth unexpectedly sometimes, revealing Itself in its symbols.

Ever he repeats in them his ceaseless births. (Ibid)

This line revisits the paradox of time appearing in eternity, an eternal

recurrence not only in each instance of becoming. The entire cosmos can be seen as an eternal recurrence but each particle of the cosmos too is an eternal recurrence. This is also symbolically experienced at the macro level as the succession of lives in individuals, birth, death and rebirth, in the cosmos as day and night and in the succession of dawns that give us the impression of a reality that is ever repeating itself.

He is the Maker and the world he made,
He is the vision and he is the Seer;
He is himself the actor and the act,
He is himself the knower and the known,
He is himself the dreamer and the dream. (Ibid)

Thus, in truth, there is no duality here; the appearance of duality is a game of the One with the One. The self-conception of Supreme Brahman occurs by the act of Maya, which is nothing other than the infinite Consciousness-Force of Brahman.

There are Two who are One and play in many worlds;
In Knowledge and Ignorance they have spoken and met
And light and darkness are their eyes' interchange;
Our pleasure and pain are their wrestle and embrace,
Our deeds, our hopes are intimate to their tale;
They are married secretly in our thought and life. (Ibid)

Sri Aurobindo makes explicit here the appearance of the One as Two, Two-in-One, which is at the primordial basis of creation. These Two, who are One are at play in many worlds with different foundations to their relationship resulting in different kinds of manifestation in each world. In Knowledge (Vidya), they recognise each other as equal and aspects of the same Reality, Ishwara and Shakti. There all the manifestations that emerge through their relationship are self-conscious as the play of the eternal Spirit with his eternal Force unveiled, the One in many bodies. But in the Ignorance (*Avidya*), their play has the veiled character of an evolution from an appearance of Inconscience and fragmentation to a full possession of Consciousness and Unity in all its parts. This is what Sri Aurobindo refers to as the game of hide and seek leading to a knowledge of identity, of the Two as One. That is why in the secret reality of every one of our lives, it is the play of these two that is at work. We provide the site and stage for the *lila* of the supreme Ishwara and the supreme Shakti through the struggle

and the embrace of Purusha and Prakriti, Conscious Soul and Nature in our lives.

The universe is an endless masquerade:
For nothing here is utterly what it seems;
It is a dream-fact vision of a truth
Which but for the dream would not be wholly true,
A phenomenon stands out significant
Against dim backgrounds of eternity; (Ibid)

A magic act of consciousness seems to create this manifestation which we feel to be so concretely real, yet this concrete reality is a veiled appearance, a dream of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo coins a compound term 'dream-fact' to refer to this appearance which hides the truth, yet is experienced as a truth. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo coins another and similar compound term, 'Real Idea' to refer to an Idea of Brahman, which because Brahman is Reality itself, cannot but be real also. The "dream-fact vision" is of this nature; it is a dream and yet it is a fact. The factual dream or the fact which is the dream of God is another appearance of God. This manifestation is as real as the reality of the dreamer who dreams it but this reality is a representation of Sacchidananda, Sacchidananda manifesting itself in a new form. However, we cannot see this in the Ignorance. We take the "fact" to be the truth, we cannot see the truth of the "dream" that backgrounds the fact.

We accept its face and pass by all it means;
A part is seen, we take it for the whole.
Thus have they made their play with us for roles: (Ibid)

We are the masks of God and believe these masks to be truths, while the One Being wears all the masks of the cosmos and acts in all of us. We are oblivious of this truth, but are called upon to realise the Oneness of the actor in the play. This indeed is the "dream" of the "dream-fact" Or "Idea" of the "Real-Idea;" forming the purpose or goal, telos, of the play of relations between Purusha and Prakriti in the Avidya. If the cosmos is to arrive at this realisation in a species of its creatures, the Divine will have realised his "dream;" and the Cosmic Being and its Consciousness-Force will become unveiled as the inhabitants of the play in many forms and bodies.

Author and actor with himself as scene,
He moves there as the Soul, as Nature she.
Here on the earth where we must fill our parts,
We know not how shall run the drama's course;
Our uttered sentences veil in their thought.
Her mighty plan she holds back from our sight:
She has concealed her glory and her bliss
And disguised the Love and Wisdom in her heart; (Ibid, pp.61-62)

This disguise of the supreme Shakti in the guise of the ignorant Prakriti and its automatisms, makes us blind to the Truth; yet it is an opportunity for the growth of the soul. That is the meaning of the play and the disguise.

Of all the marvel and beauty that are hers,
Only a darkened little we can feel.
He too wears a diminished godhead here;
He has forsaken his omnipotence,
His calm he has foregone and infinity. (Ibid, p.62)

Sri Aurobindo now turns to the Conscious Being in all creatures. This Being has plunged into the Ignorance, into an apparent denial of his own conscious omnipotence and infinity. Elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo uses the phrases “the holocaust of the supreme Purusha” and “the holocaust of the supreme Prakriti” to refer to this self-sacrifice of the Ishwara and even more so, his Shakti, to create the condition of the play of evolution from Ignorance (Avidya) to Knowledge (Vidya). Nature here presents to itself a face of forgetting, the qualities of Ignorance, Falsehood and Death. On the other hand, Being that has entered as Soul into all cosmic beings and subjected itself to this forgetting, has become the seed of consciousness in the heart of forgetting. That is the holocaust of the Purusha while the original condition of forgetting and the manifestation of its qualities is the holocaust of Prakriti.

He knows her only, he has forgotten himself;
To her he abandons all to make her great.
He hopes in her to find himself anew,
Incarnate, wedding his infinity's peace
To her creative passion's ecstasy. (Ibid)

He subjects himself to the evolutionary movement that he may know the

delight of growth, the specific form of Delight (Ananda) that time affords in the Ignorance. This Delight is of a progression of consciousness in the adventure of evolution. This is how the supreme Conscious Being has plunged himself into the play of the Divine Mother and her ‘creative passion’s ecstasy’, to grow up, to evolve within her scheme.

Although possessor of the earth and heavens,
He leaves to her the cosmic management
And watches all, the Witness of her scene. (Ibid)

In this condition, though Purusha is Lord of all things as Being of all beings, he plays the role of the obedient child of his Conscious Force. As mentioned earlier in this essay, this is the meaning of the Virgin Birth in mystical traditions such as Christianity, where the Self-Power of Being is used by Him to multiply Himself and subject these multiplied particles to her evolutionary plan. It is as if He is absorbed in Her, and subject to Her Will. The conscious soul is the Witness of the divinity in the manifest world. The smile of the Divine Mother in the sweet and bitter appearance of all the beings and events of the cosmos is what the consciousness of God is intoxicated by; losing the knowledge of its own Reality.

A rapt solicitor for her love and grace,
His bliss in her to him is his whole world:
He grows through her in all his being's powers;
He reads by her God's hidden aim in things. (Ibid)

Yet the conscious soul being in each individual has a nascent memory (*smriti*) of its Origin. This works as an intuition which lights our understanding. Nature presents to this intuitive sense a recognition of symbolic truths. All Nature is like a book in which our mystic understanding, informed by the intuition of the soul, reads symbols, revealing to us the meaning of this play and of the reality of the Divine.

Or, a courtier in her countless retinue,
Content to be with her and feel her near
He makes the most of the little that she gives
And all she does drapes with his own delight.
A glance can make his whole day wonderful,
A word from her lips with happiness wings the hours.

He leans on her for all he does and is:
 He builds on her largesses his proud fortunate days
 And trails his peacock-plumaged joy of life
 And suns in the glory of her passing smile.
 In a thousand ways he serves her royal needs;
 He makes the hours pivot around her will,
 Makes all reflect her whims; all is their play:
 This whole wide world is only he and she. (Ibid, pp.62-63)

Sri Aurobindo here assumes the experience of Sankhya, which is indeed the truth of Avidya. According to Sankhya, there are many Purushas but one Prakriti. This is because all beings belong to, inhabit and experience the same cosmic Nature (Prakriti), but are themselves various (Purusha). Hence, each soul feels itself to be only an insignificant portion of Her manifestation (“a courtier in her countless retinue”). Yet in truth (Vidya), each soul is a self-conception of the One Being. So in the Avidya, each soul can view Prakriti as the Divine Mother in a cosmic darshan. Sri Aurobindo invites us here to this meditation on Prakriti. Through it, we can come to the realisation that in all beings around us and in ourselves, the play of Ishwara and Shakti is ongoing, leading to the evolution of God from a veiled to an unveiled play of the original Love that has made all manifestation possible.

At this point, Sri Aurobindo introduces the meaning of the play in the Avidya more explicitly:

Even in his mortal session in body's house,
 An aimless traveller between birth and death,
 Ephemeral dreaming of immortality,
 To reign she spurs him. (Ibid, p.65)

That which dreams in the human being to become the Master of Nature, is the soul (Purusha) or conscious part in us and Nature (Prakriti) herself provides us with both the challenge and the encouragement to become her Master.

.....He takes up her powers;
 He has harnessed her to the yoke of her own law.
 His face of human thought puts on a crown.
 Held in her leash, bound to her veiled caprice,
 He studies her ways if so he may prevail
 Even for an hour and she work out his will; (Ibid)

This is the lot of human beings, we are bound by Nature, yet constantly studying Nature to be free and master of Her.

He makes of her his moment passion's serf:
 To obey she feigns, she follows her creature's lead:
 For him she was made, lives only for his use.
 But conquering her, then is he most her slave; (Ibid)

Within the Avidya, all creatures are in bondage to the Will of Prakriti, which has set up the conditions for the play of this cosmos. Though human consciousness attempts to master nature, by understanding Her laws, and in its ignorant self-confidence, feels it has mastered Her, there is something inscrutable in Her which escapes us, driving further, until we realise that we are bound to Her Will in the Avidya.

He is her dependent, all his means are hers;
 Nothing without her he can, she rules him still.
 At last he wakes to a memory of Self:
 He sees within the face of deity,
 The Godhead breaks out through the human mould:
 Her highest heights she unmask and is his mate.
 Till then he is a plaything in her game; (Ibid)

The true relationship between Purusha and Prakriti or Conscious Soul and Nature is that of a perfect mutuality where each recognises that he/she is a mirror of the other, a parallel infinity, the two sides of the Two-in-One. The transition from Avidya to Vidya in this passage is accomplished through the soul's waking “to a memory of Self” – in other words, the intuition of Origin which was introduced earlier. Elsewhere, as in the passage from *The Life Divine* quote above, Sri Aurobindo attributes this transition to the human surrender to the Divine Shakti. Here, too, the recognition by the Soul of its Origin brings the truth of its Mastery over Nature, but this mastery is more like a mutuality of surrender. The condition of this mastery is enslavement. In “her highest heights” where She is “his mate,” the relationship of Ishwara and Shakti is a mutual surrender, a vast surrender of Conscious Being to Conscious-Force, and of Conscious-Force to Conscious-Being. This double surrender is the possession of the perfection of integrality in the Two-in-One and we as individual aspects of their reality, are invited to that experience within us.

We are thus called upon to make our surrender to the supreme Shakti as it is

she who will raise us to our own fullest potential and reveal the truth of the Conscious Being in each individual. Each being is then seen as none other than the Supreme Lord, Ishwara, one with Her, Her equal and infinite partner in the game of the manifestation.

Book XI, Canto I

This passage is from *The Book of Everlasting Day: The Eternal Day : The Soul's Choice and the Supreme Consummation*. Here we have a description of the play of Ishwara and Shakti in the Vidya, unveiled on the heights of creation in the knowledge, as it manifests at the culmination of the evolution of the Avidya, Knowledge manifesting in the Ignorance. We may think of this as Sri Aurobindo's prophecy, opening to us a vision of the future as a consummation of the evolution. Here, Savitri herself has conquered Death and beyond that conquest which, in symbolic form, is the overcoming of the Avidya, she enters the possibility of an eternal unveiled existence in her "highest heights." It is here that she discovers her supreme identity with Conscious Being (Brahman) as Lord or Ishwara. Savitri is the incarnation of the supreme Conscious-Force and thus, in truth, the partner of the supreme Lord, Shakti to Ishwara. Here She recognises this truth. The Ishwara communicates with Savitri here, a message which we may see as a prophecy of the incarnation of the Divine Consciousness after the overpassing of the Ignorance.

O beautiful body of the incarnate Word,
Thy thoughts are mine, I have spoken with thy voice. (Ibid, p.698)

Conscious Being reveals to Savitri here her identity with him, and the meaning of her existence as the play of the One Being. She is the nature of that Being and it is this identity that is being affirmed in the voice of the Ishwara.

My will is thine, what thou hast chosen I choose;
All thou hast asked I give to earth and men.
All shall be written out in destiny's book
By my trustee of thought and plan and act,
The executor of my will, eternal Time. (Ibid)

He then initiates the conditions for a new kind of play:

I lay my hands upon thy soul of flame,

I lay my hands upon thy heart of love,
I yoke thee to my power of work in Time.
Because thou hast obeyed my timeless will,
Because thou hast chosen to share earth's struggle and fate
And leaned in pity over earth-bound men
And turned aside to help and yearned to save,
I bind by thy heart's passion thy heart to mine
And lay my splendid yoke upon thy soul. (Ibid)

This new play is the unveiled action of the relationship between Ishwara and Shakti on earth, the recognition of absolute freedom and mastery as the choice of slavery, *dasya*.

In the heart of my creation's mystery
I will enact the drama of thy soul,
Inscribe the long romance of Thee and Me. (Ibid, p.699)

The dimension of cosmic meaning is opened up in these words as the essence of the creation at the height of its evolution.

I will pursue thee across the centuries;
Thou shalt be hunted through the world by love,
Naked of ignorance' protecting veil
And without covert from my radiant gods.
No shape shall screen thee from my divine desire,
Nowhere shalt thou escape my living eyes. (Ibid)

In the Ignorance (Avidya), we witnessed the play of hide and seek. Now we witness the unveiled play of the supreme Beloved and the supreme Lover in all of nature, and in every being.

In the nudity of thy discovered self,
In a bare identity with all that is,
Disrobed of thy covering of humanity,
Divested of the dense veil of human thought,
Made one with every mind and body and heart,
Made one with all Nature and with Self and God,
Summing in thy single soul my mystic world
I will possess in thee my universe,
The universe find all I am in thee. (Ibid)

This is a moved description of the perfect union of Ishwara-Shakti in the cosmos and in the individual that will be played out at the culmination of the evolution of Ignorance. This personal revelation then turns into a cosmic chapter of the power of Love manifesting in all beings, by using the embodied Shakti as the “golden chain” to tie all beings in their divine embrace. Though here we are faced with the embodiment of the supreme Shakti as Savitri, it is her Consciousness that will manifest as a secret power uniting all beings.

Hearts touched by thy love shall answer to my call,
Discover the ancient music of the spheres
In the revealing accents of thy voice
And nearer draw to me because thou art: (Ibid, p.701)

The supreme Love of Savitri will inspire all human beings to realise oneness with the Supreme.

Enamoured of thy spirit's loveliness
They shall embrace my body in thy soul, (Ibid)

The Divine Being lives in the heart of the embodied Shakti. Through the Divine Mother the creatures will come to the Supreme Lord.

Hear in thy life the beauty of my laugh,
Know the thrilled bliss with which I made the worlds.
All that thou hast, shall be for others' bliss,
All that thou art, shall to my hands belong. (Ibid)

In these last two lines of a supreme poetic height, we hear the echo of the Mother's words, “I am Sri Aurobindo's Shakti alone and mother to all my children.” We are also reminded of her famous couplet “Without him, I exist not, without me he is unmanifest.”

I will pour delight from thee as from a jar,
I will whirl thee as my chariot through the ways,
I will use thee as my sword and as my lyre,
I will play on thee my minstrelsies of thought.
And when thou art vibrant with all ecstasy,
And when thou liv'st one spirit with all things,
Then will I spare thee not my living fires,

But make thee a channel for my timeless force.
My hidden presence led thee unknowing on
From thy beginning in earth's voiceless bosom
Through life and pain and time and will and death,
Through outer shocks and inner silences
Along the mystic roads of Space and Time
To the experience which all Nature hides. (Ibid, pp.701-02)

The poetic eloquence of these lines raises us to a height of mystic visionary bliss. In this supreme height, we find a reversal of the equation, it is no longer Nature that carries the Divine Being as a seed in her own manifestation, but the Divine that reveals His own Will in his Shakti driving Her through Her journey towards ever-greater powers of Consciousness, his illimitable potential that He has planted in Her.

Who hunts and seizes me, my captive grows; (Ibid)

Once more we find the affirmation of the divine law that the condition of freedom and mastery is a conscious slavery. As mentioned earlier, this is a mutual condition between Ishwara and Shakti in the Vidya. In this line, we witness the reversal of the phenomenon of the Ignorance, where the creature pursues Nature or Prakriti seeking mastery over her, but finds himself most her slave when he thinks he has most mastered her. Here it is the embodied Shakti that hunted and pursued the Supreme Being through the steps of her evolution, but finds that it is exactly when She captures and seizes him that She becomes his captive.

This shalt thou henceforth learn from thy heart-beats.
For ever love, O beautiful slave of God! (Ibid)

This famous last line captures the essence of the manifestation of the Divine Mother, who is the supreme Shakti. She is greatest Power because she is the power of Love. She is the incarnate power of Divine Love; this is what She is made to realise at the summit of Being. This is the very meaning of Nature; and Nature's entire journey is motivated by this power of Divine Love, which Savitri incarnates and which is the truth of Ishwara-Shakti or Soul and Nature unveiled.

The *Sapta Chatusthaya* story: How Sri Aurobindo's Yogic Agenda was fulfilled

Ashoke K Sen Gupta

The term *Sapta Chatusthaya* was first found in Aurobindonian literature in 1980s, when edited versions of the master's diary entries started appearing in Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives. These diary entries came out in the form of a 2-part book titled *Record of Yoga* by the turn of the century.

Regarding *Sapta Chatusthaya*, Sri Aurobindo explained in 1926 that he “was given” a “programme of what I would do” in yoga. This programme had seven sections, each made up of four elements. It thus was known as “*Sapta Chatusthaya*” or the seven tetrads.

Going by Sri Aurobindo's own interpretation of the seven tetrads as the agenda of his yoga, this programme clearly related to the work of the ascent to the supermind and the descent and manifestation of the supermind in the physical life.

It is evident that Sri Aurobindo did not use most of the Sanskrit words that appear in the tetrads, in his later yogic writings. But as this study will reveal, the *Sapta Chatusthaya* continued to remain as the agenda of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and these were fulfilled in course of their sadhana.

What Sri Aurobindo Received

It may be appropriate at this stage to reproduce the basic structure of the *Sapta Chatusthaya* as received by Sri Aurobindo. These are indicated both in Devanagari and Roman scripts in the manner Sri Aurobindo recorded these in his diaries.

I. Shanti-Chatusthaya

Samata shantih sukham hasyam iti shantichatusthayam
समता शान्तिः सुखं हास्यं इति शान्तिचतुष्टयम्।

II. Shakti Chatusthaya

Virya shakti chandibhavah sraddha iti shaktichatusthayam
वीर्यं शक्ति चण्डिभावः श्रद्धेनि शक्तिचतुष्टयम्।

III. Vijnana Chatusthaya

Jnanam trikaldrishtir ashtasiddhih samadhir iti vijnanachatusthayam
ज्ञानं त्रिकालदृष्टिरष्टसिद्धिः समाधिरिति विज्ञानचतुष्टयम्।

IV. Sharira Chatusthaya

Arogyam utthapana saundaryam vividhananda iti sharirachatusthayam
आरोग्यमुत्थापनं सोन्दर्यं विविधानन्द इति शरीरचतुष्टयम्।

V. Karma Chatusthaya or Lila Chatusthaya

Krishnah kali kamah karma iti karmachatusthayam
कृष्णः काली कामः कर्मेति कर्मचतुष्टयम्।

VI. Brahma Chatusthaya

Sarvam anantam jnanam anandam brahma iti brahmachatusthayam
सर्वमनन्तम् ज्ञानमानदम् ब्रह्मेति ब्रह्मचतुष्टयम्।

VII. Yoga Chatusthaya or Sansiddhi Chatusthaya

Shuddhir muktir bhuktih siddhir iti yoga chatusthayam
शुद्धिर्मुक्तिः सिद्धिरेति योगचतुष्टयम्।

Sri Aurobindo has further categorised the tetrads terming the first four *chatusthayas* as pertaining to "*adhara-siddhi*" and the last three as general *chatusthayas*. He also noted that the last or the seventh tetrad is at once the means, the sum and the completion of all the rest and its explanation is essential to the full understanding of the others.¹

The Synthesis of Yoga

Although Sri Aurobindo did not say exactly when he received the tetrads, his diary entries indicate that it happened shortly after his arrival in Pondicherry on 4th April, 1910. The first concrete effect of *Sapta Chatursthaya* can be seen in Sri Aurobindo's yogic magnum opus, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, which he penned between 1914 and 1921. Some passages from the book are quoted to illustrate the point.

In Chapter X of Part IV titled "The Elements of Perfection", the following lines seem to be dealing with the first tetrad, the *Shanti Chatusthaya*:

The first necessity is some fundamental poise of the soul both in its essential and its natural being regarding and meeting the things, impacts and workings of Nature. This poise we shall arrive at by growing into a perfect equality, *samatā*. The self, spirit or Brahman is one in all and therefore one to all; it is, as is said in the Gita which has developed fully this idea of equality and indicated its experience on at least one side of equality, the equal Brahma, *samam brahma*; the Gita even goes so far in one passage as to identify equality and yoga, *samatvam yoga ucyate*. That is to say, equality is the sign of unity with the Brahman, of becoming Brahman, of growing into an undisturbed spiritual poise of being in the Infinite. Its importance can hardly be exaggerated; for it is the sign of our having passed beyond the egoistic determinations of our nature, of our having conquered our enslaved response to the dualities, of our having transcended the shifting turmoil of the gunas, of our having entered into the calm and peace of liberation. Equality is a term of consciousness which brings into the whole of our being and nature the eternal tranquillity of the Infinite. Moreover, it is the condition of a securely and perfectly divine action; the security and largeness of the cosmic action of the Infinite is based upon and never breaks down or forfeits its eternal tranquility. That too must be the character of the perfect spiritual action; to be equal and one to all things in spirit, understanding, mind, heart and natural consciousness,— even in the most physical consciousness,— and to make all their workings, whatever their outward adaptation to the thing to be done,

always and imminuably full of the divine equality and calm must be its inmost principle. That may be said to be the passive or basic, the fundamental and receptive side of equality, but there is also an active and possessive side, an equal bliss which can only come when the peace of equality is founded and which is the beatific flower of its fullness.²

Elaboration of the second tetrad, the *Shakti Chatusthaya*, is also taken up immediately:

The next necessity of perfection is to raise all the active parts of the human nature to that highest condition and working pitch of their power and capacity, *śakti*, at which they become capable of being divinised into true instruments of the free, perfect, spiritual and divine action. For practical purposes we may take the understanding, the heart, the Prana and the body as the four members of our nature which have thus to be prepared, and we have to find the constituent terms of their perfection. Also there is the dynamical force in us (*virya*) of the temperament, character and soul nature, *svabhāva*, which makes the power of our members effective in action and gives them their type and direction; this has to be freed from its limitations, enlarged, rounded so that the whole manhood in us may become the basis of a divine manhood, when the Purusha, the real Man in us, the divine Soul, shall act fully in this human instrument and shine fully through this human vessel To divinise the perfected nature we have to call in the divine Power or Shakti to replace our limited human energy so that this may be shaped into the image of and filled with the force of a greater infinite energy, *daivī prakṛti, bhāgavatī śakti*. This perfection will grow in the measure in which we can surrender ourselves, first, to the guidance and then to the direct action of that Power and of the Master of our being and our works to whom it belongs, and for this purpose faith is the essential, faith is the great motor-power of our being in our aspirations to perfection,— here, a faith in God and the Shakti which shall begin in the heart and understanding, but shall take possession of all our nature, all its consciousness, all its dynamic motive-force. These four things are the essentials of this second element of perfection, the full powers of the members of the instrumental nature, the perfected dynamis of the soul nature, the assumption of them into the action of the divine Power, and a perfect faith in all our members to call and support that assumption, *śakti, vīrya, daivī prakṛti, śraddhā*.³

Now comes the enunciation of the third tetrad, the *Vijnana Chatusthaya*:

But so long as this development takes place only on the highest level of our normal nature, we may have a reflected and limited image of perfection translated into the lower terms of the soul in mind, life and body, but not the possession of the divine perfection in the highest terms possible to us of the divine Idea and its Power. That is to be found beyond these lower principles in the supramental gnosis; therefore the next step of perfection will be the evolution of the mental into the gnostic being. This evolution is effected by a breaking beyond the mental limitation, a stride upward into the next higher plane or region of our being hidden from us at present by the shining lid of the mental reflections and a conversion of all that we are into the terms of this greater consciousness. In the gnosis itself, *vijñāna*, there are several gradations which open at their highest into the full and infinite Ananda. The gnosis once effectively called into action will progressively take up all the terms of intelligence, will, sense mind, heart, the vital and sensational being and translate them by a luminous and harmonising conversion into a unity of the truth, power and delight of a divine existence. It will lift into that light and force and convert into their own highest sense our whole intellectual, volitional, dynamic, ethical, aesthetic, sensational, vital and physical being. It has the power also of overcoming physical limitations and developing a more perfect and divinely instrumental body. Its light opens up the fields of the superconscient and darts its rays and pours its luminous flood into the subconscient and enlightens its obscure hints and withheld secrets. It admits us to a greater light of the Infinite than is reflected in the paler luminosity even of the highest mentality. While it perfects the individual soul and nature in the sense of a diviner existence and makes a full harmony of the diversities of our being, it founds all its action upon the Unity from which it proceeds and takes up everything into that Unity. Personality and impersonality, the two eternal aspects of existence, are made one by its action in the spiritual being and Nature body of the Purushottama.⁴

Thereafter Sri Aurobindo elaborates upon the fourth one, the *Sharira Chatusthaya*, to make the cardinal point of his philosophy that whatever may be realised above, is also to be accomplished below, right in the physical body:

The gnostic perfection, spiritual in its nature, is to be accomplished here in the body and takes life in the physical world as one of its fields, even though the gnosis opens to us possession of planes and worlds beyond the material universe. The physical body is therefore a basis of action, *pratiṣṭhā*, which cannot be despised, neglected or excluded from the spiritual evolution: a

perfection of the body as the outer instrument of a complete divine living on earth will be necessarily a part of the gnostic conversion. The change will be effected by bringing in the law of the gnostic Purusha, *vijñānamaya puruṣa* and of that into which it opens, the Anandamaya, into the physical consciousness and its members. Pushed to its highest conclusion this movement brings in a spiritualising and illumination of the whole physical consciousness and a divinising of the law of the body. For behind the gross physical sheath of this materially visible and sensible frame there is subliminally supporting it and discoverable by a finer subtle consciousness a subtle body of the mental being and a spiritual or causal body of the gnostic and bliss soul in which all the perfection of a spiritual embodiment is to be found, a yet unmanifested divine law of the body. Most of the physical siddhis acquired by certain Yogins are brought about by some opening up of the law of the subtle or a calling down of something of the law of the spiritual body. The ordinary method is the opening up of the Chakras by the physical processes of Hathayoga (of which something is also included in the Rajayoga) or by the methods of the Tantric discipline. But while these may be optionally used at certain stages of the integral Yoga, they are not indispensable; for here the reliance is on the power of the higher being to change the lower existence, a working is chosen mainly from above downward and not the opposite way, and therefore the development of the superior power of the gnosis will be awaited as the instrumentative change in this part of the Yoga.⁵

We find reflection of the fifth tetrad, the *Karma Chatusthaya* in the following:

There will remain, because it will then only be entirely possible, the perfect action and enjoyment of being on the gnostic basis. The Purusha enters into cosmic manifestation for the variations of his infinite existence, for knowledge, action and enjoyment; the gnosis brings the fullness of spiritual knowledge and it will found on that the divine action and cast the enjoyment of world and being into the law of the truth, the freedom and the perfection of the spirit. But neither action nor enjoyment will be the lower action of the gunas and consequent egoistic enjoyment mostly of the satisfaction of rajasic desire which is our present way of living. Whatever desire will remain, if that name be given, will be the divine desire, the will to delight of the Purusha enjoying in his freedom and perfection the action of the perfected Prakriti and all her members. The Prakriti will take up the whole nature into the law of her higher divine truth and act in that law offering up the universal enjoyment of her action and being to the Anandamaya Ishwara, the Lord of existence and

works and Spirit of bliss, who presides over and governs her workings. The individual soul will be the channel of this action and offering, and it will enjoy at once its oneness with the Ishwara and its oneness with the Prakriti and will enjoy all relations with Infinite and finite, with God and the universe and beings in the universe in the highest terms of the union of the universal Purusha and Prakriti.⁶

The last two tetrads, the *Brahma Chatusthaya* and the *Yoga Chatusthaya* are also commented upon in the following lines:

All the gnostic evolution opens up into the divine principle of Ananda, which is the foundation of the fullness of spiritual being, consciousness and bliss of Sachchidananda or eternal Brahman. Possessed at first by reflection in the mental experience, it will be possessed afterwards with a greater fullness and directness in the massed and luminous consciousness, *cidghana*, which comes by the gnosis. The Siddha or perfected soul will live in union with the Purushottama in this Brahmic consciousness, he will be conscious in the Brahman that is the All, *sarvam brahma*, in the Brahman infinite in being and infinite in quality, *anantam brahma*, in Brahman as self-existent consciousness and universal knowledge, *jñānam brahma*, in Brahman as the self-existent bliss and its universal delight of being, *ānandam brahma*. He will experience all the universe as the manifestation of the One, all quality and action as the play of his universal and infinite energy, all knowledge and conscious experience as the outflowing of that consciousness, and all in the terms of that one Ananda. His physical being will be one with all material Nature, his vital being with the life of the universe, his mind with the cosmic mind, his spiritual knowledge and will with the divine knowledge and will both in itself and as it pours itself through these channels, his spirit with the one spirit in all beings. All the variety of cosmic existence will be changed to him in that unity and revealed in the secret of its spiritual significance. For in this spiritual bliss and being he will be one with That which is the origin and continent and inhabitant and spirit and constituting power of all existence. This will be the highest reach of self-perfection.⁷

While chapter X (Part IV) of *The Synthesis of Yoga* defines the role of each chatusthaya in the system of *The Yoga of Self Perfection* developed by Sri Aurobindo, these are also reflected in many other Chapters of the voluminous book. For example, the first tetrad, the *Shanti Chatusthaya* is elaborated upon in chapter 9 (*Equality and the Annihilation of Ego*) of Part I and Chapters 10

(*The Elements of Perfection*), 11 (*The Perfection of Equality*), 12 (*The way of Equality*) and 13 (*The Action of Equality*) of Part IV the book while the second one, the *Shanti Chatusthaya* gets reflected upon in chapters 10 (*The Elements of Perfection*), 15 (*Soul-Force and the Fourfold Personality*), 16 (*The Divine Shakti*), 17 (*The Action of the Divine Shakti*) and 18 (*Faith and Shakti*) of Part IV. The third tetrad, the *Vijnana Chatusthaya*, particularly the element of *Jnana*, is commented upon in Chapters 1 (*The Object of Knowledge*), 2 (*The State of Knowledge*), 3 (*The Purified Understanding*) and 6 (*The Synthesis of the Disciplines of Knowledge*) of Part II and Chapters 10 (*The Elements of Perfection*), 19 (*The Nature of the Supermind*), 20 (*The Intuitive Mind*), 21 (*The Gradations of the supermind*), 22 (*The Supramental Thought and Knowledge*), 23 (*The Supramental Instruments—Thought-Process*) and 24 (*The Supramental Sense*) of Part IV, while the element of *Trikaladrishti* is discussed in chapter 25 (*Towards the Supramental time vision*) of Part IV. The element of *Ashtasiddhi* is briefly dealt with in Chapter 27 (*Hathayoga*) of Part II while another element of the third tetrad *Samadhi* is dealt with in chapters 26 (*Samadhi*) and 28 (*Rajayoga*) of Part II.

Some elements of the fourth tetrad, the *Sharira Chatusthaya* like *Uttapana* are dealt with in chapter 27 (*Hathayoga*) of Part II while the element of *Saundarya* is dealt with in Sri Aurobindo's writings like *The Future Poetry* and other books on aesthetics. Fifth tetrad the *Karma Chatusthaya* is dealt with in Chapter 2 (*Self-Consecration*), 3 (*Self-Surrender in Works — The Way of the Gita*), 4 (*The Sacrifice, the Triune Path and the Lord of the Sacrifice*), 10 (*The Three Modes of Nature*), 11 (*The Master of the Works*), 12 (*The Divine Work*) and 13 (*The Supermind and the Yoga of Works*) of Part I and the sixth tetrad the *Brahma Chatusthaya* in Chapter 10 (*The Elements of Perfection*) of Part IV. The last one, *Yoga Chatusthaya* is also covered in Chapter 6 (*Purification — The Lower Mentality*), 7 (*Purification — Intelligence and Will*), 8 (*The Liberation of the Spirit*), 9 (*The Liberation of the Nature*) and 10 (*The Elements of Perfection*) of Part IV.

Comments on Tetrads in Sri Aurobindo's Diary

It is interesting to note that some elements of the tetrads are commented upon more in details in Sri Aurobindo's diary than in his *The Synthesis of Yoga*. For example, Sri Aurobindo gave a unique account of those much-coveted and much-maligned powers called *aṣṭasiddhi*, clearly defining its role in the life of a yogin. In a diary noting titled "Siddhis, their justifications, dangers and use", he observes:

The first two chatusthayas of the adhara have reference mainly to the central

principle of man's existence, the antahkarana; but there is one superior faculty and one inferior instrument which have each its peculiar siddhi, the vijnana or supraintellectual faculty and the body. The siddhi of the vijnana and the siddhi of the body belong both of them to that range of experience and of divine fulfilment which are abnormal to the present state of humanity. These are called specially siddhis, because of their abnormal nature, rarity and difficulty; they are denied by the sceptic and discouraged by the saint. The sceptic disbelieves in them and holds them to be impostures, fables or hallucinations, as a clever animal might disbelieve in the reasoning powers of man. The saint discourages them because they seem to him to lead away from God; he shuns them just as he shuns the riches, power & attainments of this world, and for the same reason. We need not shun them and cannot shun them, because God is sought by us in His world-fulfilment as well as apart from the world and in the world these are riches of His power and knowledge which we cannot avoid, once we dwell in Him perceiving and sharing His nature. Indeed, there is a stage reached by the Yogin, when, unless he avoids all action in the world, he can no more avoid the use of the siddhis of power and knowledge than an ordinary man can avoid eating and breathing unless he wishes to leave his body; for these things are the natural action of the vijnana, the plane of ideal consciousness, to which he is rising, just as mental activity and physical motion are the natural action of man's ordinary life. All the ancient Rishis used these powers, all great Avatars and Yogins and vibhutis from Christ to Ramakrishna have used them; nor is there any great man with the divine power at all manifest in him who does not use them continually in an imperfect form without knowing clearly what are these supreme faculties that he is employing. If nothing else, he uses the powers of intuition & inspiration, the power of *ishita* which brings him the opportunities he needs and the means which makes these opportunities fruitful and the power of *vyapti* by which his thoughts go darting & flashing through the world & creating unexpected waves of tendency both around him and at a distance. We need no more avoid the use of these things than a poet should avoid the use of his poetical genius which is also a siddhi unattainable by ordinary men or an artist renounce the use of his pencil. At the same time there is a justification for the denial of the sceptic and the renunciation by the saint & of this justification we must take note. The saint renounces because when these siddhis show themselves fragmentarily in a weak adhara dominated by egoism, the egoism becomes enormously enhanced, the ignorant sadhaka thinking that he is the possessor and creator of these abnormal powers and a very great man indeed, (just as we find an abnormal egoism

very frequently in the small poet and the half artist, for those who have a really great power, know well enough that the power is not theirs but a gift from god & feel that the power of God is using them & not they the power); so the sadhaka, misled by ahankara goes running after these powers for their own sake and leaves following after God. The denial of the sceptic is justified by the credulity of ordinary men who regard these things as miracles & invest them where they do not exist, and by the weakness & egoism of the sadhakas themselves and of many who are not sadhakas; for if they catch even a glimpse of these things in themselves or others, they exaggerate, puff, distort & build around some petty & imperfect experiences all sorts of jargon, mysticism, charlatanism & bujruki of all kinds which are an offence & a stumbling block to the world. We must therefore keep in view very strictly certain fixed principles;

1. That these powers are not miraculous, but powers of Nature, which manifest of themselves as soon as the *vijnanapadma* in us begins to open & are no more a cause for bragging & vanity than the power of eating & breathing or anything else that is Nature's.

2. That they can manifest fully only when we leave ego and offer up our petty separate being in the vastness of God's being.

3. That when they manifest in the unpurified state, they are a dangerous ordeal to which God subjects us and we can only pass through it safely by keeping our minds clear of vanity, pride, selfishness and by remembering continually that they are His gifts and not our acquirements.

4. That these powers are not to be pursued for their own sake, but developed or allowed to develop as part of the flower of divine perfection which is by God's grace blossoming out in us.

Subject to these cautions, we have not to reject these powers when they come but accept them, to be used in us by God for His own purposes and not by us for ours, to be poured out by *vyapti* on humanity and not kept for our own use & price.⁸

Further Unfolding of *Sapta Chatusthaya*

At this stage, it may be pertinent to question whether *The Synthesis of Yoga* is to be taken as the culmination of *Sapta Chatusthaya* idea. To get an answer to this question, one has first to take note of the fact that Sri Aurobindo could not develop all the chapters of the book in the manner he himself had wanted to do.

The Bibliographical Note⁹ appended to the book, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, indicates that the author might not have given a finality to the text and “intended to revise and enlarge” a number of its chapters. Although subsequently the first 12 Chapters of Part I (*The Yoga of Divine Works*) were “thoroughly revised and enlarged” and the Part II (*The Yoga of Integral Knowledge*) “was less extensively revised,” Sri Aurobindo “did not find the time” to revise and enlarge Part III (*The Yoga of Divine Love*) and Part IV (*The Yoga of Self Perfection*), despite his intention to do so. We even find a reference to its incompleteness, going by Sri Aurobindo’s own perception, as reflected in the conversations of the Mother with Satprem. She said:

But the last part [*“The Yoga of Self-Perfection”*] is the largest, and it’s difficult too. He didn’t complete it. He never completed the last chapter¹⁰, he even told me, “You will complete it when I have completed my yoga,” and then he went, left everything. Afterwards, several times, he told me that I should be the one to complete it. ...¹¹

The recorded talks between Mother and Satprem further indicate that the “Agenda¹² could be *“the end of The Yoga of Self Perfection.”*

One is, therefore, justified in not taking the text of *The Synthesis of Yoga* as the final enunciation of *sapta chatusthaya* and seeking more clue in Sri Aurobindo’s later writings on Yoga, particularly in the eight articles (the last of Sri Aurobindo’s prose writings) which were published in the form of a book titled *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*. Finally, an attempt is made in this essay to see how *sapta chatusthaya*, which was the ‘programme’ of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga, got reflected and perhaps found its culmination in ‘Mother’s Agenda.’ While a complete study of ‘Mother’s Agenda’ in the light of the chatusthayas, is not possible in this short essay, a few instances are given below:

One such instance is an episode, recorded in the *Agenda*, about the first anniversary of the Supramental Manifestation on the earth on 29th February, 1960. The Mother said:

Experiences are coming at a furious pace — fabulous experiences. If I were to speak now, it’s certain that I would not at all speak as I used to. That’s why we must date all these *Questions and Answers*, at least all of which came before the [Supramental] Manifestation of February 1956, so that there will be a clear cut between those before and those after. Only a few days ago, on the morning of the 29th, I had one of those

experiences that mark one’s life. It happened upstairs in my room. I was doing my japa, walking up and down with my eyes wide open, when suddenly Krishna came — a gold Krishna, all golden, in a golden light that filled the whole room. I was walking, but I could not even see the windows or the rug any longer, for this golden light that filled the whole room. And it must have lasted at least fifteen minutes. He was dressed in those same clothes in which he is normally portrayed when he dances. He was all light, all dancing: ‘You see, I will be there this evening during the Darshan. And suddenly, the chair I use for darshan came into the room! Krishna climbed up onto it, and his eyes twinkled mischievously, as if to say, ‘I will be there, you see, and there’ll be no room for you.’

When I came down that evening for distribution,¹³ at first I was annoyed. I had said that I didn’t want anybody in the hall, precisely because I wanted to establish an atmosphere of concentration, the immobility of the spirit — but there were at least thirty people in there, those who had decorated the hall, thirty of them stirring, stirring about, a mass of little vibrations. And before I could even say ‘seat’ — I had hardly taken my seat — someone put the tray of medals on my lamp and they started filing past.

But what is surprising is that in a flash, no one was there any longer. No one, you understand — I was gone. Perhaps I was everywhere (but in fact I am always everywhere, I am always conscious of being everywhere at the same time), though normally there is the sense of the body, a physical centre, but that evening there was no more centre! Nothing, no one, not even the sense that there was no one — nothing. I was gone. There was indeed something handing out the medals which felt the joy of giving the medal, the joy of receiving it, the joy of mutually looking at each other. It was simply the joy of the action taking place, the joy of looking, this joy everywhere, but me? — Nothing, no one, gone. Only later, afterwards, did I see what had happened, for everything had disappeared, even the higher mind that understands and organises things (by ‘understand’ I mean contain, which ‘contains’ things). That also was gone. And this lasted the entire distribution. Only when that [the body] had gone back upstairs to the room the consciousness of what is me return.

There is a line by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri* which expresses this very well: to annul oneself so that only the Supreme Lord may be.¹⁴

The fifth of the seven tetrads, *Karma Chatusthaya* or *Lila Chatusthaya*, begins with the word Krishna. Although Sri Aurobindo did refer to the ‘descent of Krishna’ on his Siddhi Day on 24th November, 1926, it was described as the

descent of the overmental godhead. The Mother's description of a golden Krishna (Mother said golden colour represents Supermind), who takes charge on the first anniversary of the supramental Manifestation, and her hint about the changes that the supramental manifestation might have brought about, make it appear to this writer that this is a more complete enunciation of the *Lila Chatusthaya*, as if it refers to the *swarūp* of *Lila* of Krishna in his supreme *swarūpa*, the supramental godhead, before whom the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga has "to annual oneself so that only the supreme Lord may be."

Sri Aurobindo made the following noting in his diary about the four elements of the fifth tetrad:

- Krishna is the Ishwara taking delight in the world.
- Kali is the shakti carrying out the Lila according to the pleasure of the Ishwara.
- Karma is the Divine action
- Kama is the divine Enjoyment.¹⁵

The inclusion of the word Kali in *Karma Chatusthaya* is also significant as Sri Aurobindo looked upon Kali as the *sakti* who enables the yogin to transcend even other gods in his journey towards the supreme truth and reality. The following aphorism of Sri Aurobindo makes the point:

Be wide in me, O Varuna; be mighty in me, O Indra; O Sun, be very bright and luminous; O Moon, be full of charm and sweetness. Be fierce and terrible, O Rudra; be impetuous and swift, O Maruts; be strong and bold, O Aryaman; be voluptuous and pleasurable, O Bhaga; be tender and kind and loving and passionate, O Mitra. Be bright and revealing, O Dawn; O Night, be solemn and pregnant. O Life, be full, ready and buoyant; O Death, lead my steps from mansion to mansion. Harmonise all these, O Brahmanaspati, Let me not be subject to these gods, O Kali.¹⁶

Evidently, it is a unique interpretation of the role of Kali and the Krishna-Kali dynamis has a profound significance in Sri Aurobindo's yoga. It is also learnt that in his early years in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo, for some time, used to call himself as Krishna-Kali.

The first of the tetrads received by Sri Aurobindo, *Shanti Chatusthaya*, has in it four elements,— *samatā*, *śāntiḥ*, *sukham* and *hāsyam* (equality, peace, delight and laughter). We find an interesting reference to it in the Mother's conversation recorded on 23rd May, 1962:

There's such a wonderful passage in *The Synthesis of Yoga* ("The Yoga of

Self-Perfection"), where he mentions four things the disciple needs (I have just translated it). I knew this, of course, but the passage is especially timely now — particularly after that last experience, which is a jolt for a physical being. The fourth thing is wonderful. The first three we know: equality, peace and (a hard one) *a spiritual ease in all circumstances*. He added the word "spiritual" so people wouldn't think only of material ease — it's an ease in feelings, in sensations, in everything. But when you have a lot of pain it's obviously not so easy! When physical pain keeps you from sleeping and eating, when you are plagued by constant physical pain — or rather by a whole host of physical pains! — well, that bodily "ease" becomes difficult. It's the one thing that has seemed difficult to me; but anyway, it's being investigated — I think it was sent for me to investigate.

But the last thing he mentions is a marvel — *the joy and laughter of the soul*. And it's so true, so true! Always, all the time, no matter what happens, even when this body is in dreadful pain, the soul is laughing joyously within. Always, always, always.

And suddenly, when I let myself go... You know, I have been advised (by the Lord!) to relax, relax, relax. He doesn't want action to result from the tension of an individual will; so *relax* — all right, *relax*. But when you "relax" and then suddenly get a horrible pain, you say "Hey!" — but at the same time I laugh! What the people around me must think ... I am crying and laughing!¹⁷

There are evidently the four elements of *Shanti-Chatusthaya* — *samatā*, *śāntiḥ*, *sukham* and *hāsyam* — coming into full play in the yoga of total transformation of the being. Readers may please note that in the yoga of Sri Aurobindo which aims at transformation of the physical body also, common words like *sukham* (joy or ease) and *hāsyam* (laughter) have assumed deeper connotation and meaning. The significance of *sapta chatusthaya* would have to be understood in that light.

Sharira Chatusthaya: Final Phase of Yoga?

There are some elements in the *Sapta Chatusthaya*, like the word *Ārogyam* with which the fourth tetrad, *Sharira Chatusthaya* begins, which do not seem to have been developed by Sri Aurobindo to any significant extent in his *The Synthesis of Yoga*. In the religious and yogic literature, *Ārogyam* is generally mentioned either to show the miracle cure of a disease by the grace of a saint or a god, or it is shown as a result of some processes like "*āsana*, *prāṇāyama* or *mudra* in Hathayoga. But in the following experience of the Mother, *Ārogyam* has assumed the shape of a supreme yoga *siddhi*. The incident refers to a

sudden ailment (a heart attack) that the Mother developed 3/4 days before 21st February, 1962 (her 84th birth anniversary) when a large number of people had gathered at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, for her Darshan. She said:

I should mention that three or four days before my birthday something apparently very troublesome happened (it could have been troublesome, anyway), and it made me wonder: “Will I be able to do what I have to on the 21st? I wasn’t happy about it. “No”, I said, “I can’t let these people down when they’re expecting so much from this day; that’s not right.” So throughout the 20th I stayed exclusively concentrated in a very, very deep, very interiorised invocation, not in the least superficial, far from all emotions and sentiments — something really at the summit of the being. And I remained in contact with That, for everything to be truly for the best, free from any false movement in Matter whatsoever. And that night I was CLEARLY cured; I mean I followed the action and saw myself really and truly cured. When I got up in the morning, I got up cured. All the things I constantly had to do, all the tapasyas just *to keep going*, were no longer necessary — someone had taken charge of everything, and it was all over and done with... So on the 21st morning I could say quite spontaneously and unhesitatingly, “Today the Lord has given me the gift of healing me.” (I was speaking in English about the things people had given me, and I said, “... and the Lord has given me the gift of healing me.”)...

This explanation is clear; and the healing was the result of tapasya. It’s self-explanatory. Something was even saying to my body’s SUBSTANCE, “O UNBELIEVING SUBSTANCE, NOW YOU WON’T BE ABLE TO SAY THERE ARE NO MIRACLES.” Throughout all the work that was being done on the 20th, something was saying (I don’t know who, because it doesn’t come like something foreign to me any more, it’s like a Wisdom, it seems like a Wisdom, something that knows: not someone in particular, but “that which knows,” (whatever its form), something that knows was insisting to the body, by showing it certain things; vibrations, movements, “From now on, O unbelieving substance, you can’t say there are no miracles.” Because the substance itself is used to each thing having its effect, to illness following a particular course and certain things even being necessary for it to be cured. This process is very subtle, and it doesn’t come from the intellect, which can have a totally different interpretation of it; it’s rather a kind of consciousness ingrained in physical substance, and that’s what was being addressed and being shown certain movements, certain vibrations and so forth: “You see, from now on you can’t say there are no miracles.” In other

words, a direct intervention of the Lord, who doesn’t follow the beaten path, but does things .. in His own way.¹⁸

The Mother also narrated an incident in the same afternoon when she was able to walk so fast that others were unable to keep pace with her, although around the preceding period of time, walking used to prove very difficult for her. She said:

And in the afternoon, I had a funny experience at the Playground. When I got down from the car to go inside, I felt ... For close to a year now I have been saddled with (I mean it was imposed on me) a *useless* pair of legs: weak, awkward, old, worn out — worthless. I constantly had to will them to walk, and even then they were more than clumsy. And it was all swept away in the same manner (*sweeping gesture*). I literally almost danced! Imagine, getting rid of a pair of legs just like that! INSTANTLY my legs felt the way they used to (I have always had strong legs) — that alert, solid, agile strength — and I had to restrain myself from cavorting about! “Ah, now we can walk!” “Keep calm,” I had to tell them, or they would have started skipping and prancing!

And they stayed that way, there was no relapse. I was waiting to see if it would last — it did. Something seems to be over with now.¹⁹

The *sadhana* of the Mother during the fifties and sixties till early seventies has left the record of a unique yoga brought down to the level of the physical body, the flowering of *Sharira Chatusthaya*. Her discovery of what she called “the mind of the (body) cells” and prayers and yoga practised directly by her body, adds a new chapter in the history of yogic literature. One would surmise that such a yoga of the physical body was made feasible only after the Supramental descent on the earth, which according to the Mother, took place on 29th February, 1956.

We find the following explanatory note about the word *arogyam* in Sri Aurobindo’s diary:

Arogya is the state of being healthy. There are three stages:

1. When the system is normally healthy and only gets disturbed by exceptional causes or very strong strain, such as continual exposure to cold, overstrain of any kind.
2. When even exceptional causes or great overstrain cannot disturb the

system; this shows that there is full Arogya Shakti.

3. Immortality in the body.²⁰

The experience of the Mother, quoted above, focuses on all the points including the effort to attain immortality in a body transformed into the light and consciousness of the Supermind.

It must be pointed out at this stage that although important aspects of the yoga of *Sharira Chatusthaya* culminating in the divine body appears to have not been focused adequately in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, this is the prime focus of the book, *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, which was the last prose writing of Sri Aurobindo. In chapters of the book titled “*Perfection of the Body*” and “*The Divine Body*”, Sri Aurobindo has enunciated those principles of yoga in the physical which were later practised and experimented upon by the Mother on her own body.

While talking about the supreme goal of achieving a divine life on earth, which can only be done through a transformation of the mind and life and even the body, Sri Aurobindo talked about a possibility that in ‘this transformation the body itself can become an agent and a partner.’ He writes:

It might indeed be possible for the spirit to achieve a considerable manifestation with only a passive and imperfectly conscious body as its last or bottommost means of material functioning, but this could not be anything perfect or complete. A fully conscious body might even discover and work out the right material method and process of a material transformation. For this, no doubt, the spirit’s supreme light and power and creative joy must have manifested on the summit of the individual consciousness and sent down their fiat into the body, but still the body may take in the working out its spontaneous part of self-discovery and achievement. It would be thus a participator and agent in its own transformation and the integral transformation of the whole being; this too would be a part and a sign and evidence of the total perfection of the body.²¹

We find examples of the yoga of the body, in a number of places in ‘*Mother’s Agenda*’, where she finds that her mind has been asked to “keep off” and is even “sent away” while the *sadhana* is done by the supramental power acting directly on the ‘mind of the body cells.’

Sri Aurobindo’s article titled ‘*The Divine Body*’ traces the history of *deha sadhana* from the Vedic period onwards and focuses on the problems which are to be overcome to realise a divine body on the earth. For example, he points

out that the new body will not require any food for its sustenance, thus dispensing with the digestive system. Similarly there will be no place for male-female sex duality, as the superman will procreate directly, if needed, without going through the animal sex process. While these issues are discussed in detail in Sri Aurobindo’s article, we find in a talk of the Mother a vision of her own divine body which is neither male nor female and in which the digestive organs are simply missing.²² Incidentally, Mother’s graphic description of her supramental body may also be taken as a supreme example of divine beauty or *saundaryam*, which is the third element of the fourth tetrad viz., *sharira chatusthaya*.

In fact, the above mentioned examples call for a reinterpretation of the elements of *sharira chatusthaya* in terms of the paradigm of supramental *sadhana*. We have seen in the unique experience of the Mother, quoted earlier, that *Ārogyam* in this case signifies complete mastery of the divine forces over the law of the physical body. We now refer to another experience of the Mother which seemingly gives a somewhat different meaning of the two other elements of the tetrad viz., *Utthapana* and *Vividhananda*.

Oh, I’ve had an experience, a new experience. I mean, it’s the cells of the body that have had a new experience.

When I lie down on my bed at night, there is an offering of all the cells, which regularly *surrender* as completely as they can, with an aspiration not only for union but for fusion: let there remain nothing but the Divine. It’s regular, every day, every single day. And for some time, these cells or this body consciousness (but it isn’t organised as a consciousness: it’s like a collective consciousness of the cells), it seemed to be complaining a little, to be saying, “But we don’t feel much. We do feel” (they can’t say they don’t feel: they feel protected, supported), “but still...” They are like children, they were complaining that it wasn’t spectacular: “It HAS to be marvellous.”So two nights ago, they were in the state when I went to bed....At two in the morning I got up, and I suddenly noticed that all the cells, the whole body (but it really is a cellular consciousness, not a body consciousness; it isn’t the consciousness of this or that person: there’s no person, it’s the consciousness of a cellular aggregate), that consciousness felt bathed in and at the same time shot through by a MATERIAL, power of a fan-tas-tic velocity bearing no relation to the velocity of light, none at all: the velocity of light is something slow and unhurried in comparison. Fantastic, fantastic! Something that must be like the movement of the centres out there...(Mother gestures towards faraway galactic space). It was so awesome! I remained quite peaceful, still, I sat quite peaceful; but still, peaceful as I could be, it

was so awesome, as when you are carried away by a movement and are going so fast that you can't breathe. A sort of discomfort. Not that I couldn't breathe, that wasn't the point, but the cells felt suffocated, it was so ... awesome. And at the same time with a sensation of power, a power that nothing, nothing whatsoever can resist in any way. So I had been pulled out of my bed (I noticed it) so that the BODY consciousness (mark the difference: it wasn't the cells' consciousness, it was the body's consciousness) would teach the cells how to *surrender* and tell them, "There is only one way: a total *surrender*, then you will no longer have that sensation of suffocation." And there was a slight concentration, like a little lesson. It was very interesting: a little lesson, how it should be done, what should be done, how to abandon oneself entirely. And when I saw it had been understood, I went back to bed. And then, from that time (it was two, two:twenty) till quarter to five, I was in that Movement without a single break! And the peculiar thing was that when I got up, there was in that consciousness (which is both cellular and a bit corporeal) the sense of Ananda [divine joy] in everything the body did; getting up, walking, washing its eyes, brushing its teeth... For the first time in my life I felt the *Ananda* (a quite impersonal Ananda), an Ananda in those movements. And with the feeling, "Ah, that's how the Lord enjoys Himself."

It's no longer in the foreground (it was in the foreground for an hour or two to make me understand), now it's a bit further in the background. But, you understand, previously the body used to feel that its whole existence was based on the Will, the surrender to the supreme Will, and endurance. If it was asked, "Do you find life pleasant?" it didn't dare to say no, because...but it didn't find it pleasant. Life wasn't for its own pleasure and it didn't understand how it could give pleasure. There was a concentration of will in a surrender striving to be as perfect — painstakingly perfect — as possible, and a sense of endurance: holding on and holding out. That was the basis of its existence... There was that will and that endurance, and also, "Let Your Will be done," and "Let me serve You as You want me to, as I should serve You, let me belong to You as You want me to," and also, "Let there remain nothing but You, let the sense of the person disappear" (it had indeed disappeared to a considerable extent). And there was this sudden revelation: instead of that base of endurance — holding on at any cost — instead of that, a sort of joy, a very peaceful but very smiling joy, very smiling, very sweet, very smiling, very charming — charming! So innocent, something so pure and so lovely: the joy which is in all things, in everything we do, everything, absolutely everything. I was shown last night: everything, but everything

there isn't one vibration that isn't vibration of joy.... It's the first time I have felt this physically. Meaning it's the first time these cells have had this experience.

You see, previously, they always felt the Lord's support in the power and the force, they felt they existed because of Him, they used to feel all that. But to be capable of feeling it, they had to have endurance — absolute endurance — to endure everything. Now it's not that: not that, there is something that smiles, but smiles sweetly, so sweetly, and is, oh, extraordinarily amused, behind it all, and its light, light, so light — all the weight of that tension has disappeared.

And it's the result of that awesome "flow"; a flow that carried the cells along; it wasn't that the cells were immobile and it was flowing through them: they were IN the movement, they were moving with that same velocity — a fantastic velocity with a dazzling luminosity and unimaginable speed, felt materially, like that. It was beyond all possibility of ordinary sensation. It lasted for hours.²³

One notices from the above talk of the Mother that the significance, meaning and experience-content of the well known yogic words get changed, when these are used in relation to the yoga of the body. The *Utthapana* of *Sharira Chatusthaya* may not only mean levitation, an anti-gravity *siddhi* of the Hathayogi or Rajayogi, but the 'MATERIAL power of a fan-tas-tic velocity' that raises the body-consciousness in the process of transformation of the cells. The rise is evidently a flight through the levels of consciousness and reality and not merely the lifting of the body mass against the force of gravity. Similarly *Vividhananda* of *Sharira Chatusthaya* is not merely the delight of the Brahman that the yogin experiences in the higher parts of his being — mind, heart and soul — but the very cells of his body experiencing this supreme ananda in all its common place movements spontaneously and in their own rights.

At this stage, one must clarify that this supreme yoga of the body was fully practised by Sri Aurobindo before he decided 'to sacrifice' his body in his efforts to bring down the supramental consciousness force to the earth. His writings on yoga and on supramental manifestation upon earth bear ample testimony to this supreme effort. In a message on the passing away of Sri Aurobindo on 5th December, 1950, the Mother said that his body had 'willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all'⁵⁶ to reach this goal. After his *mahasamadhi*, the mantle fell on the Mother to continue the work of which we get glimpses in her writings and recorded talks for the next 23 years. We have given enunciation of the *Sapta Chatusthaya* including *Sharira Chatusthaya* from these writings and

records. The following quote is from Sri Aurobindo's article titled '*The Divine Body*' which focuses on the elements of the *Sharira Chatusthaya*:

The human body has in it parts and instruments that have been sufficiently evolved to serve the divine life; these have to survive in their form, though they must be still further perfected, their limitations of range and use removed, their liability to defect and malady and impairment eliminated, their capacities of cognition and dynamic action carried beyond the present limits. New powers have to be acquired by the body which our present humanity could not hope to realise, could not even dream of or could only imagine. Much that can now only be known, worked out or created by the use of invented tools and machinery might be achieved by the new body in its own power or by the inhabitant spirit through its own direct spiritual force. The body itself might acquire new means and ranges of communication with other bodies, new processes of acquiring knowledge, a new aesthesis, new potencies of manipulation of itself and objects. It might not be impossible for it to possess or disclose means native to its own constitution, substance or natural instrumentation for making the far near and annulling distance, cognising what is now beyond the body cognisance, acting where action is now out of its reach or its domain, developing subtleties and plasticities which could not be permitted under present conditions to the needed fixity of a material frame. These and other numerous potentialities might appear and the body become an instrument immeasurably superior to what we can now imagine as possible. There could be an evolution from a first apprehending truth-consciousness to the utmost heights of the ascending ranges of supermind and it may pass the borders of the supermind proper itself where it begins to shadow out, develop, delineate expressive forms of life touched by a supreme pure existence, consciousness and bliss which constitute the worlds of a highest truth of existence, dynamism of Tapas, glory and sweetness of bliss, the absolute essence and pitch of the all-creating ananda. The transformation of the physical being might follow this incessant line of progression and the divine body reflect or reproduce here in a divine life on the earth something of this highest greatness and glory of the self-manifesting Spirit.²⁵

Sri Aurobindo perhaps realised the climactic role *Sharira Chatusthaya* will play in the programme of his yoga and later changed the order and sequence of the *Chatusthayas*. We find in his diary, the following revised order of tetrads, which puts the *Sharira Chatusthaya* at the end.

Outline of The Seven Chatusthayas

(Revised Order)

Yoganga — Sapta Chatusthaya—

1. Siddhichatusthaya — Shuddhi, Mukti, Bhukti, Siddhi
2. Brahma Chatusthaya — Sarvam Anantam Jnanam anandam Brahma
3. Karma Chatusthaya — Krishna, Kali, Karma, Kama
4. Shanti Chatusthaya — Samata, Shanti, Sukha, Hasya (Atmaprasada)
5. Shakti Chatusthaya — Virya, Shakti, Chandibhava, Sraddha.
6. Vijnana Chatusthaya — Jnana, Trikaladrishti, Ashtasiddhi, Samadhi
7. Sharira Chatusthaya — Arogya, Utthapana, Saundarya, Vividhananda²⁶

In the book, *Record of Yoga*, there is a note on *Sapta Chatusthaya* from the editors who researched on the diaries and notes that Sri Aurobindo kept about his yogic practices. The order in which the seven tetrads are listed, is what Sri Aurobindo called the “natural and logical order” of the *Chatusthayas* and is the only one referred to in the book, *Record of Yoga*.²⁷

According to the researchers, Sri Aurobindo wrote down the seven chatusthayas on 20th November, 1913, although the system came to him earlier as he referred to “the first two chatusthayas” in a note written down on 16 January 1912. The outline of the revised order of the *Chatusthayas*, quoted above, was written ‘during or not long after 1914’. In it, the *Chatusthayas* are listed in a different order from the one generally used in the Record. The “three general chatusthayas” come first, the one that Sri Aurobindo called the “means, the sum and the completion of all the rest” heading the list. Then follow the “four chatusthayas of the Adhara-siddhi”, the perfection or *siddhi* of the individual “vehicle” (“adh”ara).²⁸

It is to be noted that in the revised order, the *Sharira Chatusthaya* is put in the final position, which marks the consummation of the whole yogic process. Even in the order generally followed, *Sharira Chatusthaya* is put as the final phase of *Adhara-siddhi*.

Culmination of Sapta Chatusthaya

We have now traced in the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother the flowering of the mantric seed that was given to Sri Aurobindo as the programme of his yoga. Was there a point of culmination in the development of this yogic process? This writer feels that the following excerpts of the talks of the Mother, recorded in 1970, point in that direction:

Previously, those who had inner experiences used to say: ‘Yes, up there it is

like that, but here..’ Now, the ‘but here’, soon will not be any more. We are making the conquest of that, that formidable change; that the physical life must be directed by the superior consciousness and not by the mental world. It is the change of authority ... It is difficult. It is laborious. It is painful. Naturally, there will be some damage, but... But really, one can see — one can see. And that’s the REAL CHANGE. That’s what will allow the new Consciousness to express itself. And the body learns — it learns its lesson — all the bodies, all the bodies.. But this very change, the fact that it is not unavoidable ANY LONGER, that’s the great victory: that it is not unavoidable ANY LONGER. One feels — one feels, one sees, and the body itself has had the experience — that, soon, here too, it can become truer. There is ... here is really something which has changed in the world... Obviously, it will take time for it to be truly established all these years have been years to prepare — to prepare — to free oneself and to prepare —, and these last days, it was...ah! The PHYSICAL confirmation, made by the body, that it had changed. It must be ‘worked out’ as one says, it has to be realised in all details, but the change IS DONE — the change is done. This is to say that the material conditions which had been elaborated by the mental. FIXED by it (*Mother closes her first tightly*), and which appeared so inevitable, to the extent that those who had a living experience of the higher worlds thought that one had to escape from this world, to abandon this material world if one truly wanted to live in the Truth (that is the cause of all those theories and all those beliefs), but now, it is no more like that. Now, it is no more like that. The physical is CAPABLE of receiving the Superior Light, the Truth, the true Consciousness and to ma-ni-fest it...It took...a little more than one year for this Consciousness to win this victory. And yet, naturally, it is visible only to those who have the inner vision, but...but it is done...This was that, the work that Sri Aurobindo had given to me. Now, I undersand.²⁹

The Mother is seemingly talking here about the culmination of the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo (‘the work that Sri Aurobindo had given to me’) in respect of the supramental manifestation on the earth. This writer feels that it was also the full flowering and fruition of the seed of *Sapta Chatusthaya* that was sown on Sri Aurobindo 60 years earlier (1910 to 1970).

It is often said that there was a cycle of 6 or its multiples (be it days, months or years) in relation to significant events in the life of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo began practising yoga on his own account in 1904. Six years after that, in 1910 he ‘was given’ *Sapta Chatusthaya*, the “programme of what” he “would do in yoga”. It took another 60 years to complete that programme in 1970.

In the talks of 14th March, 1970,³⁰ the Mother makes another interesting observation. It is found significant that her experience about completion of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga came exactly fourteen years after the descent of Supramental light in 1956 as well as 14 months after the descent of what she termed as superman consciousness in January, 1968, and she was also talking on 14th March, 1970. She considered 14 as a significant number in that context as 14 is ‘twice seven.’

The Mother was known to have found the secret meaning of numbers during her travels to various occult and spiritual realms and planes. According to her, 7 (*sapta*) represents realisation and 4 (*chatusthaya*) represents manifestation. Seven also relates to *saptaloka*,³¹ the Vedic concept of the seven worlds representing the complete spectrum of existence and 4 the four states of our being — soul, mind, life and body.

Sapta Chatusthaya, the yogic mantra of Sri Aurobindo, therefore, signifies realisation of all the elements mentioned therein and their manifestation in all parts of our being from soul to body thus constituting the complete shastra of the integral yoga, which is Sri Aurobindo’s system for the synthesis of yoga and leading to the *yogasiddhi* of total transformation of the *sadhaka*.

The formula can also be expressed as $7 \times 4 = 28$. Following principles of numerology, 28 is to be reduced to a single digit, viz. 1 (one), which represents oneness or unity of all existence — *ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*.³² The synthesis of diverse elements of yoga takes place in that unity.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Record of Yoga*, Part II, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001. pp.1485-486 (Editorial Notes).
2. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol.21, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1971, pp.665-666.
3. ———, p.666.
4. ———, p.667.
5. ———, pp.667-668.
6. ———, pp.668-669.
7. ———, pp.669-670.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *Record of Yoga*, Part I, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001, pp.14-16.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol.21, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1971, pp.714-715.
10. ———, p.721.
11. ———, pp.721-723.

12. *Rg Veda*, X.90.12.
13. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol.21, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1971, p.874.
14. The last chapter of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, referred to by The Mother in this talk, is titled 'Towards the Supramental time vision' (Chapter XXV, pp.853-872). In this essay, we have related it to *Trikaladristi*, which is the second element of the third tetrad, *Vijnana Chatusthaya*.
The Mother, *Agenda of the Supramental Action upon Earth* — 1963, Vol.3, Institut de Recherches Evolutives, Paris/Mira Aditi Centre, Mysore, 1987, p.484.
15. The word 'Agenda' refers to the 13-Volume series called 'Mother's Agenda' OR 'Agenda of the Supramental Action upon Earth'. This is a record of The Mother's conversation with Satprem in French from the 1950s till 1973.
16. On this first anniversary of Supramental Manifestation, Mother distributed medals commemorating the occasion to the disciples filing past.
17. The Mother, *Agenda of the Supramental Action upon Earth* — 1951 to 1960, Vol.1, Institut de Recherches Evolutives, Paris/Mira Aditi Centre, Mysore, 1978, pp.358-359.
18. Sri Aurobindo, *Record of Yoga*, Parts I, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001, p.1478.
19. Sri Aurobindo, *The Hour of God and Other Writings* — Thoughts and Aphorisms — Jnana, SABCL, vol.17, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1971, p.85
20. The Mother, *Agenda of the Supramental Action upon Earth* — 1962, Vol.3, Institut de Recherches Evolutives, Paris/Mira Aditi Centre, Mysore, 1982, pp.154-155.
21. ———, pp.87-88.
22. ———, p.86
23. Sri Aurobindo, *Record of Yoga*, Part I, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001, p.1477.
24. Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*, SABCL, Vol.16, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1971, pp.15-16.
25. The Mother, *Agenda of the Supramental Action upon Earth* — 1970, Vol. 11, Institut de Recherches Evolutives, Paris/Mira Aditi Centre, Mysore, 2000, pp.182-187.
26. The Mother, *Agenda of the Supramental Action upon Earth* — 1966, Vol.7, Institut de Recherches Evolutives, Paris/Mira Aditi Centre, Mysore, 1991, pp. 125-127.
27. *Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1969, p.75.
28. Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*, SABCL, Vol.16, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1971, pp.39-40.
29. Sri Aurobindo, *Record of Yoga*, Part I, Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001, p.24.
30. ———, Part II, p.1490.
31. ———, Part II, p.1491.
32. The Mother, *Agenda of the Supramental Action upon Earth* — 1970, Vol.11, Institut de Recherches Evolutives, Paris/Mira Aditi Centre, Mysore, 1991, pp.100-104.
33. ———, p.104.
34. Vedic *Saptaloka* or the seven worlds are *Bhuh, Bhuvah, Svah, Mahah, Janah, Tapah* and *Satyam*. Sri Aurobindo explained that the last three lokas are the same as *Sat-Cit-Ananda* in the Upanisadic terminology, while *Maharloka* can also be called *Vijnanaloka* or the realm of Supermind.
35. *Rg Veda*, I.164.46.

Two Aspects of Yoga

Vikraman Balaji

The Vedanta is a body of knowledge with unlimited possibilities; it is a pathway to spiritual realisation, to inner vision; it is mysticism and practice, powered and expressed by the mantric word carved in the mystic heart of the seer. For a Ṛṣi, a Rik is a poetic quantum of energy embodying the “light and sound” substance of the Supreme. Often when dwelling on these masterly ancient texts, one feels as if the Ṛṣi is really using his Rik to drive us along the path into the cave of one’s heart by means of the mantra. Level after level is enlightened and revealed and it is a never-ending series of experiences. As the Rig Veda chants so beautifully “State upon state is revealed, covering upon covering awakens to knowledge till in the lap of the mother he wholly sees” (Sri Aurobindo, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, p.231).

In this essay, we examine closely two definitions of Yoga, the first one from a verse in the Katha Upanishad (II.3.11) and the second from the Bhagavad Gita (2.50). These two suktas are brief in style — so natural to the Vedanta — but bear in themselves an ocean of vibration, of power, of a force of impulsion. The two verses are:

tām yogamiti manyante sthirām indriyadhāraṇām — apramattastadā bhavati, yogohi prabhavāpyayau — (Katha Upanishad II.3.11).
buddhiyukto jahāti ha ubhe sukrta duṣkrte — tasmād yogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam — (Bhagavad Gita II.50).

Our theme is directed by these two descriptions of Yoga¹, apparently disjoint but for us intimately and mysteriously yoked. Guided by Sri Aurobindo’s thought, together with an “intuitive logic” as it were, we seek a plane where these two distinct definitions have a synthesis which we firmly believe will reveal greater light in these verses and also illumine us with the Truth.

¹I invite the reader to also study Sri Aurobindo’s essay “The Evolutionary aim in Yoga”, in *The Hour of God*.

While attempting to fathom the profundities of the Upanishads, we keep the following injunction of Sri Aurobindo as a constant reminder and soul-companion.

“The text has to be studied with a great patience, a great passivity, waiting for experience, waiting for light and then waiting for still more light. ... if a man can make his mind like a blank slate, if he can enter into the condition of bottomless passivity proper to the state of the all-embracing Chaitanya Atma, not attempting to fix what the Truth shall be but allowing Truth to manifest herself in his soul, he will find that then it is the nature of the Sruti to reveal perfectly its own message.” (SABCL, vol.27, p.305)

Equipped with this intuition, we seek within the *Śruti* for hints and clues and flowing with it we will try and reach where the *ṛtasya dhārā*, the stream of Truth leads us. And we have Sri Aurobindo’s assurance when he tells us, “He keeps for us the complete book of the Veda written in our secret being, *nihitam guhāyām*; veiled, but accessible, He awaits our reverential approach and questioning and, sincerely and constantly questioned, He lights the fire of Agni in our hearts and makes Surya to rise upon our darkness.” (*Archives and Research*, Volume 9, No 2, December 1985, p.167)

The verse from the Katha Upanishad (II.3.11)

The first verse translated reads as follows:

A firm holding of the senses (*sthirām indriya dhāraṇām*) is “Yoga” they (the thinkers) say (*tam yogamiti manyante*). Then man becomes undistracted and gathered within (*apramattastadā bhavati*); for verily yoga (*yogaḥ hi*) is the outward expansion (*prabhava*) and the drawing back within oneself (*apyaya*).

The compound word *prabhavāpyayau* has to be comprehended simultaneously at the cosmic and the individual levels. In the cosmic sense this can be understood in terms of the two phases of out-breathing and in-breathing occurring in each cycle of existence.

This word also occurs in the *Mandūkya Upanishad*, Verse 6, where the Supreme as *Prajña* (the comprehending Consciousness) is described thus:

This one (*prajña*) is the Master (*īśvara*) of all, He is omniscient (*sarvajña*), He is the inner controller (*anantaryāmi*), (who residing at centre of all, governs the faculties corresponding to the being’s various states, while Himself remaining in the fullness of his principal activity); He is the womb,

the source, the matrix or primordial substance (*yonī*), of all that exists (*sarva*); He is the *prabhavah* and *apyayah* of all beings (*bhūtānām*).

At the level of the individual, the mind, which happens to be our principal instrument of *sādhana*, is in its normal state turned outward (*pravṛtti*) and hence dissipated. Confused and distracted, it is hardly in a position to hit the target (a theme which we will be discussing in a little while). The mind's natural impulse is to follow in the wake of the senses and hence the first step in this process is *sthīrām indriya dhāraṇām*.

The Upanishad carries a single thread of a mighty thought and is at the same time a marvellous harmony of multiple strains. So a verse in the Upanishad is best experienced when perceived as a continuum of thought; in this spirit we examine verse II.3.11 of the *Katha Upanishad* along with the verses which lead up to it. Thus *Katha Upanishad* (II.3.10) says:

When the five senses become stilled and settled, the mind and the buddhi stir not in their workings. That is the paramount state (*paramāṃgatiṃ*), say the thinkers. (*Katha Up.* II.3.10)

The method is to reject thought suggestions, to cast them away from the mind whenever they come and firmly hold to the peace of the being which in reality always exists behind the trouble and riot of the mind. When this secret peace is unveiled, a great calm settles in the being.

When this is achieved in whatever level of perfection, there follows a state of vigilance, an alertness; the state of being gathered within. It is a poise when there is a “stepping back” as it were, where we view the movements without participating. Then the Ṛṣi says, *yogaḥ hi prabhavāpyayau*.

There is a cyclical rhythm in all that exists. The *ṛta*, the universal rhythm, the dynamis of creation manifests in everything that exists and there is *srṣṭi* and *laya* at every moment in our thought, in our breathing. Every outgoing breath comes to a point where it halts and then there follows the incoming breath; every outgoing thought comes to a point where it halts and there follows an incoming thought. The halting point is the moment when there is infinite potential energy before the kinesis begins. The harmony of the ordered-world is one of contrary tensions, like that of the harp or bow and indeed *yogaḥ hi prabhavā-pyayau*.

This rhythm, this oscillation and this repetition of the moveless point pervade our existence. In varying amplitudes the cycle repeats itself, in sleep as in waking, in day and night, in rest and action, all is a constant condensation and a spreading-

out. Yoga is experienced in this juncture, in the sandhi, the point of inflexion. In the state of *apramattataḥ*, when we poise ourselves in the joining, there is as it were an enduring of this moment. Yoga is the repeated experience of this poise.

This recurs at each level of the evolution of our consciousness. Always there is a pointed concentration, a penetration of a plane of consciousness, a poise and a waiting, then a gathering up of the previous levels, a condensation and then a spreading forth of the gains for stabilisation, followed by a new ascent, and again *yogaḥ hi prabhavāpyayau*.

The verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* (II.50)

Out of the apprenticeship to Ignorance
Wisdom upraised him to her master craft
And made him an arch-mason of the soul
(*Savitri*, 1973, 4th rev ed, pp. 25-26)

Now we turn to the second definition of Yoga as given in the Gita, which we inwardly feel is intricately tied to the definition in the *Katha Upanishad*.

The verse translated reads as follows:

One who is yoked by his buddhi to the Divine casts away from himself, even here (*jahātiha*), both correct doing and incorrect doing (*ubhe sukr̥ta-duṣkr̥te*), therefore to Yoga firmly yoke yourself (*tasmād yogāya yujyasva*), for Yoga is skill in action (*yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*).

The word *kuśala* is rendered quite aptly by the English word “skill”. The word skill comes from the Icelandic root, *skilja*, meaning, “cutting, dividing, discernment, discrimination”. Thus the skill intended in *kuśala* is in reality a divine craftsmanship together with the deep wisdom of a Ṛṣi needed while fashioning his hymn or that of a cobbler fully immersed in his shoe-making, the skill where the performance is sacred and the perfection carried over to all fields of doing or making.

How does one attain this skilled poise? The Gita says, *buddhi yuktaḥ Buddhi* comes from the root *dhī*, which is “inspirational thought” or “awakened thought”, and this gives to its possessor rare insight into the realm of divine functioning. Its seat is in the true heart, not the physical heart but the organ of true knowledge. Seated at the centre of the true heart is ‘a being no bigger than the thumb of man’ (*angusṭhamātraḥ puruṣaḥ*) (Ibid, p. 526).

The excessive cerebral activity needs to be reigned in to reach the state of

apramatta, when one can yoke oneself to Divine with the *buddhi*. Then one is in Yoga, which is skill in works.

Actions performed by such a skilled worker fulfils the entire reason for the act, *kṛtsnam karma*. The skill in any performance is a yoking, as of steeds together, or, in other words, it implies a marriage of the master and the means (The craftsman and the craft grown inly one, *Savitri*, p.112, line 25).

Works done this way, steered by the *Buddhi*, are spontaneous and there is no thought such as “have I done correctly or incorrectly?” *ubhe sukṛta-duṣkṛte*. As Sri Aurobindo says,

“by Yoga” the Gita intended “a perfect adaptation of the soul and its instruments to the rhythm of the divine and universal Spirit ...Yoga is the passage of the human thinking animal towards the God-consciousness from which he has descended. In that ascent we find many levels and stages, plateau after plateau of the hill whose summit touches the Truth of things; but at every stage the saying of the Gita applies in an ever higher degree”. (*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, vol.13, p.119)

While the outward action may be the same, the difference lies in the poise and the state from which the action is being carried out, a difference in the power and the faculty, a difference in the will and the temperament.

To experience this poise in action we listen now to the Ṛṣi of the *Mundaka Upanishad*. (I.2.1-4). In the first two verses Brahman is described as

the unity of contraries, the summum bonum, the truth immortal, smaller than the atom, set in all that exists; that *Satyam*, that *amṛtam*, That is what should be penetrated; penetrate it, O fair one (*tad vedavyam somya viddhi*).

The third and fourth verses continue:

Grasping the bow, the mighty weapon of the Upanishad, set there (*sandhayī-ta*) an arrow sharpened by assiduity and adoration (*upāsāniśitam*); draw with a consciousness of the same nature as That (*tadbhāva gatena cetasā*); the target (*lakṣyam*) is That Imperishable; pierce it (*viddhi*) O Fair one (*Somya*)!

The *pranavaḥ*, *Om* is the bow, the self the arrow, Brahman the target they say; t’is penetrable by the undistracted one (*apramattena*); like the arrow, do thou become of one substance (*tanmayo bhavet*), with the target.

In-drawn within the heart’s core in a poise of intense concentration there is

a pregnant waiting; the moment endures and causelessly (*ahaituka*), there is a release, a letting-go as it were, a gentle slipping into a dense consciousness (*chaitanya-ghana*), into a rapture. When released by one in Yoga, the arrow, like a bird homing to its nest, will find its own dwelling (*svedame*). Piercing the target is a result of one’s inner state, an evidence rather than the cause of one’s spiritual condition.

“Thy concern is only with the action (that it be ‘correct’, in accordance with *rta*), never with its results; neither let the results of action be thy motive, nor do thou refrain from acting” (*Bhagavad Gita*, I.47).

In summary, *kauśalam* is intuition, conceptual thought, discrimination, force of impulsion and a perfection of the limbs for the final execution. When poised in Yoga, works get done this way, and they stick not to the individual, *na karma lipyate nare*. This indeed is the secret of Karma Yoga.

The Synthesis

The *Katha Upanishad* has the following exquisite line on the “skill” needed to extract Brahman from within the heart’s core, and this line is the one which shows us the way of ascension to a new plane and a possible synthesis of the two definitions:

Tam svāccharīrāt pravṛ hēnmunjādivēṣikām dhairyēṇa

Translated the last line reads as

“Him one should extract with *dhairyam* from one’s own body, like the arrow from the reed” (*Katha Up* .II.3.17).

The word that needs to be studied with care is “*dhairyam*”, a quality which arises from the root “*dhi*” and the word “*dhīra*” (one possessed of the substance called *dhīḥ*).

A close look at all the occurrences of *dhīra* in the RV and the Upanishad shows beyond doubt that *dhīra* etymologically means “possessing, having received, or being characterised by, the substance *dhīḥ* and hence “wise, having insight into and knowledge of things, connections, phenomena which are hidden from ordinary men”; wisdom can also be classified as practical ability, skill, cleverness; one could translate *dhīra* also as “able, skilful, expert” and we hear the Gita’s *karmasu kauśalam*.

A *dhīra* is therefore an exalted being possessed of the faculty of supranormal

vision and on the other hand is also capable of creative achievements such as fashioning a sculpture or building a house, or arranging an “*ishṭi vidhāna*”, an altar, requiring expert knowledge into the rituals and order of things. His poise is that of the divine sculptor, with no thought for the morrow, his expression is fashioned in the intuitive heart and it is impelled by his higher intellect and given shape by his skilled hands.

Again, (RV 10.114.9) says: *kaśchandasām yogamā veda dhīrah*, i.e. “the *dhīra* is he who knows with expertise the harnessing of the rhythms which underlie existence”.

The substance, the stuff constituting the mantra was a power-substance, a densified stuff of consciousness, having the potency to give experience, to bring realisation, be a vehicle to carry great ideas across all time barriers. And who is said to have fashioned this speech by thought? None other than a “*dhīra*”, for *dhīrā manasā vācam akrata* (RV 10.71.2). The “skill” or “wisdom” required to “invent” or “create” sacral speech needs deep vision and imagination.

Such is the *dhīra*, the one who can extract the Divine from within like the arrow from the reed, who is poised in Yoga experiencing in total stillness the enduring of this moment.

If one renders *dhīra* as “contemplative”, then he is one who by his contemplation does not merely cogitate on issues but develops the engineering expertise to extricate with great skill, deeply hidden things, ideas. A skill, accompanied by the ponderous contemplation gives a “waiting patience”, unhastened by senses (*sthīrām indriya dhāraṇām*). It is a delicate art and any haste breaks the thread needing enormous labour to recover the lost insight. The “precision tooling” needed in manufacturing industries or the launch of a satellite into orbit, where even a small error can lead to a total failure, are modern instances where aspects of this skill are demanded. A *dhīra* is such a contemplative, not a mere “thinker”.

Gathering the multiple threads of light, we see Yoga revealed as a complex synthesis of mutually interdependent processes acting in tandem on the various planes and parts of our being, and the Vedic *dhīra* typifies perfectly this synthesis. Thus Yoga is the going forth and drawing within in every act of existence, Yoga is the poise in every point of inflexion, Yoga is the contemplative’s delicate act of drawing out of the true self from within, Yoga is also the expert charioteering of the wheel of life, and finally Yoga is the start of the race and its ending.

We come to a close. Having flowed along two tiny tributaries, one of the mighty Bhagirathi of the *Katha Upanishad* and the other the Alakananda of the Gita, we reached a point where they met and coalesced. The Yoga of synthesis of the contemplative and the skilled worker takes us to a new state of consciousness. A new light dawns, revealing a power and presence from within. A first plane of ascension above the ordinary existence has been attained.

Philosophy of Immortality and Rebirth

Arun Chatterjee

Introduction

Most of us wonder about life after death and we have a variety of questions in our minds. Will I continue to exist after I die in some form? What kind of a world is it where I will go? We also wonder about our existence prior to our birth. If I have a soul that will survive the death of my body, did it exist before my body was formed in my mother’s womb? Will I be reborn in this world immediately after I die, or will I spend some time in another world before the next birth? The answers to these questions that common persons accept are largely influenced by their social and religious background. For example, most Hindus believe in life after death and rebirth. Most Christians believe in life after death but not in rebirth. There are also many very intelligent and highly educated persons in both western and eastern cultures who do not believe in life after death, and some of them think that the belief in the concepts of the immortality of souls and rebirth can be attributed to the fear of the believers to accept “nothingness” as the state that they will reach after death.

Sri Aurobindo believed in the concepts of soul, life after death, and rebirth; but his belief was not based on either blind faith or the fear of “nothingness”. His belief was founded on intellectual analysis as well as his own spiritual experience. He discussed his thoughts on various issues related to immortality and rebirth in a book titled *The Problem of Rebirth* and also devoted two chapters of *The Life Divine* on these issues. One of these two chapters of *The Life Divine* is titled ‘The Philosophy of Rebirth’, and this article of mine is based primarily on that chapter. In addition to reviewing the views of traditional Vedanta, Sri Aurobindo discussed the views of a few western philosophers of ancient time and also the views of Christianity and Buddhism. I have added some additional information on the views of western philosophers and also the views of Christianity and Buddhism. To cover all world religions I have presented the views of Judaism, and Islam, which are not included in Sri Aurobindo’s

writings on this topic.

My major sources for the views of western philosophers and theologians about soul and immortality include two books of Prof. Harry A. Wolfson, which are listed in the Reference. I have also listed in the Reference the books on Judaism and Buddhism, which I consulted extensively. For Hinduism and Sri Aurobindo's views the books titled *The Life Divine* and *The Problem of Rebirth* are my major sources. I should point out that there are several other sources where one can find Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's discussion on what happens after death and the passage of the soul through different occult planes. I have not dealt with the question of the journey of a soul after death in this article. Those descriptions can be found in Sri Aurobindo's *Letters on Yoga, Savitri*, and Mother's *Questions and Answers*.

Concepts and Issues Related to Souls, Immortality, and Rebirth

Before we begin to examine the views of famous philosophers and theologians of different religions we should examine certain concepts and issues related to the definition of a soul and also what is meant by immortality and rebirth since these terms are used with different meanings in different cultures and by different writers.

There is a variety of notions about what is meant by the term soul. It is generally recognised that a human being consists of a gross physical body, which can be touched and felt like matter, and in this body reside a variety of forces, which include life or vital energy, feelings and emotions, and also mind and intellect. For each of these categories of forces, or energies, it is possible to identify a more detailed gradation of forces. Ordinarily a common person thinks that the vital, emotional and mental forces residing in his body together constitute his soul and that all these elements are immaterial, incorporeal, and they can survive after death. On the other hand, materialists believe that all these forces – vital, emotional and mental – are subtle forms of matter and corporeal, i.e., entirely dependent on the body. So according to their view when the body dies, these forces dissipate and do not remain in any integrated form. Now, in between these two extreme positions there are views that consider one or two of these elements to be the soul, and there has been much debate on this issue in western philosophy. Some western philosophers consider mind, or only a certain aspect of mind such as the intellect, as the soul. Some others consider mind and emotion together as the soul. One important implication in this debate is the question: what is separable from the body and can exist without the body?

In some of the Indian philosophies such as Sankhya Karika (of Kapila) and Vedanta, a clear distinction is made between Nature (Prakriti) and Soul

(Purusha). The body along with vital, emotional and mental energies including intellect is considered by Sankhya and Vedanta to be part of Nature. A soul for Sankhya, and also for Vedanta, is conscious being, or Purusha, which witnesses and experiences Nature's activities. However, there is a difference between Sankhya and Vedanta with regard to the relation of Nature and Soul. For Sankhya Nature and Soul (or consciousness) are made of two different substances, which are linked together but not entirely unified. According to Vedanta, Nature and Soul are made of the same substance, and they are intimately connected. For Vedanta Nature is the power of Soul, and consciousness is present at all grades of Nature. In western philosophy also there has been considerable debate on the issue of the relationship of body and soul.

There is also an issue related to the concepts of individual and universal souls. Some philosophers believe in individual souls and also in a universal soul, whereas some philosophers do not believe in individual souls but believe in a universal soul. According to the latter view the universal soul generates a sense of an individual self in a person's consciousness by coming in contact with the body and other forces operating in it, but this individual self really is fictitious. We will return to these concepts when we will examine the views of a few eminent philosophers and theologians of the east and the west.

With regard to immortality, views of common people as well as philosophers and theologians vary. Some believe that the only immortality we can hope for is in the memory of other persons – friends, relatives and others – depending on what we do during our life time. At the other extreme there is a belief in certain religions that not only will our soul survive but that there also will be a resurrection of the body in the sense that our dead body will be restored in its living form by God's grace. Some philosophers and theologians believed that only a special faculty of our mind, which has to be acquired by special effort, can survive without the body, and so they did not think that every person can attain immortality since everyone does not acquire the special faculty.

Some religions believe that a soul is created for the first time when a person is born but it continues to exist after death, whereas some other religions and philosophers believe in the pre-existence of a soul and that a soul is reborn again and again. There is another issue related to the rebirth of a soul and it involves the question whether a soul is reborn in a new body immediately after death. The concept of immediate rebirth is usually called 'transmigration'. However, there are many who believe that a soul stays in other worlds for a long time before it is reborn. Sri Aurobindo preferred to use the term 'rebirth' since it is simple and does not imply the return of a soul either immediately after death or after an interval. (*The Problem of Rebirth*, p. 9)

Views of Western Philosophers and Theologians

Whereas in eastern philosophy and theology the concepts of the immortality of souls and reincarnation go hand in hand in most cases, that is not the case for western philosophy and theology. Western philosophers usually do not base their philosophical views on religious scriptures such as the Bible, Torah or Koran although some of them were religious-minded in their personal life. Some of the famous philosophers actually belonged to ancient time before these scriptures were written. Theologians base their views primarily on the interpretation of religious scriptures, and they also try to reconcile the differences between the views of scriptures and philosophy. In this section I will first discuss the views of western philosophers and then the views of western theologians and religions.

Western Philosophy

There are some philosophers in the west who believe in the immortality of souls as well as reincarnation, but their number is small and most of them belonged to the ancient era. One of the earliest philosophers who believed in reincarnation of souls is Pythagoras (570 BC – 495 BC). Pythagoras believed that the human soul is immortal and that it returns to life again and again in animal as well as human forms. The most famous among philosophers who believed in the immortality of souls and their rebirth are Plato (427 BC – 347 BC) and Plato's teacher Socrates (469 BC – 399 BC). Plato's student Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) disagreed with his teacher on several issues. Plato's and Aristotle's views have had immense influence on many philosophers and theologians of all three major western religions – Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and therefore, it would be worthwhile to review their thoughts briefly.

Plato wrote about his concept of soul and reincarnation in his famous books *Phaedo*, *The Republic*, and *Timaeus*. (Plato's concept of reincarnation is also referred to as "metempsychosis".) In *The Republic* Plato identified three parts of the human soul – appetite, spirit (or emotion), and reason. Appetite is primarily concerned with food, drink and sex. Spirit is a motivating force and it generally accounts for self-assertion and ambition. Reason is the part of the soul that is attached to knowledge and truth. These three parts of the soul do not always act in harmony with each other, and it is the rational part that tries to keep the other two parts in control. To explain the relation of the three parts of a soul, Plato used his famous allegory of a rider of a chariot trying to control two horses pulling the chariot. The chariot is the soul, the rider represents intelligence, and the two horses represent appetite and spirit (or emotion). The rational part is not always successful in controlling the other two parts, and individual persons'

souls are different according to the dominance of one part over the other two. Some souls are dominated by reason, some by the spirited element and others by bodily appetites. In *Phaedo* Plato discussed what happens to each of these types of souls after death.

According to Plato all three parts, or elements, of the soul are immaterial and can be separated from the body. The soul of a person is reborn several times in order to strengthen the rational part and purify the lower parts. Finally the rational part of the soul takes over the transformed lower parts, and at the end of its final reincarnation the soul goes to the higher world of unchanging realities (or Forms) and lives there forever. Plato also believed that if the lower elements of the soul of a person could not be transformed and integrated with the rational part even after several rounds of reincarnation, those parts would go to an underworld of some type and remain there, while the higher rational part by itself would go to the higher realm of unchanging Forms. It should be noted that in Plato's concept of tripartite soul the 'appetite' and 'spirit' elements, which animate a body, are included in the category of 'soul' and they too survive when the body dies. However, for Plato it is the rational element, or intellect, which is the most important aspect of the soul of a person because it is capable of contemplating eternal and unchanging Forms, or Ideas, and it can live in that higher realm by virtue of its inherent nature. So in Plato's view just having a life after death does not make a soul truly immortal; it is only when a soul goes beyond the cycle of birth and rebirth and lives forever in the higher realm of unchanging Forms that it is truly immortal.

Aristotle did not agree with all aspects of Plato's views although he was his student. On the issues involving souls and their immortality he changed his views in later years of his life. Aristotle, too, presented a detailed account of various aspects of human soul, and his views on the relationship of soul and body and immortality of soul were different from Plato's. According to him, soul is the animating principle, which he called the 'form' of body, and it is unified with and inseparable from the body. So based on this view the soul will perish when the body dies. Aristotle is very clear of his view that the soul perishes with the body with reference to plants and animals. However, he seems to have made an exception for human beings. With regard to the intellect of a human being, he distinguished between a passive part and an active part, and he suggested that the active (or creative) part of intellect can be separated from the body. The active part of intellect is divine in character and it will not perish with the body at death while the passive part will perish. It should be noted that in Aristotle's view the active, or creative, intellect of a person, which survives death, does not have a personal identity, and this divine principle returns

to God. Most scholars agree that Aristotle did not believe in personal immortality in the same sense as Plato did.

Most of the western philosophers of the medieval period and later did not believe in either the immortality of souls or reincarnation. One exception is René Descartes (1596 – 1650) who is famous for his philosophy of the dualism of mind and body. According to Descartes, mind and body are made of two different substances, and he believed that mind can survive the death of body. For Descartes the mind includes sensations, but the pure life, or vital, force which animates a body is included in the body.

Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677) disagreed with the dualism of Plato and Descartes. He believed that mind and body are made of the same substance. He believed in God and that everything in the world is derived from God, but he did not believe in the concept of an immortal soul in the way that Plato and Descartes did. However, he acknowledged an immortal principle of faculty that human beings can possess. In his famous book *Ethics* (Part V, Proposition 23) he wrote, “the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal”. (Wolfson, 1965, p. 266) This ‘something of mind’ that survives death is related to the essence of mind, and according to Spinoza this essence is knowledge. Spinoza believed that the more knowledge a person acquires the greater is the portion of his mind that will be immortal. It is important to note that according to him many faculties of mind such as imagination and memory do not survive the death of the body. Further, the special faculty or aspect of mind that Spinoza considered to be immortal is different from the standard concept of an individual soul since it is a general principle and does not have personal identity.

There are also a few philosophers who recognised the existence of a realm beyond the phenomenal world and also believed in an aspect of human beings belonging to this realm, but they did not discuss the concepts of the immortality of souls and reincarnation clearly in their scholarly work. One famous philosopher who fits this description is Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860) who took a lot of interest in Hindu and Buddhist philosophies. Schopenhauer was greatly impressed by the concepts of Upanishads and in his later life he supposedly read Upanishads every night. However, he did not acknowledge immortality of individual souls in his writings. In his famous book, *The World as Will and Representation*, he postulated two different types of subjects or selves. One is his ‘subject of will’, which is similar to Indian philosophy’s ‘ego’ (*ahamkara*). This self is corporeal and so it perishes with the body. However, his other self is the ‘Subject of knowledge’, and it is similar in concept to the Self (*Atman*) of Upanishads. He described this Subject as “the world’s one eye that looks out

from all cognisant beings.” This Subject is cosmic and not individual. Schopenhauer was not clear as to the relationship of the ‘Subject of knowledge’ with Will, which according to him is the thing-in-itself of everything. He did not acknowledge individual souls and their immortality. One writer and poet, whom Schopenhauer admired, believed in reincarnation of souls; he is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 -1832). There are a few western essayists, poets, scientists, and psychiatrists of the modern era who believed in reincarnation. They include Ralph Waldo Emerson, Albert Schweitzer, Benjamin Franklin, and Carl Jung. Some of these individuals were clearly influenced by Indian philosophy.

The fundamental reason why most of the modern western philosophers do not believe in the immortality of souls and reincarnation is because they believe in materialism, or physicalism, according to which all components of the phenomenal world are composed of matter and that there is nothing beyond the physical world. According to them the emergence of vital force, or life, in matter is accidental. They also believe that all of our experiences such as feelings, thoughts, and ideas, which we usually consider to be non-material, actually are subtle forms of matter and can be explained by processes of brain and changes in the neural network. So for materialists who do not believe that any part of our conscious being can survive physical body’s death, the question of rebirth does not even arise. In Sri Aurobindo’s words, “Rebirth is for the modern mind no more than a speculation and a theory; it has never been proved by the methods of modern science or to the satisfaction of the new critical mind formed by a scientific culture.” (*The Philosophy of Rebirth*, pp.9 – 10) Besides materialism there is also a theory that accepts a vital or life force, as the primary principle, which is manifesting in different forms including matter and mind. The vitalistic view too does not admit the presence of souls that can survive the death of gross bodies. At the best these materialistic and vitalistic theories accept that some of the physical and mental characteristics can be transmitted by parents to their children in the form of chromosomes and genes, and thus some characteristics of the parents continue to exist after their death.

Western Religions and Theologians

In this section I will discuss the views of three world religions of the western world – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Sri Aurobindo discussed the views of Christianity but did not discuss those of Judaism and Islam.

Judaism

Jewish theology and philosophy present a few different views on immortality as well as reincarnation. Judaism is focused on life here and now rather than

on the afterlife, and that may be one of the reasons why there is not much dogma about life after death and reincarnation. Theological views range from various interpretations of the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*) at one end to the mystical views of Kabbalah and Hasidism at the other end. In between are the Rabbainic views, which are varied since those developed over many years during the early centuries of the Common Era (after Christ) and in several different places where Jewish diasporas lived.

Hebrew Bible, *Tanakh*, is inconsistent about the immortality of souls and what happens after one dies. Torah, which represents the major portion of *Tanakh*, does not say anything about what happens after a person dies. In Ketuvim, which is included in *Tanakh* but is not a part of Torah, there are a few statements about life after death. With regard to how a human body and soul come into existence, both Judaism and Christianity accept the view of Genesis, which is expressed in Verse 2: 7: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” According to this verse the soul of a person is created when his body is formed, and thus a prior existence of a human being is ruled out. This verse has been interpreted by some Jewish theologians as implying that body and soul are a unified entity, and so when the body dies the soul also dies. Further, in Genesis 3: 19 God said to Adam, “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” This verse also indicates that there is no life after death. However, the more widely accepted view among common persons and also some theologians is that body and soul are two different entities and that the soul is incorporeal and can survive without the body. This common view is supported by a few verses of the *Books of Ecclesiastes and Daniel*, which are included in Ketuvim and came much later than Genesis. For example, the Verse 12.7 of *Ecclesiastes* says that after death, “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the Spirit will return to God who gave it.” This verse has been interpreted to mean that the human soul is immortal, and it also has been interpreted as ruling out the possibility of the resurrection of the old body. The verse 12.2 of the *Book of Daniel* also refers to life after death.

Jewish theological views about life after death developed in several stages. During the early stages prior to the Rabbinic stage, the Sadducees, who were the noble priests of the Temple, did not believe in afterlife whereas the Pharisees, the predecessors of Rabbis, believed in life after death. In Rabbinic Judaism it is commonly believed that the soul of a person is immortal, and that after death of the body the soul goes to either the Garden of Eden, which is similar to Paradise, or Gehinnom, which is similar to Hell, depending on what the person does during his life time. Many Jewish philosophers and theologians, however,

did not accept the common notions of Garden of Eden and Gehinnom, and they include the famous philosophers Moses Maimonides (1135 – 1204) and Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677). Maimonides is one of the great Jewish philosophers and theologians of all times. He did not believe that every human being attains immortality after death. According to him only a special faculty of human consciousness, or soul, is incorporeal and can survive after death. This faculty is a higher grade of intellect, which must be acquired by an individual person. This ‘acquired intellect’ is an emanation from God. The way to acquire this higher intellect according to Maimonides is by following the path prescribed in Torah.

I discussed the views of Spinoza in an earlier section and now it can be seen that his concept of immortality is similar to that of Maimonides. It is important to note that Spinoza’s as well as Maimonides’ view that only a special faculty or aspect of mind is immortal is different from the standard concept of a soul since this faculty does not have the stamp of personal identity.

Although the immortality of soul has been accepted in Judaism gradually, there still are many who believe differently. Many among the non-believers of immortality are of the opinion that the only type immortality one can have is through the memories of other persons. The notion of resurrection of the body after death has never been widely accepted in Judaism, and reincarnation of a soul in a different body also is not accepted widely in traditional Judaism. It also should be mentioned that during the time of Maimonides (1135 – 1204) there was considerable controversy regarding the resurrection of the dead body. Maimonides did not believe in the common notion of resurrection. It is interesting to note that reincarnation is accepted by the mystical versions of Judaism – Kabbalah and Hasidism. Both Isaac Luria, one of the famous teachers of Kabbalah, and Israel ben Eliezer (also known as Baal Shem Tov), who is considered as the founder of Hasidism, believed in reincarnation. There is considerable discussion within Kabbalah as to which aspect of the soul goes through reincarnation, and it is generally believed that only the lower aspects of the soul – *nefesh* and *ruah* – are reborn in a new body, but *neshamah*, the higher and divine aspect, goes back to God.

Christianity

Christianity is largely based on *The New Testament*, but some of its views including that of the creation of the world and human soul are based on *The Old Testament*, the Hebrew Bible. Christians believe in the verse of Hebrew Bible (Genesis 2: 7), which says: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a

living being.” This verse is interpreted in a dualistic manner. It is widely accepted by Christian theologians and common persons that the body is matter but the human soul, which is created by God when the body of a child is formed, is incorporeal and spiritual. With regard to the status of the body and soul after death two beliefs are fundamental to most of the Christians, and these are the immortality of souls and resurrection of bodies. Christian theologians of early centuries after Christ, who are also known as Church Fathers, discussed these beliefs in their writings extensively. Saint Augustine (354–430) may be included in this group of theologians. To the Fathers of the Church, as Prof. Wolfson pointed out, “the belief that Jesus rose on the third day after crucifixion meant that his soul survived the death of the body and was reinvested with his risen body. Similarly the belief that in the end of days there will be a general resurrection of the dead meant the reinvestment of surviving souls with risen bodies.” (Wolfson, p. 70) The Church Fathers also believed that “in the interval between death and resurrection, the soul had a life of its own without a body, though there was some difference of opinion as to what was the state of the soul’s life during that interval.” (Wolfson, p. 70) The Gospels of *The New Testament* have abundant reference to the belief that one’s soul can gain salvation and immortality through Jesus Christ by the grace of God.

The idea of the immortality of souls is more widely accepted by Christian theologians than the concept of the resurrection of a dead body. The concept of resurrection was challenged by many philosophers of ancient and modern times. Some Christian theologians believe that the concept of the resurrection of a body really refers to the formation of a spiritual body for the soul and not the body of flesh and blood. Details of the arguments for and against resurrection are beyond the scope of this article. For our purpose what is to be noted is that the habitation of a soul in a resurrected body is the closest that an orthodox Christian comes to the idea of rebirth. Those who considered the possibility of rebirth in its true sense of a soul returning to earthly life in a new body formed in the womb of a woman are outside the mainstream of Christians. The Gnostics and some of the early Christians believed in reincarnation, but later on the Church removed such a view.

Islam

The most common view among the Muslims, which is based on the *Quran*, is that a human being has an immortal soul and there is life after death. It is also believed that there will be a Day of Judgment when God, Allah, will decide based on what a person did during his life on the earth whether his soul will go to heaven or hell. Nobody except God knows when exactly the Day of Judgment

will occur, and there is not any clear idea given in *Quran* as to what happens to the departed souls during the waiting period between death and the Day of Judgment. The common idea among Muslims about a soul is that it is identical to a person’s current personality. Rebirth of souls is not accepted in traditional Islam.

There are several Islamic scholars who studied western philosophy and were influenced by Plato and Aristotle. These philosophers include, Al-Kindi (800–870 AD), Ibn Sina (980-1037 AD) and Ibn Rushd (1126-98 AD). Their views challenged many of the traditional views of Islam based on *Quran*. Their concept of a soul was different from that of common Muslims. In general their philosophies distinguished between a part of consciousness that is intimately connected with the physical body and another part that is rational. They considered the rational part of mind as incorporeal and thought that only this part of mind can be immortal.

Islamic philosophy includes a mystical dimension known as Sufism. In some respects the views of Sufi mystics have similarities with the views of Kabbalah and Hinduism since they believe in the concept of a universal soul and the unity of all existing beings. The spiritual practices of Sufis are somewhat different from traditional Muslims. With regard to rebirth of souls Sufis are divided in their views. Certain groups, or orders, of Sufis believe in rebirth; but there are also many Sufis who accept the traditional views of Islam and do not believe in reincarnation.

Views of Eastern Philosophies and Religions

Among the eastern philosophies and religions the two that are most prominent and considered as world religions are Hinduism and Buddhism. Each of these includes several variations of thought and views with regard to souls and rebirth. In this article I will cover only the major schools of Buddhism and Hinduism – Theravada Buddhism, and Vedanta of Hinduism.

Soul and Rebirth according to Buddhism

There are several different schools of thought within Buddhism and most of them believe that there is no permanent Reality or Being underneath the phenomenal existence. This belief also means that human beings do not have any essence, or soul, either individually or collectively. This is a fundamental doctrine of Buddhism and known as the doctrine of *Anatman*, or No-Self. According to Buddhist philosophy everything in the phenomenal existence is a part of causal chains of Karma, which are formed by successive actions and reactions. What we see and experience is an ever-changing process of

continuous Becoming, and there is no Being, or beings. An individual person is nothing but a collection of different aggregates, or *Skandhas*, which are constantly changing. These aggregates are: material form (*Rupa*), sensation (*Vedana*), perception (*Samjna*), disposition or mental formations (*Samskara*), and consciousness (*Vijnana*). All the aggregates are causally interconnected and constantly changing, and there is no unchanging substance in any of these aggregates. Further, there is no subject, or agent, behind a conscious act although there is an ego sense of a doer and experiencer. For example, when a thought arises there is no thinker, and it is the thought that thinks. So the concept of immortality and rebirth of souls in the traditional sense is not applicable to Buddhism.

That Buddhist philosophy does not believe in the concept of rebirth of souls surprises many common persons since in Buddhist literature there is considerable discussion about rebirth and *Samsara*. Actually, one of the goals of Buddhist spiritual practice is to get out of the cycle of *Samsara* and attain Nirvana. What is important to understand is that the entity that is reborn is not a soul, but it represents the continuation of the chain of Karma. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "In the Buddhist theory rebirth is imperative because Karma compels it; not a soul, but Karma is the link of an apparently continuing consciousness, – for the consciousness changes from moment to moment: there is this apparent continuity of consciousness, but there is no real immortal soul taking birth and passing through the death of the body to be reborn in another body." (*The Life Divine*, p. 747, footnote)

Views of Vedanta and Sri Aurobindo

Vedanta represents the philosophy of Upanishads, and there are a few different schools of thought within it based on the interpretations of certain Indian theologians/philosophers. Advaita (Non-Dual) Vedanta is one of these schools. The other two prominent schools are Vishistha Advaita (Qualified Non-Dualism), and Dvaita (Dualism). Moreover, there are a few different interpretations of Advaita Vedanta itself, and one extreme view is referred to as Mayavada. According to Mayavada, the reality of individual souls and their rebirth is merely a conventional (*byabaharik*) truth and it does not have any ultimate (*paramarthik*) truth because it is only the silent and inactive Brahman, the Supreme Reality, that is real and everything else is false and like a dream. For Mayavada, an individual soul is merely a temporary and illusory phenomenon. As Sri Aurobindo explained, "The Self in this view is one, it cannot be many or multiply itself; there cannot therefore be any true individual, only at most a one Self omnipresent and animating each mind and body with the idea of an 'I'."

(*The Life Divine*, p. 752, Footnote)

The extreme view of Mayavada is not accepted by many scholars including Sri Aurobindo. Upanishads do not mention that the world is unreal or an illusion. According to Upanishads the world is the manifestation of Brahman in space and time, and an individual soul too is real since it is Brahman who takes the form of an individual being. Upanishads explain that the cause for an individual's birth and rebirth is his desire. He forgets his eternal true self, and his lower self (or ego) gets entangled in the desires of perishable life and thus he becomes subject to *Samsara* and rebirth. When desire and ignorance are removed the eternal Brahman hidden in an individual leaves the individual personality and its experience, and returns to the impersonal imperishable status beyond space and time. The focus of Upanishads is on the universal self, the all-soul, and it considers an individual to be a temporary, although real, manifestation as if it were a wave of the ocean of Brahman appearing and again disappearing. According to this view, negation of individual self and its merging with universal Self represent the process of liberation and the way of getting out of the cycle of *Samsara*. It should be noted that with regard to immortality the view of Upanishads is not limited to ego-self having a life after death. As Sri Aurobindo explained, for Upanishads: "By immortality is meant the consciousness which is beyond birth and death, beyond the chain of cause and effect, beyond all bondage and limitation, free, blissful, self-existent in conscious-being, the consciousness of the Lord, of the supreme Purusha, of Sachchidananda." (*The Upanishads*, p. 68)

Traditional interpretation of Advaita Vedanta does not present a meaningful purpose for the existence of an individual and his rebirth, and it is puzzling why an individual will come into phenomenal existence at all if getting out of this existence and *Samsara* should be his goal. However, all Upanishads do not present a negative view toward life on earth, and *Isha Upanishad* is a good example of those that embrace both Being and Becoming. Sri Aurobindo believed in the concept of Advaita, or non-dualism, but he also believed in the reality and immortality of individual souls. He added to the views of Upanishads an evolutionary perspective, which gives human existence and rebirth a meaningful purpose. Sri Aurobindo pointed out that whereas the physical evolution of species has received the attention of scientists and scholars, what is overlooked is the evolution of consciousness, which is taking place simultaneously. Rebirth of souls is the necessary mechanism for this spiritual evolution.

In Sri Aurobindo's view, which fully agrees with the view of Upanishads, this universe is the self-creation of a supreme Reality, and Spirit is the substance of everything; all things are various powers and forms of the manifestation of

Spirit. *Sachchidananda*, which is “an infinite existence, an infinite consciousness, an infinite force and will, and an infinite delight of being”, hid itself in an apparent nescience, and now it is manifesting itself more and more through matter, life and mind. The emerging consciousness at the levels of matter and life had to take numerous forms, which include the forms of plants and animals, until it reached human level. This process has not ended at the human level and the continuing evolution of mental consciousness is clearly evident. There is a large difference between the mind of an uneducated primitive man and that of a present-day educated man. Even the leading principle of mind at the present time, the intellect, does not represent mind’s highest stage. According to Sri Aurobindo, the emergence of higher levels of mind including Supermind, which now are concealed, is inevitable.

The real meaning of evolution is the gradual ascent of consciousness, and it is accompanied by the development of suitable bodies. Reaching the highest level of consciousness from the unconscious existence by a single leap is not the rule of its operation. By residing in Nature within each type of body individual souls grow by a variety of experience and are progressively enriched. Rebirth of individual souls is necessary for this progressive growth. In Sri Aurobindo’s words, “It is through the conscious individual being that this recovery is possible; it is in him that the evolving consciousness becomes organised and capable of awaking to its own Reality. The immense importance of the individual being, which increases as he rises in the scale, is the most remarkable and significant fact of a universe which started without consciousness and without individuality in an undifferentiated Nescience. The importance can only be justified if the Self as individual is no less real than the Self as cosmic Being or Spirit and both are powers of the eternal.” (*The Life Divine*, p. 755) Sri Aurobindo points out that it is only by taking birth in a physical body, which provides a separative form, that a soul can develop through the play of relations between an individual and other individuals. Eventually this progressive development leads to the recovery of unity of a soul with God and with all in God.

In addition to his clear view about the role of individual souls in the evolution of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo presented a clear idea about what exactly he means by a human soul and what is it that is reborn. He explained that “The human birth in this world is on its spiritual side a complex of two elements, a spiritual Person and a soul of personality; the former is man’s eternal being, the latter is his cosmic and mutable being. As the spiritual impersonal person he is one in his nature and being with the freedom of Sachchidananda who has here consented to or willed his involution in the Nescience for a certain round of soul-experience, impossible otherwise, and presides secretly over its evolution.

As the soul of personality he is himself part of that long development of the soul-experience in the forms of Nature; ...” (*The Life Divine*, p. 759) The individual spiritual person is *Jivatman*, or *Jiva*, which remains outside the phenomenal Nature. *Jivatman* is unchanging and unborn, but it has its representative in Nature, which participates in the life of a person in the phenomenal world. This representative is the mutable purusha, or soul, supporting the outer personality, and Sri Aurobindo calls it ‘psychic being’, or *chaitya purusha*. It is the psychic being that is immortal and is reborn, and it grows by the experience gained from life activities.

In traditional Hindu philosophy, Karma is considered to be the primary factor that determines the need of rebirth as well the nature of the new life that is assumed by a soul after rebirth. There is another common belief that the soul returns to a new life with most of the outer personality of the present life intact. According to Sri Aurobindo these concepts are only partially true, and he emphasised that the factor that plays the most important role in the process of rebirth is the need of a soul, or psychic being, to grow and attain new experience, and according to him after death the psychic being of a person assimilates the experience of the past life and keeps only a small portion of the outer personality to bring to the new life. In Sri Aurobindo’s own words, “In each return to earth the Person, the Purusha, makes a new formation, builds a new personal quantum suitable for a new experience, for a new growth of its being. When it passes from its body, it keeps still the same vital and mental form for a time, but the forms or sheaths dissolve and what is kept is only the essential elements of the past quantum, of which some will but some may not be used in the next incarnation.” (*The Life Divine*, p. 817) Sri Aurobindo also said that in the case of an advanced spiritual person whose mental and vital personalities have undergone spiritual transformation in the present life, a large portion of the outer personality can be preserved. [For gaining a better understanding of these issues readers are encouraged to read a chapter of *The Life Divine*, which is titled “*Rebirth and Other Worlds; Karma, the Soul and Immortality*”.]

It should be pointed out that the concept of psychic being and its evolution through the process of rebirth is not found in traditional Vedanta and it is a contribution of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to spiritual philosophy and yoga. With regard to an individual self, traditional Vedanta usually refers to ‘ego self’ (*Ahamkara*), which is the lower self, and *Jivatman*, which is the higher self, whereas Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy includes ‘psychic being’ along with ‘ego self’ and *Jivatman*. However, a few Upanishads mention about a soul in the spiritual heart, which is similar to psychic being. For example, Verse II. 3. 17 of *Katha Upanishad* says,

“The Purusha, the Spirit within, who is no larger than the finger of a man is seated for ever in the heart of creatures: one must separate Him with patience from one’s own body as one separates from a blade of grass its main fibre. Thou shalt know Him for the Bright Immortal, yea, for the Bright Immortal.”

Sri Aurobindo believed that the above verse is referring to psychic being. Readers may refer also to Verse III. 14. 3 of *Chandogya Upanishad*, and Verse III. 13 of *Svetasvatara Upanishad*. According to Sri Aurobindo psychic being is the pure divine element in our consciousness. In his own words, “It is the concealed Witness and Control, the hidden Guide, the Daemon of Socrates, the inner light or inner voice of the mystic. It is that which endures and is imperishable in us from birth to birth, untouched by death, decay or corruption, an indestructible spark of the Divine.” (*The Life Divine*, p. 225) Psychic being plays a very important role not only in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy but also in his integral yoga.

Conclusions and Comments

There is a variety of beliefs about the immortality of souls and rebirth in both western and eastern cultures. In western philosophy belief in the immortality and rebirth of souls is mostly limited to ancient philosophers Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and a few others. Most modern western philosophers reject the concepts of immortality and rebirth of souls as they believe in materialism. According to them the concepts of God, souls and rebirth cannot be proven and are nothing but the speculation of human mind. However, most theologians of different western religions believe in souls and their immortality, but they do not believe in reincarnation. Only the mystical dimensions of western religions believe in the rebirth of souls. The definition of soul in western culture is different among philosophers and theologians. For most of the western philosophers, except Plato, it is the mind, or a higher aspect of mind, of a person that is considered to be his soul. For Plato and western theologians, however, soul includes mind and also the vital forces that animate a body.

Reincarnation or rebirth of souls is widely accepted in eastern religions. Rebirth is a fundamental tenet of Hinduism. Buddhism is unique as it believes in rebirth, but it does not believe in souls. According to Buddhism it is the chain of Karma that causes certain aggregates or components of an existing human being to be reborn. In Indian philosophies, mind is considered to be a part of Nature and an instrument of soul. For Hindu philosophy, soul is a conscious being, which remains hidden behind various parts of Nature including mind and it is intimately connected with Nature.

Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that human intellect cannot find satisfactory answers to questions about what we were before birth and what we will be after death. According to him we need to examine these questions in the context of the nature, source, and object of the cosmic movement. If we restrict ourselves to accepting only what can be proven by science or logical analysis using our intellect, we have to believe that our existence in this world as individual persons ends with the death of our bodies. Further, it will be hard to find any meaning and purpose of our existence, and we will have to agree with twentieth century existential philosophers that life in this world is absurd. Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that: “If there is no soul, then there can be a mechanical evolution without necessity or significance and birth is only part of this curious and senseless machinery. If the individual is only a temporary formation beginning and ending with the body, then evolution can be a play of the All-Soul or Cosmic Existence mounting through a progression of higher and higher species towards its own utmost possibility in this Becoming or to its highest conscious principle; rebirth does not exist and is not needed as a mechanism of that evolution.” (*The Life Divine*, p.764) However, for Sri Aurobindo and many other highly spiritual persons, the existence of individual souls not dependent on the body is real. The process of rebirth too is real and a necessary mechanism for the evolution of consciousness. Understanding the process of the evolution of consciousness is important for all human beings because we have reached a stage where instead of being passive participants we have the option of actively and consciously participating in this process and thus help speed up the progress of spiritual evolution. According to Sri Aurobindo, rebirth offers the sure assurance that imperfect individual beings will be able to attain perfection and eventually a divine life will be established on this earth.

References

- Ariel, David S., *What Do Jews Believe?: The Spiritual Foundations of Judaism*”, Schocken Books, New York, 1995
- Abraham, Azriel, and Waxman, Bob, *Kabbaalah Simply Stated: A Conversation with the Rabbi*, Paragon House, 2004
- Gethin, Rupert, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, 1998
- Hick, John, *Philosophy of Religion*, Prentice-Hall, 1963
- Rouse, W. H. D. (Translator), *Great Dialogues of Plato*, A Signet Classic, Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999
- Sri Aurobindo, *The Problem of Rebirth*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1973
- Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1973
- Sri Aurobindo, *The Upanishads*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1981

Wolfson, Harry A., “Immortality and Resurrection in the Philosophy of the Church Fathers”, *Religious Philosophy: A Group of Essays*, Atheneum, New York, 1965
(Originally Published by Harvard University Press)
Wolfson, Harry A., *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Volumes I and II, Schocken Books, New York, 1969

Maha-Europa: the World Mind

Michael Miovic

If we turn now from Asia to Europe, the world-mind, we move from the manifold vastness of a spiritual consciousness on the Indian subcontinent, and the swift and delicate subtleties of the higher mind of Northern Asia, into the strong and defined light of the mind proper. This plane of consciousness, both in the human being and in the planet, is adept at formulating ideas and concepts, analysing and dividing the One into many subordinate mental formations and movements, organising a plan and framework for the operations of all the planes of the vital and physical that stand below. It can progress by a laborious process of classification, experimentation, long trial and error, but its limitation is that it cannot achieve the spontaneous perception of oneness that is characteristic of the planes of consciousness that stand above the thinking mind. For the nature of the mind is to define, delimit, analyse, question, doubt. Whatever order it establishes at one point in time, at another it destroys only to rebuild anew. In the realm of pure Thought, this produces a constant play of ideas which may be either stimulating or dissatisfying to the thinker, but when this incessant uncertain labour is applied to the problems of life, the Mind is prone to error and can wreak great destruction in the world when it pursues wrong ideas to their logical conclusion.

To those who are familiar with the history of Europe, this description of the character, powers, and limitations of the Mind succinctly summarises the last two thousand plus years of European cultural history; the rest is simply illustrative details, of which we shall sketch some large lines and significant features here. Beginning at the end, Europe is in crisis today, as it has been for most of its history. The specific problem it is grappling with now in terms of the European Union (EU) is new, but the essential spirit of this problem remains ever the same. And that is the question of how to balance the centripetal forces of its separate cultures and countries against the centrifugal forces of its aspiration to establish a unified central authority, e.g., how to organise a central State that yet gives a maximum sustainable play of different ideas and perspectives to its

constituent units. This is, essentially, the mind's eternal question in all its fields of activity, whether practical or theoretical.

In the life of Europe, this quest for unified division has had many phases, has tilted heavily and sometimes violently in one direction or the other over the ages, has sought both religious and secular solutions, but at root all of these variations are like musical elaborations upon a single theme. The first flowering of European civilisation, what we may call its psychic bud, was in ancient Greece, with its apex in Periclean Athens. And right from this high inception we see the central issue of Europe emerge. On the one hand, Athens gave a shining first mental expression to all the seed ideas which the later history of Europe sought to develop. Rationalism, science, art, literature, poetry, drama, philosophy, politics, architecture, both religion and secularism, law, and of course democracy – all of these later flowers of European civilisation had their first seeds in Athens. And yet, on the other hand, the resplendent bud was so short-lived, due to challenges both from without and within Athens. From without came three Persian invasions and the constant conflict with the tougher and more militaristic culture of Sparta, from within the fractious and mercurial spirit of the Athenians themselves. Thus the larger sense of Hellenic culture as a whole had enough centrifugal force to draw all Greeks together to repel repeated attempts at invasion by the Persians, and at the end gave one, last, glorious flare in Alexander's quest for empire of the world as it was known then, but the centripetal forces finally predominated and Hellas subsided.

Next came the larger and more powerful rule of Rome; this was clearly a phase in which the centrifugal force held sway. If Hellas was the psychic centre of European civilisation – and, indeed, from the geo-spiritual perspective the land of Greece radiates a psychic light in the mental plane – then Rome represented the first attempt to develop the soul's outer instruments of manifestation. The Italian peninsula expresses, in the land, what Sri Aurobindo calls the vital mind, which is that plane of the mind that is strongly influenced by the vital. In the human being, this plane is involved in imagining, planning for the future, daydreaming, forming fantasies of greatness, happiness, wealth, fame, heroism, and so on. The vital mind thus gives power and passion to the mind, and again there could be no more apt and succinct summary of history on the Italian peninsula than this description of the vital mind.

First came the quest for power: the Roman empire became a dominating and massive centralised state, highly effective in matters of war and political administration, though still vitally crude in its passion for orgies and the bloody drama of gladiators. But as Rome grew too large to administer from one centre, and Christianity began to bring a humanising influence and higher aspiration to

the brutalities of Roman life, the forces tilted in a centripetal direction again. The Holy Roman Empire was divided into two administrative states, Eastern and Western, and the Empire eventually crumbled under the cumulative stress of attacks by various Germanic tribes, Huns, and Goths from without, and the decay that overspending and vital indulgence brought from within. In the dark and then Middle Ages that followed the fall of Rome, Christianity persisted and slowly spread throughout the northern and eastern lands of Europe, beyond the former reaches of the Roman Empire, and created a new centrifugal force in terms of a shared religion and world-view. The Catholic Church developed a new and more evolved method of ruling the masses by controlling what they think, rather than by sheer force as Rome did, and as faith and belief became internalised in the common man, the Age of Chivalry dawned. Arising from France, this movement brought new courage and idealism, suggested a personal relationship with the Divine independent of religious dogma, created the modern individual who could have romance and love, and conferred a refining influence on the otherwise bloody business of war.

In terms of the evolution of consciousness over time, the Age of Chivalry probably represents an ascension from the lower and mid vital thrust of Rome into the higher vital, or *anahata* level. However, in terms of space, this age clearly shifted the centre of European civilisation northward, into the mental planes proper. The Italian peninsula of course remained important, and again played a critical role in the ensuing Renaissance, but note that as modern Italy emerged from this cultural revolution, its focus of action shifted from the power aspect of the vital mind to its more creative, aesthetic, and emotive aspect. Hence, as Italy evolved in the last five hundred years, its political power waned as northern Europe grew and slowly took command of Europe, while its artistic and hedonistic bent continued, if becoming perhaps a bit indulgent and decadent in the last century. The Italian peninsula, then, offers a fascinating opportunity to study how the evolution of consciousness over time as already described by Sri Aurobindo can interact with the geo-spiritual force of land, and future scholars may wish to pursue this line of analysis further.

For the moment, though, let us return to the central dialectic of European evolution, the problem of centralising vs. peripheralising tendencies. While Christianity provided some centralising movement to the evolution in the last thousand years – though not without constant schisms and factions within Catholicism, and the major offshoot of the Protestant revolution – the peripheral forces were ascendant again. Through the constant wars of the Renaissance, Age of Discovery, Enlightenment, and Industrial Revolution, the European countries as we now know them gradually emerged. A critical turning point

came in the 19th century, when the monarchies of old collapsed and were slowly or swiftly replaced by democracy. At this point nationalism emerged as a driving force, and the modern countries of Europe coalesced largely around linguistic units. These nation states then grew and vied for power within Europe and colonial territories abroad, leading ultimately to the two World Wars, conflicts so ghastly and destructive that they all but levelled Europe to rubble and ended her long fascination with war. The peripheral tendencies were exhausted, and a move towards the centre returned, with the hope that central government could bring peace, civility, and economic stability if not prosperity. Western Europe pursued this goal through various permutations of social democracies that used regulated market economies and eventually grew into the current E.U., while Eastern Europe took the path of communism and planned economies that became the former USSR. Much has been made of the real differences between these two models of society, but their underlying similarities have not been sufficiently appreciated.

For note that, in the end, all Europeans show a higher tolerance for central planning as compared to Americans, who from their anti-mental stance in the physical consciousness tend to view even Western Europeans as covert socialists. This sympathy for the mind's method of organising and regulating life is the basic orientation towards society that all Europeans share. The political and economic differences between Eastern and Western Europe during the last century simply reflect how this central tendency is modulated across space, according to the geo-spiritual influence of the land. Eastern Europe corresponds to the inner mind and therefore tends towards a greater degree of discipline, concentration, and a with- or rather in-holding of forces. The traits of this are evident not only politically, but also culturally. In the instance of Russians, they were formerly more religious and mystical than Western Europeans prior to the communist revolution, and when communism ended religion as such, the Russian people canalised their tendencies and abilities into new forms, hence the extensive experiments in ESP conducted by the atheist Soviet government, methods of using mental visualisation to enhance performance in athletics, and a rich and continuing practice of how the inner mind can be used to regulate the health of the body. In contrast, Western Europe corresponds to an out-flowing movement in the mental consciousness, hence the greater freedom, flexibility, efflorescence of the West, evident in its contemporary secular culture.

This brings us to today, back around the upward spiral of history to the beginning of the constant dialectic in Europe: how to balance the One and the Many? The Soviet Union has collapsed, and the current E.U. may as well, we have yet to see. By an ironic twist of fate that is paradoxically appropriate, the

peoples of the planet who most cleave to rules and plans are once again seeking for a more stable order, while the most chaotic (Indians) have the largest organised democracy in the world, and the most anti-intellectual (Americans) have the oldest and most stable federal government – which half of them bitterly descry. Imagine what Europeans could do with a unified political unit such as India or the United States. But in point of fact, Europe is still deeply divided and struggling to preserve what little unity she has built against much resistance, and for the moment one can only pray that Europeans finally do achieve some type of union in the future, for that indeed would be the outer sign of the inner fulfilment promised long ago, in the golden age of Athens. However, in order to achieve this full efflorescence, two things must come to pass: Eastern Europe, including Russia, must develop a harmonious sharing of inner and outer energies with Western Europe, and Greece must be reborn as the soul-centre of Europe, for indeed she is. The road to this large and luminous fulfilment currently seems blocked, and the final political form it shall take hard to imagine at the moment, yet we should never give up hope. For if Europe has come this far despite all of her upheavals and almost cataclysmic cycles, if she has recovered from Hitler and Stalin to pursue once more the higher ideals of mental culture envisioned in Greece over two millennia ago, then Reason counsels us not to give way to the fears and despairs of today, but to preserve a steady faith in the fulfilment of tomorrow. As the flower is destined to emerge from the bud, and the tree from the seed, so too is pan-European unity destined to grow out of the division we now see.

*

Having thus reviewed the large outlines of European political history, let us now examine more closely some of Europe's signature achievements in art, thought, and culture. For the creative arts more readily express the light and beauty of the mental plane of consciousness than do the heavy mediums of politics and war.

Now, when we use the word mental consciousness in a yogic sense, we mean an infusion of light, energy, perception, movement of forms from the mental planes, not intelligence quotient (IQ) as it is understood and measured in a scientific sense. IQ in that conventional sense is a function of the brain's information processing ability, and is part of the outer, physical nature of the human being. There is no reason or evidence to believe that Europeans have a higher IQ than other peoples of the world. However, they do preferentially open to the mental plane of consciousness when engaged in artistic and creative endeavours, and it is this subtle, inner, and non-physical movement of consciousness that lends a characteristic quality to European creative expression.

The best way to illustrate this assertion is not in words, but with music. It takes only a short time of listening to European classical music to feel its unique appeal to the mind. This is something that has to be heard and felt to be understood, yet there are features and formal aspects of this mental appeal that can be described. First, is the overarching importance of composition and orchestrated execution. Indian classical music has all of the formal complexity of European, but the fact that all performances are improvised and generally limited to a small number of musicians creates a completely different aura. European classical music emphasises the central, organising conception of the composer, followed by the highly planned execution of that idea in practice. After the composer puts pen to paper to record a musical idea, musicians, conductors, orchestras, and symphonies execute that idea with brilliant fidelity, century after century. It is true that there is some small room for subtle variation in delivery of the music, and this makes for the difference between good and great performances, yet still, overall an audience that comes to listen to European classical music today will hear almost exactly the same Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, or Tchaikovsky piece performed one to two hundred years ago. This is a quite a feat of mental conception, organisation, execution – and quite different from musical traditions almost everywhere else in the world, which are beautiful but not so mentally ordered.

Second, is the mental spirit of the music itself, its sense of method, measure, order. Bach's fugues demonstrate this par excellence; it is hard to find any other music in the world that is so purely mathematical in feel. But even less mathematical European classical music still appeals strongly to a sense of musical ideation, as in Vivaldi's onomatopoeic depiction of the four seasons, and of course Mozart's oeuvre. With Mozart, especially, the underlying mood of the piece is generally so light and charming that the mental genius stands out unobscured by any turbid emotion: all is a pure and lucid flowing of beautiful musical ideas, with each theme elegantly developed, each phrase maximally efficient for the level of complexity expressed, each note necessary and seeming to float in a little space of surrounding silence that conveys a sense of unhurried perfection. Other famous classical composers express more vital power and tension, but always the emotion is carried in, and in a way intensified by, a containing musical idea and structure. Thus we have the grand symphonic style of Beethoven, with his signature mounting series of tensions and climaxes ending in a final resolution. At its highest, as in the "*Ode to Joy*," this can actually take a psychic melody line and raise the full choral and orchestral expression of this to an overhead inspiration. Or, on the opposite pole of form and temperament, take the delicately haunting songs of Schubert, so small in

size and sound yet such a lyrical mental expression of that yearning for an unknown Ideal which is the beginning of the inward spiritual quest. The most widely known and well-loved example of this is Schubert's version of *Ave Maria*, which has a deep feeling of spiritual devotion but also a lovely mental form of expression that is quite different from, say, an Indian bhajan.

There is of course much more to say about European classical music, but here let us focus on two key points. First, I am not suggesting that European classical music is not emotional; it is, and some of the examples just cited highlight that. However, from the jewel centre perspective it is important to note that the emotion of the music is always given a mental form of expression. Thus, for instance, Italian opera is highly emotional and dramatic, yet if we compare it to African-American gospel choirs, the difference in plane of consciousness is evident: the latter is powerfully emotional but appeals directly to the heart with a minimum of mental super-structure and a maximum power of sheer physicality to the voice; while the former depends completely on the mental discipline of operatic technique and musical form to express its emotion. Secondly, note that the European turn towards the mental plane of consciousness continued even after the classical style was abandoned in the first half of the 20th century. In fact, the mental spirit of European music became all the more apparent at this juncture, for as modernist composers made a new mental rule of rejecting the old intellectual order, their experiments in atonal and oddly arrhythmic music became so intellectualised that only a small circle of cognoscenti could appreciate its technical brilliance. European music thus lost its base of popular appeal, and the mantle of Western popular music passed to America, where jazz musicians showed that it is possible to be technically innovative while yet remaining emotional, vital, and fascinatingly physical.

And as with music, so it is with all of the creative arts in Europe. Compare European ballet with the more emotional appeal of African tribal dances or the sensuality of Latin salsa. See how Europeans mould the human body into a thought, with limbs that are straight and neat, yet not rigid, and with highly unnatural movements that are yet graceful and beautiful and measured. Everything about ballet is mental.

In architecture, the mental inspiration is expressed through a love of geometry, symmetry, and clean lines. Beginning with the Parthenon, that glowing masterpiece of European design, this trend continued through the larger and grander Roman style, to the great gothic Cathedrals and beyond. There were, of course, experiments with more ornate, elaborate, and embellished styles, as in the Gothic and Baroque periods, but the core structure of a Christian church always remained symmetrical and geometrical, i.e., a rectangle or a cross. And

as we have noted in a previous chapter, Christian architecture is designed to focus the mind of the devout on the one, central altar from which the message is to be delivered. That is, a Christian church is centralising and concentrative, while a Hindu temple is discursive, decentralised and meditative. The first puts the mind into the order of awe, or awe-inspiring order, the second dissolves it into the vastness of the Infinite.

In European sculpture, the mental pursuit of analysis, accuracy and order lead to the almost perfect anatomical rendering of the human body; Asian sculptors were never so literal. For example, look at the north Asian rendering of the Buddha's face: that sublime look of meditative peace and bliss is not outwardly "real" in the European sense, but is certainly a beautiful evocation of what is felt inwardly in the depths of meditation. Likewise, in painting the European mental analysis of outer, physical realities lead on the one hand to an almost photographic rendering of the human face and figure, and on the other to the development of spatial recession during the Renaissance using recession lines and a vanishing point. This technical innovation in depicting three-dimensional space was amplified later with atmospheric recession (i.e., that objects appear more blue in the distance), and finally Cézanne's discovery of how to paint depth and volume in nature based purely on colour. And then, when European art revolted against these accumulated accomplishments of classicism, it went on to explore one visual idea after another but was never able to synthesise all of these experiments together at once. Thus Impressionism focused on seizing the light and colour of the passing moment, Cubism on geometrically deconstructing and reconstructing space and movement, Surrealism on dreamlike images of physically impossible physical scenes, and Abstract Expressionism veered off into completely non-representational experiments of colour, texture, and shape. Each of these schools is indeed interesting, and allowed painters to develop a core idea to its logical conclusion. However, note that except for the somewhat synthetic and vaguely Oriental spirit of Cézanne's and Monet's late meditations on Nature, European painters never synthesised all of these varied ideas together into an intuitive whole as we shall see later in our study of Chinese and Japanese monochrome ink painting.

In philosophy, the European love of creating an intellectual order is unmistakable, as European thought leans more heavily on logic and reason as the final arbiters of Truth than Asian traditions do. It is true that Europe has had a number of saints and mystics, but they have generally been either outcasts or at best small counterpoints to the mainstream of European thinking. After Plato and Aristotle turned Greek thought away from its roots in the mystical orientation of Heraclitus and Pythagoras, European thought never again seriously

took up supra-rational intuition as a worthwhile method for philosophy. Even Socrates, whom history records as having been inspired by his soul or "daemon", in discourse established the tradition of logical debate and sceptical analysis as the foundation of philosophy. Later Christian thinkers were certainly devout and founded their thought upon an ultimately supra-rational Faith, yet still their manner of elaborating this faith was via logic and a complex process of reasoning. At its best this sort of thinking glorified God's mystery and power and love and Grace, created a first uplook towards an order above the Mind; but at its long and destructive worst — vestiges of which continue to this day — the religious logic of Europe created an unnecessary and unproductive schism with the emerging discoveries of Science, and also promulgated wrong-minded nonsense about hell and sin and damnation and so on. One need only compare the rigidities of Christian thought with the more supple and synthetic traditions of Buddhist and Hindu thought to see that it is possible to be spiritual and even religious without being so mentally fixated. In Asian thought, reason and logic were cultivated and respected, but there was always a clear understanding that the goal of spiritual practice is direct experience of a supra-rational Reality, and that intuition of this higher type is a more accurate arbiter of Truth than logic or reason based on sensory data.

An illustrative case study that highlights these differing world views is to compare the life and work of the French mathematician and scientist, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), with the Hindu mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan (1887-1920). Pascal made seminal contributions to both mathematics (e.g., calculus and probability theory) and the scientific method, and he is also remembered as a philosopher and master of the French language who wrote in defence of the Christian faith. Yet few Europeans are formally taught that what motivated Pascal to defend faith was a mystical vision of God he had one night, which he recorded on a piece of paper that he kept sewn in his coat until the day he died. When one studies his defence of faith, the brilliant *Pensées*, one notes that Pascal constantly employs reasoned argument to create doubt in the mind of the sceptic and to reveal the limits of rationalism — yet nowhere does he say simply "stop thinking, go have your own mystical experience as I did." One senses that both for Pascal and his European audience, there is a felt contradiction or at least tension between reason and faith, religion and science. Mystical experience needs to be either hidden or justified by some other methodology, and religious belief seems more important than spiritual experience.

In contrast, the equally brilliant Hindu mathematician Ramanujan was open about the fact that he looked to his family's deity, Namagiri of Namakkal, for inspiration in his work, and reported having visionary dreams related to the

Goddess in which he saw scrolls of mathematical equations. He also said candidly that all religions seemed of equal value to him. For the Indian, there was no contradiction among religions nor between science and spirituality, no need to conceal or explain mystical experience, no sense that supra-rational intuition is a problem in any way. And yet the dogma of materialism was stronger in Ramanujan's day than in Pascal's, and as a Hindu living in England, Ramanujan faced more discrimination in affirming his faith than Pascal did in Christian France. Two kindred temperaments — but two very different cultures, each according to his jewel centre.

*

Thus far we have focused on Europe's classical arts and culture. However, the mental orientation of European thought and aesthesis is not confined only to her high, classical achievements — to this day it remains ubiquitous even in her contemporary, popular, and practical aesthetic preferences. One of the most fascinating and readily accessible media for studying these jewel centre effects is industrial design, where the patent differences between European and American tastes highlight the emigration effect that occurred when Europeans moved from the *ajna* to the *muladhara* centre of the world.

To begin with, note the intellectual beauty of the metric system that European engineers use to design and build whatever it is they conceive. For good reason the European metric system is the standard of science, as it is obviously more logical than the old English system of measurements still used in the United States long after England herself went metric. And as with the method of measurement, so too with the final product, from cars and traffic signs to a variety of other industrial goods.

One universally known example of this is the German car and driving experience. German autobahns are among the best roads in the world, perfectly designed and manicured to be safe at the highest speeds the average human being can drive. The guard railings, overpasses, and checkpoints (along former European borders) all have contemporary styling that showcases what steel and glass can express in terms of the designer's concept. And, to traverse these excellent roads, Germany makes equally well-designed cars that are globally known for their quality engineering — BMW, Mercedes, Audi, Volkswagen, Opel. Whatever size or price range of vehicle one looks at, each in its class and all of them together appeal to the mind more than a comparable American car: the German styling is always sleeker and better conceived than the American, more attention has been given to fuel efficiency and durability, and more attention and intention is involved in driving the vehicle. That is, not only Germans but Europeans in general prefer manual transmissions and stiffer

suspensions, both of which focus the driver's awareness on the act of driving and appreciating the machine more than do the automatic transmissions and softer seats and suspensions of American cars.

This focus on driving a driving machine is further enhanced across Europe by more frequent accelerations and decelerations as local highways wind through towns and villages, and with a proportionately higher driving speed to width of road than is customary in the United States. Also, wherever one drives in Europe, one will be guided by a conceptually clear and coherent set of road signs that follow defined conventions and use a common set of visual symbols in order to communicate to drivers who speak a variety of languages. These signs make so much more intellectual sense than their American counterparts, which rely too much on English to be effective for the many non-English speakers in the United States. And finally, note that the other automobile manufacturers in Europe, such as Fiat (Italy) and Renault or Peugeot (France), each develop a particular style that is consonant with its national history and aesthetic, yet all are unmistakably European.

Other examples of industrial design are plethora, and follow the same principles just outlined. Fire hydrants in the United States are either stout and hefty or large and strong, but have no conceptual appeal; they are simply hunks of steel that dispense water when needed. In Europe, fire hydrants are taller, narrower, neater looking, and reflect a sense of design and even aesthetic appeal. Trucks in the United States have big cabs with long hoods in front, various ungainly appendages such as smoke stacks and fuel tanks attached with no thought given to conceptual design, and generally create the impression of being large and muscular. In Europe, trucks feature a modern, sleek look with clean lines, a box-like cab up front that is integrated into the rectangular design that defines the whole vehicle, and mirrors and other appendages are carefully tapered so as not to protrude in an awkward fashion. Similarly, children's playgrounds in Europe feature more vertical dimensions and elegant design than those in the United States, and even the dimensions of office paper are sleeker in Europe than America, e.g., compare the proportions of European A1 to the shorter and wider American 8 x 11 inch sheet.

And this is just the beginning. The sense of mental discipline inherent in European industrial design is more widely manifested as a love of mental development and mental culture in every aspect of contemporary European life as compared to the United States. For instance, Europeans spend more time in school than Americans, have harder schools, support education with much more government funding, and give Nobel prizes for intellectual achievement. As a result of this mental development, Europeans admit the reality of global warming,

conserve energy, have well-developed public transportation, and protect their environment more than Americans do. Europeans buy high-quality clothing and household items in small quantities and preserve them, while Americans buy large quantities of junk and dispense with it regularly. Europeans gave children of the world the healthy mental disciplines of Boy Scouts and Lego blocks, while America gave them TVs, cartoons, and lately video games. Europeans regulate firearms tightly to limit homicide, while Americans cherish the means to shoot each other accidentally or intentionally. Europeans develop mentally focused sports like golf, which is so minimally physical that some question whether it is actually a sport; and mentally elegant sports like soccer (football) that engender a maximum amount of skill and pleasure from a minimum amount of equipment and rules. And then they invite the whole world to participate. Indeed, one could say that the Europeans have done more good for the cause of international community with the Olympics and the World Cup than all other forms of diplomacy combined.

Not surprisingly, this same preference for mental development is evident in all the domains of popular creative expression as well. One can taste it in the more varied, sophisticated, and defined national cuisines of Europe vs. the United States. One might argue that food is an unfair comparison, because Europe has had almost a thousand years to perfect its cuisine, while America has had only two centuries. But we taste the difference even in simple things for which recipes are widely known — as in Italian pasta vs. American pizza, German beer vs. American piss water, the French crepe vs. American pancakes, English high tea vs. American tea bags, a range of European sausages vs. American hot dogs, and so on. In short, Europeans like to focus and execute a well-conceived idea, while Americans are certainly capable of this but for jewel-centre reasons usually prefer to produce huge quantities of average quality food stuff (such as McDonalds, Coca-Cola), or quality products that highlight the textural and physical characteristics of material substance (e.g., compare the lush and rich taste of Starbuck's chocolate cake to the more dry, spare, and disciplined taste of the Viennese chocolate torte).

At the cinema, we see this same difference in plane of consciousness in how movies are made. European cinema emphasises low-tech, low-cost, artistic productions that highlight an intellectual exposition of a human story or viewpoint on life. On the other hand, Hollywood churns out high-technology, high-cost, block-busters that abound in special effects and large quantities of material objects being blown up. Once again, the European is interested in the mind, the American in the physical world whether real or imagined (as in science fiction, e.g. Star Wars).

In popular music we hear this same divergence of orientation everywhere from the past to the present. The most common form of popular music is children's songs and nursery rhymes, which are often the first forms of music to which a human being is exposed. Compare the opening stanzas of the English classic, below, to a typical American counterpart. Note how orderly and intellectual the English verse is; it teaches the child to think and ask questions, even to wonder at the mysteries of the universe. In contrast, the American verse is more sloppily organised and recounts a series of physical facts and allusions to physical events that do not cohere into any specific point or story, though the song is certainly catchy and lively.

Twinkle Twinkle Little Star (English)

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night....

Yankee Doodle (American)

Yankee Doodle went to town
A-riding on a pony
Stuck a feather in his cap
And called it macaroni.
Yankee Doodle, keep it up
Yankee Doodle dandy
Mind the music and the step
And with the girls be handy.

Moving forward in time a couple of centuries to the heyday of rock 'n roll music, we find that the same difference in narrative structure persists. When Elvis, an American, sang about a romantic loss, the emotion of heartbreak is described through physical movement and an allusion to a physical place of embodied loneliness:

Well, since my baby left me
Well, I found a new place to dwell
Well, it's down at the end of Lonely Street
At Heartbreak Hotel

Well, I'll be
I'll be so lonely baby
Well, I'm so lonely
I'll be so lonely, I could die.

In contrast, when Paul McCartney of the Beatles turned his British mind to the same human problem only a few years after Elvis, the result was a song of almost poetic poignancy and depth of feeling. In two stanzas McCartney lays out the entire psychological impact of romantic loss, but in a much more self-reflective and articulate manner than Elvis:

Yesterday,
All my troubles seemed so far away,
Now it looks as though they're here to stay,
Oh, I believe in yesterday.

Suddenly,
I'm not half the man I used to be,
There's a shadow hanging over me,
Oh, yesterday came suddenly.

Why she had to go, I don't know
She wouldn't say
I said something wrong
Now I long for yesterday.

Indeed, it was this power of mental conception that made the Beatles the so-called “classic” masters of rock ‘n roll. Remember, when the Beatles began in the early 1960s, rock ‘n roll was a new and energetic American music that was closely linked to dancing, almost always on the topic of love songs, and was considered entirely anti-intellectual. When the Beatles retired as a group less than 10 years later, they had turned the genre into music that was for the most part un-danceable, heavily turned towards social commentary, and promoted the idea of rock musicians as full-fledged artists with creative credentials. No

one can fail to notice the intellectual character of the Beatles’ later work, including creating the concept of a concept album with Sgt. Peppers, but what may be more surprising to note is that this typically European power of mental formation is present even in their earliest work, which is generally considered to be adolescent.

Take, for instance, the lyrics of “*She Loves You*,” that quintessential teenage anthem from yesteryear. One would not normally describe this song as either mature or intellectual, yet if one turns down the music, ignores the surface content, and focuses on the lyrics’ narrative structure, one finds that the song is actually a nice little piece of mental articulation. The narrator is speaking to a friend and advising him to forgive the girl who broke his heart. This is a complex social situation that involves three people and at least two — possibly three — independent relationships that need to be balanced against each other. The statements are complete and clear, and sound advice is offered. Indeed, one almost hears the brilliant interpersonal dialogue of a Jane Austen novel adapted to the needs of a teenage rock audience:

You think you've lost your love
When I saw her yesterday
It's you she's thinking of
And she told me what to say

She says she loves you
and you know that can't be bad
Yes, she loves you
and you know you should be glad

She said you hurt her so
She almost lost her mind
And now she says she knows
You're not the hurting kind

She says she loves you
and you know that can't be bad
Yes, she loves you
and you know you should be glad.

Despite the many talented rock and pop musicians the United States produced in the last 50- 60 years, some of whom have had equal or greater innate musical

ability than the Beatles, none achieved the same degree of creative influence on modern culture. This is due, in part, to the fact that the Beatles lived in Europe and were infused with the supporting idea-power of their jewel centre. Thus, we return to the beginning: that Europe is the mind-centre of the world and therefore all of European culture tends inevitably to the luminous clarity of a well conceived Idea. This remains as true today as almost three thousand years ago, in the time of Homer's *Iliad*.

[Note: For a superb and highly enjoyable summary of European history, which itself is a prime example of the European gift of conceptual clarity, see *A Little History of the World*, by E.H. Gombrich, Yale University Press, 2008.]

Bhartrihari's Century of Morals *A Guide to the Art of Right Living*

Sampadananda Mishra

Introduction

The Indian tradition is very conscious of moral values and moral conflicts or dilemmas, as well as the difficulties related to practical reason and wisdom. Since ancient times, this consciousness found its expression in the native literature of India, specifically in the *dharmashastras* and the *subhashitas* literature.¹ The consultation of these texts serves well in illuminating any discussion on

¹The universal embracing dharma in the Indian idea is a law of ideal perfection for the developing mind and soul of man; it compels him to grow in the power and force of certain high or large universal qualities, which in their harmony build a highest type of manhood. In Indian thought and life this was the ideal of the best, the law of the good or noble man, the discipline laid down for the self-perfecting individual, *ārya*, *śreṣṭha*, *sajjana*, *sādhu*. This ideal was not a purely moral or ethical conception, although that element might predominate. It was also intellectual, religious, social, aesthetic, the flowering of the whole ideal man, the perfection of the total human nature. The most varied qualities met in the Indian conception of the best (*śreṣṭha*), the good and noble man (*ārya*). In the heart benevolence, beneficence, love, compassion, altruism, long-suffering, liberality, kindness, patience; in the character courage, heroism, energy, loyalty, continence, truth, honour, justice, faith, obedience and reverence where these were due, but power too to govern and direct, a fine modesty and yet a strong independence and noble pride; in the mind wisdom and intelligence and love of learning, knowledge of all the best thought, an openness to poetry, art and beauty, an educated capacity and skill in works; in the inner being a strong religious sense, piety, love of God, seeking after the Highest, the spiritual turn; in social relations and conduct a strict observance of all the social dharmas as father, son, husband, brother, kinsman, friend, ruler or subject, master or servant, priest or warrior or worker, king or sage, member of clan or caste: this was the total ideal of the Arya, the man of high upbringing and noble nature. The ideal is clearly portrayed in the written records of ancient India during the last two millenniums and it is the very life-breath of Hindu ethics. It was the creation of an at once ideal and rational mind, spirit-wise and worldly-wise, deeply religious, nobly ethical, firmly yet flexibly intellectual, scientific and aesthetic, patient and tolerant of life's difficulties and human weakness, but arduous in self-discipline. This was the mind that was at the base of the Indian civilisation and gave its characteristic stamp to all the culture.

[Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, Vol. 20, *The Renaissance in India*, pp.163-64]

Ancient India's ethical and moral philosophy.

The entire *subhashita* literature in Sanskrit abounds in thousands of moral maxims, ethical teachings and wise sayings.² Herein one finds profound knowledge of human nature with all weaknesses and defects, and finds also sound moral advice with respect to various situations in which human beings may discover themselves. The authors of these *subhashitas* believed that the future of a man depends on his present action. They believed that if the present action is good and moral, then happiness and joy follow. In order to help individuals conduct themselves properly they created thousands of verses containing moral or ethical advice, moral guidance and instruction in practical wisdom. This is how the didactic literature took its birth with its wise sayings, advisory sentences and sententious maxims. It also contains pithy epigrams of proverbial philosophy. At times one feels these pithy epigrams are profound miniature word-paintings. These epigrams, aphorisms, wise sayings, maxims, adages, however quaintly expressed, contain moral truths or practical wisdom. They all are drawn from real life and are expressed in cultivated language, beautifully turned and eloquently said. The main object of these sayings is to give expression to a practical wisdom and a moral thought through interesting examples and precepts. One often finds here poetical skill in the intricate satirical play of words. Other qualities, such as humour, scorn or compassion, are also invoked.

***Nitishataka* of Bhartrihari**

Sri Aurobindo explains that in a successful *subhashita* there is "the instantaneous concentration of vision", "the carefully created luminousness and crowded lucidity of separate detail in the clear-cut unity of the picture."³ Bhartrihari's *Nitishataka* belongs to this category of poetry. The *Nitishataka* is a fine product of its age and has the touch of Bhartrihari's extraordinary genius. This forms, as Sri Aurobindo states, "a series of poetical epigrams or rather sentences upon human life and conduct grouped loosely round a few central ideas..."⁴ The Sanskrit word *neeti* has several meanings, such as: guidance, conduct, propriety, policy, wisdom, plan, politics, righteousness, morals,

²The infinite harmonic variation of the four-lined stanza, as provided by the classical prosody, gave the poet of the age ample scope and opportunity to express vivid and beautiful pictures, "some great or apposite thought, some fine-edged sentiment. If a picture, it might be crowded with felicitous detail; if a thought, with pregnant suggestion; if a sentiment, with shades of feeling..." (Sri Aurobindo: *Archives and Research*, Vol.I, No.I, p.24) A poem that successfully achieved the above manner of expression was called by the ancients a *subhashita*. A *subhashita* may be defined as a "thing well said and therefore memorable."

³Sri Aurobindo: *Archives and Research*, Vol.I, No.I, p.25

⁴Sri Aurobindo: *Archives and Research*, Vol.I, No.I, p.24

etc. The word *shataka* means century. Though a *shataka* (hundred) should necessarily comprise 100 verses, in almost all editions we find more than hundred verses. The excess is due to accretion and the mistaken ascription to Bhartrihari of verses not of his making but cast in his spirit and manner. In all the verses of *Nitishataka* we see how Bhartrihari's speech has taken a heroic turn. He has presented the whole picture of human life, nature and conduct, and also the world outside. We find here a large and puissant atmosphere. Through all these verses Bhartrihari speaks about many personalities – those with high-spirit, high-mind, high of temper, keen in sympathies, courage, firmness and daring inspiration. Bhartrihari speaks of various aspects of human life, behaviour and values. He speaks of fools, of the learned, of valour, of wealth, of the wicked, of the virtuous, of service, of firmness, of fate, of karma and so on. Through the verses of *Nitishataka*, Bhartrihari unravels the intricate weave of humanity. This work abounds in authentic factual material on the life of the people of the time, and is an integral part of the cultural life of ancient India. Here we discover that kindness, self-sacrifice, knowledge, goodness, wisdom etc. are taught sometimes through scorn and sombre irony, and through stern invective. But everywhere there is sweetness in its expression. In Bhartrihari's style and diction we find a careful blending of curious richness with concentrated force and directness of expression. In his thought and matter we discover a compact vividness and pregnant lucidity. The moral verses of Bhartrihari are not only a guide to the art of right living, but are the product of a sensitive intellectuality and intimate experience, with great potency and poignancy in its utterances.

Bhartrihari: His Life and Personality

Bhartrihari was a versatile genius. The three shatakas – *Nitishataka*, *Shringarashataka* and *Vairagyashataka* – bear testimony to Bhartrihari being a poet of high excellence. His other work, *Vakyapadeeya*, reveals him to be a fine grammarian and philosopher. Due to the absence of authentic chronology it is difficult to say anything concrete of Bhartrihari's life. Tradition tells us that Kalidasa and Bhartrihari were contemporaries. Some say that Bhartrihari was the elder brother of Vikramaditya to whom he transferred his crown. Sometimes he is identified as a devotee of Shiva; sometimes as a follower of Buddha. Some say that he was a Brahmin, some others call him a Kshatriya, yet others put the stamp of Shudra on him. Thus, tragically, Bhartrihari's personality has become enigmatic, engulfed in the dense fibre of legends, fantasies and conjectures.

Sri Aurobindo says Bhartrihari was evidently a Kshatriya, "for all his poetry breathes that proud, grandiose, arrogantly noble spirit of that old magnanimous

Indian aristocracy, extreme in its self-assertion, equally extreme in its self-abnegation... ”⁵ Further he explains that this “savour of the Kshatriya spirit in Bhartrihari is of the most personal, intimate kind, not the purely poetic and appreciative delight of Kalidasa...It expresses itself even in his *vairagya* by the fiery and ardent, almost fierce spirit which inspires his asceticism – how different from the fine quietism of the Brahmin! ”⁶

Conclusion

The verses presented in the *Nitishataka* were not written with an aim to provide a solution to any moral conflict or dilemma. But inculcating the values or thoughts expressed in these verses may help individuals in striving towards moral perfection.⁷ The verses of *Nitishataka* are intuitive, based on practical wisdom, morality or ethics. On the whole, they use metaphorical language to provide a kind of moral education or guidance for leading a right way of living. We can always gather some insightful or helpful inspiration from these verses and use them for character-building, self-assessment and, above all, for overcoming the weaknesses of the outer nature. They inspire to reflect upon one’s own nature and way of being.

Sanskrit as a language has immense potential to instil higher values in an individual if it is studied consciously. It can play an amazing role in channelling the highest philosophy into practice. Sanskrit scriptures, and to some extent the very language itself, are designed to inculcate higher qualities such as patience, tolerance, concentration, truthfulness in thought and speech and act, confidence, faith, sincerity, benevolence, kindness, harmony, service, loyalty, gratitude, strong will, positive attitude etc. These are fundamental values based on eternal truths, and they rule for all time.

Indeed, Bhartihari’s *Nitishataka* helps greatly in understanding the value of

⁵ Sri Aurobindo: *Archives and Research*, Vol.I, No1, p.27.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “What is usually called moral perfection is to have all the qualities that are considered moral: to have no defects, never to make a mistake, never to err, to be always what one conceives to be the best, to have all the virtues — that is, to realise the highest mental conception: to take all the qualities — there are many, aren't there? — all the virtues, all that man has conceived to be the most beautiful, most noble, most true, and to live that integrally, to let all one's actions be guided by that, all the movements, all the reactions, all the feelings, all... That is living a moral ideal of perfection. It is the summit of man's mental evolution.

“It is almost impossible to pass from the mental being — even the most perfect and most remarkable — to the true spiritual life without having realised this ideal of moral perfection for a certain period of time, however brief it may be.”

[*Complete Works of the Mother*, Vol.9, pp. 9-10]

the soul-qualities such as patience, tolerance, concentration, truthfulness in thought and speech and act, confidence, faith, sincerity, benevolence, kindness, harmony, service, loyalty, gratitude, strong will, positive attitude etc. These are fundamental values based on eternal truths, and they rule for all time. Many more ethical and moral insights can be derived from a scrutiny of this work and used as a basis for discussion on India’s contribution to morality or Moral Philosophy. As *Nitishataka* is an outcome of Bhartrihari’s own deep experience, his own character and every word of the text carries a breath of sincerity and evokes a similar feeling in the reader’s mind. A sincere reading immediately impels one to look at one’s own character. This is the ideal of a Moral Language. We have to remember at this point that morality is much more than ‘a well-regulated individual and social conduct ...and leads towards a better, a more rational, temperate, sympathetic, self-restrained dealing with our fellows.’ In its deeper sense, it ‘is a means of developing in our action and still more essentially in the character of our being the diviner self in us, a step of our growing into the nature of the Godhead.’⁸ Ancient Indian thought teaches that morality is not an end in itself. It is a means and a preparation to reach a still higher ideal or spiritual state or perfection. This is what is reflected in the verses of Bhartrihari. Indeed, Bhartrihari’s *Nitishataka* is a perfect guide to the art of right living and presents a Moral Philosophy not thought of, but lived in action.

A Few Verses from the *Nitishatakam* of Bhartrihari with Sri Aurobindo’s Translation.⁹

BODIES WITHOUT MIND

साहित्यसङ्गीतकलाविहीनः

साक्षात् पशु पुच्छविषाणहीनः ।

तृणं न खादत्रपि जीवमान

स्तद् भागधेयं परमं पशूनाम् ॥

Some minds there are to Art and Beauty dead,
Music and poetry on whose dull ear

⁸ *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol.20, p.35

⁹ It is to be noted that Sri Aurobindo has done a poetic translation of the entire of the *Nitishatakam* containing 126 verses. This is available in a book form under the title ‘*The Century of Life*’ compiled and edited by the author of this article and is published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry.

Fall barren. Horns grace not their brutish head,
Tails too they lack, yet is their beasthood clear.
That Heaven ordained not upon grass their feasts,
Good fortune is this for the other beasts.

THE HUMAN HERD

येषां न विद्या न तपो न दानं
ज्ञानं न शीलं न गुणो न धर्मः ।
ते मर्त्यलोके भुवि भारभूता
मनुष्यरूपेण मृगाञ्चरन्ति ॥

Whose days to neither charity nor thought
Are given, nor holy deeds nor virtues prized,
Nor learning, such to cumber earth were brought.
How in the human world as men disguised
This herd walk grazing, higher things unsought !

THE REAL ORNAMENT

केयूरणि न भूषयन्ति पुरुषं हारा न चन्द्रोज्ज्वला
न स्नानं न विलेपनं न कुसुमं नालङ्कृता मुर्धजाः ।
वाण्येका समलङ्करोति पुरुषं या संस्कृता धार्यते
क्षीयन्ते खलु भूषणानि सततं बाग्भूषणं भूषणम् ॥

It is not armlets that adorn a man,
Nor necklaces all crammed with moonbright pearls,
Nor baths, nor ointments, nor arranged curls.
'Tis art of excellent speech that only can
Adorn him: jewels perish, garlands fade;
This only abides and glitters undecayed.

GREAT AND MEANER SPIRITS

प्रारभ्यते न खलु विघ्नभयेन नीचैः
प्रारभ्य विघ्नविहता विरमन्ति मध्याः ।
विघ्नैः पुनः पुनरपि प्रतिहन्यमानाः
प्रारब्धमुत्तमगुणा न परित्यजन्ति ॥

Some from high action through base fear refrain;
The path is difficult, the way not plain.
Others more noble to begin, are stayed
By a few failures. Great spirits undismayed
Abandon never what once to do they swore.
Baffled and beaten back, they spring once more,
Buffeted and borne down, rise up again,
And, full of wounds, come on like iron men.

WEALTH THE SORCERER

यस्यास्ति वित्तं स नरः कुलीनः
स पण्डितः स श्रुत्वान् गुणज्ञः ।
स एव वक्ता स च दर्शनीयः
सर्वे गुणाः काश्चनमाश्रयन्ति ॥

He who has wealth, has wealth, has birth; gold who can spill,
Is scholar, doctor, critic, what you will;
For who has golden coin, has golden tongue,
Is glorious, gracious, beautiful and young;
All virtues, talents, fames to gold repair
And lodge in gold leaving the poor man bare.

THE TRIPLE WAY OF WEALTH

दानं भोगो नाशस्तिस्रो गतयः भवन्ति वित्तस्य ।
यो न ददाति न भुङ्क्ते तस्य तृतीया गतिर्भवति ॥

Three final roads wealth takes and only three,
To give, enjoy or lose it utterly;
And his whose miser hand to give is slow
Now yet enjoys, the worst third way shall go.

THE ALTRUIST

मनसि वचसि काये पुण्यपीयूषपूर्णा-
स्त्रिभुवनमुपकारश्रेणिभिः प्रोणयन्तः ।
परगुणपरमाणून् पर्वतीकृत्य नित्यं
निजहृदि विकसन्तः सन्ति सन्तः कियन्तः ॥

How rare is he who for his fellows cares!
His mind, speech, body all are as pure jars
Full of his soul's sweet nectar; so he goes
Filling the world with rows on shining rows
Of selfless actions ranked like the great stars.

He loves man so that he in others' hearts
Finding an atom even of noble parts
Builds it into a mountain and thereon
His soul grows radiant like a flower full-blown;
Others are praised, *his* mind with pleasure starts.

THE IMMUTABLE COURAGE

निन्दन्तु नीतिनिपुणा यदि वा स्तुवन्तु
लक्ष्मीः समाविशतु गच्छतु वा यथेष्टम् ।
अद्यैव वा मरणमस्तु युगान्तरे वा
न्याय्यात् पथः प्रविचलन्ति पदं न धीराः ॥

If men praise thee, O man, 'tis well; nor ill,
If they condemn. Let fortune curst or boon
Enter thy doors or leave them as she will;
Though death expect thee ere yon sinking moon
Vanish or wait till unborn stars give light,
The firm high soul remains immutable
Nor by one step will deviate from the right.

The Celtic Twilight

The Indian Journey of James Cousins

Sachidananda Mohanty

There are at least four reasons why the birth anniversary of a forgotten figure called James Cousins merits public attention: his view of art and literature, his notion of politics, his concept of friendship, and his vision of spirituality. Each of these intersects with the larger Indian imaginaries, and each was India-centric in approach.

Yet, Irish poet and critic James Cousins (1873-1956) was no insular nativist or xenophobic nationalist. Cosmopolitan of the higher order, he and his spouse Margaret Cousins (1872-1954) belong to the company of those who constituted what post-colonial critic Leela Gandhi calls transnational 'affective communities': Rabindranath Tagore, M.K. Gandhi, Mirra Alfassa, Sri Aurobindo, C.F. Andrews, Okakura, Paul Richard and Annie Besant.

Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, to a Protestant family, James Cousins was an active member of the Irish Revivalist Movement and was a close companion of W.B. Yeats, George Russell (AE), and James Joyce. Close to Dublin's Abbey Theatre, Cousins was an avid actor and produced well received plays such as a '*The Sleep of the King*'. Drawn to occultism and Indian spirituality, he was influenced by Madame Blavatsky, and was one of the members of the Dublin Theological Lodge in 1886. He developed differences with Yeats, according to one account, over Yeats's lover Maud Gonne and parted from him.

At the invitation of the eminent Indian nationalist and theosophist Annie Besant (1847-1933), James and Margaret Cousins travelled to India in November 1915. Margaret herself was a leading advocate of women's franchise, a noted writer and singer. Her 1907 book *Votes for Women* remains an important milestone in the history of women's suffragette movement.

At Adyar, Madras, Cousins served as a sub-editor in Annie Besant's journal, *The New India*. He wrote extensively on philosophy, art, music and education.

He became a Lecturer in English in 1916 at the Theosophical College at Madanapalle, and later, in 1918, the Principal of the same college set-up by Annie Besant. In due course, he became the Director in the School of Synthetic Studies at Adyar.

Cousins' interest in Indian art in the earlier decade of 20th century brought him closer to the members and advocates of the Bengal School of Art. These included R.N. Tagore, O.C. Ganguly, Sir John Woodroffe and others. Travelling widely across the country, Cousins taught the importance of what Sri Aurobindo called '*The National Value of Art*'. He deserves to be recognised justifiably as one of the pioneers of the art movement of modern India. He was invited to join the Government of Travancore as the Art Adviser, a post he served ably till 1947. The first Indian art gallery at Sri Chitralayam was opened in September, 1938 by him.

Cousins' contribution to national education was acclaimed by the South India Teachers' Union in December, 1934. He served the Academy of Arts at Kalakshetra as the Vice-President, with Rukmini Devi as the Director. Cousins wrote: 'A national culture is impossible without the individual creative artist ... the true artist is the true patriot speaking the language of eternity but in the vernacular of his own time and space ... Art that embodies the creative impulse of universe with high vision and deep emotion in its own time and place and way, will by the force of its authenticity, pass beyond its limits to universal appreciation'.

Cousins' views on art, literature and spirituality drew him closer to Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. The latter was an admirer of Ireland throughout his life. Young Aurobindo wrote poems like '*Charles Parnell*' and '*Lines on Ireland*' (1896) and saw the continued relevance of the Irish experience for India in political cultural and spiritual terms. This affinity was also manifest in influential sections of militant nationalism in India including in Surya Sen's Indian Republican Army.

The affinity between Cousins and Sri Aurobindo are seen in the book they wrote on the same subject and on the same title, namely *The Renaissance in India*. (Cousins:1918), (Sri Aurobindo:1920) In *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, Sri Aurobindo pays a rich tribute to the aesthetic and critical acumen of Cousins, who shared the same synthetic approach to philosophy, art and culture as he did. Cousins' significant critical work, *New Ways in English Literature* (1917) inspired Sri Aurobindo to write the essays in the journal *Arya* from 1917-1920, later published as *The Future Poetry* in 1953. The poets Cousins commended in *New Ways* such as Tagore, Meredith, Carpenter, and Stephen Phillips are precisely the same ones Sri Aurobindo celebrated in *The Future*

Poetry. Both believed that the new age of human evolution, based on a higher consciousness, would usher in the aesthetic form and poetic idiom that Sri Aurobindo calls the Mantra in *The Future Poetry*. He wrote approvingly of Cousins: 'I stand Cortez-like on the peak of the large impression created for me by Cousins' book,' and added that, in Cousins' writings we see, 'literary criticism which is of the first order, at once discerning and suggestive which forces us to both to see and think'. 'The possibility' he added. 'is the discovery of the closer approximation to what we may call the Mantra in poetry'. Equally impressed by Sri Aurobindo's poetic excellence, Cousins wrote:

For a companion to Mr. Ghose's double-sightedness, the glimpsing simultaneously of norm and form, we have to pass behind the confines of Europe and listen to the spiritual songs of AE. The Irish poet has not the patience and expansiveness of his Aryan brother, but in heart and vision they are kindred. (*New Ways in English Literature*, Madras: Ganesh and Company, 1970, p.28)

Cousins' friendship with Tagore is equally noteworthy. The former travelled to Santiniketan on 30 April 1919 to pay homage to Tagore's world vision. His review of Tagore's *The Creative Unity* was published in *The Modern Review* in July, 1922. Travelling to Japan, he served as a Visiting Professor for one year in the Keijuku University of Tokyo. In Japan, he came in close contact with several key Pan-Asian figures of the times such as Nuguchi, Tamikoume, Okakura, Paul and Mirra Richard. He founded the Tokyo Lodge that attracted the Buddhists and theosophists alike.

Invited by the Cousins, the poet of Bolpur journeyed to Madanapalle in South India. Eager but unsure of his plans, given his unfamiliarity with southern culture, Tagore wrote an extraordinary letter full of humour:

Dear Mr. Cousins,

Certainly I shall never fail to see you at Madanapalle. But my heart quakes to imagine what is awaiting me at your presidency and I hope I shall be able to keep up my courage up to the last moment and take the final desperate step towards the south. Death's door is called the southern door in Bengali, and I hope it won't claim me as a duly consecrated victim sacrificed to the myriad-tongued divinity of the public meeting. However, it will not be possible for me to be present at your art exhibition and I shall not be free to move before the last week of January. But should I not warn you not to put to

implicit faith upon my promise? Chanakya advises never to trust women and kings, but I think the poet should top the list of all unreliaables!

Very sincerely yours,

Rabindranath Tagore (Original MSS at Rabindra Bhavan, Santiniketan)

In the event, Tagore reached Madanapalle in February 1919 and stayed there for about a week, hosted by the Cousins.

Enjoying the salubrious atmosphere of the college and the immediate ambience, Tagore translated *Jana Gana Mana* into English which he termed '*The Morning Song of India*', and Margaret Cousins with her considerable experience in music and singing, gave tune to it. Recalling the memorable moment, Cousins wrote vividly:

In a voice surprisingly light of so large a man, he sang something like a piece of geography giving a list of countries, mountain and rivers; and in the second verse a list of religions in India. The refrain to the first verse made us pick up our ears. The refrain to the second verse made us clear our throats. We asked for it again and again, and before long we were singing with gusto; *Jaya hai, Jaya hai, Jaya hai, Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya, hai* (victory, victory, victory thee).

The importance of the event left a lasting impression upon the Cousins. Later, he recollected in his autobiography:

It made literary history and carried the name and thought of Tagore into the minds and hearts of billions of young in schools and colleges and outside them and ultimately gave humanity a nearest approach to an ideal national anthem. It happened, as so many great events of the spirit do, without anticipation and without collusion.

Tagore left on March 2, 1919 and described the Madanapalle College as the Santiniketan of the South.

James Cousins left behind a long list of titles in the varied areas and disciplines he excelled in. Mention may be made here of a few of them: *The Quest* (1906), *The Wisdom of the West* (1912), *The Renaissance in India* (1918), *The Cultural Unity of Asia* (1922), *Above the Rainbow and other poems* (1926), *Collected Poems* (1940), among others.

Despite the many-sided achievements of James and Margaret Cousins in

India, they are sadly forgotten figures today. Barring stray critical works of scholars like D.K. Chatterjee's *James Henry Cousins: A Study of His Works in the Light of Theosophical Movement in India and the West*, Sharada Publishing House, 1994, fairly comprehensive, and C.N. Mangala's, *James Cousins: A Study*, B.R. Publishers, 1995, there seems to be little scholarship on Cousins.

This is both sad and puzzling. A literary critic and historian par excellence, Cousins introduced the term 'Indo-Anglian', perhaps for the first time, in the critical idiom of the subject in his book, *New Ways in English Literature*, 1917. Similarly, his contribution in the field of art history and art criticism are equally impressive, just as his understanding and appreciation of Indian mysticism and spirituality in the cross-cultural context, remains unparalleled.

Above all, Cousins would be known for the deep and abiding friendship he cherished across cultural, ideological and political barriers. The institutions that Cousins served and the founders of movements: Tagore, Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo and Annie Besant, with whom he shared deep affinities, are today gone. But the legacy of liberal thinking beyond the East-West boundaries that James Cousins deeply believed in and promoted would serve the contemporary world well.

(An earlier version of the article appeared in *The Hindu* on Sunday, 21 July, 2013)

Notes On Authors

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

Ashoke K Sen Gupta was first introduced to Aurobindonian thought in 1956, when as a school student, he was working for the publication of *Srinwantu* and in New Life Movement, dedicated to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Later, he joined Civil Services and served various Ministries of Government of India. After a long stint in Africa in 1990s as a Foreign Correspondent of *Prasar Bharati*, and before retiring as a Director-General in the Ministry of I & B, he had a posting in Brussels, Belgium, for the promotion of Indian jute goods in Europe. Post retirement, he worked as Resident Editor of a Government-sponsored Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture for publication of over 100 books. He is a Government accredited free-lance journalist and engaged in writing researched papers on philosophy, mysticism and yoga

Jean-Yves Lung was born in France in 1952, where he studied Political Science in Bordeaux. After having worked there as a consultant for business creation, he joined Auroville in 1993 with his wife and daughter, as a researcher under the Sri Aurobindo International Institute for Educational Research (SAIIR). He is also a teacher in French, History and Sanskrit.

Kishor Gandhi (1915-1996) During his life of more than four decades at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Professor Kishor Gandhi distinguished himself as one of the most dedicated and outstanding students of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. Editor, teacher and critic, he showed a remarkable thoroughness in the exposition of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's writings. He is best remembered for the editing of the annual *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, the compilation of *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* in four volumes, *Lights on Life Problems* as well as original works like *The Social Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* and *The Fallacy of Karl Marx*. Kishor Gandhi is also remembered for founding and continuing The New Age Association from 12 July 1964 till he passed away in 1996. In his early life, Kishor Gandhi came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. He obtained his Masters and doctorate in sociology from Bombay University, the latter on the social philosophy of Havelock Ellis. At the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, he taught at the International Centre of Education. He consecrated his life to a spiritual seeking under the guidance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He can be easily counted as one of the finest minds and most dedicated sadhaks that the Ashram has produced since its inception.

Vikraman Balaji: Sadhaka of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's Yoga, Professor of Mathematics at the Chennai Mathematical Institute, Chennai. Research Interests: Sri Aurobindo's Works, The Rig Veda, the Upanishads and Algebraic Geometry.