

Śraddhā श्रद्धा



21 February 2014

Śraddhā



श्रद्धा



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grace and charm and tenderness
flow out from her like light from the sun

Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*

Śraddhā

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

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Editorial

To me 21 February would always bring back to mind the sweet nostalgic memories of the sixties when I accompanied the Pathamandir group to Pondicherry for the Mother's Jayanti celebration. An entire compartment of 72 berths on the Madras Mail was reserved by the Pathamandir for this purpose. When the notice was served to members months in advance, there was literally a mad scramble to get oneself included in the select group. Once we were in the train, what pure fun and pleasure it was to travel in this way. Not for a single moment did we feel the hardship, the boredom and the tiredness one usually comes to associate with such a long train journey. Moments passed swiftly on their wings and we would only crave for more of the simple pleasures that such a journey offered. It forged a strengthening bond and camaraderie and a deep sense of fellow-feeling and togetherness and intimacy among fellow passengers — at first sight perhaps a small beginning, yet in a very subtle and defining way a distinct pointer to the ultimate goal of a community life lived primarily around a soul centre based primarily on brotherhood and an inner oneness.

Having arrived in Pondicherry, we would eagerly await the day of the Darshan. In many ways, it was a privilege to be part of the Pathamandir group as the Mother, out of her graciousness, would always give a special darshan to this group in addition to the general one. And when that special day arrived, we would all prepare ourselves for the occasion by cleansing ourselves as far as possible both within and without. The darshan time was usually in the afternoon. We would put on our best clothes and be present in the Meditation Hall on the ground floor at the appointed hour.

Climbing slowly the stairs to the Mother's room would remind me of those wonderfully moving lines immortalised forever by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*, Book II, Canto I, *The World-Stair*. 'There was no step of breathing men, no sound', and as we climbed higher and higher, a great hush fell on us. At each turn of the climb, this brooding stillness deepened into a tranquil calm and grew into an ever-widening silence and an ineffable peace. We had finally arrived at the gate of the 'spirit's crypt'. Once we crossed over the threshold and were inside

the 'cathedral cave', there She was, a frail figure of light, 'In body weak, in its heart an invincible might,'. As our turn came, each one of us kneeled in front of her with folded hands of prayer and we looked upon each other,

The secret deity and its human part,
The calm immortal and the struggling soul.

She looked deep and hard into our eyes searing our innermost recesses with her diamond gaze. For moments unimaginable we bore this 'luminous torture in our heart' till she reined herself in. We bowed deep and low and when we had raised ourselves, she would let fall on us her captivating and heavenly smile and give us a flower with a slow gentle nod of her head, a sign for us to move on.

Climbing down the stairs we were filled with a nameless joy and love and felt a new strength and power invade us; we felt like a king and an emperor of this world and master of ourselves and our surroundings. Such were the subtle changes wrought in those few timeless moments by the Presence. On this very special and auspicious occasion, let us once again take a vow never to forget her, even for a moment, and keep this unshakeable faith that her Grace and Light and Protection are always there for her children for all time to come.

This year happens to be the 150th birth anniversary of another great son of India, Swami Vivekananda, whom Sri Aurobindo once described as 'a radiant glance from the eye of Shiva'. He further went on to say that 'Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men, but the definite work that he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India and we say "Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children"'. (*SABCL*, v.17, p.332) As a mark of our homage to this great Vedantin, we bring you extracts of certain sections of a chapter of the book entitled '*The evolution of Integral yoga*', by Kundan Singh and published by VDM Verlag, 2008. We are grateful to the author for permitting us to publish the relevant sections in our journal. We also take this opportunity to thank the Adwaita Ashram, Kolkata, for granting permission to reproduce the article on *Veda-Mimamsa* by Srimat Anirvan which originally appeared in *Prabuddha Bharata* in May, 1948 and later included in the book entitled '*Buddhiyoga of the Gita and other essays*' by the same author and published by Biblia Impex pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 1983. Our thanks to Shonar, editor of the e-magazine *Next Future*, for her permission to reprint the passage

entitled '*Transformation*' by Sri Aurobindo which was posted on her website in May 2013. Our thanks to our dear friend, Ananda Reddy, for kindly allowing us to reproduce the papers by Shruti Bidwaikar and the late Georges van Vrekhem which originally appeared in their publication *New Race*. Finally our thanks and gratitude to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for its permission to reproduce the photograph of the Mother taken from the Ashram digital catalogue of photos and the excerpts from *SABCL*. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgement and thanks to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust.

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श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāml labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Transformation

Sri Aurobindo

We want an integral transformation, the transformation of the body and all its activities. But there is an absolutely indispensable first step that must be accomplished before anything else can be undertaken: the transformation of the consciousness. The starting-point is of course the aspiration for this transformation and the will to realise it; without that nothing can be done. But if in addition to the aspiration there is an inner opening, a kind of receptivity, then one can enter into this transformed consciousness at a single stroke and maintain oneself there. This change of consciousness is abrupt, so to say; when it occurs, it occurs all of a sudden, although the preparation for it may have been long and slow. I am not speaking here of a mere change in mental outlook, but of a change in the consciousness itself. It is a complete and absolute change, a revolution in the basic poise; the movement is like turning a ball inside out. To the transformed consciousness everything appears not only new and different, but almost the reverse of what it seemed to the ordinary consciousness. In the ordinary consciousness you advance slowly, by successive experiences, from ignorance to a very distant and often doubtful knowledge. In the transformed consciousness your starting-point is knowledge and you proceed from knowledge to knowledge. However, this is only a beginning; for the outer consciousness, the various planes and parts of the outer active being are transformed only slowly and gradually as a result of the inner transformation.

There is a partial change of consciousness which makes you lose all interest in things that you once found desirable; but it is only a change of consciousness and not what we call the transformation. For the transformation is fundamental and absolute; it is not merely a change, but a reversal of consciousness: the being turns inside out, as it were, and takes a completely different position. In this reversed consciousness the being stands above life and things and deals with them from there; it is at the centre of everything and directs its action outwards from there. Whereas in the ordinary consciousness the being stands

outside and below: from outside it strives to reach the centre; from below, crushed by the weight of its own ignorance and blindness, it struggles desperately to rise above them. The ordinary consciousness is ignorant of what things are in reality; it sees only their shell. But the true consciousness is at the centre, at the heart of reality and has the direct vision of the origin of all movements. Seated within and above, it knows the source, the cause and effect of all things and forces.

I repeat, this reversal is sudden. Something opens within you and all at once you find yourself in a new world. The change may not be final and definitive to begin with; it sometimes requires time to settle permanently and become your normal nature. But once the change has taken place, it is there, in principle, once and for all; and then what is needed is to express it gradually in the details of practical life. The first manifestation of the transformed consciousness always seems to be abrupt. You do not feel that you are changing slowly and gradually from one state into another; you feel that you are suddenly awakened or newly born. No effort of the mind can lead you to this state, for with the mind you cannot imagine what it is and no mental description can be adequate.

Such is the starting-point of all integral transformation.

(Reproduced with thanks and acknowledgement from *Next Future*, 18 May, 2013)

Veda-Mīmāṃsā*

Srimat Anirvan

Faith (*śraddhā*) and Reason (*tarka*), the two most potent functions of consciousness, though often at variance with each other, are really two complementary and independent instrumentations in our search for Truth. The root of faith, as the Vedic seers declared, is in *hr̥d*, wherein lies the luminous seat of mystic realisation; it is born of 'the yearning of the heart' (*hr̥dayyā ākūti*) for the Beyond; it kindles the divine fire of aspiration in us and prompts us to sacrifice our own selves unto it, it sustains us at the peak of our 'final : achievement.¹ It is as Katyayana so beautifully expresses it, *Kāmāyāni*, the Daughter of Desire,² which again is the primal creative urge of the Divine mind³ whether evolving or involved, and is symbolised in the occult sciences as the interlacing triangles of Mystic Fire.⁴ It is the possession (*āveśa*) by the Divine, of unwitting and childlike human soul,⁵ opening before it the portals of Immortality that is to be achieved by an initiation into the mysteries, of Death.

The root of Reason is in the mind or rather in the mental intelligence. Its function is an extension of the workings of the sense-mind; but it can never completely shake off the limitations of its origin whether in its upward flight of ever-widening generalisations, or in its penetrative procedure of intensive analysis. Its generalisations, as they gain in width, lose the assurance and the colourful touch of the particularised impressions, while its power of analysis concentrating on the particular, in its supreme efforts of ultimate division, lands itself into the domain of the colourless Void. Pure Reason, essentially introspective in character, is a great and indispensable aid in mystic realisation, no doubt; but being the path of *upāya* or the individual's self-reliant endeavour, it runs the risk of being absorbed by the luminous darkness of *Vināśa*⁶ or annihilation, whether it moves along the track of atomicity (*anu*) or of universalisation (*mahat*), unless it has the saving grace of Faith, the positive power of supreme intuition of the ultimate Reality.

**Prabuddha Bharata*, May, 1948.

As Faith may degenerate into credulity, so Reason also may degenerate into speculation and wordy warfare; in both, the root cause is a want of the direct perception of the Truth. To guard ourselves against spiritual bankruptcy, we must wed Faith with Reason. 'In matters regarding mantras', says Yaska in his epilogue to *Nirukta*, 'there is no chance of a direct perception except by a seer or a spiritual energiser When the seer passed beyond, men asked the gods, "Who are going to be seer for us?" To them, the gods imparted Reason (*tarka*) as the seer. And hence, whatever one speaks with Reason, following in the track of the Word, becomes as good as the speech of a seer... This knowledge is a form of revealed and reasoned illumination; its furthest end is to be reached by spiritual energising.'⁷

In the Vedas, two types of seekers are envisaged — the *vipras* and the *naras*. The *vipra*, trembling with emotion, is the *ṛṣi* who has penetrated into the mystery by dint of the yearning of a poetic soul (*kāvya*).⁸ The *nara* on the other hand follows the path of Reason, which is called *oha* in the Vedas; his position is that of a fighter, of a hero; 'he attains the goal in the battleground of Reason (*samoha*), while the *vipra* leans on inner illumination (*dhi*)', and they both, aided by the urge of Indra, 'win the progeny of their aspiration, the touch of the final beatitude (*toko*)'⁹ As yet there is no sharp distinction between the path of *śraddhā* and the path of *oha*. In a perfect spiritual realisation, both are of equal importance. The mystery of the Mystic Fire has descended into the heart and touched it with its luminous flames, says Vamadeva; it is like a creative urge (*kratu*), radiant and benign, and we must enrich it with the powers of Reason (*ohaiḥ*).¹⁰ 'When aiming at things which are fashioned by the heart (*hr̥da taṣṭeṣu*) and speed beyond the ranges of the mind', says Bṛhaspati Angirasa, 'the Brahmanas strive harmoniously together as associates, just there they simply leave behind someone who is ignorant by the flights of their knowledge; while others whose expanding consciousness is grounded on Reason (*oha-brahmāṇāḥ*) move on towards the planes of intensive contemplation (*vicaranti*).'¹¹ Here we have clear indication of the triple process of comprehensive realisation through manas, *manisā*, and *hr̥d*,¹² wherein there is a complete harmonisation between Reason and Faith.

But even in the age of Illumination, there were detractors (*niḍaḥ*), men of asuric temperament who denied the gods (*asurāḥ*, *adevāḥ*, *devanīḍaḥ*), whose only delight was in the good things of life (*asutṛpaḥ*). They mocked the gods; they had no faith; of Indra's awful Presence, they knew nothing; they mockingly asked the seer:

‘Where is he, of whom thou speakest ? We tell you, he does not exist at all!’

And challenged by them, in a splendid hymn full of impassioned faith and ardour, the seer proceeds to demonstrate the glories of the Mighty One.¹³

And again, the path of realisation is not smooth; dangers lurk at every bend and the seekers must always be on the alert. In the inmost recesses of their hearts, they have received the draught of Immortality, the divine heritage of Fathers; and yet, they might be overpowered by the drowsiness of the flagging spirit or be carried away by the wiles of the mind and lose themselves in the maze of speculation (*jalpi*).¹⁴ It is this tendency to speculate which is to be most dreaded in spiritual life. It clouds the light of pure intuition in us; we are no longer in direct touch with the source of Creation, we do not know Him as the inner Other (*anyad antaram*) in the depths of our being. Our vision is covered by a mist, by the dust raised by fruitless speculations; and yet we move about uttering the great Word, though all the while we have remained engrossed in the delights of sensuous life!¹⁵

Just as *śraddhā* is to be guarded against the drowsiness of the spirit (*nidrā tandri*), so one should also take care not to allow *oha* to degrade itself into *jalpi*.¹⁶ *Oha*, as we have already seen, is only an extension of Faith; its abode is still in the heart. But the perfect match between Faith and Reason cannot be maintained for long. The light of Faith becomes dimmed, the perception becomes blurred, and doubt, not as a destructive agent, but as a stimulator or fruitful enquiry, enters into the domain of Reason. The result is a heightened activity of the mind, a desire to look at truth from all angles of vision, and we have what in the *Brāhmaṇas* have been known as *mīmāṃsā* or brahmodya (dissertations about *Brahma*). This *mīmāṃsā* is a logical development of the ancient *oha*, and the emphasis is still on Faith; for a thesis is established here not by an appeal to dialectical reason but by naive expression of mysticism and narrations of parables. It is still the *vipra*-consciousness that we find here in the foreground, but it cannot be said that the *nara*-consciousness was lying inactive all the while. In fact, the two great ideals of *brahma* and *kṣatra*, not only as indispensable factors of social construction, but as representatives of two original turns of the human mind, have run parallel throughout the course of the cultural development of ancient India. While *brahma*¹⁷ stands for the spontaneous expression of the spiritual consciousness, *kṣatra* typifies the spiritual vigour, the urge to conquer new realms by self-exertion. Instances of the juxtaposition of the two forms as spiritual symbolisms are numerous in the Vedic texts, and it is interesting to note that the very ancient *nivid* formulas which are still extant and which have been called by the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* as 'the embryos of the *sāstras*' (hymns),¹⁸ contain in every case an urge to a harmonious realisation

of these two ideas.

This harmonious spirit of *mīmāṃsā* pervades the whole of that part of the revealed scriptures which is known as the *Brāhmaṇa*. In spite of the traditional fourfold division of the scriptures into *Samhitā*, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣad*, we must remember that the original division is into two broad categories — the *mantra* and the *brāhmaṇa*, the Upaniṣads, which are known as *jnānakāṇḍa*, being embodied in the *Brāhmaṇas* themselves, and the *āraṇyaka* forming a transitional link between the two. *Mantra* may be called the spontaneous revelations of the supreme end of human existence (*puruṣārtha*), while the *brāhmaṇa* is the description of the means. The means may either be exoteric, finding expression in ritual practices which are clearly symbolical, or it may be esoteric, turning to introspection and contemplation. The source of inspiration of these two would then be the mantras — the traditional *Brāhmaṇas* and the Upaniṣads both being the amplification of the Truths, contained in them. In this case, the Upaniṣads should not be regarded as a later revolutionary departure from the *mantra*-cult, but rather a form of exposition of its mysteries running parallel to that of the traditional *Brāhmaṇas*.

The simplest definition of a *mantra* is that of Yaska — it is a product of spiritual mentation;¹⁹ it may equally contain a revelation both of *brahma*, the transcendental Vast, or of *dharma*, the eternal laws; or as a Vedic seer would express it, it may be the expression equally of *satya*, or of *ṛta*. Originally there should have been no distinction between the two, both being the expression of an invisible spiritual experience, the whole scheme *mīmāṃsā* forming a compact unit, as is still maintained by tradition. But with the advent of the age of scholastic philosophy, fissiparous tendencies began to appear. *Brahma-mīmāṃsā* and *Dharma-mīmāṃsā* are still systems of *mīmāṃsā*, leaning for their authority on *Śruti* or revelation and sharply distinguished from the systems of *tarka*,²⁰ which depended mainly on Reason for the establishment of Ultimate Truths. But then according to Jaimini, the mantras are only categorical imperatives; their sole import lies in urge to action (*kriyā*), all other implication being only a superfluous adjunct; they are not so many statements of facts, but rather reminders of one's duty; they form the basis of *dharma*. On the other hand, according to Bādarāyaṇa, the import of *sāstra* (by which he of course means the *mantra* or the revealed scripture) lies in *Brahma*, the Pure Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, which is the supreme fact of spiritual experience and, as Śāṅkara holds, is intuited and not produced even by mental activity. The aim of both the *Mīmāṃsās* is a systematisation and exposition of the revealed scripture;

but it should be noted that they have sought to explain not the whole of the Vedic lore but chiefly the *Brāhmaṇa* portion of it, Jaimini basing his system mostly on the traditional *Brāhmaṇas*, and Bādarāyaṇa on the traditional Upaniṣads. If the ritualistic interpretation of the Vedas is the only legitimate course to be adopted in Vedic exegesis, then the *Mīmāṃsā* of Jaimini as an exoteric thesis cannot be blamed for leaving the *mantra* portion alone. But if the mantras have an esoteric sense also, then Bādarāyaṇa's system, apparently depending on the Upaniṣads, leaves a serious gap, the bridging of which becomes a desideratum, unless we subscribe to the current view that the Upanishadic thought is a mature development of the primitive thought contained in the mantras.

The two *Mīmāṃsās*, though they have developed into two distinct and sometimes opposing schools, of thought, are still intuitionist in character. They draw their strength more from Faith than from Reason; the Truth is revealed, it is not to be attained by Reason; the function of Reason is not to discover Truth but to facilitate its reflection in the heart by removing the doubts and confusions natural to the unilluminated mind. The *śrutis* are the storehouses of the super-sensuous Truths, and their authority must be maintained against the onslaughts of the freethinking rationalists. Faith, to defend its integrity, must fight with the weapons of reason, but not allow the latter to override its sanctions. This Jaimini does, in his *Pūrvamīmāṃsā*, with regard to the Word, and Bādarāyaṇa in his *Uttarmīmāṃsā* with regard to the Idea; both are defences of what may be called the pure Vedic tradition.

In this defence of the authority of the Revealed Word, Jaimini does not mention by name to what school his opponents belonged. Of course, they were the successors of the old *devanīḍṣ*. Manu speaks of them in a general way as the 'twice-born who decry the Vedas on the strength of *hetuśāstra*', and dubs them as unbelievers. (*nāstika*).²¹ Jaimini puts forth his arguments to establish two main points — the *apauruṣeyatva* (non-human-origination) and the *nityatva* (eternality) of the Word. Whether he has succeeded in his attempt to the satisfaction of all, will always remain a moot point. For centuries a battle of words has raged around a conception which is ultimately an object of mystical realisation alone. All philosophical schools in India, though they might seem to exploit reason in their passionate attempt at mutual refutation, nevertheless agree in one point, namely, that the ultimate source of authority on which they stand is a factor of direct experience of some super-sensuous truth: arrived at by a particular course of spiritual discipline. What thus appears dogmatic or ideological to the mental reason is often the result of an unsuccessful effort of adducing proofs to something, which is not capable of rational proof.

A peculiar theory has been maintained in classical philosophies that the word

is the property of ether; a certain amount of confusion has entered into the discussions trying to establish this proposition on logical grounds. But it appears in another light when we trace it to its Vedic original; there 'the flaming Words are in the immutable highest ether, wherein are firmly seated all the gods; in the highest ether, the One Word has become the thousand words.'²² Conceived as a goddess, she is the White Deer, the symbol of Life, who fashions, the Waters of Creation.²³ Just as *Vāk* is situated in the highest ether, her three steps remaining hidden in the depths of the Unknown,²⁴ so, if we follow the track of her course through 'sacrifice', we may find her embedded in the hearts of the seers.²⁵ In the *Brāhmaṇa*, *Vāk* is the rhythm of the ever-expanding Vast (*br̥hati*), she is the consciousness of the Vast (*Brahma*), she is the stream of divine consciousness (*sarasvatī*), 'flowing sparkingly down into our spiritual endeavours from the heights, from the vast resplendence above from the ocean of the unknown.'²⁶ Her divine consort is variously called as *Sarasvān*,²⁷ *Vācaspati*, *Br̥haspati*, or *Br̥hmanaspati*, the two forming the androgynous conception of *Śiva-Śakti* so familiar in the Tantras.

The thoughts are sufficiently clear; they speak with the conviction of something actually seen and are not merely a creation of poetic imagination. Put in a more philosophical language facilitating a mental comprehension of the mystery, they seem to speak of an original Void in which is inherent the eternal urge of self-expression (*Vāk*) or self-manifestation (*Sphoṭa*) — the thrill of joy (*nāda*) breaking forth into the irradiance of creation. A Śaiva philosopher would speak of Siva's total transcendental experience beyond all categories projecting itself into the still-unevolved luminous joy of self-musing which, as the first thrill of creation (*prathamah spandah*), translates itself into the benign form of Pure Existence — the great Lord of the mantras (*mantra-maheśvara*). The Word is the creative thrill in the Void; and this utterance of the mystic cannot be proved by logic, as no direct perception can ever be. The only proof of its veracity lies in a call for immediate realisation, in being an *ehi-paśyika* — in coming and seeing for one's own self as the Buddha called it. If the *Vāk* emanating from the Void has become all this that we see, the only course of realising her is to follow the track in the reverse order through different levels of introspective consciousness, just to plunge into that immutable Void and feel in the depths of the silence the thrill of the creative urge in the Supreme Word (*Parāvāk*). The process has been hinted at in the Vedas; in the Tantras it has been detailed and based on philosophical reason. The mantra, the divine spark lying dormant in every soul, is kindled into a steady spotlight in the Void as the first earnest of intensive self- and all-realisation, when the flashes of undifferentiated universal illumination become massed; and then, when the pull

of gravitation has been transcended, starts the supreme movement (*parāgati*) towards the heights passing through the intra-cosmic illumination of *Mantresvara* and then on to the supra-cosmic poise of the *Mantramaheśvara*, till the three concealed steps of the Supreme Word are discovered and *Vāk* stands revealed to the seer 'like a beautifully robed wife yearning for her husband.'²⁸

The thrill, the flash, the thought, and finally the speech — this is the order of the evolution of the creative urge of the *Vāk*. Its potency is a matter of experience and not of speculation; in supreme experience the totality of Being is androgynous in nature, the passivity of the Immutable and the activity of the Demiurge being but the two phases of the same reality. The psychological expression of this truth we find in the Vedic conception of *kavi-kratu*, in which the vision itself is the Creation. The potency of the *mantra* when viewed at its highest level lies exactly in this: the thrill has the power to create, first subjectively in one's own self and then objectively in another's self and lower down in the world-processes even. In mystic cults, this has been known as 'the transmission of power' (*śakti sañcāra*) and its efficacy has lived even up to this day. The uttered word becomes the vehicle, the transmitter, and through the process of *sampradāya* (giving without reserve) it gains in strength and vitality, it becomes the 'living word', the original potency it carried being released more and more through the passage of time till it becomes a natural power of 'the super-conscious of the race' — a national asset as it were. It is at this stage that the occultist demands that the *mantra* should not only be *arthanitya* or eternal in spirit but its *varṇānupūrvī* or letter-order also should be regarded as eternal.²⁹

Subtle distinction seems to be drawn between the two aspects of *Vāk* as *chandas* and *mantra*, the former being the perception of the rhythm and hence elastic in character,³⁰ while the latter are those very rhythms turned towards the effective realisation of an end (*karma sampatti*)³¹ and made inflexible in the manner described above. The conception of the mantras is thus not a meaningless product of the speculative reason but is an expression of a mystical experience; a careful study of the different points of view held on the subject by the different schools of philosophy will reveal the fact that it was only the attempt at rationalisation at different levels of consciousness (*pramāṭṛpada*) that brought in the differences: otherwise, all the systems, excluding the Carvaka, are ultimately intuitionists in character and depend on the authority of revelation in one form or other. It is the Word, whether of an *āpta* or of *Īśvara* or self-revealed, that carries the greatest weight in matters beyond the mind.

A vigorous protest against the Vedic cult, which Jaimini seems to have overlooked in his defence, is expressed in the denunciation of its ritualistic excesses. If the old *devanīḍṣ* found the *deva*-conception itself repugnant to them, it is no wonder that they would also look down upon the means of the

realisation of that conception as a futile spiritual endeavour. But the practical side of the *deva*-cult has come in for criticism even in the orthodox school of thought, including some sections of the Upaniṣads. The most famous denunciation we find worded in the Gita, in Sri Kṛṣṇa's tirade against what he calls *vedvāda* or the vaunted cult of the Vedas. But then he equally denounced *prajñāvāda*; he was not averse to the *yajña*-cult in itself, he even thought it as an indispensable form of karma; in *yajña* he saw the working of an eternal law of creation, the interdependence and the intercommunion of the spirits of the aspiring humanity and the fostering divinity; the all-pervading *Brahma*, the matrix of the creation, he saw eternally established in the spirit of the sacrifice; he widened and spiritualised its meaning into a multiform means of God-realisation. What he criticised in no uncertain terms was the dogmatic spirit, the tedious multiplication of ritualistic details, all with the motive of self-enjoyment and self-aggrandisement, the spiritual bankruptcy of the sacrifice being evident in his greediness, arrogance, and want of faith. A ritual is only one outward expression of Faith, the inner Illumination; we sacrifice because we must, as the Gita puts it. Or at least it is a conscious means to an end; and hence in the *Brāhmaṇas*, we repeatedly find the words *ya evam veda*, 'he who knows thus'. It is the knowledge (*vidyā*) that should guide the action (*karma*); 'with this Word as the means' says the Upaniṣad, 'both of them act — he who knows it to be so, as well as he who does not know; but then, Knowledge and Ignorance are altogether different; whatever one does with knowledge, with faith, with a sense of the mystery, verily that becomes more efficacious.'³² The conceit of those who are addicts of external rituals has been ridiculed in the Vedas too. 'They think they have drunk the soma when they crush the herb; but the *soma* which they of the vast consciousness know, is not partaken of by any one.'³³ 'For the mortal the path is simple and straight', declares Sobhari Kanva, 'he must give himself into the Fire, enkindling and offering himself with knowledge (*yedena*) and with self-surrender ; and then the lightning-forces descend into him speeding him along, and he attains the matchless Might of the Illumined Mind.'³⁴

It will be clear from the above discussion that attacks by reason against the tenets of the Vedic faith, though often formidable, did not shake the foundations because the Rationalists themselves were advocates of Faith in spiritual matters; they were all *āstikas* in the broadest sense of the word. Hence their criticisms were never really destructive; they rather widened the horizon of the mind and made a rapprochement between Faith and Reason not very difficult to achieve. But with the advent of European materialism, a new form of criticism has been levelled against the ancient Faith which, by its insinuations, has done more harm than a formal attack, and an examination of this *pūrva-pakṣa* we hope to take up on a future occasion.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Rgveda*, X.151.4.
2. *Sarvānukramāṇi*; the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* calls her the daughter of Savitā, the sun of Divine Impulsion (XII. 7.3.11), while the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* in a beautiful parable speaks of her as the Daughter of Prajāpati, the Lord of Creation (II. 3.10.1); in both the cases, she is described as the beloved of Soma, the God of Immortality.
3. *Rgveda*, X. 129.4.
4. In the *Praśna Upaniṣad*, the *Puruṣa* of the sixteen phases (*ṣoḍaśa-kalā*) appears with *prāṇa* as the primal androgyne and projects *śraddhā* as the apex of the first stage of creation (IV. 4); *śraddhā* as the first condition of spiritual realisation is well-known; the two (*prāṇa* and *śraddhā*) starting points of the processes of spiritual involution and evolution.
5. *Katha Upaniṣad*, 1.1.1-2; Śankara explains there *śraddhā* as *āstikyabuddhi* or the intuition of the existence of the beyond.
6. Also called *vināśana*, symbolically described as the spot where Sarasvatī the stream of divine consciousness, disappears either into the ocean or into the sands; etymologically it may mean either annihilation or supreme attainment; for a graphic description of the ancient tradition, see Madhavācārya on *Lāṭyayāna Śrauta Sutra*, X. 15.1.
7. *Nirukta*, XIII. 1.12*13.
8. *Rgveda*, VIII. 79.1; in the text it is a description of Soma by a transference of epithet; the identification of the seeker and the sought is a common feature in the Vedas.
9. *Rgveda*, I. 8.6.
10. *Ibid.*, IV. 10.1.
11. *Ibid.*, X.71.8; the use of *oha* (*tarka*) and *vicāra* (in *vicaranti*) in the last line is significant in as much as they remind us of the first two steps of the yogic and the Buddhist process of meditation, in which the cognitive elements predominate, gradually giving place to the feeling-element of *ānanda* or *prīti*. It is here that the power of intuition is developed, which the Vedic seers call the working of the heart.
12. *Ibid.*, 1.61.2, where the triad is distinctly mentioned.
13. *Ibid.*, II. 12.
14. *Ibid.*, VIII. 48.12-14.
15. *Ibid.*, X. 82.7
16. In classical philosophies, reasoning in the form of *vāda* with a view to an ascertainment of truth is commended but not polemics or wrangling in the form of *jalpa* or *vitaṇḍā*.
17. Literally it means expanding consciousness or the consciousness of the vast, and this from a subjective standpoint; viewed objectively, it is the truth, the Law, the Vast (*br̥hat*); to call it simply 'prayer or a formula', leaving out the mystical element, is to render it insipid.
18. *Āpastamba-paribhāṣā*, .XI. 33 ; *Jaimint Sūtras*, II. 1.32-33.
19. *Nirukta*.VII. 11.
20. Rajasekhara in enumerating the six Rationalist schools (*sat-tarka*) makes mention of the Lokayatas, the Buddhist, the Jainas, the Sāṅkhyists, the Naiyāyikas, and the Vaiśeṣikas, and arranges them in two opposing groups (*Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, p.4). That they are distinct from the *Mīmāṃsākas* can be seen from the Champā inscription of Indravarmā III (c/. Prof. D. Chatterji in the *Pravāsi* for Āṣāḍha 1350 B.S.).
21. *Manusamhitā*, II. 11. But among the members of the *daśavara-pariṣad* for the decision the norm of *dharma*, he includes the *hetuka* along with *tarkī* (XII.III).
22. *Rgveda*.I. 164. 39, 41.
23. *Ibid.*,1,164. 41.
24. *Ibid.*, 1.164.45.
25. *Ibid.*,X. 71.3.
26. *Ibid.*, V. 41.11; VII. 95.2.
27. *Ibid.*,VII.96.4,6.
28. *Ibid.*, X.71.4.
29. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1.4.1.25.
30. Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, IV. 3.101.
31. *Nirukta*,I.2.1.
32. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 1.1.10.
33. *Rgveda*, X. 85.3.; *Atharvaveda*. XIV. 1.3.
34. *Rgveda*, VIII. 19. 5-6.

The Mother Image in Sri Aurobindo

Prema Nandakumar

5. Bhawani Mandir

One can comprehend the firm manner in which the Mother idea had descended into Sri Aurobindo's consciousness by reading the Bhawani Mandir scheme. He catches the attention of the reader (or listener) with his opening that peals like a brass temple bell:

"Om Namas Chandikayai

A temple is to be erected and consecrated to Bhawani, the Mother, among the hills. To all the children of the Mother the call is sent forth to help in the sacred work.

Who is Bhawani?

Who is Bhawani, the Mother,
and why should we erect a temple to her?
Bhawani is the Infinite Energy."

As simple as that.

The scheme was a political document which, of course, transcended, mere politics. It was a scheme to revitalise a nation and gives us an idea of the thoughts that besieged Sri Aurobindo during his direct involvement with politics which lasted for a brief while. He had become an admirer of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. *Ananda Math* went directly into his soul. That was also the time when Swami Vivekananda's name and message were on everybody's lips. The Swami had passed away in 1902, but he filled the consciousness of India. We may even say that seeing religion, nation and all things that matter in one's life in the mother-image was underlined by the Swami for the younger generation. There is an incident which may have had a direct impact upon Sri Aurobindo. While conversing with a disciple in Calcutta, the Swami asked the young man:

"What would you do if someone insulted your mother?" The disciple answered, "I would fall upon him, sir, and teach him a good lesson."

One finds the echoes of the disciple's answer in Sri Aurobindo's letter to Mrinalini Devi, when he explained his third 'madness':

"My third madness is that while others look upon their country as an inert piece of matter — a few meadows and fields, forests and hills and rivers — I look upon my country as the Mother. I adore Her, I worship Her as the Mother. What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother's breast and started sucking her blood? Would he quietly sit down to his dinner, amuse himself with his wife and children, or would he rush out to deliver his mother? I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race. It is not physical strength, — I am not going to fight with sword or gun, — but the strength of knowledge. The power of the Kshatriya is not the only one; there is also the power of the Brahmin, the power that is founded on knowledge. This feeling is not new in me, it is not of today. I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to earth to accomplish this great mission."

Resurgence of India and making it a free, healthy, spiritual lighthouse for all nations was the aim, and so it called for a many-pronged process. Indian people had almost lost a sense of their true heritage and followed only the external rituals, forgetting their superb inner significances. Poverty, ignorance, listlessness — the list was frighteningly long when taken up by the visionary Indian at that time. Swami Vivekananda had clarified the aim in crystalline terms as soon as he set his feet in India. *'My Plan of Campaign'* delivered in Madras presents a blue print for the workers:

"My India, arise! Where is your vital force? In your Immortal Soul. Each nation, like each individual, has one theme in this life, which is its centre, the principal note round which every other note comes to form the harmony. If any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality, the direction which has become its own through the transmission of centuries, that nation dies....In one nation political power is its vitality, as in England. Artistic life, in another, and so on. In India religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of the national life. And therefore, if you succeed in the attempt to throw off your religion and take up either politics or society, the result will be that you will become extinct. Social reform and politics have to be preached through the vitality of your religion.... Every man has to make his own choice; so has every nation. We made our choice ages ago. And it is the faith in an

Immortal Soul. I challenge anyone to give it up. How can you change your nature?"

Swami Vivekananda lost no time in setting up a Mission with dedicated workers to carry aloft his message of revitalising India. Religion, spirituality, social work: but the Mission would keep itself aloof from politics. This was a wise decision, since people were getting impatient and the British rulers had no patience to deal with the patriots. After all *Bande Mataram* was sung by a sannyasin in the novel! Now the question was how to take the message of renunciation and work to the politically conscious people for gaining India's freedom. It needed another institution, self-sufficient by itself, but modelled on the Sri Ramakrishna Mission. As Swami Vivekananda had suggested, science, politics and spirituality too would be the Mother's work. "She it is who is having Her work done in various ways through multifarious natures and tendencies."

This could be the reason for the Bhawani Mandir Scheme which is clearly modelled on the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, but is politically oriented to work for the nation's liberation from alien rule. Interestingly, unlike the Sri Ramakrishna Mission set up in the city of Calcutta, Bhawani Mandir's location would be in the deep forests, again like the *Ananda Math*, a portion of which we have in Sri Aurobindo's translation:

"In a huge tract of ground in the forest there was a great monastery engirt with ruined masses of stone. Archaeologists would tell us that this was formerly a monastic retreat of the Buddhists and afterwards became a Hindu monastery. Its rows of edifices were two-storeyed; in between were temples and in front a meeting-hall. Almost all these buildings were surrounded with a wall and so densely hidden with the trees of the forest that, even at daytime and at a short distance from the place, none could divine the presence of a human habitation here. The buildings were broken in many places, but by daylight one could see that the whole place had been recently repaired. A glance showed that man had made his dwelling in this profound and inaccessible wilderness."

Having suggested the locale which would assure the workers of privacy, the scheme then explains why it is Bhawani that is to be evoked now. These times call for an energetic nation to face the foreign oppressors, not the bourgeois types which had been created by English education. Indians should not seek the ease of comfort anymore! Hence the invocation of Bhawani. Shivaji had invoked

her and called halt to the aggrandisements of the Moghul rulers. He had worshipped at the ancient temple of Bhawani in Tuljapur, where the Mother Goddess appears with eight arms holding weapons, in the victorious pose of having destroyed the demon Mahishasura. Sri Aurobindo who had been working with Bal Gangadhar Tilak was naturally struck by the fact of the Bhawani temple being a Shakti-peetha, and even the locale for the Tulja Bhavani temple is upon a hill of the Sahyadri range, and is known as Yamunachala. It was this Bhawani who gave Shivaji his sword which came to be known as Bhawani Talvar.

The time had come for invoking Bhawani again, says the Scheme for we have grown weak of body, mind and heart. "We have abandoned Shakti and are therefore abandoned by Shakti." Tamas is the villain and we have to throw it aside at once. It is true the Indians have received the new message: Industrialisation. But that is no panacea to our ills if we are not prepared to back up this new movement with Shakti. Have we made full use of the rich past that we now turn aside after pastures new?

"Our knowledge then, weighed down with a heavy load of Tamas, lies under the curse of impotence and inertia. We choose to fancy indeed, nowadays, that if we acquire Science, all will be well. Let us first ask ourselves what we have done with the knowledge we already possess, or what have those who have already acquired Science been able to do for India. Imitative and incapable of initiative, we have striven to copy the methods of England, and we had not the strength; we would now copy the methods of the Japanese, a still more energetic people; are we likely to succeed any better? The mighty force of knowledge which European Science bestows is a weapon for the hands of a giant, it is the mace of Bheemsen; what can a weakling do with it but crush himself in the attempt to wield it?"

Sri Aurobindo also makes the seemingly astonishing statement that even devotion cannot survive if not backed by Shakti. The Durga-power is what helps the rest to flower and reach fruition. We are not far off the teachings of Swami Vivekananda when we read in the *Bhawani Mandir* Sri Aurobindo's call for "strength physical, strength mental, strength moral, but above all strength spiritual which is the one inexhaustible and imperishable source of all the others. If we have strength everything else will be added to us easily and naturally. In the absence of strength we are like men in a dream who have hands but cannot seize or strike, who have feet but cannot run."

This reminds me of a childhood story-line taught by my grandmother. "There

are eight types of Lakshmis, she would say and describe each one of them in colourful terms: *Adi Lakshmi* was the very first Lakshmi, she was the daughter of Bhrigu. Then there is *Dhana Lakshmi*, Lakshmi of riches who gives you whatever you want in gold ornaments or nice silks and so on. *Dhānya Lakshmi* is, of course, Lakshmi of Grain. You have seen paddy stocks, haven't you? The more we have of them, the greater freedom from hunger, isn't it? But then you must have milk, curds, butter. So we have *Gaja Lakshmi*, the Goddess of cattle. She also makes you look good wherever you are, a queen. And all of you, your brother, cousins, this house full of playing children, all of you are the gift of *Santāna Lakshmi*, Goddess of progeny. There is also the Goddess of Knowledge who gives you education, *Vidyā Lakshmi*. Very important is *Dhairya Lakshmi*, the Goddess who gives us courage to take up heroic work. When you have this heroism, this courage, you are victorious, you are *Vijaya Lakshmi*! But remember, unless you hold on to Dhairya Lakshmi, the other goddesses will stay a little apart from you. Never lose your dhairya, courage!"

The exercise was wonderful for learning mathematics, I had to keep the count on my finger tips; also the 'courage' idea as the basis of all prosperity was inculcated in the girl child so early in her life by one who no doubt had overcome a million problems of poverty and female illiteracy so prevalent in those far-off days. That is exactly the lesson that Sri Aurobindo is recording in *Bhawani Mandir*. The need to follow Mother Courage! What surprises me is that Sri Aurobindo sounds so utterly contemporaneous. I have been hearing members of our educated elite castigating the present conditions of India and assuring us that doom is around the corner, and Indians will never learn! If we speak to them of Swami Vivekananda's hope and work for Indian resurgence, they look askance and speak of TV debates and news reports and one gentleman even assured me that a thousand Vivekanandas will not be able to prevent the country's kismet which is going to be nothing but disaster. From whither has come this sense of helplessness, self-pity and suicidal notion that all is lost? More than a hundred years ago, India was under the additional weight of foreign rule which was pressing us down as an incubus. Yet, Sri Aurobindo could write, with the morning sun's glow in his face, invoking the Mother image.

"Many of us, utterly overcome by Tamas, the dark and heavy demon of inertia, are saying nowadays that it is impossible, that India is decayed, bloodless and lifeless, too weak ever to recover; that our race is doomed to extinction. It is a foolish and idle saying. No man or nation need be weak unless he chooses, no man or nation need perish unless he deliberately chooses extinction.

For what is a nation? What is our mother country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhawani Mahisha Mardini sprang into being from the Shakti of all the millions of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred million people."

So Sri Aurobindo says that we are given the choice. Shall we use this Shakti or reject it? Nor need we give instances of ancient spiritual heroism that was an emanation of Shakti. Sri Aurobindo says that right in their own times such heroes have demonstrated that the human being is no frail vessel at all. Writing within a decade of Swami Vivekananda's passing, Sri Aurobindo is able to convey the idea of Indians being emanations of Shakti. If the Swami could do it, why should we think we cannot? Was it foreign education or a huge army or being born a maharajah that helped the young man from Kolkata?

"What is it that so many thousands of holy men, Sadhus and Sannyasis, have preached to us silently by their lives? What was the message that radiated from the personality of Bhagawan Ramakrishna Paramhansa? What was it that formed the kernel of the eloquence with which the lion-like heart of Vivekananda sought to shake the world? It is this, that in every one of these three hundred millions of men, from the Raja on his throne to the coolie at his labour, from the Brahmin absorbed in his Sandhya to the Pariah walking shunned of men, God Liveth. We are all gods and creators, because the energy of God is within us and all life is creation; not only the making of new forms is creation, but preservation is creation, destruction itself is creation. It rests with us what we shall create; for we are not, unless we choose, puppets dominated by Fate and Maya; we are facets and manifestations of Almighty Power."

Enough harm has been done to the Indian psyche by the theories of Karma and Maya. Yes, why should I strive if this world is but an illusion? Would it not be like the shadows in the cinema roll? And the idea that Fate overrules all our activities: how silly! If only we would strengthen ourselves with the concept of a Guardian Mother, of Durga who is in charge of her creation, there would be no more whisperings of Maya or helplessness induced by the karma theory. For it is She who does, who is all-Powerful and if we strive we will gain not only political freedom but all other freedoms as well. "May we yet remember that it

was Kali, who is Bhawani, Mother of strength whom Ramakrishna worshipped and with whom he became one... the Mother demands that men shall arise to institute Her worship and make it universal.”

How then to gain strength? Sri Aurobindo indicates the first step. Adore the Mother, worship her, have Faith in her presence! Even an ordinary human mother comes to the rescue of the crying child. Will the universal mother be anyone less? We need the faith that gave us a superb picture of the All-powerful Divine Mother in *Savitri*:

“At the head she stands of birth and toil and fate,
In their slow round the cycles turn to her call;
Alone her hands can change Time's dragon base.
Hers is the mystery the Night conceals;
The spirit's alchemist energy is hers;
She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.
The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,
A power of silence in the depths of God;
She is the Force, the inevitable Word,
The magnet of our difficult ascent,
The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,
The Light that leans from the unrealised Vasts,
The joy that beckons from the impossible,
The Might of all that never yet came down.
All Nature dumbly calls to her alone
To heal with her feet the aching throb of life
And break the seals on the dim soul of man
And kindle her fire in the closed heart of things.”

To adore the Mother thus, Sri Aurobindo calls for a temple to be built and the installation of the white Bhawani (*Ksheer Bhawani*). She is the All-powerful Mother of India. From this temple Bhawani's strength will flow all over India. “She will pass like fire into the brains and hearts of Her worshippers.” But adoring Bhawani is not mere clanging of cymbals and beating of drums and murmuring of bhajans. Adoring means karma yoga and this is what the banded brahmacharis and the sannyasins of the Bhawani Mandir would do. Service to man is adoration of the Divine Mother. Sri Aurobindo explains the need for renunciation (at least for a few years) in the Indian context:

“Because for the development of Shakti, entire concentration is necessary;

the mind must be devoted entirely to its aim as a spear is hurled to its mark; if other cares and longings distract the mind, the spear will be carried out from its straight course and miss the target. We need a nucleus of men in whom the Shakti is developed to its uttermost extent, in whom it fills every corner of the personality and overflows to fertilise the earth. These, having the fire of Bhawani in their hearts and brains, will go forth and carry the flame to every nook and cranny of our land.”

When the Bhawani Mandir scheme was being formulated by Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda was already enthroned in the heart of the true lover of India and Indians. The memories of the heroic sannyasin were green still and so was the way he propitiated Durga Shakti for the nation's resurgence for the first time in Belur Math in 1901. It was he who had an image of Mother Durga installed in the Math and took the lead in conducting the puja as a sannyasin, though generally renunciates are not associated with the ritualistic worship of an image. And this was an unusual, non-traditional sannyasi community! But the message went to all Indians. Shakti is very much with you, whoever you are, to whatever class or caste you may belong. This was a message for unification of Indians. With the eloquent flow of power-packed words in his call sounded in the Bhawani Mandir scheme, we get assured of how the Mother image had been consecrated in the writings of Sri Aurobindo:

“Come then; hearken to the call of the Mother. She is already in our hearts waiting to manifest Herself, waiting to be worshipped, — inactive because the God in us is concealed by Tamas, troubled by Her inactivity, sorrowful because Her children will not call on Her to help them, You who feel Her stirring within you, fling off the black veil of self, break down the imprisoning walls of indolence, help Her each as you feel impelled, with your bodies or with your intellect or with your speech or with your wealth or with your prayers and worship, each man according to his capacity. Draw not back, for against those who were called and heard Her not She may well be wroth in the day of Her coming; but to those who help Her advent even a little, how radiant with beauty and kindness will be the face of their Mother.”

Prophetic words!

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- i. Though the Ramakrishna Math followed Swami Vivekananda's advice scrupulously, a problem did come up when some revolutionaries of the Bande Mataram Movement

gave up their political ambitions and joined the Ramakrishna Order. This made the Math suspect in the eyes of the British government.

Lord Carmichael, the Governor of Bengal happened to comment adversely on the Math in this connection. The Math could not reject the new entrants as Mother Sarada Devi did not want the new entrants to go. On December 11, 1916, the Governor of Bengal Lord Carmichael, made some adverse statements about the Ramakrishna Mission. In January, 1917, the Secretary of the Math, Swami Saradananda, wrote a memorandum containing twelve points to disabuse any notion of the Math harbouring political ambitions, and explained the stand in a meeting with the Governor who withdrew his statement against the Math.

- ii. Incidentally, there is a famous drama by the German writer, Bertolt Brecht called *Mother Courage*. This was his daring reply to Adolf Hitler who invaded Poland in 1939.
- iii. *Savitri*, Book III, canto ii

Evolution - Part I

Debashish Banerji

Evolution is one of the central themes of Sri Aurobindo's teaching, giving meaning to the world in which we find ourselves. The idea of the evolution of consciousness lies at the base of cosmic reality, an evolution that is preceded by an involution. Thus we may think of this idea as a double movement of involution and evolution. This could be seen as a static image in eternity or a dynamic image in time, a static image which is constantly unfolding in time. In this idea, the primary attributes of infinite conscious being which are existence, consciousness and delight become involved in a self-forgetting, thus presenting the appearance of their opposites, an inconscience and an insentience. Out of this, consciousness and sentience must emerge, and evolve through a systematic exploration. Consciousness awakening from inconscience presents the appearance of an ignorance seeking for knowledge, just as sentience awakening from insentience presents the appearance of the dualities of experience, pleasure and pain, seeking for a pure and untroubled bliss. This is the very drift of our manifestation leading to the successive grades of consciousness and sentience emerging out of an inconscience and an insentience. This in itself would be a universal evolution and we can see this all around us as the evolution of forms leading towards an increasing variety and complexity and housing increasing gradations of consciousness.

Charles Darwin has foregrounded the idea of biological evolution in modern times. But Darwinian evolution concerns itself only with the evolution of forms adapting themselves to survival in this material world. However, along with this kind of evolution we can also see an evolution of consciousness to which Darwinian evolution does not grant any significance. Yet this remains a concern of philosophy and in Sri Aurobindo's case this concern is addressed in terms of an emergence out of an involution. This evolution of consciousness becomes at a certain point, a conscious evolution, which Sri Aurobindo also refers to as an accelerated evolution. Sri Aurobindo has adapted this term "accelerated evolution" from Swami Vivekananda, who used the term as a synonym for yoga.

To understand yoga as accelerated evolution, we have to see evolution not only as a universal process of the emergence of the grades of consciousness and delight but also as a progressive individuation. This is because Personhood is at the centre of Conscious Being which has involved itself as the basis of cosmic manifestation. Thus in the self-oblivion of Being, not only does it lose its consciousness and sentience, it loses also its singularity and its personhood. Yet its inconscient insentient fragmentation into particulate forms is also a self-multiplication into infinite centres of potential conscious personhood. This gives a potentially divine reality to human individuality. At the level of the human, this individuality becomes a key factor because of the self-consciousness that we possess, a self-consciousness expressing through the principle of the mind in the form of the ego, *ahamkara*. This makes us aware of ourselves as separate beings and the world in which we find ourselves as a specific experience, thus individualising cosmic existence in innumerable subjective experiences.

The appearance of the human realm is one, therefore, in which evolution individuates itself and this individuation can be accelerated through the process of yoga. Thus the evolution of universal being out of its self-forgetting, self-denial and self-fragmentation towards a complete manifestation of its oneness and its infinite consciousness, is carried out through innumerable processes of individuation achieved in an accelerated form through yoga.

This conscious human evolution is what backgrounds *Savitri*. We may say that if we did not understand this background of evolution to *Savitri*, her conquest of death would be a freak in our world. *Savitri* as a special individual who comes with powers by which she can conquer the iron law of matter would be considered just a fantasy of the human imagination, a romantic ideal which cannot be generally or universally upheld or affirmed. But it is because *Savitri* represents a universal principle of emergence in an individual way through the process of yoga, that the final act of *Savitri*, the abolition of the law of death, becomes the affirmation of a universal destiny, not only for herself and her beloved but for the human species and all of nature. Still, there is something special to *Savitri*'s representative achievement, because she is a Shakti avatar, the embodiment both of nature's aspiration and Divine Grace

Sri Aurobindo deals with this theme of evolution in a number of places in his writings, through the process of the involution of being in an appearance of non-being and the emergence of the grades of consciousness and individuation out of this non-being. The infinite unmanifest bedrock out of which being emerges is the essence of what one might call non-being. Thus it is an act of conscious force which creates the ground of its own emergence or its evolution.

The first presentation of this ground occurs through what we call Space. Physics affirms the nature of Space as a vacuum, a kind of non-being in which

subatomic particulate matter exists at the nanometric or infinitesimal range. At the other cosmic or astrophysical range of Matter, we find stellar objects moving in the non-being of Space. Quantum physics has tried to explain this magic of a visible and substantial appearance in an invisible and insubstantial Space using the mathematical language of probability. In this, one of the models proposed dispenses with the notion of a vacuum. According to this, the apparent emptiness of Space is actually a plenitude of virtual particles. We may think of this as a material analogy for the appearance of being out of a non-being. In ancient Indian physics, the Vedic physics that Sri Aurobindo draws on in *Savitri* and in *The Life Divine*, there is mention of five elements constituting all manifestation. We may relate these five elements analogically to states of Matter. In physics we are familiar with four states of Matter. We have matter in solid, liquid, gaseous and plasmatic forms. In an earlier formulation ether was thought of as a fifth state of Matter but this was later discarded in favour of empty space. However, following quantum physics, we may think of space as a plenitude of virtuality and view this as analogous to the fifth state of Matter.

In Sri Aurobindo's case, drawing on an ancient physics, these five states and elements belong not only to matter but to all substantiality. What we know as Matter is a grade of Substance, an aspect of the substantiality of Being. It is pure objectification, the bedrock of our inconscient world from which consciousness evolves. But Vedic physics identifies other grades of Substance. Of these, the primary and subtlest grade is called *vyoman*, translated ordinarily as ether. This is the virtual medium in which continuous waves are generated. There are other grades of subtle substance or media for other phenomena. The next grade in density of Substance is called *vayu*, the aerial or gaseous medium. *Vayu* enables the activation of directed movement through the principle of polarity. This makes possible the property of attraction and repulsion, the variety of electromagnetic phenomena. A third grade of substance is called *tejas* and manifests the radiant or plasmatic principle. This initiates a possibility where substance comes into visibility. One may see here the beginnings of the states of Matter but such "radiant" matter carries subtler principles of consciousness than the inconscient matter we are familiar with. The next grade of density is that of *apas* or the liquid or watery principle. The liquid element represents a form of material substance which becomes the medium for the expression of consciousness as taste, the feeling or *rasa* of things. Finally, we have the material principle in its objectified fullness, the principle called *kshiti* or earth. This manifests the world of fragmented matter and its agglomerates and conglomerates that create the stability of an inconscient material universe.

This is the way by which the process of the appearance of Being as an inconscient material base for the evolution of consciousness, manifests out of a

seeming non-being, Space. This gradation of Substance sets up the ladder of involution and evolution for the emergence of consciousness from the inconscient basis of Matter. The basis of inconscience becomes the ground from which the grades and powers of consciousness will emerge. But they will not emerge as a predictable continuous expansion. They will emerge through a labour and a struggle because the Inconscience is granted a reality and an independence to remain what it is.

This power of Matter to remain inconscient is the denial of Spirit; it is not merely the forgetting of Spirit. The forgetting or oblivion of Spirit is Ignorance, it carries within it a will to Knowledge. But the denial of Spirit carries a perverse will. This denial of spirit is the basis of Falsehood in the universe. In a universal sense, the ultimate bastion of Falsehood is Death. Death is the reversion of all other principles of consciousness to the foundational property of Inconscience. Thus this denial of the Inconscient is the principle that *Savitri* is fundamentally concerned with challenging. Life struggles to emerge out of Matter. Once it establishes itself in an instance which expresses a will to survival and endure with some persistence, it then needs to establish itself in a recurrence because each instance of life becomes predictably prey to the primary property of Inconscience, through the eventuality of death. Further along the evolutionary scale, Mind struggles to emerge out of Matter and Life and after establishing itself to some enduring degree in an instance, can only overcome its subjection to Inconscience through the recurrence of forms of mentalised life. Each principle of consciousness thus enlarges and heightens the power of consciousness of the lower principles but also becomes subject to them. Sri Aurobindo describes this interdependence of the principles emerging out of inconscience in *The Life Divine*:

An evolution of forms of Matter more and more subtly and intricately organised so as to admit the action of a growing, a more and more complex and subtle and capable organisation of consciousness is the indispensable, physical foundation. An upward evolutionary progress of the consciousness itself from grade to higher grade, an ascent is the evident spiral line or emerging curve that, on this foundation, the evolution must describe. A taking up of what has already been evolved into each higher grade as it is reached and a transformation more or less complete so as to admit a total changed working of the whole being and nature, an integration, must be also part of the process, if the evolution is to be effective. (SABCL, vol.19, pp.702-3)

In other words, lower principles will yield to higher principles but higher principles must act upon lower principles and transform their fundamental action.

However, the reason that the principles of consciousness that have emerged out of Matter do not have a complete power of transformation over the fundamental laws of Matter, particularly the law of Inconscience, is because they are not original powers of consciousness. They are also subtly dependent powers of consciousness, powers, as Sri Aurobindo says, of Ignorance. And therefore they are modified by Matter even as they modify Matter. Sri Aurobindo further says:

This movement of evolution, of a progressive self-manifestation of the Spirit in a material universe, has to make its account at every step with the fact of the involution of consciousness and force in the form and activity of material substance. For it proceeds by an awakening of the involved consciousness and force and its ascent from principle to principle, from grade to grade, from power to power of the secret Spirit, but this is not a free transference to a higher status. The law of action, the force of action of each grade or power in its emergences is determined not by its own free, full and pure law of nature or vim of energy, but partly by the material organisation provided for it and partly by its own status, achieved degree, accomplished fact of consciousness which it has been able to impose upon matter. (SABCL, vol.19, p.706)

In other words, it is only to the degree that Matter will allow Life or Mind to emerge by providing it with forms, that it can emerge. Here Sri Aurobindo introduces another key principle of evolution. This pertains to the necessity of both immanence and transcendence to emergence. If an emergent principle of consciousness was not involved in Matter, if it was a visitor from an extra-cosmic or a supra or infra terrestrial plane, then it would never be accepted by Matter in a material manifestation. It would only have an influence upon Matter and Matter would translate it into its own proximate forms. Furthermore, if it was involved in Matter but had no independent status as a non-material principle, and could not call upon its own original status outside of Matter to aid its emergence, then it could evolve merely freak or at most sporadic or approximate manifestations of its own principle. But a principle of consciousness having an immanence in Matter while also being transcendent to it, could call down a descent of its originary consciousness by the power of its aspiration within matter. This descent would yield a universal manifestation of that principle of consciousness in Matter. Of course, as noted, this universal manifestation would be subject to the laws of Matter in terms of a mutual modification. It is this that explains why the emergence of Life, for example, with its myriad life forms in the material universe has such a plenary perfection about it. We see that life

forms are not merely struggling freaks in the material world but that each one of them carries an archetypal stamp of perfection, a perfection which makes us intuit something pre-existent on some unearthly plane of existence. So, too, the human being as a mental creature carries an archetypal existence, something that inspired the European Renaissance to extol the human being as "the measure of all things" and spawn the era of humanism. This double reality of transcendence and immanence ensures a dynamic resulting in cosmic evolution. Sri Aurobindo, in the above quoted passage, develops further this dynamic and the mutual dependence of these forms and principles on each other:

All depends upon the more or less evolved condition of consciousness, quite involved in inconscient matter, hesitating on the verge between involution and conscious evolution in the first or non-animal forms of life in matter, consciously evolving but greatly limited and hampered in mind housed in a living body, destined to be fully evolved by the awakening of the Supermind in the embodied mental being and nature. (Ibid)

One sees in this development the prophetic announcement of a more powerful form of consciousness yet hiding within mind. This is Supermind, that originary Power of Consciousness, the Idea which is the Reality we experience as the evolving Ignorance. This is why Sri Aurobindo calls it the Real-Idea.

To each grade in this series achieved by the evolving consciousness one by one there appear material forms and forces, vegetable life, animals and half-animal man, developed human beings, imperfectly evolved or more evolved spiritual beings: but because of the continuity of the evolutionary process there is no rigid separation between them; each new advance or formation takes up what was before. The animal takes up into himself living and inanimate Matter; man takes up both along with the animal existence. ... The evolving consciousness passes from one grade to another or from one series of steps to another either by an imperceptible process or by some bound or crisis or, perhaps, by an intervention from above, — some descent or ensouling or influence from higher planes of Nature. But, by whatever means, the Consciousness secretly indwelling in Matter, the occult Inhabitant, is able thus to make its way upward from the lower to the higher gradations, taking up what it was into what it is and preparing to take up both into what it will be. (Ibid, pp.706-7)

Thus we find a continuity in the ascending evolution from principle to principle, from being to being, from organisation of consciousness to organisation

of consciousness. Yet there's a mutuality and dependence between these forms or principles and we find that this cross-linkage makes it possible for higher principles of consciousness to be embodied in lower principles, upgrading them so that we can envisage the eventual possibility of a divine life in Matter. This would be a transformed Matter, Life and Mind that will manifest Spirit under the originary control of Supermind.

This constitutes the basis of a cosmic evolution but Sri Aurobindo also points to another evolution, an evolution of Personhood, what one could call an individuation, when he says that in all this there is one secret indwelling Inhabitant, the involved divine Person that is evolving. The generalised and universal evolution leads in the human being to an individuation of this cosmic Purusha, this divine infinite Person, multiply manifesting and evolving in all individual instances. This dimension of evolution is then experienced as an individuation in each living creature and at the human level, in each human being. In the human being, this property of Personhood becomes most conscious. It is as if the emergence of the principle of Mind in its heightened degree of intelligence somehow makes possible this emergence of Personhood. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother refer to this emergence of Personhood in the human being to the development of what they call the psychic being or soul personality. This is what gives a different character to the evolution once the human being as an embodied mental being appears on the stage of nature.

We find that *Savitri* is the expression of such a process of individuated evolution occurring in one archetypal or exemplary person, Savitri whose existential praxis aims at the evolution of a supramental consciousness in her mentality, vitality and physicality, thereby integrating and transforming the properties of these lower gradations of consciousness and finally overcoming the "iron law" of material Inconscience, death. At the human level, we find that the human being is an individualised, struggling ignorance. This struggling ignorance is the tragedy and the paradox of human existence. We experience ourselves as conscious beings in an unconscious world, beings whose lives are "rounded off with sleep," as Shakespeare says in *The Tempest* – "Our little lives are rounded off with sleep." We come into this world full of aspiration but even before we can dream the dreams that are nascent in us, we find ourselves too old and we die, entering into the Big Sleep of Matter, the law of Inconscience or Death.

We discover, partly through acculturation, partly through compulsion, and partly through accident that we have various faculties whose proper use eludes us. We don't know what their independent operations or their proper interrelationships are. We don't know the capacities or potentia of consciousness within us, we lack the knowledge of the proper or full use of our lives. We are

dealt with like puppets by cosmic forces and we have little or no inkling of the conscious Inhabitant within our mind, life and body. All this compounded ignorance yields a strange, impractical struggle and a maze-like experience to our human lives. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo designates this multiple condition of ignorance in which human beings find themselves as the sevenfold Ignorance. The sevenfold Ignorance is one that must be replaced by the sevenfold Knowledge and that is the fullness of the Supramental consciousness individualised in human beings. Sri Aurobindo describes this sevenfold Ignorance thus:

If we look at this Ignorance in which ordinarily we live by the very circumstance of our separative existence in a material, in a spatial and temporal universe, we see that on its obscurer side it reduces itself, from whatever direction we look at or approach it, into the fact of a many-sided self-ignorance. We are ignorant of the Absolute which is the source of all being and becoming; we take partial facts of being, temporary relations of the becoming for the whole truth of existence, — that is the first, the original ignorance. We are ignorant of the spaceless, timeless, immobile and immutable Self; we take the constant mobility and the mutation of the cosmic becoming in time and space for the whole truth of existence, — that is the second, the cosmic ignorance. We are ignorant of our universal self, the cosmic existence, the cosmic consciousness, our infinite unity with all being and becoming; we take our limited egoistic mentality, vitality, corporeality for our true self and regard everything other than that as not-self, — that is the third, the egoistic ignorance. We are ignorant of our eternal becoming in Time; we take this little life in a small span of Time in a petty field of Space, for our beginning, our middle and our end, — that is the fourth, the temporal ignorance. Even within this brief temporal becoming we are ignorant of our large and complex being, of that in us which is superconscient, subconscient, intraconscient, circumconscient to our surface becoming; we take that surface becoming with its small selection of overtly mentalised experiences for our whole existence, — that is the fifth, the psychological ignorance. We are ignorant of the true constitution of our becoming; we take the mind or life or body or any of these or all three for our true principle or the whole account of what we are, losing sight of that which constitutes them and determines by its occult presence and is meant to determine sovereignly by its emergence their operation, — that is the sixth, the constitutional ignorance. As a result of all these ignorances, we miss the true knowledge, government and enjoyment of our life in the world; we are ignorant in our thought, will, sensations, actions, return wrong or imperfect responses at every point to

the questionings of the world, wander in a maze of errors and desires, strivings and failures, pain and pleasure, sin and stumbling, follow a crooked road, grope blindly for a changing goal, — that is the seventh, the practical ignorance. (Ibid, pp.654-5)

This is the sevenfold ignorance in which human beings find themselves and yet the human being also houses within himself the Divine Inhabitant. Sri Aurobindo has a poem titled *Man the Despot of Contraries* in which he brings out this paradoxical human ontology.

To overcome this sevenfold ignorance and transform it into the sevenfold knowledge, is another way of talking about Sri Aurobindo's integral yoga as a process of conscious evolution. The evolution of cosmic nature is ongoing as we have seen in terms of the emergence of principles of consciousness from an original Inconscience. But the evolution of the Person, the process of individuation requires conscious effort, an acceleration of the evolution of nature. Sri Aurobindo speaks of this conscious evolution sometimes as the Triple Transformation. Through the discovery of the psychic being we arrive at the realisation of our "temporal eternity," the fact that we are a dynamic individualised existence that moves perpetually from life to life, from birth to birth through innumerable rebirths; we have a perennial persistence in time. This realisation leads to the overcoming of the "temporal ignorance." Through this realisation, we also largely overcome our egoistic ignorance because the psychic being points us to an indwelling existence which is the same in all beings, the divine element in all things. The overcoming of psychological and cosmic ignorance requires the realisation of the cosmic being and the cosmic transformation. The cosmic realisation brings us to the knowledge of a single cosmic consciousness modulating itself into a variety of graded forms of consciousness, a subliminal and occult consciousness within us and others, a circumconscient around us, an intraconscient and an inter-conscient between us, a dynamic consciousness at work in all things and beings, the cosmic Shakti. In this cosmic identification, we also overcome what Sri Aurobindo calls the constitutional ignorance, and realise that our body, life and mind are forms of consciousness instrumental to a higher, cosmic and transcendental consciousness.

In realising the Supramental consciousness, we overcome what Sri Aurobindo calls the "Original Ignorance," which is our lack of knowledge of our Origin, the One Being and Person that/who has multiplied itself/himself into all beings in the cosmos. The One is the All and the Each and in that identification, we overcome the Original Ignorance and find that the cosmic powers are powers of the One, we become masters of all powers. We are masters of the evolution and the conditions of the emergence of consciousness. This is the trajectory

that Savitri follows and this triple transformation allows her to overcome the sevenfold ignorance giving her the power by which she can overcome Death, the ultimate result of subjection to material Inconscience and all the other grades of Ignorance. This is how Sri Aurobindo's teaching of evolution backgrounds Savitri through her yoga, making her an example to the universal creation.

Unending Education, Constant Progress and a Youth that never ages. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of Education in today's context

Deepti Tewari

PART I

Or we may find when all the rest has failed
Hid in ourselves the key of perfect change.
Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.256

“Our call is to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new world.” Sri Aurobindo

There are in the history of the earth, moments which are special turning points, when old standards no longer hold good, when a spirit is abroad that shakes to the core comfortable beliefs in well-trodden paths. The settled order loses its holding force, things seem to fall apart, disintegrate and the need to robustly seek for new solutions becomes imperative. Sri Aurobindo, writing in *The Life Divine* speaks of such an evolutionary crisis which also conceals in it a choice of destiny. Humanity, he says, has reached a stage at present where an enormous development has taken place, but because this growth has been so one-sided, so external, the human mind can no longer find its way forward. This huge complex structure of human life has become unmanageable because it is organised to “serve largely his baser instincts” and, given the human being's limited spiritual and moral capacity it has become “a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites”.

The twentieth century saw science step away to some extent from high-

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standing ideals and become largely a handmaid to technology, aiding and abetting the selfish self-aggrandising impulses of nations and peoples.

“At the same time Science has put at [man’s] disposal many potencies of the universal Force and has made the life of humanity materially one; but what uses this universal Force is a little human individual or communal ego with nothing universal in its light of knowledge or its movements, no inner sense or power which would create in this physical drawing together of the human world a true life-unity, a mental unity or a spiritual oneness. All that is there is a chaos of clashing mental ideas, urges of individual and collective physical want and need, vital claims and desires, impulses of an ignorant life-push, hungers and calls for life satisfaction of individuals, classes, nations, a rich fungus of political and social and economic nostrums and notions, a hustling medley of slogans and panaceas for which men are ready to oppress and be oppressed, to kill and be killed, to impose them somehow or other by the immense and too formidable means placed at his disposal, in the belief that this is his way out to something ideal.”¹

It is obvious that something else is needed. Could this ‘something else’ be a greater aim, a seeking for a higher truth and good and beauty? Does the solution lie in “the discovery of a greater and diviner spirit which would intervene and use life for a higher perfection of the being”?

Utilitarianism and Education

Humanity stands at the crossroads, and the choices we make today will create the world that our children inherit. If a revolution in perspective were to take place, perhaps we would be able to create systems of education that would empower youth to comprehend, inwardly and outwardly, the world they confront. On the other hand, educational aims may continue to remain largely utilitarian, valuing merely what is useful rather than what is good and true and beautiful. At present, the system continues to construct ‘products’ whose personalities are oriented mainly towards the pursuit of successful careers and money making. Such a purpose handicaps and dwarfs the wholeness of being. At an age when children should dream of beauty, of greatness and perfection, children now think of money and worry about how to earn it. They are encouraged to seek only what may be useful for their outward life. What happens to the aspiration to learn for the sake of knowledge, to study in order to know the secrets of Nature and life, to educate oneself in order to grow in consciousness, to discipline

oneself in order to become master of oneself, to overcome one’s weaknesses, incapacities and ignorance, to prepare oneself to advance in life towards a goal that is nobler and vaster, more generous and more true?

The world today resembles a vast melting pot; one cannot remain isolated from problems and issues that may arise in another part of the globe. Reason and Science, because they act by standardising, by fixing into an artificially arranged and mechanised unity, seem unable to advance new thoughts before this vast intermingling of ideas, of forces, of peoples — something else is called for.

“A greater whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power is needed to weld all into a greater unity of whole-life.

A life of unity, mutuality and harmony born of a deeper and wider truth of our being is the only truth of life that can successfully replace the imperfect mental constructions of the past which were a combination of association and regulated conflict, an accommodation of egos and interests grouped or dovetailed into each other to form a society, a consolidation by common general life-motives, a unification by need and the pressure of struggle with outside forces. It is such a change and such a reshaping of life for which humanity is blindly beginning to seek, now more and more with a sense that its very existence depends upon finding the way.”²

In this redefining evolutionary moment what are the idea-forces that will help us to create the educational structures that will serve us for the new century?

The Leadership of the Self-developing Soul

Writing in the *Karmayogin* in 1910, Sri Aurobindo spoke of the necessity of evolving a system of National Education for India. Many of his suggestions remain relevant today. An education based upon the Indian Spirit is indeed something we should have already developed for it would have served us well in meeting the many challenges India confronted. That we did not is a continuing factor in the impoverishment of the Indian mind which, functioning under an imitative foreign impress has not been allowed to flower into its innate genius.

The solution to the present predicament lies not in outer changes but within, in the subjective being of each individual. It is by such a self-finding that the youth of today can be empowered, and given the tools to take charge of their own destinies. There is in each human being, a subliminal part which ought to be discovered first and then made the true centre of consciousness and action. All energies, all processes of education should be directed towards seeking this

part of the being which exists veiled and concealed behind one's familial, social, ethical, religious and cultural background. Once located and brought forward to the front, it is this being alone that has the power to take the whole educational process out of its present mechanical round.

Writing in *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo argues that it is now more or less acknowledged:

“each human being is a self-developing soul and that the business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material.”

But what is not yet conceived is the true power and sovereignty of this soul. For if this soul were once allowed to come forward and assume the role of leadership in the child's psychological nature it.

“will itself take up most of the business of education out of our hands and develop the capacity of the psychological being towards a realisation of its potentialities of which our present mechanical view of life and man and external routine methods of dealing with them prevent us from having any experience or forming any conception.”³

It is this truth, brought in not merely as an idea, but as the fundamental axis and guiding principle — a standard and a norm that reorganises — which could give birth to a new and vibrant method of education, revolutionary in its results for the individual, the society, the nation and also humanity.

Looked at from this angle the problem of education both individual and on a mass scale, assumes manageable dimensions. For in each case, the solution lies within — in the psychological being of the individual — whether it is teacher or student. The only way to build enduringly is from within outwards. It is this inner self-knowledge that is the pathway to mastery in all domains from the most material to the highest spirit. To attempt or to propose marvellous and progressive ideas on education without first a change of consciousness is to change nothing, for we merely somersault upon our habitual centre of gravity. Indian knowledge has always held that it is the spirit that creates the forms, and if the spirit is sourced in this sovereign part of the being, almost all forms, unless they are totally strait-jacketed, can be rightly fashioned or adapted.

A Reversal of Perspective

Such an inner change, which creates a new centre of gravity in the human individual centred in his soul, is the one means by which humanity can evolve structures of living based upon unity, mutuality and harmony. It can be argued that until this fundamental transformation in human personality is wrought, the destiny of the race will remain dangerously poised. The present infra-rational and infra-spiritual life-self of humanity is unable to bring about real growth or change. For it works under the drive of the vital (i.e. energy-in-life) ego that is easily seized by colossal forces on a scale too large for man's reason and will to handle. A deeper knowledge system is needed. The legitimate question that follows is: does such a systematised knowledge system exist?

The one country which has had the knowledge of this *greater whole-being, whole-knowledge and whole-power* is India. Through her various systems of Yoga, — which needs to be acknowledged as a systematised, methodised science of accelerated psychological self-development, — Indian knowledge blue-printed and mapped the pathways of the inner worlds, creating a high road that anyone can tread. In this age of great change, it is India alone if she wills, who can be the physician for the problem that afflicts not only her own self but all humanity. Yet, to offer meaningful solutions, she has herself to rediscover and redefine in the light of the modern world, this great inner knowledge, for it lies locked in her soul-spaces and secret retreats. And, most importantly, she must master the material domains that she neglected — to her detriment for so many centuries — and do so if possible in the rhythms of her own particular genius.

We may equally return to the Upanishadic question: Is there something, knowing which, everything can be known? *Kasmin vijñate sarvam vijñatam?* The question gains enormous importance given the present-day complexities of the information-age world where one can spend one's whole life merely 'keeping up' with the knowledge explosion. For India to follow blindly, in her educational philosophy, the already well-beaten outer paths developed by the civilisation of the West, will not bring the commensurate progress and growth that we urgently seek for our emergent country. This will keep her always a step behind — no more than a poor and more backward copy of the West.

“The scientific, rationalistic, industrial, pseudo-democratic civilisation of the West is now in process of dissolution and it would be a lunatic absurdity for us at this moment to build blindly on that sinking foundation. When the most advanced minds of the occident are beginning to turn in this red evening of the West for the hope of a new and more spiritual civilisation to the genius of Asia, it would be strange if we could think of nothing better than to cast

away our own self and potentialities and put our trust in the dissolving and moribund past of Europe.”⁴

Something more is needed.

A Value-orientation based upon the Indian Spirit

It is in the Indian Spirit that the solution awaits. Not, as some seem to suggest, in a blind return to her past but in a recasting into modern conditions of her subtle and psychical sciences of Yoga. It is these sciences which can bring about an accelerated development not only in the powers of the mind, but in the psychological personality and character of our people. There is no good reason why the many complex systems of the science of Yoga that India perfected through centuries should not be incorporated into educational contents and processes. This will be of great benefit not only for Indians themselves but a confident assertion of this culture’s unique contribution towards the concert of human progress.

“Spirituality [does not mean] the moulding of the whole type of the national being to suit the limited dogmas, forms, tenets of a particular religion, as was often enough attempted by the old societies ... Spirituality is much wider than any particular religion...”

“India can best develop herself and serve humanity by being herself and following the law of her own nature. This does not mean, as some narrowly and blindly suppose, the rejection of everything new that comes to us in the stream of Time or happens to have been first developed or powerfully expressed by the West. Such an attitude would be intellectually absurd, physically impossible and above all unspiritual; true spirituality rejects no new light, no added means or materials of our human self-development. It means simply to keep our center, our essential way of being, our inborn nature and assimilate to it all we receive, and evolve out of it all we do and create ...”

“[India] can if she will, give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solution is there in her ancient knowledge. Whether she will rise or not to the height of her opportunity in the renaissance which is coming upon her, is the question of her destiny.”⁵

The Individual, the Nation and Humanity

In his *Preface on National Education* (1920) Sri Aurobindo spoke of the

three units that had to be taken into account in any true or living education. The first was the individual in his commonness and in his uniqueness; the second was the nation or people and the third universal humanity. Education had to give proper consideration to each of these if it wanted to be a living evocation of the powers of the mind and the spirit of the human being. Each element must be brought out to its fullest advantage, but there can be so many varying conceptions that may radically alter approaches to the problem. The unique characteristic of Indian thought is that it has not looked at the human being merely from his outward aspect — either as a physical being alone or as pre-eminently a reasoning animal, a thinking feeling and willing natural existence, a mental son of physical Nature (the Western viewpoint). Also Indian thought did not conceive of man solely as a political, social and economic being. All these things were accepted, were necessary but were seen as part of the instrumentation of man’s mind and life and action, not his whole being. We may recognise the universality of these three conceptions of human life, for their presence can be found in many of the popular ideas that still permeate modern India. But because they exist in a confused and disorganised manner, in our emotional rather than our analytical centre, we do not benefit from their power and force.

“India has seen always in man the individual a soul, a portion of the Divinity enwrapped in mind and body, a conscious manifestation in Nature of the universal self and spirit. Always she has distinguished and cultivated in him a mental, an intellectual, an ethical, dynamic and practical, an aesthetic and hedonistic, a vital and physical being, but all these have been seen as powers of a soul that manifests through them and grows with their growth, and yet they are not all the soul, because at the summit of its ascent it arises to something greater than them all, into a spiritual being, and it is in this that she has found the supreme manifestation of the soul of man and his ultimate divine manhood.

“And similarly India has not understood by the nation or people an organised State or an armed and efficient community well prepared for the struggle of life and putting all at the service of the national ego ... but a great communal soul and life that has appeared in the whole and has manifested a nature of its own and a law of that nature, a Swabhava and Swadharma and embodied it in its intellectual, aesthetic, ethical, dynamic, social and political forms and culture.

“And equally then our cultural conception of humanity must be in accordance with her ancient vision of the universal manifesting in the human race, evolving through life and mind but with a high ultimate spiritual aim, — it must be the

idea of the spirit, the soul of humanity advancing through struggle and concert towards oneness, increasing its experience and maintaining a needed diversity through the varied culture and life motives of its many peoples, searching for perfection through the development of the powers of the individual and his progress towards a diviner being and life, but feeling out too though more slowly after a similar perfectibility in the life of the race.”

“It must be an education that for the individual will make its one central object the growth of the soul and its powers and possibilities, for the nation will keep first in view the preservation, strengthening and enrichment of the nation-soul and its Dharma and raise both into powers of the life and ascending mind and soul of humanity. And at no time will it lose sight of man’s highest object, the awakening and development of his spiritual being.”⁶

It is these universal idea-forces that should legitimately be the spirit and fulcrum of Indian education.

The Three Principles of Education

In his earlier preliminary writings on education, Sri Aurobindo speaks of three principles of education. It is easy to see that these are fundamental verities which, sincerely and comprehensively applied, could in themselves bring about a complete change in the way teaching and learning takes place.

1. “The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master; he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil’s mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface.

2. “The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature. There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a prearranged career. To force the nature to abandon its own dharma is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the

benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common. Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.

3 “The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man’s nature is almost always, in addition to his soul’s past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully because insensibly, and from that then we must begin. We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be brought in from outside it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development. ... The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future our aim and summit. Each must have its due and natural place in a national system of education,”⁷

Integral Education

It is important to recognise that what Sri Aurobindo and The Mother propose is not merely a mental principle; it is a new idea of life and a realisation of consciousness. It has been said: All life is education. Yes, without a doubt, if one recognises that one never stops learning, that progress can be made in every least thing, and that growth is the sign of youthfulness and indeed, one can be young at 90 years! Earth is a field of progress, and education is something that must be continued all one’s life. It is this that gives interest and meaning to life, this ability and this aspiration to continue to hone one’s faculties and develop one’s capacities. A high vast and all-embracing aim changes the quality of life and if one makes one’s aim the growth of consciousness, then one has chosen an immeasurable path; for there can be no end, no limit to the growth of consciousness. Schools are merely a preparation to make youth capable of thinking, studying, progressing and becoming intelligent, but the process of acquiring knowledge, and synthesising it in one’s being; increasing one’s capacity for heroism and illumination and harmony; working upon one’s power to express skill, strength, plasticity, and beauty, must be continued all one’s life. For no aspect of knowledge is outside the scope of an education aiming at integrality.

Rather than a linear development, one adopts a spherical method that enfolds all the world and nature too and studies its many processes from the physical to the psychical. All subjects: ethics and aesthetics, the humanities and the sciences are means by which one can touch the overarching aim which is to arrive at a unity and synthesis of knowledge based upon a deeper poise of the being; and each is necessary to the whole.

It is such an Integral education built upon a deeper centre of gravity, a psychic and spiritual education, which Sri Aurobindo envisioned for the youth of India. Commenting on this ‘knowledge of the Spirit’ that India nurtured through millennia, The Mother remarked:

“India has or rather *had* the knowledge of the *Spirit*, but she neglected matter and suffered for it.

“The West has the knowledge of matter but rejected the Spirit and suffers badly for it.

“An integral education which could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, but bring back the legitimate authority of the Spirit over a matter fully developed and utilised.”⁸

What then is this ‘legitimate authority of the Spirit’ that India knew and understood? What are the elements necessary to create a true Integral education? How does one create a matter ‘fully developed and utilised’ but placed at the service of the deeper truth of the spirit? It is in seeking answers to these questions that a comprehensive picture of the education that Sri Aurobindo and Mother envisioned will emerge. And for this we need to analyse the complexity of centres that constitute the human being.

The Parts of the Nature

The Mental Being

An analysis of the planes and parts of the being creates a perspective of the elements necessary in any ‘organised’ growth of consciousness. The outer instrumental nature of the human being is composed of the mind, the life and the body and there is the ‘inner nature’ composed of the psychic and the spiritual being. In any system of education, each of these parts requires a separate and finely honed action of development. But most systems stop at the first three: the mind, the life-force and the body, for the other deeper parts are seldom even conceived, leave alone addressed. Indian Education can and should base itself on the deeper layers and allow them to orient the work and the action upon the outer instrumental nature.

In one of his early essays, Sri Aurobindo discussed the structure of the external mind. This is composed first of the active and passive memory — the *citta*. Then there is the mind-layer, *manas*, the sixth sense of Indian terminology and finally the intellect or *buddhi* which is the aspect of the rational being. There are upper layers of the mind which include sovereign discernment, intuition and illumination among them, but these are the domains of the higher mind which can be systematically acquired only through the conscious and enabling pursuit of Yoga. Each of these levels has its proper place in any system aimed at self-development, but in recent times, education in India has given undue importance to that aspect of memory which records information while neglecting to address or to awaken the mental powers of observation, comprehension, expansion, discrimination, discernment and synthesis. The capacity for reflective thought — *vichar*, and discriminative intelligence — *vivek* which were once so valued, capacities that should be and could be native to the Indian mind are no more encouraged in the present system. All educational thinkers have lamented the lack of real and profound thinking skills in modern India. In a letter, written around 1920 Sri Aurobindo made this telling comment:

“I believe that the main cause of India’s weakness is not subjection, nor poverty, nor lack of spirituality or Dharma, but a diminution of thought-power, the spread of ignorance in the motherland of Knowledge. Everywhere I see an inability or unwillingness to think, — incapacity of thought or ‘thought-phobia’”.⁹

Thus he saw that if India had to arise and fulfil her potential, the youth of India had to learn to think and to think deeply, independently and fruitfully:

“Our first necessity, if India is to survive and do her appointed work in the world, is that the young of India should learn to think, — to think on all subjects, to think independently, fruitfully, going to the heart of things, not stopped by their surface, free of prejudgments, shearing sophism and prejudice asunder as with a sharp sword, smiting down obscurantism of all kinds as with the mace of Bhima... In India alone there is self-contained, dormant, the energy and invincible spiritual individuality which can yet arise and break her own and the world’s fetters.”¹⁰

For it is only when the young of India — indeed all of India, but our concern is especially for the future nation-builders — think originally, concentratedly, and clear-sightedly, that an Indian renaissance will come about. These young

minds should become wide, complex, supple and capable of a comprehensive synthesis.

It is when one has created a widespread habit of original thought which pervades all aspects of life that one can consider an education that teaches one to think in ideas — ideas that will be creative forces to improve and change society. Finally, if the capacity of concentration is cultivated to bring about thought-control leading to mental silence and a growing receptivity to higher inspirations, the youth of India could even acquire the power to ‘think’ in experiences. Of old, India had this gift — usually latent in human beings — developed to its full effulgence in the lives and actions of her robust soul-spirits, the Rishis, who were the true creators of our ancient long-lasting culture. It is the experiences of these seer-poets that one finds recorded, through the medium of a finest poetic expression, in her ancient books of knowledge. The understanding of and the highest status that were accorded to this exceptional psychological soul type are distinctively Indian and constitute part of its gift to the cycle of human progression. The youth of India must acquire a living contact with this sublime universal heritage that is the solid bedrock and foundation of India. And it ought to become the model to which they too can aspire.

The Aesthetic and Ethical side of the Being

The mental being of man, says Sri Aurobindo, has a sort of triangular disposition — there is in our mentality a side of will, conduct, character which creates the ethical man; there is another side which is sensible to the beautiful, — understanding beauty in no narrow or hyper-artistic sense, — which creates the artistic and aesthetic man. Holding these in balance is the intellect or rational being. Often it is found that the aesthetic and the ethical represent two conflicting ideals which must naturally stand opposed and look askance at each other with a mutual distrust or even reprobation.

An ethical self-culture aimed at developing will and character, leading to self-discipline and finally self-mastery is the essential backbone upon which educational structures should be built for without character, without some kind of high or strong discipline, without courage and endurance, there is no durable power of life.

The ethical being in us is the seeker for the Good, just as the aesthetic being is the seeker for the Beautiful. A balanced development of these two sides of the being is indispensable. Ancient India gives us a luminous example of a civilisation that, neglecting neither aspect, found just such a harmonious balance between these two essential impulses in the human personality. This culture’s great idea-force: Dharma stands testimony to the high-charactered people and

enduring civilisation that this master idea helped to shape. The other idea-force rooted in Indian thought, is that it is Delight, Ananda that has created the universe. This is demonstrated in the common conceptions of the Divine as *Sachchidananda* or as *SatyamShivamSundaram*. This Delight of existence pervaded and influenced all of India’s art, painting, music, literature, sculpture and architecture. A sense of a deep joy of existence is the master-impulse of Indian artistic expression which in its primary impulse, sought for the Divine as the All-beautiful.

If the education provided to the youth of today can encourage them to nurture in themselves a similar love of beauty through a *tapasya* of art and all forms of creativity, of music and poetry and literature, this ‘worship’ can in itself transmute the nature and uplift it to its spiritual heights. But even at an ordinary level, the power of a highly developed aesthetic sense to influence every part of the being is invaluable — for when one habitually surrounds oneself with all that is beautiful, noble, fine and harmonious one can grow into the image of that which one contemplates. The sense of beauty can equally awaken within oneself the idea of giving expression to a conduct that is always beautiful, refined and noble. For one instinctively abjures anything vulgar, low or ugly.

And then, there is too an intellectual utility in educating the aesthetic faculty, for a mind that is accustomed to a training in art develops mobility, subtlety, fineness and delicacy.

“Poetry raises the emotions and gives each its separate delight. Art stills the emotions and teaches them the delight of restrained and limited satisfaction ... Music deepens the emotions and harmonises them with each other.

“Between them, music, art and poetry are a perfect education for the soul; they make and keep its movements purified, self-controlled deep and harmonious

“These therefore are agents which cannot profitably be neglected by humanity in its onward march or degraded to the mere satisfaction of sensuous pleasure which will disintegrate rather than build the character. They are when properly used, great educating, edifying and civilising forces.”¹¹

The Vital Being

So long as we pursue knowledge for its own sake, there is nothing to be said: the reason is performing its natural function; it is exercising securely its highest right. It is when reason tries to apply its ideas to life that the human intellect stumbles and finds itself at a loss. It is perhaps for this reason that the development of life domains has often been neglected. It is at great cost to herself that in her

last millennia, India chose to neglect life. For of what use are the acquisitions of the gifts of the spirit if there is a sheer impoverishment of life?

The Vital being is the seat of power in the human personality. It is in the vital that thought is transformed into will and becomes a dynamism for action. The vital is also the seat of desires and passions, of violent impulses and reactions and revolts and depression. It is for this reason that many disciplines seek to starve the vital into submission. But this is hardly an intelligent doctrine. It is by enlightening, strengthening and purifying the vital that one can progress. The youth of India ought to develop the habit of heroism, of self-sacrifice, of a vast and selfless energy of service. It is these habits that give real meaning to life; that can awaken one to the delight and harmony and beauty of existence. It is not a coincidence that when the action of heroic self-sacrifice became generalised amongst the Indian people as it did in the Freedom Struggle, a new energy, marvellous and mystical in action and unity and force of movement was born in the country. What wants to be awakened in India is the eagle-soar of the leonine warrior spirit, not the cold comfort and weak security of the bourgeois.

The *tapasya* of beauty, starting with the training, cultivation and refining of the senses leading to the fostering of the aesthetic capacity is the most marvellous way to educate and refine the vital. The *tapasya* of character, leading to the birth of nobility, heroism and disinterested action is the mark of a cultivated and illumined vital and every youth of India should be given conditions that help him or her acquire these qualities. Our aim should be a spiritualised society, but to achieve it we need a highly developed, richly empowered, illumined life-force.

“It is a great error to suppose that spirituality flourishes best in an impoverished soil with the life half-killed and the intellect discouraged and intimidated. The spirituality that so flourishes is something morbid, hectic and exposed to perilous reactions. It is when the race has lived most richly and thought most profoundly that spirituality finds its heights and its depths and its constant and many-sided fruition”.¹²

The Body

The body is the base and pedestal on which all the qualities and capacities of the being rest. Thus a proper and comprehensive physical culture is an essential foundation upon which all education must be built. Sri Aurobindo gave great importance to the need for a discipline aimed at the perfection of the body. It is this part of the being that lends itself most to organisation, order and regulation.

“The perfection of the body, as great a perfection as we can bring about by

the means at our disposal, must be the ultimate aim of physical culture. Perfection is true of all culture, the spiritual and psychic, the mental, the vital and it must be the aim of our physical culture also. If our seeking is for a total perfection of the being, the physical part of it cannot be left aside; for the body is the material basis, the body is the instrument which we have to use. *Śariram khalu dharmasāadhanam*, says the old Sanskrit adage, the body is the means of fulfilment of dharma, and dharma means every ideal which we can propose to ourselves and the law of its working out and its action.”¹³

Sri Aurobindo spoke in detail on the development and perfection of all the powers and capacities of the body. His first recommendation is to build the conditions for a generalisation of the habit of taking part in physical exercise from childhood and youth through early manhood as this would help greatly towards the creation of a physically fit and energetic people. An essential foundation must be built of health and strength and fitness in the body.

But much more important is the value of sports and physical training in developing discipline and morale and sound and strong character. There are sports that necessitate the qualities of courage, hardihood, energetic action and initiative, or call for skill, steadiness of will or rapid decision and action, the perception of what is to be done in an emergency and dexterity in doing it. All of these can awaken in the body the consciousness which can see and do what is necessary without any indication from mental thought “and which is equivalent in the body to swift insight in the mind and spontaneous and rapid decision in the will”

Sports can also awaken that invaluable quality: the sporting spirit. The capacity to be good-humoured and show consideration, friendliness, self-control and a scrupulous observance of the laws of the game, the sense of fair play, and team-spirit and a calm acceptance of decisions in adverse circumstances are all qualities that are useful for life in general. Sports can also train one in the discipline of leadership, the capacity to command or to obey, which is of utmost importance in any combined action.

“This strictness of training, this habit of discipline and obedience is not inconsistent with individual freedom; it is often the necessary condition for its right use, just as order is not inconsistent with liberty but rather the condition for the right use of liberty and even for its preservation and survival. ...

“The nation which possesses them in the highest degree is likely to be the strongest for victory, success and greatness, but also for the contribution it

can make towards the bringing about of unity and a more harmonious world order towards which we look as our hope for humanity's future".¹⁴

The Fourfold Personality

The human personality has in it a fourfold nature. There is a side of us that is a power for knowledge, another that is a power for strength and dynamic will, a third for mutuality and active and productive relation and interchange, and finally a fourth which is a power for works and labour and service. Often it is, that depending upon our temperament, character and personality type, one or other side predominates. But each of these powers and capacities is there, latent in every being. Depending upon which of these four powers is most strongly active in us we discover our main tendencies, dominant qualities and capacities and our effective turn in action and life.

An integral education must aim at not only a conscious sounding of these four powers of the being but at their fullest development. First, wisdom; then a strength that leads to a sovereign will-force; next a sense of harmony, of sweetness and of beauty; and finally, a capacity for skill in works and an urge for perfection are the attributes that each youth must develop in his being. And when through a great process of individual askesis, soul-force is manifested in fullness in the completely developed fourfold personality, these are the powers that one can anticipate in the individual being, examples of which have been celebrated in the generic term, Rishi — powers that every youth can set before him/herself as the great and high ideal to be attained within in the psychological nature:

“The godhead, the soul-power of knowledge rises to the highest degree of which the individual nature can be the supporting basis. A free mind of light develops which is open to every kind of revelation, inspiration, intuition, idea, discrimination, thinking synthesis; an enlightened life of the mind grasps at all knowledge with a delight of finding and reception and holding, a spiritual enthusiasm, passion, or ecstasy; a power of light full of spiritual force, illumination and purity of working manifests its empire, *brahma-tejas*, *brahma-varcas*; a bottomless steadiness and illimitable calm upholds all the illumination, movement, action as on some rock of ages, equal, unperturbed, unmoved, *acyuta*.

“The godhead, the soul-power of will and strength rises to a like largeness and altitude. An absolute calm fearlessness of the free spirit, an infinite dynamic courage which no peril, limitation of possibility, wall of opposing force can deter from pursuing the work or aspiration imposed by the spirit, a

high nobility of soul and will untouched by any littleness or baseness and moving with a certain greatness of step to spiritual victory or the success of the God-given work through whatever temporary defeat or obstacle, a spirit never depressed or cast down from faith and confidence in the power that works in the being, are the signs of this perfection.

“There comes too to fulfilment a large godhead, a soul-power of mutuality, a free self-spending and spending of gift and possession in the work to be done, lavished for the production, the creation, the achievement, the possession, gain, utilisable return, a skill that observes the law and adapts the relation and keeps the measure, a great taking into oneself from all beings and a free giving out of oneself to all, a divine commerce, a large enjoyment of the mutual delight of life.

“And finally there comes to perfection the godhead, the soul-power of service, the universal love that lavishes itself without demand of return, the embrace that takes to itself the body of God in man and works for help and service, the abnegation that is ready to bear the yoke of the Master and make the life a free servitude to Him and under his direction to the claim and need of his creatures, the self-surrender of the whole being to the Master of our being and his work in the world. These things unite, assist and enter into each other, become one.”¹⁵

This is a description of the fullness of personality when the soul-force, secret in our inmost being is brought to the front and allowed to achieve its untrammelled action of fulfilment. These words and images are as yet merely delineating the potentialities secret within us that await their day. For it is only the entering and illumining action of this soul-force into the smallest detail of our outer instrumental nature and life of action that can energise and liberate the action of the Shakti that slumbers there within us awaiting her hour. It is with such a robust spiritual faith that every Indian especially the young should approach their life, their growth and their action in the world. This should be the aim of education in India, which of old, has been the land of spiritual living.

Psychic Education and Spiritual Education

Speaking of the future, a European intellectual is said to have remarked that the Twenty-First Century would either have to be spiritual or else it would NOT be. India with her ancient capacity, her long and thorough exploration of the subtle and psychical sciences, can take the lead here for all humanity. She must give her youth the opportunity of attempting an integral education aimed at bringing the fruits of the psychic and spiritual discovery into outer life and action in the world. This is Sri Aurobindo's dream for his motherland. Mother's

description below gives us some hint of what the fullness of the psychic realisation can bring with it and what the spiritual discovery represents:

“...one can say that the psychic life is immortal life, endless time, limitless space, ever-progressive change, unbroken continuity in the universe of forms. The spiritual consciousness, on the other hand, means to live the infinite and the eternal, to be projected beyond all creation, beyond time and space. To become conscious of your psychic being and to live a psychic life you must abolish all egoism; but to live a spiritual life you must no longer have an ego.”¹⁶

(To be continued)

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Śankara's Māyā and Sri Aurobindo's Consciousness-Force: A Critical Comparison

L.Vijai

Indian metaphysics has time and again revolved around three entities: the ultimate reality, the universe of our experience and the individual Self; the knower or cogniser. To define their nature, to assign them an ontology and to explore into the relationship between these three entities is a herculean task that philosophers have attempted to accomplish since the dawn of Indian culture and civilisation. The fact that even twentieth century philosophers like Sri Aurobindo have discussed at length, this perennial problem, is testimony to the fact that it is far from obsolete. I have taken up for discussion in this paper Śankara's concept of Māyā and Sri Aurobindo's parallel concept of Consciousness-Force. The two though similar in a few respects are dissimilar in many. I shall attempt in this paper a critical analysis of the two concepts in the backdrop of their respective metaphysical positions and delineate the points of convergence and divergence.

The Metaphysical Background

Both Śankara and Sri Aurobindo call their system of philosophy 'Advaita' (Non-Dualism). However Sri Aurobindo's Advaita is often referred to as Pūrṇādvaita (Integral Non-Dualism), to distinguish it from the system of Śankara. Having accepted the reality as non-dual, they are confronted by the task of explaining the existence of the universe and the relation between the ultimate reality and the universe.

Śankara's Approach

According to Śankara consciousness is the ultimate reality, its inherent nature (*svarupa*) being Sat (infinite existence) Cit (infinite consciousness) Ananda (infinite bliss). He says that Brahman which is of the nature of pure consciousness, devoid of all specific adjuncts, quiescent, endless and non-dual,

and which is called infinite, cannot be known easily.¹ The aim of the Upaniṣads is also to reveal the nature of the ultimate reality as consciousness which is beyond the reach of the mind and the senses.² In his commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*, Śāṅkara says:

The Upaniṣad also says that Brahman is pure consciousness, devoid of other aspects contrary to this, and without any distinguishing feature, as in, “As a lump of salt is without interior or exterior, entire, and purely saline in taste, even so is the Self without interior or exterior, entire, and pure intelligence alone” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. IV. v. 13), which means that the self has no internal or external aspect apart from pure consciousness, its nature being mere impartite consciousness without any interstices. Just as a lump of salt has the saline taste alone both inside and outside, and no other taste, so also is the self.³

The Problem of Becoming and Maya

If such be the nature of consciousness, then how does Śāṅkara explain the experience of the world around us? This is the problem of becoming. Once being has been defined as has been done above, the philosopher is faced with the problem of explaining the world of diversity which is in sharp contrast to the nature of being. In his commentary on the *Māṇḍūkya kārika*, Śāṅkara raises this problem. He asks, “If it is established that the Self is verily one, how does it come to be imagined to be multifarious, such as *prāṇa* etc, that are characterised by phenomenality?” To this he replies thus “All this (referring to the world), is that shining self’s *māyā*. Just as the magic employed by the magician makes the absolutely pure sky, filled with trees blooming with flowers and luxuriant with leaves, so also does the *māyā* of this self-shining Self make it self-deluded as it were.”⁴ He makes it more explicit in the *Brahmasūtra bhāṣya*. He says that the seed power responsible for creation is of the nature of nescience (*avidyā*). It is designated by the word *avyakta*, the unmanifest. It is dependent on God, is of the form of *māyā*, the great sleep. In it the transmigrating souls sleep devoid of the knowledge of the Self. The unmanifest indeed is *māyā*, because it is not possible to define it as being either true or untrue.⁵ Going strictly by the criterion of reality adopted by Śāṅkara, *māyā* is unreal. In one instance he makes this very clear when he states “*Māyā* is that which does not exist. *Māyā* is the name of the non-existent.”⁶ *Māyā* therefore accounts for a world in time and space. It accounts for everything subjective or objective that can be ‘known’ in the empirical sense. *Māyā* is a power that creates a world different from Brahman. A power cannot exist or function by itself. It must

reside in some kind of Being. Being is therefore primary and the power is secondary. Here the Brahman is therefore primary and *Māyā* is secondary. Again the being may be united to its power or lose the power to which it was united. But a power can never exist independent of the Being. *Māyā* resides in Brahman and functions as the power of Brahman. Since *Māyā* according to Advaita is only a power of creating illusory appearances, it is best understood as the power of erroneous perception. The power of erroneous perception can further be analysed into the power of ignorance and the power of error proper. Ignorance prepares the ground for error. It does not necessarily lead to error but is a necessary precondition of error. The power of ignorance and the power of error together constitute the structure of *māyā*. They are known as the power of veiling (*āvaraṇa-śakti*) and the power of projection or distortion (*vikṣepa-śakti*). These powers however require an intelligent being as their ground (*adhiṣṭāna*) and Brahman is that ground. It is a fact of common observation that a substance that partakes of the nature of the veil cannot be further veiled. That which is by its very nature darkness or is unintelligent cannot be further veiled; only that which is resplendent or intelligent by nature can be veiled. Hence that which *māyā* veils must be Brahman alone which is by its very nature intelligent and luminous. The power of error too like the power of ignorance must have a ground (*āśraya*) and an object (*viṣaya*). Brahman is both the support and object of *Māyā*. Erroneous perception also requires a real object that is erroneously perceived, e.g., the rope that is perceived as a snake.

Explaining the Texts Dealing with Creation

Śāṅkara does not support any theory of creation at all. According to him those who theorise about creation always commit the fallacy of thinking that creation is the expansion of God. Seeing a magician throw a rope into the sky, climbing on it fully armed, even going beyond sight and getting torn up in a battle, falling and rising again, one does not believe in the reality of the magic that he does. He compares the throwing of the rope into the air as the appearance of sleep, dream etc. The magician mounting the rope is compared to the states of *prajñā* and *taijasa*. However the real magician is different from both the rope and the one who mounted it. He always remains on the ground, hidden by his own magic and unseen. The fourth state, *turiya*, which is the supreme reality is like the magician in the analogy. He therefore recommends for the real aspirant of truth, meditation only on the reality. He should not have any theory of creation which is futile.⁷ Śāṅkara points out that it is not the case that the snake that is assumed illusorily in the rope existed there in fact and then was removed through discrimination. Nor is it that the magic produced by the

magician exists in fact and is then removed when the veil is lifted off the sight of the onlookers. Even thus here the duality which is called the world is a mere illusion. Non-duality comparable to the rope and the magician is the supreme truth. Therefore no world either as evolving or dissolving exists.⁸ Duality which is the nature of difference is said to exist because it is perceived and is practically useful. Therefore Śāṅkara concludes that perception and practicality are not the criteria for the reality of duality.⁹ Where does the appearance of the world subsist? Does it have a reality apart from Brahman? Śāṅkara answers that just as pot-ether, basin-ether etc, are not different from the ether-at-large, and just as the mirage-water etc, are not different from the desert sand etc, because they are of the nature of what appear and are subsequently sublated, and because their nature cannot be defined, even so the aggregate called the world, consisting of objects of enjoyment and enjoyers, has no existence apart from Brahman.¹⁰ Just as all empirical usages relating to dream is true before one wakes up, similarly, all empirical usages are true only before the realisation dawns that the Self is the Brahman itself. As long as there is no knowledge of the one true self, for no one there arises the knowledge that the modifications characterised by the means of knowledge, objects of knowledge, fruit etc, are unreal. It is the modifications that all beings apprehend as 'I' and 'mine' identifying them with the self on account of nescience, rejecting the natural truth that Brahman is indeed the self. If this be the case the question remains as to why the scriptures like the Upaniṣads speak of creation explicitly? Śāṅkara says that wherever creation has been declared in the scriptures through illustrations of clay, metal, spark etc, they are only a means to generate in us the cognition of the oneness of the individual soul and the supreme soul. He takes the example of the story of the organs of speech etc, being smitten with evil by the demons, as related in the sections on *prāṇa*, which serves as a prelude to the teaching of the excellence of the *prāṇa* and also points out that in different sections on *prāṇa*, the story is related differently. According to him if the story were absolutely true, then the narration would be identical in all the sections, and not in various forms which are even mutually contradictory, as they appear in those sections. Therefore the narration is not for teaching that the story is true; similarly, the texts dealing with creation are but a prelude to the cognition of the oneness of the self.¹¹

Proof for the Illusoriness of the World

Śāṅkara furnishes a formal proof for the illusoriness of the world in keeping with the structure of the Nyaya inference. The premise (*pratijñā*) is that the

things perceived in the waking state are illusory. The reason (*hetu*) is because they are perceived. Like the things perceived in dream: this is the example (*dṛṣṭānta*). The subsumptive correlation (*upanaya*) is that just as in dream the things perceived are illusory, so it is even in the waking state. Therefore there is illusoriness in the waking state also: this is the conclusion (*nigamana*). Because of being within and in enclosed space, the things perceived in dream are different from those perceived in waking. But 'being perceived' and 'being unreal' are common to both.¹² The things perceived in the waking state do not exist at the beginning nor in the end, hence they are illusory. Śāṅkara further argues that that which does not exist at the beginning or in the end, e.g. mirage etc. does not exist in the middle also. So these things that are perceived in the waking are illusory since they are similar to the illusory mirage which is non-existent in the beginning and the end. Only the dull-witted people who do not know the nature of the Self refer to them as real.

Sri Aurobindo's Approach

In tune with the realisations in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, Sri Aurobindo identifies consciousness with the ultimate reality, the sachchidananda; infinite existence, consciousness and bliss. The metaphysical position of Sri Aurobindo is described as Integral Non-Dualism. The three are not a trinity but a unity. Sri Aurobindo says:

Sachchidananda is the One with a triple aspect. In the Supreme the three are not three but one - existence is consciousness, consciousness is bliss, and they are thus inseparable, not only inseparable but so much each other that they are not distinct at all.¹³

It is one eternal Existence... one eternal Consciousness which sees its own works in us and others, one eternal Will or Force of that Consciousness which displays itself in infinite workings, one eternal Delight which has the joy of itself and all its workings, one eternal Delight which has the joy of itself and all its workings, — itself stable, immutable, timeless, spaceless, supreme and itself still in the infinity of its workings, not changed by their variations, not broken up by their multiplicity, not increased or diminished by their ebbings and flowings in the seas of Time and Space, not confused by their apparent contrarieties or limited by their divinely-willed limitations. Sachchidananda is the unity of the many-sidedness of manifested things, the eternal harmony of all their variations and oppositions, the infinite perfection which justifies their limitations and is the goal of their imperfections.¹⁴

Brahman

Sri Aurobindo defines Brahman as the reality of things which fills and supports their idea and form.¹⁵ It is an eternal in all stabilities, truth behind all appearances and a constant which supports all mutations but itself does not undergo any either in terms of increase or decrease. The Brahman is the highest and this highest is the all; there is none beyond or none other than it. To know it is to know all. It is the beginning and the source of all things, so everything else is its consequence. In relation to the universe the Brahman is not only the spiritual, material and conscious substance of all the ideas and forces and forms of the universe, but their origin, support and possessor. It is the cosmic as well as the supracosmic spirit. According to Sri Aurobindo, all the last terms to which we can reduce the universe, force and matter, name and form, *puruṣa and prakṛti* are still not entirely what the universe really is either in itself or its nature. Just as we are the play and form, the mental, vital, psychic and physical expression of a supreme Self unconditioned by the mind, life and body, the universe too is the play and form and cosmic soul expression of a supreme existence. This existence is unconditioned by force and matter, idea, name and form and the distinction between *puruṣa and prakṛti*. Our supreme Self and the the supreme existence which has become the universe are one spirit, one self and one existence. The individual is also an expression of the universal being, an emanation from the transcendence. Sri Aurobindo here draws our attention to the fact that one's true Self is not the natural personality, the created individuality which we are aware of, but is a universal being in its relations with others and with nature. It is the living front of a supreme transcendental spirit.¹⁶

Sri Aurobindo gives equal ontological status to the transcendental as well as the divine in the form of creation. He says “ We have to perceive Brahman comprehensively as both the Stable and the Moving. We must see It in eternal and immutable Spirit and in all the changing manifestations of universe and relativity”.¹⁷ “We have to perceive Brahman as that which exceeds, contains and supports all individual things as well as all universe, transcendently of Time and Space and Causality. We have to perceive It also as that which lives in and possesses the universe and all it contains”.¹⁸ Sri Aurobindo uses the term Brahman to denote an Absolute which takes all relativities in its embrace. To substantiate his position he draws our attention to the Upaniṣads that affirm that all is Brahman, Mind is Brahman, Life is Brahman, Matter is Brahman; addressing *vayu*, the Lord of air and of life it is said “O *Vayu*, thou art the manifest Brahman”. Again pointing to man, beast, birds and insects, each is separately identified with the Brahman – “O Brahman, thou art this old man and boy and girl, this bird, this insect.”

Sri Aurobindo further identifies Brahman with the Consciousness that knows itself in all that exists. It is the force that sustains the gods, titan and even demons. It is the force that acts in man and other animals and forms and energies of nature. It is *Ānanda*, the secret bliss of existence without which no being can survive. Brahman is the inner soul in all, taking a form corresponding to each created form which it inhabits. It is that which is conscious not only in the conscious being but also in inconscient things. He is the timeless and Time; he is space and all that is in space; he is causality and the cause and the effect. All realities and all aspects and all semblances are the Brahman.

It is the Consciousness-force of Brahman that has become the living being in a world of living beings. In his own words:

Brahman, the Ishwara, is all this by his *Yoga-Maya*, by the power of his Consciousness-Force put out in self-manifestation: he is the Conscious Being, Soul, Spirit, *Purusha*, and it is by his Nature, the force of his conscious self-existence that he is all things; he is the Ishwara, the omniscient and omnipotent All-ruler, and it is by his *Shakti*, his conscious Power, that he manifests himself in Time and governs the universe.¹⁹

Nirguṇa and Saguṇa Brahman

According to Sri Aurobindo, the impersonal divine, *Nirguṇa Brahman* and the personal divine, *Nirguṇa Brahman* are equal and co-existent parts of the Divine.²⁰ They are the two essential modes, the fundamental aspects, the two poles of the eternal being. The Transcendent divine reality exceeds both these modes. These two modes practically correspond to the silent and active Brahman. In the context of the Overmind, Sri Aurobindo mentions about the two aspects of Brahman thus:

In Overmind, in all the higher ranges of the mind, we find recurring the dichotomy of a pure silent self without feature or qualities or relations, self-existent, self-poised, self-sufficient, and the mighty dynamis of a determinative knowledge-power, of a creative consciousness and force which precipitates itself into the forms of the universe. This opposition which is yet a collocation, as if these two were correlatives or complementaries, although apparent contradictions of each other, sublimates itself into the co-existence of an impersonal Brahman without qualities, a fundamental divine Reality free from all relations or determinates, and a Brahman with infinite qualities, a fundamental divine Reality who is the source and container and master of all relations and determinations – *Nirguna*, *Saguna*.²¹

Consciousness-Force

Sri Aurobindo asserts that however we explain the concept of consciousness, taking Nature to be an inert impulse or a conscious principle, it is certainly force. According to him the basic principle of things is a formative movement of energies. All forms are born of the meeting and mutual adaptation of unshaped forces. All actions and sensations arise as a response to some previous occurrence and manifest in the form of forces. Thus, even if the entire world is conceived essentially as an act of consciousness, an act is implied in it and in the act a movement of force and a play of energy. This is the fundamental nature of the world as experienced within us. All our activities accordingly are the play of triple forces, namely, knowledge-force, desire-force and action-force. All the three are really three streams of one original and identical power called *ādyā śakti*. Even the states of rest are but an equilibrium in the play of forces. The nature of consciousness-force being diametrically opposite to the eternal repose of Brahman, the question as to how a movement of force originated in it is quite intriguing. What was its cause and what was its possibility? Sri Aurobindo speaks the language of ancient Indian thought when he says that force is inherent in existence. Represented by the two forms of Shiva and Kali, Brahman and Shakti are two inseparable aspects of the same existence. This force may be at rest or in motion. Even when it is at rest it exists and is never abolished, diminished or essentially altered. Sri Aurobindo points out that even the illusionist theory (reference to Advaita) must admit that *Māyā*, the power of Self-illusion in Brahman is potentially eternal in eternal Being and it is only a question of manifestation or non-manifestation. *Sāṃkhya* also admits the eternal co-existence of *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa* and the alternate states of the equilibrium and disturbance of *Prakṛti*.

Force by its very nature exists in the two alternative states of self-concentration and self-diffusion. Sri Aurobindo argues that this being accepted, the question as to how the movement of force originates does not arise as movement has been accepted as one of the states of force. The potentiality of force must translate itself as an alternative rhythm of of rest and movement succeeding each other in time or else as an eternal self-concentration of force in immutable existence with a superficial play of movement, change and formation like the rising and falling of waves on the surface of ocean. This superficial play itself may be eternal and coeval with self-concentration or it may begin in time, and be resumed in a sort of constant rhythm. It is then not eternal in continuity but eternal in recurrence. In a conscious existence which is absolute, independent of its formations, not determined by its works, we must suppose an inherent freedom to manifest or not to manifest the potentiality of

movement. In his own words, “A Brahman compelled by *Prakṛti* is not Brahman, but an inert Infinite with an active content in it more powerful than the continent, conscious holder of Force of whom his Force is master”.²²

Characteristics of Consciousness-Force

Consciousness-Force has three characteristics. They are:

1. Infinite self-variation
2. Infinite self-limitation
3. Infinite self-absorption

The Consciousness-Force is not restricted to one particular state of consciousness or to one law of action. “...it can be many things simultaneously; have many co-ordinated movements which to the finite reason may seem contradictory; it is one but innumerable manifold, infinitely plastic, inexhaustibly adaptable.”²³ The individual consciousness can see itself as a limited and phenomenal being; it can also put off its apparent limitations and see itself as a universal and a transcendent Being. The underlying consciousness being one and the same, there is no essential difficulty in passing from one status to another. The one being can thus experience or realise itself triply from any of these three statuses.

The second characteristic of consciousness-force is its power of self-limitation. It is the subordinate movement of the infinite consciousness determining itself within the bounds of space and time. The power of self-limitation expresses itself in two forms – individual self-limitation and cosmic self-limitation. Though all spiritual individuals are, in essence, the same, they have their individual differentiations. This individual self-limitation is not a fundamental characteristic but only an individual specialisation of a common universality or totality. The spiritual individual from his own locus of Truth and in accordance with his nature, but on a common basis and not being blind to other selves and the nature around him. It would be a consciousness limiting its action with full knowledge and not a movement of ignorance.

Apart from the individual self-limitation, there is also the cosmic self-limitation of the infinite consciousness, which is the power responsible for the existence and working of the universe. The Infinite Consciousness supports the universe with only a certain part of itself and holds back all that is not needed for the cosmic movement. The self-determination of the Mind, Life and Matter takes place according to the same principle. Sri Aurobindo says that though such a self-limitation of consciousness seems contradictory to our normal reason, it is one of the powers of the infinite which the logic of the infinite alone can reveal.

The self-determinations of the infinite consciousness do not effect any divisions in it. However the power of self-limitation does not give us any account of the ignorance and the binding limitations of our phenomenal consciousness, i.e., individual ego.

Self-absorption is the third characteristic of the Infinite that takes place in two ways: that of Superconscience and Inconscience. In the state of Superconscience, the Infinite consciousness takes a plunge into itself which is a state of pure self-awareness of Being. This state is devoid of both the universal as well as the individual consciousness. It transcends both and is a state of absorption in the ineffable One. The Infinite consciousness again takes a plunge into the Inconscient which is a state of utter darkness. This state though it appears as one of non-being is really one of Being where the Being is in a state of perfect self-oblivion. The inconscient also possesses intrinsically both consciousness and force. Here the infinite consciousness is hidden, blinded and works automatically. The states of the Superconscient and the Inconscient are that of total self-absorption of the Infinite consciousness. Mind, Life and Matter are states where the consciousness is partially Self-absorbed. Sri Aurobindo cites these powers of Self-absorption of Brahman as the factors responsible for the simultaneous existence of the *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa* aspects of Brahman. When the infinite consciousness confines itself to one particular status, it becomes apparently oblivious of its other states. The whole of the infinite consciousness remains there behind the special status, but that particular state of consciousness is not aware of it. Sri Aurobindo says:

... that to the infinite consciousness both the static and the dynamic are possible; these are two of its statuses and both can be present simultaneously in the universal awareness, the one witnessing the other and supporting it; or the silent and static may be there penetrating the activity or throwing it up like an ocean immobile below throwing up a mobility of waves on its surface.²⁴

A Critical Analysis

Both Śāṅkara and Sri Aurobindo accept consciousness as the ultimate reality of the nature of Sat (infinite existence), Cit (infinite consciousness) and Ānanda (infinite bliss). By defining consciousness in this way they have both accorded the highest ontological status to it. However there is a marked difference in the way they explain this definition. In tune with the Upaniṣadic dictum that the ultimate reality is one that the mind cannot grasp and from where words return unable to reach them²⁵, Śāṅkara says that the definition of Sat-Cit-Ānanda has

only a negative implication. Sat implies that the reality is not non-existent; Cit implies that the reality is not devoid of consciousness and Ānanda implies that it is not devoid of bliss. Consciousness for Śāṅkara is a principle that excludes the universe of name and form though it pervades everywhere. It is the substratum of the universe of diversity wherein the names and forms are grafted on it. Logically it is arrived at by a process of negation (*neti-neti*), where, after negating everything other than consciousness, the remaining residuum, indescribable though it is, is termed as consciousness. Such a negative process ensures that consciousness is totally different from any entity or action in the world, be it physical or psychological. It transcends them entirely. Even the conception of consciousness as possessed of infinite qualities (*saguṇa*), is born out of viewing consciousness from the limiting adjuncts of name and form superimposed on it. True knowledge destroys and dispels this superimposition thereby leaving room only for pure consciousness unconditioned by any adjuncts. Śāṅkara categorically dismisses as absurd and self-contradictory, the conception that consciousness can simultaneously possess and be free from attributes.

Sri Aurobindo brings within the fold of consciousness not only the spirit transcendent of all creation or mutation, but also the universe with all its diversity. This is one of the most obvious and important differences between their conceptions of consciousness. This comprehensive vision of consciousness is substantiated by him by citing the Upaniṣadic dictum, “*Sarvam Khalvidam Brahman*” (everything is the Brahman). The Upaniṣads explicitly describe even the forces of nature like wind to be the highest reality as has been mentioned in an earlier chapter. This position is certainly unacceptable to the Śāṅkarite thought process. The Śāṅkarite would accuse Sri Aurobindo of bringing the Absolute and the relative together which according to them are as opposed to and exclusive of each other as light and darkness. Moreover in according equal reality to consciousness devoid of attributes and consciousness identified with the universe, Sri Aurobindo grants them the same ontological status. He calls them the two poises of the same reality. The logical incompatibility in bringing the two together has been explained by Sri Aurobindo by saying that the incompatibility lies only in the plane of mundane logic and this being a transcendental metaphysical situation, can be explained only by what he calls “the logic of the infinite”. Everything that is seemingly incompatible in the plane of mundane logic is perfectly synthesised and brought together in a higher plane of existence which follows a logical pattern that is quite incomprehensible to the ordinary human mind. This synthesis is established in the higher realms of the mind starting from the higher mind and finds its culmination and perfection in the Supermind which is the ultimate synthesising agency. But again the

Śankarite would argue that the synthesis in a higher plane would not take care of the sublation of the lower order of reality in the experience of a higher order. If both the aspects of consciousness, i.e., with and without attributes were to co-exist then one would not experience the sublation of the one in the experience of the other. Non-sublatability (*abādhyatā*) as the criterion of truth is the pivot around which the whole of the metaphysics of Śankara revolves. The levels of reality, which is the backbone of Śankara's metaphysics, is rooted in this criterion of truth. Śankara categorically dismisses as unreal anything that does not stand the test of this criterion of truth. On the basis of this, he gives to the universe of experience, a lower ontological status. Regarding the Upaniṣadic dictum that everything is Brahman, Śankara explains that it has to be understood in a specific sense. Brahman or consciousness is the substratum (*adhiṣṭāna*) of all entities in the world. The existence of every entity is rooted in the consciousness that supports and gives reality to it. In this sense every entity is essentially the consciousness that supports it. But the identity of an entity marked by the name and form acting as limiting adjuncts is rooted in an eternal principle of nescience that at once veils the true nature of consciousness (*āvaraṇa*) and projects a universe of name and form (*vikṣepa*) that is superimposed on it. This identity being opposed to the true nature of consciousness can never be equated with it. Moreover the whole ontology of this principle of nescience is indescribable (*anirvacanīya*) as it can neither be termed existent (*sat*) as it is sublated in the knowledge of Brahman, nor can it be called non-existent (*asat*) as it is an object of experience and anything that is an object of experience cannot be dismissed away as non-existent, as without an element of existence, it cannot become an object of experience. The knowledge of Brahman completely destroys this principle of nescience along with all its products just like fire burns camphor without leaving any residue. So any entity can be called ultimately real only when it is shorn of its limiting adjuncts of name and form. And when name and form are de-superimposed from an empirical entity what remains is the infinite pure consciousness that is unbound. Therefore Śankara says that when the scriptures speak of the objects of the world as Brahman, its meaning should not be construed in a literal sense but in the sense of consciousness that gives existence to it. Such statements in the scriptures are mere pointers which draw our attention to the reality that underlies all objects constituted of name and form. The scriptures never intend to describe an empirical entity delimited by name and form and bound to an existence in space, time and causation, as ultimately real or as having the same ontological status as Brahman. If such an equal ontological status is granted then it would defeat the very objective of an enquiry into the nature of the ultimate reality.

Consciousness Conditioned and Unconditioned

There is a marked difference between the way the two thinkers explain the conditioned (*Saguṇa*) and unconditioned (*Nirguṇa*) aspects of consciousness. According to Śankara, consciousness which is in fact free from attributes and limitations appears to be limited and conditioned by certain limiting adjuncts when it is perceived in conjunction with them. These limiting adjuncts themselves are superimposed on pure consciousness owing to the principle of nescience (*avidyā*). The very concept of the co-existence of the conditioned and unconditioned aspects of consciousness is dismissed by Śankara as sheer absurdity. This argument is coherent with and is rooted in his metaphysics of multiple layers of reality. Pure consciousness in its true nature can be comprehended only in the plane of the absolute (*pāramārthika dr̥ṣṭi*). When viewed from the plane of the empirical (*vyāvahārika dr̥ṣṭi*) it appears to be conditioned by various limiting adjuncts. Consciousness at all times remains completely free from the taints of the limiting adjuncts though it appears to be bound by them. Just as the plane of the absolute dawns only when the empirical is sublated, similarly, the unconditioned consciousness is realised only when the conditioning factors are sublated. Their co-existence is impossible. Sri Aurobindo asserts that the co-existence of the consciousness devoid of attributes and possessing infinite attributes is possible and the reconciliation of these apparent opposites takes place in the higher ranges of the mind above the overmind. He even calls them two poises of consciousness, namely the static and the dynamic. To give them an equal ontological status would go against the Upaniṣadic statements which describe consciousness as immutable. Now the meaning of immutability is explained by the two thinkers differently. For Sri Aurobindo it means that consciousness, the ultimate reality, does not exhaust itself when it creates multiplicity out of itself. Its fullness is never hampered even when creation emanates from it. He substantiates his view from the Upaniṣadic dictum which says that the ineffable Brahman is complete in every respect, and so is the universe of diversity. Even when creation which is complete, emanates out of Brahman, the Brahman remains as complete as ever.²⁶ Sri Aurobindo argues that passages such as these confirm a theory of a real creation emanating from Brahman and hence to place creation at a lower ontological status and even terming it illusory from the standpoint of the absolute, is uncalled for and is not in keeping with the spirit of the Upaniṣads. Śankara however maintains the dichotomy of the Self and not-Self which is in fact a watertight division made between consciousness and the world. To think of consciousness as dynamic is an error that is committed due to a lack of discrimination between the consciousness that illumines and the whole of creation that is animated by it. Consciousness

only lends the light; the power of sentience which illumines the insentient *prakṛti*. It does not transform itself but only transfigures into the world of creation. Brahman or consciousness is the transfigurative cause of the universe while *prakṛti* or *Māyā* is the transformative cause. Now the argument of Śankara is that when creation occurs without any change whatsoever in its source which is consciousness, it can only be apparent and not real. The term change or transformation can be applied only to empirical entities where there is a depletion of the source when something is created out of it. For example, when a pot is created out of clay, the lump of clay is completely used up in the process. The word creation cannot be used if the source remains unchanged. Moreover giving equal ontology to Brahman or consciousness and creation would put the universe at par with Brahman and logically when two entities are equally real and at par with each other, one's existence cannot be completely dependent on the other. But the scriptures categorically state that it is Brahman that provides existential reality (*sattā*) to the world. Moreover an equal reality to consciousness and world would create a situation where two independent realities exist side by side. This undermines the non-dual nature of reality. To this Sri Aurobindo's reply is that the question of two realities co-existing simply does not arise as there is only one reality but manifested in two poises, namely, the static and the dynamic. Creation is only an expression of the dynamic poise. It is at no point divorced from the static poise nor is it essentially different from it. The Śankarite would here raise a serious objection. The world of experience is by its very nature diametrically opposed to the nature of pure consciousness.

Conclusion – The Reason Why They Differ

An element of ignorance is accepted by both the thinkers and both agree to the presence of ignorance in the experience of the universe. For Śankara, ignorance is the fundamental basis of the universe; the universe itself being a projection of *Māyā*. But for Sri Aurobindo the existence of the universe is not fundamentally rooted in ignorance. The universe is the manifestation of Consciousness-Force which is a poise or aspect of Brahman and hence is not a product of ignorance. Ignorance comes to play only when individuation becomes operative, i.e., when an entity identifies itself as essentially divorced from the rest of creation. The principle of individuation and the plunge into ignorance is an inevitable necessary stage in the process of evolution. This ignorance itself is not a complete falsity according to Sri Aurobindo but the result of a partial self-manifestation of Truth-Consciousness. From a state of complete self-oblivion in the state of the inconscient which is imposed by consciousness on itself, the Truth-Consciousness slowly starts manifesting itself in the rungs of the ladder

of evolution. From matter to mind, and from mind to the supermind, there is a gradual increase in the manifestation of Truth-Consciousness which attains its culmination in the Supermind which is completely free from any form of ignorance. However the Supermind is not the ineffable Brahman free from any form of creation. It is, on the contrary, the very principle of creation, the universal creatrix. In the Supermind, creation with all its names and forms exists, but completely free from ignorance. It is this unique state of existence in the Supermind, that defies the rules of logic, that prompts Sri Aurobindo to make the claim that creation not necessarily be rooted in ignorance; there can be a state of creation that is completely free from ignorance. Thus we observe that while Śankara's concept of *Māyā*, though an instrument of Brahman, is essentially a principle of ignorance, Sri Aurobindo's Consciousness-Force is essentially free from ignorance and assumes ignorance temporarily to serve the purpose of evolution. This is the reason why Truth-Consciousness for Śankara can only be experienced by the sublation of *Māyā* and its evolutes that constitute the universe. For Sri Aurobindo, Truth-Consciousness can be experienced in the Supermind where creation is neither falsified or negated, nor transcended.

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26. *aum pūrṇamadam pūrṇamidam pūrṇāt pūrṇamudacyate*
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśisyate|
aum śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ|

Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo – a comparison

Kundan Singh

Part I

Integration of Different Schools of Vedanta

Swami Vivekananda held as one of his missions to reconcile and integrate the different schools of Vedanta: Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita. He derived this inspiration from Sri Ramakrishna whom he considered the living example of the reconciliation and integration. As the first step towards this reconciliation, he states that the Upanishads contain both dualist as well as non-dualist thoughts and that all the aforementioned schools find their support from the Upanishads. What these jarring sects forget is that the “truth is One, sages call it by various names” — a wise phrase from the Upanishads that characterises their underlying unity. According to the Swami, they are not contradictory but complementary, and instead of opposing each other they fulfil each other. Taking Ramanuja as the representative of the dualist school he says that there are three entities — God, soul, and nature, with God interpenetrating the other two. In his conception, God is the personal God who performs different functions, for instance that of creator, ruler, preserver, and destroyer of the universe. The soul, though essentially pure, expands and contracts according to its karma — a good one expands it and a bad one contracts it. When the soul attains its purity, it remains in close proximity with God. However, according to Advaita Vedanta, there is nothing but that non-dual consciousness called God which has veiled itself as many due to the prevalence of Maya. According to the Swami, the Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Advaita are different stages in Realisation — one leading to another until the oneness in experience is realised. They are seen differently because of Maya, which causes different minds to perceive the same truth differently.

They were the same truth, only seen through the glass of Maya, distorted it may be — yet truth, and nothing but truth. The same God whom the ignorant man saw outside nature, the same whom the little-knowing man saw as

interpenetrating the universe, and the same whom the sage realises as his own Self, as the whole universe itself — all are One and the same Being, the same entity seen from different standpoints, seen through different glasses of Maya, perceived by different minds, and all the difference was caused by that. Not only so, but one view must lead to the other. (Vivekananda, 1970c, p. 423)

Integration of the Personal and the Impersonal Aspects of the Divine

Closely aligned with the previous section is the issue of personal and impersonal aspects of the Divine, for the emphasis of Advaita is on impersonal whereas Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita focus on the personal aspect of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo does not take an exclusive stance in favour of either the impersonal or the personal aspect of the Divine. According to him, the Divine is *nirguṇo guṇi*, or “Qualified who is without qualities,” and that the *nirguṇa* and the *saṅguṇa* are two modes of the Supreme, corresponding to the Silent and Active Brahman, exceeded in the transcendent reality. The impersonal and the personal are two gates through which one can enter into the Divine and neither is subordinated to the other. Swami Vivekananda’s writings are somewhat ambiguous on this issue. Though he states that, “God is both Personal and Impersonal at the same time,” he clearly creates a hierarchy between the personal and the impersonal, for in the same vein he states that the impersonal includes the personal: the former gives a better ground for the existence of the latter (Bishop, 1982). According to the Swami, the impersonal is beyond the limits of the space, time, and causation whereas the personal is within their bounds — an experiential understanding of the impersonal does not dismiss the personal but helps explain the latter better. There are four reasons why I see the emphasis: First, because Swami Vivekananda experienced the impersonal as the One spirit pervading everything after Sri Ramakrishna instituted the aforementioned experience in him in response to his constant goading as to whether God existed or not. Second, the Swami was an Advaitist — his arguments against the dualists or the followers of Dvaitavāda are very much in line with the traditional standpoint of the Advaitists, which is to show Bhakti or Dvaita form of worship as subordinate to Advaita. This is quite understandable because the motive of the Advaitists is to show that there is just One, and not two. Bhakti or the dualistic form of worship harbours the acceptance of two, the almighty God and the individual soul, which has to be refuted from the Advaita perspective. Third, most of his lectures were delivered to audiences comprising Christians, the representatives of whom — the missionaries — had launched a tirade in India in order to convert the Hindus and in the process were invalidating the fundamentals of the Hindu religion. Fourth, he was speaking to audiences

consisting of rationalists and materialists who, due to the positivist and scientific spirit prevalent in Europe, did not want a faith-based religion. It is true that since Advaita Vedanta seeks knowledge through intellect, it is very logical and rational in its approach. However, from Sri Aurobindo’s integral perspective both the Advaita and the Dvaita perspectives are true because it is the same One which has become the many, including Gods and Goddesses, and that the same One also manifests on many different planes giving a plethora of options to seekers for association with the Divine. At the same time, Swami Vivekananda, as mentioned before, does not dismiss Dvaita or Viśiṣṭādvaita completely. He states that they are true, and that they are necessary stages in attaining the realisation of the Advaita, which he holds as supreme. Without giving a spiritual basis of the truth of the above two aspects of Vedanta, one gets a feeling that Advaita, in his view, needs to tolerate or accommodate the other two. On the contrary, by giving a detailed account of the existence of different planes of spiritual world, which make the possibility of diverse kinds of spiritual experience and of spiritual philosophy consequently, Sri Aurobindo is genuinely able to bring different traditions together in a framework where the diverse spiritual traditions can coexist in a diverse and plural way yet arranged in a hierarchical manner. In addition, by linking the manifestation of one or many aspects of the absolute with the relative individual constitution as complete in itself, Sri Aurobindo brings about a trans-logical and trans-rational reconciliation of the absolute and the relative and of the hierarchical and relative plurality. At another place, Swami Vivekananda brings the impersonal and the personal together stating that the Vedic and Vedantic thought preached “impersonal personal God.” In his opinion, the Vedas and the Upanishads are the repertoire of impersonal laws that were manifested by divine beings who were godheads — Avatars, prophets, and incarnations of gods. Since these beings manifested one or many divine impersonal principles, they are worthy of being worshipped. Therefore, in venerating these beings the personal and the impersonal come together. Citing the Vedas he says that, in contradiction to the monists who have only looked for non-dualist ideas in the Vedas and the dualists who have only looked for the dualist ideas, the scriptures contain both dualist and non-dualist thoughts in them, affirming again that the dualist forms of practice ultimately do culminate in the realisation of the non-dual:

The dualistic commentator, knowing no better, wishes to knock the monistic texts on the head. Preachers and priests want to explain them in the dualistic meaning. The monistic commentator serves the dualistic texts in a similar fashion. Now this is not the fault of the Vedas. It is foolish to attempt to

prove that the whole of the Vedas is dualistic. It is equally foolish to attempt to prove that the whole of the Vedas is non-dualistic. They are dualistic and non-dualistic both. We understand them better today in the light of newer ideas. These are but different conceptions leading to the final conclusion that both dualistic and monistic conceptions are necessary for the evolution of the mind, and therefore the Vedas preach them. In mercy to the human race the Vedas show the various steps to the higher goal. Not that they are contradictory, vain words used by the Vedas to delude children; they are necessary not only for children, but for many a grown-up man. So long as we have a body and so long as we are deluded by the idea of our identity with the body, so long as we have five senses and see the external world, we must have a Personal God. For if we have all these ideas, we must take, as the great Ramanuja has proved, all the ideas about God and nature and the individualised soul; when you take the one you have to take the whole triangle — we cannot avoid it. Therefore as long as you see the external world, to avoid a Personal God and a personal soul is arrant lunacy. But there may be times in the lives of sages when the human mind transcends as it were its own limitations, when man goes even beyond nature, to the realm of which the *Shruti* declares, “whence words fall back with the mind without reaching it”; “There the eyes cannot reach nor speech nor mind”; “We cannot say that we know it, we cannot say that we do not know it”. There the human soul transcends all limitations, and then and then alone flashes into the human soul the conception of monism: I and the whole universe are one; I and Brahman are one. (Vivekananda, 1970c, pp. 281-282)

In my opinion, the integration of the impersonal and personal is much more complete and comprehensive in the thoughts of Sri Aurobindo, for the reason that he gives an ontological basis for the cosmic existence of gods and goddesses. Swami Vivekananda, despite being Advaitic in orientation, initiated the process towards such integral resolution. In fact, I would rather say that Sri Aurobindo simply moved forward with the integration that had already been accomplished by Sri Ramakrishna — while filling in the gaps left by Swami Vivekananda — for in Sri Ramakrishna we find the experience of both — personal and impersonal — unlike in Swami Vivekananda who, it is not recorded, had any experience with any personal God or godhead.

Integration of Knowledge, Love, and Work

Jñāna Yoga of Shankara lays a specific emphasis on finding a union with the transcendental Brahman while giving the path of love (Bhakti Yoga) and work

(Karma Yoga) a secondary status, though interestingly Shankara is also known to have composed extremely poetic devotional hymns. According to Swami Vivekananda, Shankara’s genius lies in an intellectual and rational approach to religion whereby he outlined everything that was esoteric in the Upanishads and Vedas clearly, succinctly, and precisely in very simple terms. On the other hand, the Swami holds Buddha to have a profound compassionate and universal heart. Therefore, in his opinion the meeting of heart and intellect was of capital importance for Practical Vedanta. As he points out:

In Buddha we had the great, universal heart and universal patience, making religion practical and bringing it to everyone's door. In Shankaracharya we saw tremendous intellectual power, throwing the scorching light of reason upon everything. We want today that bright sun of intellectuality joined with the heart of Buddha, the wonderful infinite heart of love and mercy. This union will give us the highest philosophy. Science and religion will meet and shake hands. Poetry and philosophy will become friends. This will be the religion of the future, and if we can work it out, we may be sure that it will be for all times and peoples. (Vivekananda, 1970b, p.140)

He further states that faith, which is a key component of Bhakti Yoga, is crucial but it contains in itself an inherent danger of producing fanaticism — on the other hand the path of knowledge (Jñāna Yoga) has the tendency of producing dry intellectualism. He believed in an integration of faith and knowledge, and for him it was Sri Ramakrishna, his master, who was the epitome of one such harmony. In contrast to Shankara, the Swami in an effort to make Vedanta practical incorporates the importance of work as well. Shankara, in order to establish his Advaitic philosophy states that the world is *mithyā*: it is as unreal as a dream because it does not have an independent existence, is superimposed on Brahman, and is everchanging. Swami Vivekananda brings a new interpretation to this position, which actually is not at variance with that of Shankara’s. He states that in reality the world is not the way it appears to the five senses (which is in consonance with Shankara’s position); however, it does not mean that one has to abandon it. One can work in the world with a sense of passionate detachment, seeing God in everything, performing desireless action, and surrendering all the results of one’s actions to the Divine — the one non-dual Brahman. He thus introduces the concept of Karma Yoga into Advaita Vedanta, and takes a philosophical position dissimilar to that of Shankara who was quite categorical in stating that work or action is not for gaining knowledge but is a means to purify oneself, and that it is only through the use of logic,

intellect, and discernment that one can attain knowledge (Saraswati, 1997). However, it is not for world transformation that he brings the Vedanta of Shankara together with Karma Yoga but for liberation. He is quite convinced that the world is neither evil nor good — it depends upon the mind and circumstances through which it is seen — and it is like a dog’s tail: straighten it as much as you want but it will curl back again as soon as you let it go. We also see that, despite being Advaitic in his approach, he brings all the other yogas to the same platform with respect to their philosophy and efficacy for attaining liberation or *moksha*. This is in contrast to the situation before where the proponents and adherents of the different yogas were not in agreement with one another in the sense that though each system was a complete method in itself, if practised to completion could lead to the same result of liberation. He lectured on all the predominant forms of the yogas prevalent at his time — Jñāna, Karma, Bhakti and Rāja.

Each one of our Yogas is fitted to make man perfect even without the help of the others, because they have all the same goal in view. The Yogas of work, of wisdom, and of devotion are all capable of serving as direct and independent means for the attainment of Moksha. (Vivekananda, 1970a, p. 93)

In addition, we also see the glimpses of integration of Jñāna Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and Rāja Yoga in his writings. He states that the simultaneous practice of all the above yogas produce the noblest kind of beings and that each yoga when individually practised to the fullest also brings the results of all the other yogas — for example, the practice of Bhakti Yoga when taken to completion will result in knowledge that Jñāna Yoga aims at and vice-versa. In the following passage we see a remarkable similarity as to how Sri Aurobindo integrates the three yogas — Jñāna, Karma, and Bhakti — to evolve the principle and practice of the “Triple Path”:

Three things are necessary for a bird to fly — the two wings and the tail as a rudder for steering. Jñāna (knowledge) is the one wing, Bhakti (Love) is the other, and Yoga is the tail that keeps up the balance.... Each seems to lay a great stress upon his own peculiar method of worship, forgetting that with perfect love true knowledge is bound to come even unsought, and that from perfect knowledge true love is inseparable. (Vivekananda, 1970c, pp. 33-34)

Thus, in the lectures and writings of Swami Vivekananda, we see that he is integrating the different yogas under the larger umbrella of Practical Vedanta; however it was not a synthesis comparable to that of Sri Aurobindo’s, for Sri

Aurobindo synthesised the different yogas by identifying their central principles and creating something anew from them. The difference that I see between Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo with respect to integration of the different yogas is that of, chemically speaking, mixture and compound — in a mixture, the different elements retain their individuality but in a compound they come together to lose their individual identities in order to produce something novel (see Organ, 1989 for similarities on the differences between integration, synthesis, and reconciliation). Nevertheless, one can say that Swami Vivekananda — and Sri Ramakrishna — did lay the foundation for the larger integration and synthesis to emerge validating the central thesis of this book that Sri Aurobindo’s ideas are an evolution, furtherance, and extension of the accomplishments of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna. In no uncertain terms the different ideas of Integral Yoga are scattered and inchoate in the writings of Swami Vivekananda, though the principle and philosophy of his Practical Vedanta are a completely developed and well-formulated system in its own right.³

Integration of the World With the Beyond

While both Sri Aurobindo and Sri Ramakrishna state that this world is real, Shankara held that the world is *mithyā* or unreal. Swami Vivekananda’s position is in-between. For him the world is neither real nor unreal. Speaking about his conception of the world to an audience in London, he states,

“It has, therefore, no real existence; it has no unchangeable, immovable, infinite existence. Nor can it be called non-existence, seeing that it exists, and we have to work in and through it. It is a mixture of existence and non-existence”. (Vivekananda, 1970b, p. 91).

This dialectical tension between the world being real and unreal can be understood from the Swami’s allegiance to the Advaita philosophy, which holds the world to be more unreal than a dream, and to his Guru’s pronouncements that the world is very much real. Further, he is convinced that, since good and evil are not absolute but relative qualities, the sum total of good and evil in the world will remain the same. Then why should one do good to the world? His answer is very simple: To reduce misery for oneself and to attain *moksha*.

³ Before I conclude this section a word or two may suffice with regard to the comparison between Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in terms of the synthesis of yogas. Whereas Sri Ramakrishna was essentially a bhakta, the Swami was a Vedantin. Sri Ramakrishna gave primacy to Bhakti whereas the Swami to Jñāna. However, in both of them we find an integration of Advaita Vedanta and Karma Yoga.

Almost immediately, however, a contradiction emerges for he states that by understanding the relative nature of the world, one will be able to work with more zest, patience, and less fanaticism and his or her interactions with others will produce better interpersonal understanding creating more love, light, and freedom in the world. What I am trying to imply is that there is a serious attempt on his part to change and make the world better, even if he was not fully able to reconcile a philosophy that primarily focuses on liberation (Advaita Vedanta) with an orientation that can bring about a progressive and permanent change within the world where there is less misery, suffering, and exploitation on an absolute scale. At the same time, he wants to make Vedanta practical by bringing it into the world from the confining space of the Himalayas, cave, forest, and monasteries — the Vedanta according to him needed to come down from the heavens and flow into the world. He wanted the Indians to learn arts and sciences from the West and combine it with the diverse spiritual knowledge present in India in order to create a better world. Spirituality for the betterment of humanity was his clarion call. Addressing his brother monks, he says:

In our country, the old idea is to sit in a cave and meditate and die. To go ahead of others in salvation is wrong. One must learn sooner or later than one cannot get salvation if one does not try to seek the salvation of his brothers. You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment you must be ready to go and cultivate these fields... You must be prepared to explain the difficult intricacies of the Shastras now, and the next moment to go and sell the produce of the fields in the market. You must be prepared for all menial services, not only here, but elsewhere also.
(Vivekananda, 1970c, p. 447)

On countless occasions, one finds him addressing in his lectures the poor condition of the downtrodden masses in India, for an utter need to raise them from all the infirmities that they had been subjected to under various social laws and economic hardships, for making them educated, for opening the gates of the temples and for making all scriptures accessible to them. He lectured profusely and begged from the rich — from the Maharajas and princes — so that he could alleviate the poverty and the misery of the poor. Changing the poverty-stricken state of India was very close to his heart as can be gauged from his following words:

I do not believe in a God, who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal

bliss in heaven! Pooh! India is to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread, and the evil of priestcraft is to be removed. No priestcraft, no social tyranny! More bread, more opportunity for everybody! Our young fools organise meetings to get more power from the English. They only laugh. None deserves liberty who is not ready to give liberty. (Vivekananda, 1970d, p. 368)

As far as the origins of Integral Yoga are concerned, this progression of thought from the world being unreal in Shankara's expositions to real in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy with this in-between stance of the Swami stating that it is neither real nor unreal speaks volumes. Integral Yoga is very clear about seeking to bridge the gap between the spiritual and the material. By integrating Tantra with Vedanta, Sri Aurobindo is able to accomplish the aforementioned objective completely: By aligning with the Will and the Force of the Divine Mother, one can progressively manifest the Divine in the world. However, in the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda, though the attempt is made to make a philosophy of renunciation and liberation more in sync with bringing about social and terrestrial transformation, the philosophy of *Māyāvāda* becomes a handicap in a complete reconciliation (Sen, 2000 makes similar comments). By refuting *Māyāvāda*, Sri Aurobindo brings about a complete reconciliation; however, Swami Vivekananda lays the foundation towards the accomplishment. Despite contradictions, the Swami does make an attempt to square the split between the world of the spirit with the world of matter.

Unity in Diversity of Religions

The primary Vedantic idea that it is the One non-dual Brahman that has become the many and that it is the One that manifests in myriad ways, forms the basis of Swami Vivekananda's idea of a Universal Religion based on the principle of unity in diversity of religions. According to him, no religion and no book has an exclusive monopoly on God and Truth, no religion has captured the infinity of the Divine in totality, and all religions have a soul behind them which is unique to them. However, the existence of this difference does not make them contrary to each other but complementary and supplementary. Opposing the dichotomous idea that followers of different faiths have held and still hold that their religion alone is true or truer than the others, Swami Vivekananda favours a multiplication and proliferation of faiths, for he holds that variety and diversity are a sign of life: "I pray that they may multiply so that at last there will be as many sects as human beings, and each one will have his own method, his individual method of thought in religion" (Vivekananda, 1970b, p. 364). In addition,

he avers that one path, one way, and one method cannot be applicable to the entire humanity since there is a tremendous diversity in the ways the calling of “higher” or spiritual life appeals to different people — what does not agree with the inner constitution of an individual becomes oppressive to him or her. Apart from this psychological dimension, historically proselytising religions have caused much mayhem and bloodshed in the name of religion and God. Just like Sri Aurobindo, he holds that different religions take one slice of the Universal Truth, and instead of seeing it as partial feel that it is complete. When they do not see each other as complementary, they become adversaries leading to disputes and wars. Thus in his scheme of Universal Religion, different religions and sects, even though contradictory, can coexist in a true spirit of unity-in-diversity and acceptance while allowing different people to practise different paths, religions, and sects according to their constitution and inner calling. He is very clear in that there would be no universal philosophy, mythology, and rituals common to all religions. However, what can weave all these religions together is appreciation and respect for their inherent diversity. It is only in admiration of the inherent diversity that a universal human-hood can come about, for diversity, variety, and plurality are a sign of life. Sameness and universality without differentiation will lead to death and extinction of the universe. For him it is Advaita Vedanta with its non-dual philosophy that gives the platform and the common ground to unify and harmonise all different religions and different kinds of human aspirations to unite with something “higher” and divine. Throughout his lectures there are countless instances where he is most appreciative of Christ and the Buddha, speaking of them in highest terms despite being highly critical of the fanaticism that followers of different faiths have showered upon the ones different from their own. Similarly with respect to individuals: since the inner constitution of individuals varies from one another, there cannot be one way and one path for everybody. The Universal Religion should have enough flexibility and elasticity to allow for diverse paths based on varying inner appeal for different individuals, for according to Swami Vivekananda different paths when taken to the extreme result in an experience of the same reality — which is in contradiction to Sri Aurobindo, who holds that the Divine has many planes and facets of existence, and what one experiences depends upon his or her aspiration, intention, work, destiny, and grace:

If there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or

Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for every human being, from the lowest grovelling savage not far removed from the brute, to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognise divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be created in aiding humanity to realise its own true, divine nature.

(Vivekananda, 1970a, p. 19)

However, there is a major contradiction that emerges in the writings of Swami Vivekananda. Like a typical Advaita Vedantist, he is sometimes highly critical of the dualistic (Dvaita) and the qualified monistic (Viśiṣṭādvaita) versions of the spiritual universe, sometimes calling Dvaita crude or arguing to refute the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy. In contrast, Sri Aurobindo holds that all of these different versions of the spiritual universe are true: it is the same One that also appears as God to others (who approach Him in such a way), and since it manifests itself on many different planes, the idea which Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy propagates that there are planes of universal matter, universal thought, universal mind, and universal soul supporting the universe and an individual (an individual existence is supposed to be the microcosm of the universal microcosm) is also true. Despite this, the Swami, was not an advocate of inter-religious conversion or for people switching to his faith. On the contrary, he encouraged the followers of each religion to assimilate the spirit of others while preserving their own individuality and following.

(To be continued)

(The above text is an excerpt from one of the chapters of the author's book *'The evolution of Integral Yoga'*, published by VDM verlag, 2008. Our grateful thanks to the author for his kind permission to reproduce the relevant sections from this chapter)

The Experience of the Psychic Being and its Mutation – Part. I

When the psychic being bursts its agelong veil and grows towards a supramental being.

Alain Grandcolas

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Prologue

The Mother's own psychic being "burst out" unexpectedly at the end of December 1906, when she was 28 years old. She narrated this sudden happening to Satprem. It was

"the first contact... To have it (just to give you an idea) took me a year of

exclusive concentration on finding that within myself – that is, to enter into contact with the immanent God. I did nothing but that, thought of nothing but that, wanted nothing but that....

It was New Year's Eve and I decided: "Within the coming year." I looked at the sky and there, just as I looked, was a shooting star. You know the tradition: if you formulate an aspiration just as you see a shooting star, before the star disappears, it will be realised within the year. And there, just as I opened the door, was a shooting star – I was totally in my aspiration: "Union with the inner Divine." And before the end of December of the following year, I had the experience.

But I was entirely concentrated on that. I was in Paris, and I did nothing else but that; when I walked down the street, I was thinking only of that. One day, as I was crossing the Boulevard Saint Michel, I was almost run over because I was thinking of nothing but that – concentrating, concentrating ... like sitting in front of a closed door, and it was painful! (intense gesture to the chest). Physically painful, from the pressure. And then suddenly, for no apparent reason – I was neither more concentrated nor anything else – poof! It opened... It didn't just last for hours, it lasted for months! It didn't leave me, that light, that dazzling light, that light and immensity. And the sense of THAT willing, THAT knowing, THAT ruling the whole life, THAT guiding everything – since then, this sense has never left me for a minute. And always, whenever I had a decision to make, I would simply stop for a second and receive the indication from there".¹

Many disciples are under the impression that becoming aware of the psychic being is the result of a long process which started many lives before and may need some more rebirths to complete. This impression is supported by what the Mother told in 1955:

"It is only with the sadhana and a very persistent effort that one succeeds in having a conscious contact with his psychic being... In almost all cases, a very very sustained effort is needed to become aware of one's psychic being. Usually it is considered that if one can do it in thirty years one is very lucky—thirty years of sustained efforts, I say".²

But something has definitely changed in the world as the Mother stated in February 1973, just three months before she stopped definitely meeting people and writing. At that time she received some teachers of the Ashram school and invited them to find their psychic being and to unite with it:

"If each one of you could find his psychic being and unite with it, all problems would be solved...Normally it takes an entire lifetime, or even several lives in some cases. But here, in the present conditions, you can do it in ... a few months. Those who have an ardent aspiration can do it in a few MONTHS".³

This essay is the result of an initial search and interview of people who can state that they know their psychic being. After having met fifteen of them, it was found that they had several common points which were worthwhile to be outlined. Unhappily, it has not been a regular question and answer session with a proper questionnaire since several parameters have emerged. Nevertheless, it was decided to publish part of the narration of these fifteen people who state they had at one point or presently have the knowledge of their psychic being. Most of the narrations here have been approved by the persons concerned. It is interesting to note that all of the fifteen persons have stated that the knowledge of the psychic being came through a sudden and unexpected experience, which corroborates what the Mother has told several times. No interviewee has stated that he knows his psychic being after a slow emerging process. The initial sudden awareness lasted varying periods — from one day to some days to some months but not one year — then it disappeared (except in one recent case). For some of them, it came back one or several times for a certain period, no longer in a dramatic way as it occurred for the first opening, but in a soft and gradual manner. It could easily be recognised since the taste of the psychic being was already known.

One assumption is that the “*present conditions*” mentioned by the Mother in her talk of 1973 have been triggered by the descent of a supramental substance on 29 February. The Mother stated that on that evening the supramental consciousness and force and light descended into the earth. One year later she commemorated the first birthday of that event by saying that: “*a new world has been born.*” We wonder if one feature of the coming new world is not an acceleration of the blooming of the psychic being and its sudden bursting forth, even without a sustained effort in this life. The results of this very limited survey seem to illustrate this statement.

This essay is dedicated to those who have a thirst to know their psychic being and also to those who had the first contact and are eager to contact it again. The first section is an attempt to describe several phases for the awareness of the psychic being. The second section describes what has happened to several interviewees at the moment they suddenly became aware of their psychic being.

The third section describes what remained of the experience afterwards. The fourth section gives some consolidated results of a very limited survey. Then, the final four sections describe how the psychic being is experienced in our physical body and how it is meant to mutate into the next species, the supramental being.

The survey refers to those interviewed as either a “visitor” (to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram or Auroville), an “Ashramite,” or an “Aurovilian,” a status they had at the time of the happening. One who is called a “visitor” in the survey may now be an “Ashramite.”

SECTION 1

BECOMING AWARE OF THE PSYCHIC BEING

For the clarity of the survey, it may be stated that three levels of contact with the psychic being are being distinguished. The psychic being may manifest through a sudden and unexpected happening, through some touches in certain parts of the being or, more frequently, through an influence. The full process of emergence takes long, as Sri Aurobindo writes:

"The psychic being emerges slowly in most men, even after taking up sadhana . . . One has to wait till the necessary process has gone far enough before it can **burst its agelong veil** and come in front to control the nature [emphasis added]".⁴

1.To “know” one’s psychic being in its entirety is always the result of a sudden and unexpected happening.

Several times, the Mother compared the sudden identification with the psychic being to a chicken coming out of the egg:

"One is shut up in a shell and, inside it, something is happening, like the chick in the egg. . . Something is happening in the shell, but outside one sees nothing. And it is only when all is ready that there comes the capacity to pierce the shell and to be born into the light of day. . . I don’t think one can go through gradually, I don’t think it is something which slowly wears and wears away until one can see through it. I haven’t had an instance of this so far [emphasis added].

There is rather a kind of accumulation of power inside, an intensification of

the need. . . One is like an explosive that nothing can resist, and one burst out from one's prison".⁵

The sudden experience of the psychic being is in another dimension. Some features of it may be ineffable because there is "no point of recognition" in the sadhak. It can be translated into words but only those who have experienced it, who have "tasted" it, may understand the description.

A visitor to the Ashram compared this sudden event to the fission of an atom in order to express, in an image, that something unknown and very powerful was hidden under some surface lid. For a long time, scientists were in contact with the atom without being aware that an atomic energy existed. One day there was a fission of the atom, something sudden, very powerful, emitting an energy of a different nature. In the same manner, inside this psychic space, an individual may not know that another being, the psychic being, is hidden within him and is waiting for the right time to emerge, suddenly.

In the next section there will be the narration of what happened to some of the 16 persons who have described that sudden experience after which they state: "Now, I know my psychic being".

2.A sudden experience of the psychic being may also be the result of touching some parts of the being which are under a psychic influence, though this is not yet a direct contact with the soul.

Some readers may wonder whether the interviewee narrates a true contact with the psychic being or whether it is an experience of the inner consciousness (inner physical, inner vital, inner mental) or an experience of the higher (spiritual) consciousness. This question is valid and it explains why three of the interviewees, who had some experience which they linked to an identification with their psychic being, were not retained as having had a direct contact with it. The Mother comments:

" very often, when one touches certain parts of the mind which are under the psychic influence and full of the light and the joy of that light, or when one touches certain very pure and very high parts of the emotive being which has the most generous, most unselfish emotions, one has the impression of being in contact with one's soul. But this is not the true soul; it is not the soul in its very essence. These are parts of the being under its influence and manifesting something of it.

So very often people enter into contact with these parts and this gives them

illuminations, great joy, revelations and they feel they have found their soul . . . and then it gets veiled and one wonders: "How is it that I touched my soul and now have fallen back into that state of ignorance and inconscience." But that's because one had not touched one's soul, one had touched those parts of the being which are under the influence of the soul and manifest something of it".⁶

3.Usually the psychic being is felt as a presence and an influence although it is not individualised as a being in one's consciousness.

"In every one, even at the very beginning, this spiritual presence . . . is there".⁷ In most people concerned with the psychic being, it manifests itself as a presence in the heart region, more or less living, depending how the movements which contradict its expression within oneself are rejected and how its intimations are followed. A warmth is physically felt. If we think of the Mother's analogy of the chick in an egg, it is as if the shell of the egg is more or less warm.

Anybody concerned with the spiritual life perceives, in that region, some inner indication. Those who are following Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's inner disciplines will learn to give great importance to that presence, which will grow in their inner consciousness and more and more become a reference point for all their actions, thoughts and feelings. It will be perceived as an indication of the psychic disapproval or approval of their behaviour.

For some, the psychic presence is living and they may wonder if they know their psychic being or not. The answer from the Mother is clear:

"There are people who come and ask you: 'Am I conscious of my psychic being?' One can tell them: 'This itself is the proof that you are not because if you are, you can no longer ask this'".⁸

SECTION 2

WHEN THE PSYCHIC BEING BURSTS ITS VEIL

What happens at that instant when the psychic being suddenly "bursts its age long veil"?⁴ Anybody who experiences a sudden contact with his psychic being has a personal, clear and living memory of that event. Two common

In analysing the contents of the interviews, some errors of appreciation of the quality of the contact with the psychic being may have occurred, but it is felt that they do not alter the global observations of this essay.

features are always there: a certitude of knowing one's psychic being, and an immense unexpected and untriggered joy. Eight other outstanding experiences, feelings or facts may accompany this happening — some are specific to the bursting of the psychic being, some are common to other ranges of spiritual experiences.

1. One common feature of this sudden identification is that it brings the certitude of knowing one's psychic being.

The Mother commented:

"This is an absolutely tangible experience, something more concrete than the most concrete object, more concrete than a blow on your head, something more real than anything whatever . . . When people ask me how one may know whether he is in contact with his psychic being . . . it makes me laugh; when it happens to you . . . you can no longer ask any questions".⁹

For two Ashramites and one visitor, it was clear immediately that they had contacted their psychic being and that they could state that they know their psychic being.

For six other interviewees, their intellectual knowledge of the concept of the psychic being was not sufficient and they could not recognise it immediately. One visitor to the Ashram was quite surprised by the experience, since it did not correspond to whatever he had read on the psychic being before; there was no "dazzling light" (he did not see any light) nor any "reversal of consciousness." There was the awareness of a new "being" which was more real than his own flesh, but no reversal! A European person who had just finished reading "*The Adventure of Consciousness*" by Satprem had an experience after which he "knew" his heart. It was quite concrete. Later on, he understood that it was his psychic being. Two ladies, one in Europe and one in the US, could not recognise it since they did not know that a psychic being was inhabiting them. The latter one now states, "without any doubt I know my psychic being!"

Among the eighteen people who related that they know their psychic being, two of them stated that its knowledge was not the result of a sudden happening but the awareness had always been there. They became aware of this fact only when they read about it. The first one, an Indian visitor, mentioned that when she read about the psychic being, it was clear for her that it had been always present in her and is always there. The second one is an Indian Ashramite who came to Pondicherry with her parents and was brought up in the Ashram

school at the time the Mother was closely supervising it.

Among the interviewees, several other people were well aware of their psychic as an influence, but they answered negatively when asked if they "know" their psychic being.

2. The second common feature for this sudden event is that it triggers a great joy without any external cause.

The Mother described this event in this way: "it is an experience that gives a very concrete joy; at the moment of identification one truly feels a very, very great joy".¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo writes even, "it is true that nothing can give so much happiness and joy".¹¹

Amal Kiran, who joined the Ashram in 1927, narrates: "my paramount aspiration . . . was to have the opening of the heart – what Sri Aurobindo calls the psychic being. This gave me an intense feeling of joy that was self-existent".¹² An Ashramite, who was going to be operated, experienced suddenly what he perceived as the opening of his psychic being; it was accompanied by "a joy of an intensity [he] had never felt in his life." In a lighter vein he added: "I could not expect that it would happen to a rascal like me!" A lady in Europe who was delivering her first child spoke of an "explosion" of joy, a "bursting of love and joy without cause in spite of the pain of the delivery." A visitor in the Ashram who was reading a letter of Sri Aurobindo suddenly experienced an identification "filling the whole body with a great and pure joy." A lady was looking at the deceased body of a dear cousin when she experienced "an explosion of profound overwhelming joy."

All these descriptions of the joy are part of a global experience and are examples of a total or partial contact with the psychic being.

3. The experience often brings the awareness that the individual harbours something immortal in him.

The living awareness that our true self is immortal and cannot die is a sign of the quality of the psychic experience:

"one has the feeling of having always been and of being for eternity. That is when one has touched the core of the soul".¹³

The Mother gives one description of the moment when the psychic being

"bursts its agelong veil", an expression by Sri Aurobindo:

"the moment you are in contact with your psychic being, you have the feeling of immortality, of having always been and being always, eternally".¹⁴

A guest of the Ashram who discovered his psychic being in a sudden happening stated that he got the knowledge that "this psychic being has always been and precedes the birth of this body. It will not die with this body. Nobody can ever dismiss this certitude."

This feeling of immortality is well described in *Savitri* through Aswapathy's psychic experience:

*"He feels his substance of undying self
And loses his kinship to mortality".¹⁵*

The word "substance" is very important since it is not a feeling of some subtle physical but an awareness of some physical reality.

4. At the time of the bursting, some people narrate that they have become aware of their "true being."

In 1958, the Mother makes interestingly the difference between the spiritual "presence" which exists in every one and the psychic "being":

"we call "being" an organised entity, fully conscious of itself, independent and having the power of asserting itself and ruling the rest of the nature... In every one, even at the very beginning, this spiritual presence is there".¹⁶

When a visitor became aware of his psychic being, he discovered at the same time that this psychic being was in fact himself, his real "I." He started to speak of himself in the third person, as "he" instead of "I," since the one who was talking was the outer envelope of the inner being he had identified as himself, the newly discovered psychic being. A Parisian lady, who hardly knew about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, knew with certainty that her physical body was not "her."

It is interesting to note how Sri Aurobindo describes the moment when *Savitri* discovers her soul. The first section of the concerned canto finishes with the line:

"There suddenly she met her secret soul."

Then, after one blank line, the poet resumes with solemnity:

"A being stood immortal in transience
Deathless dallying with momentary things".¹⁷

5. After the identification, some are aware of "a reversal of consciousness."

After a psychic contact, some people are aware of a reversal of consciousness, something difficult to understand if it is not experienced:

"suddenly — perhaps because one is sufficiently prepared, perhaps simply because the time has come, and it has been so decreed — suddenly, when such an experience occurs, its result in the part of the being where it takes place is a complete reversal of consciousness; it is a very clear, very concrete phenomenon. The best way of describing it is this: a complete reversal . . . Those who have experienced this reversal know what I am speaking about; but if one hasn't, one can't understand . . . It is usually the first contact with the psychic being which brings this experience".¹⁸

One visitor expresses it in this manner. Earlier, when he was "influenced" by the psychic, he would consult the psychic space to have a psychic indication. But after that his psychic has burst out, he goes within the psychic space and looks at his body activities as those of a human being who is not himself. Yes, difficult to understand! An Aurovilian stated that in 1972 he had the Mother's darshan, and at the time of leaving, She opened her eyes and suddenly "everything turned over."

Another time, the Mother tried to describe this important experience:

"a total reversal of consciousness comparable with what happens to light when it passes through a prism. Or it is as though you were turning a ball inside out, which cannot be done except in the fourth dimension".¹⁹

Some reader may wonder if the sudden awareness of one's "true being" does not bring also a "reversal of consciousness". Considering whatever has been read and heard, it can be told that the bursting out of the psychic being can bring only the first experience or both of them.

6. There is the feeling and certitude that one's psychic being cannot be touched by hostile forces.

The Mother once related her arrival in Théon's residence in Algeria, less than one year after she had discovered her psychic being:

“suddenly, without warning, he [Théon] spun around, planted himself in front of me, and said, ‘Now you are at my mercy. Aren't you afraid?’ Just like that. So I looked at him, smiled and replied, ‘I'm never afraid. I have the Divine here (Mother touches Her heart)’.”²⁰

In the same vein, She said that a person united with his psychic being is:

“almost if not totally free from external influences; for, being conscious when these influences come, he sees them: those that seem to him to harmonise with his inner development and normal growth he accepts; those which are opposed he refuses”.²¹

A visitor who became aware of his psychic being inside himself suddenly got the strong conviction that hostile forces cannot touch this “being” and cannot influence him as long as he has his psychic being as a reference.

This feeling is described by Sri Aurobindo who wrote that the psychic being:

“is the only part that cannot be touched by the hostile forces and their suggestions”.²²

7. Often, the psychic being creates an increased consciousness and awareness.

A visitor spoke of “an increased consciousness, a feeling that the purpose of life is this consciousness. This acute consciousness makes everything become more concrete and living.” An Ashramite spoke of “a truer and more vivid consciousness. The world is seen in a different way. Everything had a luminous glow in it. Everything was conscious and alive.” He had a different relationship with all things: human beings, animals and even plants.

This experience reminds us of what the Mother once wrote about the psychic awareness:

“What seemed inert suddenly becomes full of life, stones quicken, plants feel and will and suffer, animal speaks in a language more or less inarticulate, but clear and expressive; everything is animated by a marvelous consciousness without time and limit. And this is only one aspect of the psychic realisation”;²³

8. For many persons, the bursting includes an apparition or even an inrush of light.

“an inner door will suddenly open and you will emerge into a dazzling splendour”.²⁴, the Mother writes. The seeing of light is one of the experiences which are triggered by a spiritual descent, but it is also triggered by the bursting of the psychic.

One Aurovilian described “an ocean of light,” another saw a white light which was flowing everywhere, a third spoke of a strong white light at the level of the heart. An Ashramite saw a red flame, as large as a thumb, within his heart; this flame went towards Sri Aurobindo and Mother's photos, which were bathed in full white light before him; the flame then came back to his heart. A person, who hardly knew anything about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, writes: “when this bursting first occurred I connected with a light in my heart centre that was so incredibly brilliant. It seemed so brilliant that it was beyond colour.”

9. There may be also a sudden awareness that one has always been guided.

One may feel that one has been guided by the psychic or by the Mother or by something undefined. One Aurovilian said that since that time, he has had the feeling that he has been always guided, that everything is arranged. Another Aurovilian thought that “there is a thread with an origin long before and that the psychic being is directing in spite of all obstacles.” A visitor said: “the psychic being indicates that it has always been there to overlook circumstances and nothing can happen in the future without its sanction.”

A visitor stated with conviction that the Mother and his psychic being are one. This is confirmed by these words of Sri Aurobindo: “There is within you a psychic being which is divine, directly a part of the Mother”.²⁵

Nevertheless, it is worthwhile noting that during the time of the experience, few interviewees made an identification between the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and their psychic being.

10 Powerful sensations are frequently mentioned, varying from one person to the other.

While describing the bursting forth of their psychic being, most persons put emphasis on strong feelings or sensations which were often still vivid in their memory. For one it was a feeling of “richness” which remained for some time; for another a feeling of “plenitude”. One lady will always repeat the words: “stillness, stillness”. For the lady delivering a child it was “a very intense emotional moment and at the same time a great stillness, both were together.” Several of these attributes are mentioned in a description of the soul given by the Mother:

“something warm, quiet, rich in substance and very still and very full, like a sweetness — that is the soul. . . A kind of plenitude which gives the feeling of something complete”.²⁶

The word “sweetness” is a characteristic of all the persons who have had this contact. In fact, a definite psychic sweetness emanates from ALL of them.

11. A sudden contact with the psychic being is one of the rare and intense spiritual experiences which may happen with open eyes in the midst of some activity.

This experience can occur while one is alone or while interacting with people, with open eyes or with closed eyes and does not disappear when one opens one’s eyes. Usually, spiritual experiences are characterised by a definite spiritual change in consciousness and a specific sensation within the body (peace, force, waves, current and electricity) or a vision. But as soon as the person having the experience opens his eyes and joins the active life, it vanishes somehow; this is not the case with the psychic experience.

We already mentioned how it happened to the Mother when she was 28 years old: “One day, as I was crossing the Boulevard Saint-Michel . . . suddenly, for no apparent reason — I was neither more concentrated nor anything else — poof! It opened”. In our survey, more than half of the sudden emergences happened with open eyes, sometimes in the presence of other people quite unaware of the intense experience taking place. One mother was delivering her child; an Ashramite got the bursting when the thumb of an elderly ashramite was pressed on his forehead; a visitor had it alone while reading a letter of Sri Aurobindo; a young American visitor had it while receiving a fierce look from the Mother into his heart: “Her left eye appeared to begin to spin around as

though it were a drill, and She bore down into my deepest heart right down to the level of my chest” one time, two times, “in a third time with an ever greater intensity. The obstruction ripped open. Her consciousness went right into my heart centre and opened it. It was an incredibly powerful experience”.²⁷

SECTION 3

AFTER THE BURSTING FORTH

What remains after this first experience with the psychic being? A permanent contact is there and also the feeling that the new state is permanent and will always last. However, experience teaches it is not permanent, that it may withdraw after a time which may depend on the initial intensity but also on the ability to keep it. The inner preparation through a certain discipline or yoga and the understanding of the phenomenon may be two important elements to help the body or the consciousness to “digest”, absorb or imbibe the experience and avoid some action detrimental to its presence. That is why it is very important to know the fragility of this new state of being so that, when it happens, proper steps are taken to nurture it as long as possible and get the maximum psychic nourishment.

Some visitor mentioned that he narrated in a diary his sensations and feelings during the time the psychic was fully living and the description is rich and quite evocative. It has helped, at a later stage, to relive its vibration and some of the feelings and sensations experienced during that moment. Another remembers that this state seemed so “normal” at that time that one does not think to write about it! He was also wondering if there was not a risk of “mentalising” the experience and thus diluting it.

1. How long does this experience remain living? How does it vanish?

More specifically, how long does this experience carry with it its own reality and force? What is the duration of the various sensations and feelings? The Mother answers: “it is difficult for a human being to keep up a constant contact with his psychic.”²⁸ The identification with the psychic being may last some minutes, some hours, some days, some months, or even three years for one of the persons interviewed, before getting clouded (but never disappeared). After the experience, one usually lives with it in a permanent manner up to the time, one fine morning, we discover that it is not living any longer and we have to make a conscious concentration to become aware of it. We note that for one

person, the awareness is still living after eight months and we hope that the reading of this essay will help her to keep it longer!

The question was put to the Mother: “Once the psychic has come to the front, can it withdraw again?” She answered,

“Generally one has a series of experiences of identification. Very intense the first time, the sensation of identification gradually diminishes and then one day you find that it has disappeared. Still you must not be disturbed since it is quite a common phenomenon. But next time — the second time — the contact is more easily obtained. And then comes a moment, which is not very far off, when as soon as one concentrates and aspires, one gets a contact. One may not have the power of keeping it all the time, but one can get it at will”.²⁹

For the Mother Her “first contact”, when She was 28 years old: “didn’t just last for hours, it lasted for months”.¹

A visitor in the Ashram has spoken of several identifications and dispersions on the same day, having the impression that his ego was mentalising and was responsible for clouding it, but the original sensation came back often. On the following days, it was still a game of hide and seek, but less living, up to the time it vanished.

For an Ashramite, who had been prepared by some spiritual discipline, the awareness of the new state of being lasted several months. Peace emanated from him and was felt around and it was reported to him. He thought it would always last but it faded gradually. One day, he became unexpectedly aware that it had withdrawn. He attributed it to a flaw in his own sadhana, which may also be a subjective explanation. But for sure, he may still be able to connect with it at will.

An elderly Ashramite even said that the contact had taken place 100 times (!) Considering the content of the meeting, we definitely believe him!

In all these cases, it is difficult to tell how much the circumstances are responsible for the loss of the psychic consciousness or if the psychic consciousness was doomed to fade in a more or less short time.

2. Once the psychic vibration and atmosphere is known, one is in a better position to discriminate psychic perceptions and vital/emotional feelings.

Once a contact has been established, once the veil has been pierced even

slightly, once the taste of the psychic is known, it is always possible, at will, within some seconds, to feel again that presence, that influence, the quality of that vibration and the nature of that substance. One has gained a pretty sure way to recognise the psychic influence:

“if one among you has had the experience, he knows in this way what comes from the Divine, and necessarily . . . he knows perforce all that does not . . . It is only after this experience that one knows, not before”.³⁰

Somebody writes: “The psychic feelings are more subtle and have a sweetness to them”. They are very distinctly different from my emotional feelings which seem to be dependent on something and seem to be more coarse or dense in nature. For an Aurovilian, the psychic has become a permanent “reference” point. For one Ashramite, it can be recognised since it has a “different nature;” it can no longer be confused with something else.

3.The consciousness of our inner being has definitely changed.

The Mother explains that when the reversal of consciousness has taken place in the psychic being:

“the relation of the consciousness with the other parts of the being and with the outer world is as if completely changed. Absolutely like an overturning. And that reversal no longer comes back to the same old place, the consciousness no longer returns to its former position”.³¹

4.During the identification the sense of our immortality is quite living.

During the period of the identification, the perception that one part of us is immortal is quite living and will

“bring you the certitude of immortality, the concrete experience that you have always lived and always shall live, that external forms alone perish and that these forms are, in relation to what you are in reality, like clothes that are thrown away when worn out”.³²

When the experience has vanished, it remains the mental remembrance and the certitude that our true being is immortal.

The relation with death has changed. The fear of the death disappears. One

visitor in the Ashram, some days after such a psychic experience, came down with a high unidentified fever. The Ashram doctor was alarmed and the Mother was informed. That visitor felt that his consciousness was withdrawing from his legs and arms, starting from their extremities, as if death was invading the body, going towards the heart. With interest and even curiosity, and without the least fear, he remained concentrated into his living psychic being which, he knew, cannot die. He was wondering what would happen when the numbness/death would reach his soul which cannot become numb. But he lost consciousness. One hour later, he was awakened and the feeling of numbness/death was no longer there. This experience illustrates the vividness of this sense of immortality and its power since he was in a position to look at death as a witness.

There was an Ashramite who was fearful of a life-endangering heart surgery. Suddenly, he got a contact with his psychic being. He had the strong feeling that his body was the robe of his eternal psychic being and he was no longer worried. Later, he could then go undisturbed to the operation theatre. For him, “death was no longer a concern”. His state of consciousness was illustrating the Mother's words: The Mother said “it gives the certitude of immortality, the concrete experience that you have always lived and always shall live, that external forms alone perish and that these forms are, in relation to what you are in reality, like clothes that are thrown away when worn out.”¹⁶ Later, he could then go undisturbed to the operation theatre. For him, “death was no longer a concern”. His state of consciousness is illustrating the Mother's words quoted above.

5. A permanent state of happiness without cause may also remain quite long.

One sadhak comments that “during the period of awareness of one's psychic being, when one is so full of happiness, we make very little personal effort for progress since everything is so spontaneously beautiful. We accept any adverse circumstance without fighting since such things become secondary: nothing really matters.” He considers that it is “the Mother who gives us such an effortless state of happiness to show how beautiful the life could be and then She withdraws the experience so that we can start the work of transformation consciously.”

An Aurovilian, during his third living psychic period, was aware of a constant state of happiness, from the time he awoke in the morning (kissing his pillow to tell thank you to the new day to come!). Every hour, he would remember how happy he was to reside in Auroville . . . up to an overnight withdrawal!

6. During the identification, there is the feeling that whatever we experience is quite natural and must also be felt by those around us.

This is another unique feature of the psychic experience. As long as the experience is living, the one undergoing the experience feels that many people around him must have or share the same feelings, must be experiencing the same thing and be living with it. It is as if we are close to a tree with a lot of jasmine flowers and we breathe their perfume: we are convinced that the others also smell the same fragrance although they do not.

In the same manner, when we are in contact with our psychic being, whenever we meet somebody with some psychic sweetness, we think that he is also living with the inner perception of his psychic being.

7. After that contact, does life become a sunlit path?

With the new awareness, the new feelings and the new sensations, everything seems to contribute to the transmutation of our lives so that we get a permanent state of joy and happiness. As seen from the beginning of this essay, this is partly true and life may or may not become a sunlit path, but life is no longer the same:

"the psychic is there when one feels better within oneself, when one is full of light, hope, goodwill, generosity, compassion for the world, and sees life as a field of action, progress, realisation. Doesn't it make a difference from the days when one is bored, grumbling, when everything seems ugly, unpleasant, wicked, when one loves nobody, wants to break everything, gets angry, feels ill at ease, without strength, without energy, without any joy"?³³

Has life become a sunlit path? Not quite, since another feature of this awakening was highlighted by the Mother one year later:

"the more psychic one is, the more is he in contradiction with the present state of the world. . .

The development of the psychic being has a double result, which is concomitant. That is, with the development of the psychic being, the sensitivity of the being grows. And with the growth of sensitivity, there is also the growth of the capacity for suffering; but there is the counterpart, that is, to the extent to which one is in relation with the psychic being, one faces the

circumstances of life in an altogether different way and with a kind of inner freedom which makes one capable of withdrawing from a circumstance and not feeling the shock in the ordinary way. You can face the difficulty or outer things with calm, peace and a sufficient inner knowledge not to be troubled".³⁴

Yes, with the development of the psychic being, the sensitivity of the being grows. And with the growth of sensitivity, there is also the growth of the capacity for suffering.

8. After that experience, does one become a holy person?

The bursting of the psychic being is a definite landmark in the spiritual life, but all the cellular residues are still quite present and living. The actions and reactions are still very often governed by the instinct and may take place before the psychic being is consulted. Even if there is the possibility, at any moment, to feel its vibration again, sometimes it is too late, after we have reacted! There is no reason to be dejected. It is part of the process.

"It is difficult for a human being to keep up a constant contact with his psychic. As soon as he settles down and the freshness of the new experience fades away, the old person comes back to the surface with all its habits, preferences, small manias, shortcomings and misunderstandings".³⁵

Even, sometimes, the being follows willingly the ordinary nature rather than the psychic indication. For all those who do not know their psychic being, it may appear as a sacrilege or such a waste of the grace which has been received. But for all those who have tasted it, they know how difficult it is to remain constantly within the psychic vibration.

9. Is the psychic bursting a sign that a person stands at a certain level in the ladder of the evolution?

Neither Sri Aurobindo nor Mother has given any hint to answer that question. From our meetings, it appears that some sadhaks, very close to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for many years, quite probably among the advanced souls, do not hesitate to tell: "no, I do not know my psychic being" and they do not seem bothered about it.

At this junction, we are surmising that the bursting of one's own psychic being is a great help for one's own development but it does not give the sanction that the psychic which has burst is an advanced soul.

10. How a lost contact with the psychic being is renewed: bursting forth or progressive?

For the clarity of the experience, we have to distinguish the contact with the psychic presence, which is at will after the first preliminary experience, and the direct perception of the psychic being. We have not met (yet) anybody who underwent two burstings! If we refer again to the hatching of an egg, it looks as if the shell can be broken only once!

The psychic being may come back in front from time to time but it is no longer through a sudden experience. It comes back in a manner which is not dramatic: one discovers, one day, that the awareness of the psychic being is quite living. In the same manner, we usually discover one morning that the psychic is no longer alive . . . and the full awareness is definitely lost, for some time.

The following narration illustrates how concrete is the awareness of the psychic being. A visitor, who experienced a sudden bursting of his psychic being on 2 January 1968, lost it some months later, back in his own country, after having shrieked and shrieked during a popular concert, being absolutely enthralled by the atmosphere. On 9 September 1973, he entered again, gradually, into the living psychic awareness; it lasted eight months, up to 30 April 1974, on which date he had an action which contradicted this psychic presence; the next morning it had gone. Quite later, in December 2001, he discovered one morning while cycling that the awareness of the psychic being was again there. He nurtured it very very carefully but he lost it on 25 March 2002 after receiving a violent verbal abuse which shook his whole body; the next morning the living awareness and plenitude had vanished. What is permanent is the capacity to contact its vibration at will for reference.

SECTION 4

STATISTICS OF THE SURVEY

Among the people who have been interviewed, it has been considered that thirteen of them came to know their psychic being after a sudden bursting of

the veil, an experience which can be differentiated from a psychicised higher emotion. One of them stated that she knows her psychic being since her childhood, a knowledge which seems to have been always present. It was an informal discussion since there was no systematic review of the subject.

With such a limited number of interviewees which have narrated their first contact and how was the life after, there was some hesitation to present some statistics. Nevertheless, the conclusions are found interesting and they are certainly an invitation to continue more interviews.

At a later stage, if an interest is shown, a second round of discussions may be started. It will cover each aspect with each past interviewee and enrich the survey with new participants.

1. Features of the bursting

a. **A sudden happening which remains living in the memory:** all the interviewees asked about their event could describe with precision the circumstances, place and time when it occurred.

b. **A great joy without cause:** all the interviewees asked about their event have described this joy: a self-existent joy, maximum, intense, overwhelming, a bursting of joy, like an explosion of joy.

c. **A certitude to “know” one’s psychic being:** when the bursting happened, some of the interviewees did not know anything about the psychic being and could not identify what had happened. All the interviewees are presently part of the Sri Aurobindo and Mother’s family and have become acquainted with that concept. All of them state with certitude that after this experience they know their psychic being.

d. **A knowledge of something immortal within oneself:** Six interviewees have mentioned the new knowledge and certitude of something immortal in them.

e. **A new individual entity within oneself:** three persons have mentioned that the psychic being has been perceived as an individual entity, distinct from the body.

f. **A flow of light:** four interviewees have seen much white light, a strong white light, a red light, an ocean of light, a light in the heart centre that was so incredibly brilliant.

g. **Other sensations described by more than one person :** love for human beings, animals and plant, an outstanding peace, a stillness, richness, plenitude, an increased consciousness.

2. After effects of the bursting

a. **Disappearance:** Out of 10 interviewees, the awareness lasted from one full day up to several months, but never one year. For most people it is difficult to explain what has happened between the bursting which brought a psychic awareness and the moment when they suddenly became aware it had gone. They guess it is because of a wrong movement from oneself or coming from the environment, a wrong behaviour or the working of one's own mind.

b. **Permanent reference:** the psychic area becomes the permanent reference for eight of them: even if the permanent awareness of the psychic being has gone, it is always possible to connect, at will, to the psychic area which has a special vibration and warmth and sweetness, with a variable degree.

c. **Discrimination between emotional and psychic feelings becomes easier:** this was mentioned by eight people who have “tasted” the psychic vibration.

d. **Circumstances are arranging by themselves:** this was mentioned by four people.

e. **Continuation of the knowledge of immortality?** Yes for three persons.

The survey on the after-effects of the bursting has been weak since it was not originally covered. The five above features should have been presented for appraisal and feedback, but at that time, it was not yet known what would be relevant. Some other features have been signalled here and there, one or two times. More information will be gathered if it is decided to enrich this initial survey. In the next paragraph, information on the circumstances of the bursting was easier to gather although it has not been collected in an organised manner.

3. Circumstances of the bursting

a. **In which year?** In the 1920s (1), in the 1940s (1), in the 1960s (3), in the 1970s (2), in the 1980s (2), in the 1990s (1), after 2000 (2). Three of the persons were not asked this question. To be noted: the survey shows a remarkable distribution in time.

b. **At what age?** Below 20 (0), below 30 (5), below 40 (3), below 50 (1), below 60 (1). Four were not asked. It is hoped that this essay will not draw people above 40 into a depression!

c. **Contact with Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s writings before?** yes (11). Seven out of twelve had seen the Mother before, two persons knew only their names, one person only knew the name of Sri Aurobindo and one person

did not even know his name (two weeks later he would see *The Life Divine* in a bookshop and purchase it because of the title!)

d. **The Mother had been seen before:** yes (8), no (6). It is interesting to notice that almost half of the interviewees had not seen the Mother before.

e. **Inner discipline before the bursting?** Out of 10 answers, serious inner discipline (8), some inner discipline (2), no spiritual discipline but psychotherapy (1). The bursting is not limited to people who have done a concentrated sadhana. It has also happened to people who have been taken by surprise and did not know anything about it, whether they know the Mother and Sri Aurobindo or none.

f. **Yearning for something else?** Yes, for everybody, except one. All the people who experienced the bursting were yearning for something else, were strongly aspiring for it, sometimes without knowing what they were aspiring for.

g. **Being alone or amidst a company?** Alone(4), not alone(3), with the Mother(3), not asked (5).

h. **Where did it happen?** in the Mother's room (3), in their reading-room (2), just lying on the bed (1), in the operation theatre (1), in an office with people (1), looking at a deceased cousin (1), looking at the nature (1), on a Paris boulevard – for the Mother also, it happened on a Paris boulevard! No places are privileged."

i. **Was doing what?** Meditating (only 2), doing pranayama (1), looking into the Mother's eyes (1), reading Sri Aurobindo's letters (1), reading the Mother's *Questions and Answers* (1), musing on one's bed (1), lying almost unconscious on one's bed (1), standing in front of a spiritual person (1), looking at a dear deceased cousin (1), delivering a child (1), walking on a boulevard (1) — a kaleidoscope of situations. Although meditation may be a useful tool, only two were meditating in an organised manner.

j. **Any signs announcing the bursting** which has been for everybody the most important moments of their life? Forerunner signs have not been identified, if any occurred. In other words, any aspirant is a potential candidate for the crack of the shell which allows the psychic being to come out.

k. **More Indians or more foreigners?** Among the 15 people who spoke of the bursting of their psychic, 7 were Indians and 8 were foreigners. Among 64 sharing sessions on the psychic being, 18 were Indians and 46 were foreigners.

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Author's note: An organised survey would certainly confirm but also deny some remarks and statements contained above. Some readers may like to share their own experience of this bursting forth of the psychic being, may have reservations on some of the statements made, or may like to add some additional findings or comments. Whether a survey will be organised in order to enlarge the scope of this essay depends on the feedback received from the readers. The writer of this study will be glad to answer to each e-mail sent to Alain Grandcolas, Auroville, India alain@auroville.org.in

This essay has been written mainly for people, who are concerned with Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's philosophy.

It is basically a research paper which examines the unexpected and sudden discovery of the psychic being by several interviewees, a phenomenon which seems no longer reserved to people with a long record of sadhana under the guidance of a guru. It also highlights the growth and evolution of the psychic being as an entity which is meant to become the next species, the supramental being.

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(To be continued)

Does the Delightful Absolute provide for Evils?

Indrani Sanyal

Evils, sorrow, sufferings obviously snoop into human affairs. Man's tussle with obstreperous ways of evils and his consistent strive to pull through the harmful and despicable invasion of evils during the course of his existence, characterise his activities as essentially human. Meddlesome bearings of evils are difficult to confront and still more difficult is to make the notion of evil intelligible. Evils, sorrow and sufferings are necessary accompaniments of beings. Evils of various shades, shapes and strength, do intrude into each and every human's existence. Any attempt to provide a definition of evil is no doubt a Herculean task. It is an arduous task to categorise or to classify evils or to theorise about their nature. Whether evils are absolute or relative, whether these are objective or subjective are no doubt important issues which need deliberations. Evils do occur – whether physical or moral – but their occurrences are questionable. Again discussion about evils cannot avoid altogether any consideration about the nature of the perpetrators of evils and the sufferers of evils. The stories and anecdotes of evils abound the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Pages of any daily newspapers are flooded by gloomy incidents of evils. Most of the TV news channels are busy catering to ominous events of evils with minute details. The omnipresence of evil and suffering in our world seems to pose a serious challenge to the belief in the existence of a perfect God. In the world it is not uncommon to see the untold suffering of the virtuous person, whereas the wicked have good time in spite of his unrighteous deeds. Thousands and thousands of good-hearted people, innocent people, scrupulous people fall prey to the wildness of nature, suffer from diseases, death and old age, experience the roguery of heinous crime. In this essay, I avoid all nitty-gritty issues relating to definition of evil and its scope. Everyman's perceived sense of evils is the starting point of this discussion. Instead of citation and enumeration of varied instances of evils, I refer to the following excerpts from

the writings of Sri Aurobindo as providing a rough but comprehensive list of items to be brought under evils; Sri Aurobindo writes;

‘... grief, pain, suffering, error, falsehood, ignorance, weakness, wickedness, incapacity, non-doing of what should be done, and wrong doing, deviation of will and denial of will, egoism, limitation, division from other beings with whom we should be one, all that makes up the effective figure of what we call evil’¹

Evils as befallen on somebody mostly challenge the perceived sense of justice. In the *vanaparva* of the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi questions the very idea of God as a just and good ruler of the universe on the ground that Yudhisthira, who was well-known as the embodiment of virtue was being subjected to untold sufferings, whereas, Duryodhana, the well-known arch-fiend was enjoying immense prosperity. To quote Draupadi,

*Na matripitrivad rajan dhata bhutesu vartate,
rosadiva pravrttoyam yathoyam itara janah* ²

In Western philosophy, the problem of evil has been dealt with as the problem of reconciling the belief in God with the existence of evil. The orthodox theistic claim that there exists a perfectly good God comes into conflict with blatant facts about evil and sufferings. Discussions about the paradoxical and unsettled characteristics of evil and their elaborate explanations are made in Indian philosophy and western philosophy but not always from the same viewpoint. All the schools of Indian philosophy excepting Carvakas speak of worldly existence to be sorrowful because of sufferings.

In the present discussion, keeping the vastness of the problem in mind, I would like mainly to elaborate the viewpoint of Sri Aurobindo on evil which I consider in several respects as providing the most elegant explanation of evils and sufferings. Our discussion will consider closely the viewpoint of *The Life Divine*, one of the main contentions of which is to offer not philosophical balm for wounds but to ‘lit the flame of aspiration’³ for transcending evils and suffering. Sri Aurobindo’s candid admission that suffering is a great stumbling block to our understanding of the universe led him to search for avenues for transforming undivinely imperfection into divinely perfection Sri Aurobindo acknowledges:

‘...the presence of evil, the insistence on suffering, the large, the enormous part offered to pain, grief, and affliction in the economy of Nature are the

cruel phenomena which baffle our reason and overcome the instinctive faith of mankind in such an origin and government or in all-seeing, all-determining and omnipresent Divine immanence.’⁴

Evils exist as stern reality; evils are not treated by Sri Aurobindo as illusions. We shall see in course of our discussion how Sri Aurobindo’s arguments aided by his persuasive skill established that the spectacle of evils is not so miserable. This world being temporary and unhappy, *anityam asukham lokam imam* ⁵, Sri Aurobindo emphasises upon enthusiasm of human beings towards self-development and self-transformation. Sri Aurobindo’s explanation of evil is to be comprehended against the vast canvas of his integral monism. Sri Aurobindo though an avowed interpreter of the Upanishads, a staunch Vedantist, sharply distinguishes his viewpoint from that of Sanakaracarya⁶ and his followers. In his framework evils are real for evils have their origin out of the interaction of different forms of consciousness. But he does not treat evil as any universal principle subsuming under its fold all aspects and levels of consciousness. What is interesting to find is that Sri Aurobindo is not at all baffled by the presence of evil in our surrounding. Sri Aurobindo finds out some significance for the appearance of these evils, sufferings or what may be called ‘contrary phenomena’. For Sri Aurobindo, evil or falsehood is not an accidental phenomenon. Since Brahman is all-knowledge, such phenomena as evil or falsehood cannot be taken to be something whose occurrence is accidental. His belief in an Omnipresent Divine Reality prevents him from rejecting the existence of whatever falls short of that standard. He argues, on the other hand, that workings of the Omnipresent Divine Reality do adumbrate the necessity of falsehood and error, necessity of wrong and evil and their functioning.

Explanations Rejected by Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo does not share the view of those who would like to explain evils by attributing these to an involuntary forgetfulness or confusion of the Consciousness-Force of the Brahman, the All-Wise. The suggestion that evil could have been the handiwork or manoeuvre of some miscreant to defame the All-wise, is discarded by him. Sri Aurobindo does not try to evade the explanation of evil or falsehood by labelling these as mysteries of the Being, of the original and eternal. Neither does he succumb to the temptation to say that evil and falsehood are so mysterious of all mysteries that even All-Wise is at its wit’s end to provide explanation of all these. His straight away rejection of all these viable options, does not imply that Sri Aurobindo had no definite clue as to the nature of evil. According to him the All-Wise Brahman is the source of all evil

and falsehood and it is significantly responsible for evil and falsehood. He emphatically asserts that evils have significance in the working of our self-experience and world-experience.

Evils are possible only in cosmic manifestation.

Sri Aurobindo characterises evil with various qualifications and at times it may seem that all these adjectives do not match with one another. To grasp Sri Aurobindo's idea of evil we need to give up our many unfounded prejudices about tallying one qualification with the other. If something is fundamental then it is authentic, if it is authentic then it is real, hence if it is fundamental then it is real. Does this style of arguing endorse something to be real in spite of being non-fundamental in the sense of Sri Aurobindo? Is it acceptable to say something to be real but unauthentic? The constructive suggestions from *The Life Divine* provide answers to these baffling questions. The first pronouncement about evils is that these are relative in status but he reinforces that the relative status of evil and falsehood does not necessarily imply their unreality. This is where Sri Aurobindo differs from other philosophers who forsake evil to the domain of unreality. In this connection, we are reminded of Sankaracarya's resolution of the charge of being partial with regard to God by relegating evil to the domain of unreal. While explaining the nature of evil in relation to the Absolute, Sri Aurobindo is straightforward in rejecting the possibility of taking the Supreme Reality as the locus of evil. He does not hold that evil and falsehood have any direct root in the Supreme reality itself. Sri Aurobindo made it categorically explicit that falsehood and evil are not to be supposed to have any kind of fundamentality, or power of infinity or eternal being. Evils neither have any authenticity of the original inherence. He views self-existence as essentially and eternally inhering in the self-existent and that is the condition of absoluteness. Sri Aurobindo speaks of one Absolute, i.e., Brahman and for him this absoluteness of Brahman is a well-defined concept. However, in his view, as pointed out by Sri Aurobindo,

'This self-existence reveals itself again in three terms of its essential nature, Self, Conscious Being or Spirit, and God or the Divine being.'⁷

The Indian concept of Brahman, the Reality as Atman, Purusha, Ishwara more satisfactorily explain Sri Aurobindo's viewpoint.

We are all sensitive about evils, evils are something that happen, evils are thus episodic. Hence the question as to what occasions evil is an important question. Now, let us turn to Sri Aurobindo's answer:

'But it must first be noted that it is only in cosmic manifestation that they become possible; they cannot pre-exist in the timeless being, for they are incompatible with the unity and bliss that are its substance.'⁸

The question, as to why there should be the kind of manifestation in the cosmos that originates evil, is disquieting. Sri Aurobindo admits ignorance or *avidya*, as the cause of evil and falsehood, This notion of ignorance or *avidya* is not a unique idea that has been introduced by Sri Aurobindo but in the whole domain of Indian philosophy this is one of the very meaningful concepts. In the Aurobindo literatures especially in *The Life Divine* we find his vivid account of *avidya*. However, in this discussion no attempt will be made to compare Sri Aurobindo's idea of *Avidya* with that of other Indian philosophy or a detail elaboration of Sri Aurobindo's idea of ignorance. However, in order to grasp the nature of evil and its origin, Sri Aurobindo's explanation of *avidya* needs to be touched upon in this connection. He does not desist from considering the problem of evil on the basis of the integral Oneness as the truth of existence. According to Sri Aurobindo ignorance is also knowledge, in its nature it is a self-limiting knowledge oblivious of the integral self awareness. The process of consciousness has brought ignorance into existence. At this juncture, an answer to the question as to how this happens, seems to be imperative. In other words, how could this manifold ignorance or this narrowly self-limiting and separative knowledge arise and come into action or maintain itself in action in an absolute being who must be absolute consciousness and therefore cannot be subject to ignorance? The profundity of the question rests on the anxiety to match multitudinous and separative something with the eternal absolute. In fact, this is the perennial question which bothers the metaphysicians from time immemorial. The other intriguing question is as to why, even if it arises, does it need to arise? Sri Aurobindo's response to these questions, is particularly, to be elucidated in this article.

To understand the nature, the origin and the influence of evil and suffering on the universe and the individual, we need to comprehend Sri Aurobindo's explanation of the same. Within Aurobindonian scheme, transcendent, universal and individual are the three aspects of the one existence, and 'each of these always contains secretly or overtly the two others'. An enquiry into the problem of evil needs to be taken up from these three angles, which are not supposed to be absolutely separate from one another:

1. In the first place, Sri Aurobindo provides an explanation of evil in its relation to the Absolute, the supreme reality.
2. He provides an elaborate account of the origin of Ignorance and falsehood

- by tracing its relation to the cosmic workings of the Sachchidananda.
3. Thirdly, he tries to fathom the nature of evil by its action and its hold in the individual being.

Evils in relation to the Absolute Reality

What is Reality according to Sri Aurobindo? Sri Aurobindo begins with the idea of an omnipresent Reality, a reality which is independent and exists in its own right. Is it possible to say that reality is *Asat* or *Sunya* in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy? Sri Aurobindo criticised nihilism or *Sunyavada* in the ordinarily understood sense. On some occasions, he attempted to show why it would be too hasty a conclusion to argue that the Buddhist conception of reality is antagonistic to the Vedas. Referring to the poems of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, wherein it has been stated that the Being was born of non-Being, Sri Aurobindo interprets the expression *Asat*, i.e., non-Being as not mere *sunya* or null but as that which exceeds even the purest conception and the highest experience of existence in the cosmos. Reality defies all attempts to limit it by either negative or positive descriptions. Sri Aurobindo interprets the expression *asat* as implying the indescribability of reality. *Asat* is not the whole conception of reality nor does its experience represent the limit of our knowledge about it. So what is *asat* or non-existence in the vision of Buddha is also an aspect of reality according to Sri Aurobindo. In the view of Sri Aurobindo *Sat* is also an aspect of reality. Sri Aurobindo would say that *sat* and *asat* are just categories for apprehending consciousness. Thus in the view of Sri Aurobindo, Existence is Consciousness and he derived this view from the Upanishads. He also adds that Consciousness is Consciousness-Force, *cit* is *cit sakti*. Consciousness is the ultimate light in the illumination of which everything is manifest but which needs no light other than itself for the manifestation of its own existence. According to Sri Aurobindo, self-awareness of Brahman is the background and possibility of the self-knowledge of Brahman. One line of interpretation of the Upanishads denies that Brahman knows itself. It is pure Consciousness but not conscious or self-aware. Sri Aurobindo affirms that Brahman is pure consciousness and accepts that knowledge of Brahman is a movement within its own being. The self-awareness of Brahman is also world-awareness and that is what Sri Aurobindo calls the Supermind.

Brahman is conceived and experienced in three aspects: *Atman* (self), *Purusa* (Soul or Conscious Being) and *Isvara* (Divine). The first aspect of the Brahman is the *Atman*, the pure Self which represents the basic aspect and is considered to be static, and provides support to the creative adventure. In its second aspect, the self as a witness of the process of dynamic manifestation which it initiates

in its own being by its conscious power is a conscious Soul, *Purusa*, the self of the cosmos. The third is the aspect of the Brahman wherein it is as the *Isvara*, the lord and master of the cosmic manifestation. None of these aspects are to be considered as more authentic than or superior to others. Our emphasising only the aspect of Self to the exclusion of other aspects amounts to concentrating only on the static silence of the Infinite. Again overemphasis on the aspect of *Isvara* would imply making the dynamicity more important at the cost of its 'eternal status and infinite silence. Our concentration on *Purusa-Prakrti* alone would highlight the dichotomy of Soul and Nature, Spirit and Matter and its unity aspect will be overlooked.

'We must not commit the mistake of emphasising one side of the Truth and concluding from it or acting upon it to the exclusion of all other sides and aspects of the Infinite.' ⁹

The integral supramental knowledge reveals these three as the same Reality simultaneously without losing the distinction among them. *Atman* or self has an impersonal and static aspect. It is not by itself active in the manifestation of the universe. It provides the foundation of the cosmic creative act, but not itself active. *Purusa* or soul is in comparison to *Atman* or self, more active and closer to the act of manifestation. It gives sanction to the manifestation and enjoys the creation. It is not the aspect of reality which dynamically controls the creation. *Isvara* is the masterful governor. Divine being or *Isvara* is the supreme person. It is not impersonal reality nor is it static and aloof from the act of manifestation and the manifested universe. Divine being is free from his creative act and is not bound by it. None of these aspects of Brahman is either superior or inferior to the other. They are on the same level and equally real and represent three sides of the omnipresent reality when it is approached from the standpoint of cosmos.

Coming to the question of evil and suffering, thus we find that Sri Aurobindo denies evil and falsehood as belonging to the 'fundamental or primary aspects of the Being.'¹⁰ He was quite categorical in his denial about the existence of any absolute of evil or absolute of falsehood. Evil and falsehood are not native to the Absolute.

Evils in relation to the cosmic manifestation

Evils and falsehood arise at the level of cosmic manifestation. According to Sri Aurobindo, Brahman, an inherent self-consciousness inseparable from its being, throws itself out as a force of movement of consciousness which is

creative of forces, forms and worlds. According Sri Aurobindo, as we have already discussed Consciousness is also conscious-force. In relation to the three aspects of Brahman, Self, Soul and the Divine Being, Consciousness Force also assumes three aspects. According to Sri Aurobindo, they are *Maya*, *Prakrti* and *Sakti*. It is the *cit-sakti*, consciousness force, conceptually creative of the universe. It does not execute what it conceives. The dynamic execution is the work of *Prakrti*. *Sakti* is the synthesis of these two aspects of consciousness force, that is of *Maya* and *Prakrti*, and is both conceptually creative and dynamically executive. *Isvara* is the synthesis of the other two aspects of the Brahman, Self and Soul. For Sri Aurobindo, the notion of manifestation is important and this should not be confused with the notion of creation, which has a different connotation. He says,

‘In fact, the Infinite does not create, it manifests what is in itself, in its own essence of reality: it is itself that essence of all reality and all realities are powers of that one Reality.’¹¹

If one still insists on the notion of creation in accounting for the diverse multiplicity around us Sri Aurobindo would suggest drawing a line of demarcation between two sorts of creation. Sri Aurobindo’s position is not difficult to understand from the perspective of Indian philosophical tradition which speaks of two sorts of doctrine regarding the nature of causal relation, known as *satkaryavada* and *asatkaryavada*. Unlike the proponents of *asatkaryavada*, who maintain that effect has no existence (*asat*) in the cause but brought into being anew, Sri Aurobindo as a proponent of *satkaryavada* argues that effect or origination is the actualisation of pre-existing potentialities.

He clarifies further,

‘The Absolute neither creates, nor is created, - in the current sense of making or being made; we can speak of creation in the sense of Being becoming in form and movement what it already is in substance and status.’¹²

The world is a manifestation of Brahman, but it is from another point of view a self-concealing of Sat-Cit-Ananda. The self-concealing does not in any way affect the existence of Brahman, it remains what it is for ever and yet the act of self-limitations is the beginning of the process of manifestation of the universe. The transcendent limits itself as Cosmic being, the self and soul of the universe. And the cosmic being self limits itself as the individual self. These

three, the transcendent, the cosmic and the individual are three aspects of sat-cit-ananda.

The following passage from the ‘*Brahman, Purusha, Ishwara*’ explains the reason for exploring the problem of evil from these three angles,

‘Brahman is the absolute, the transcendent, and incommunicable, the Supracosmic Existence that sustains the cosmos, the Cosmic Self that upholds all beings, but It is too the self of each individual: the soul or psychic entity is an eternal portion of the Ishwara; It is his supreme Nature or Consciousness-Force that has become the living being in a world of living beings.’¹³

It is in the Supermind and by the action of the Supermind that sat-chit-ananda becomes the subject knowing itself as the object. This ideal biuneness presupposes an integral consciousness.

In the Gita, according to Sri Aurobindo’s interpretation, the supreme Divine has three aspects, the *kshara Purusa*, the *Akshara purusa* and the *Purusottama*. The first is the reality in the flux of the world and all creatures, the second is immutable and away from all movements of *prakrti*, the third reconciles in its being the mutable and immutable Purushas, their apparent contradiction is resolved in this supreme aspect of the super personal Person who is both unmoving and moving and yet transcends these formulations of his self-existence. The *Bhagavad purana*, trika philosophy accept both the dynamic and the static aspect of reality.

The progressive process of self-variation of the one Self is called descent of consciousness by Sri Aurobindo. Ignorance, according to Sri Aurobindo is not an original power of creating unrealities and illusions, but it is a development by limitation from Knowledge. From the point of view of the descent of consciousness, it is knowledge hiding itself partially. It is to be differentiated from that of the ascent of consciousness which is developing knowledge. Ignorance arises from the third poise of the Supermind, its projecting and apprehending activity in which it looks at an aspect of itself as if it were an object other than itself. Ignorance arises from this apprehending status and function of the Supermind. Ignorance is not entirely devoid of consciousness. It is in Sri Aurobindo’s language, half-light and half-shadow. Sri Aurobindo thinks that in the Indian ascetic ideal, the great Vedantic formula ‘one without a second’ has not been understood properly in relation to the other formula equally imperative, ‘All this is the Brahman’. To enjoy Himself in material existence, divinised so as to reveal and not to veil Him, the Divine created the world which is a manifestation of this creative delight through consciousness-force in His

Divine being. The instrument of this self-manifestation is the supermind, the link between the unitary divine existence and the world of multiplicity.

In his opinion, evil and falsehood are products of Ignorance and being products of Ignorance, these cannot exist where Ignorance does not reside. Naturally again question will arise as to why should Brahman at all throw out force of consciousness to create in itself these worlds of forms?

Sri Aurobindo is quite categorical in maintaining that ignorance has been brought into existence by the process of consciousness. He cites quotations from *Mundaka Upanishad* and *Taittiriya Upanishad* at the beginning of his chapter on ‘*The Origin of Ignorance*’¹⁴, in support of his claim about the origin of ignorance.

Mundaka Upanishad states in 1/1/8

*Tapasa ciyate brahma tatohannamobhijayate
Annyat prano manoh satyam lokah*

(by energism of consciousness Brahman is massed; from that Matter is born and from Matter Life and Mind and the worlds.)¹⁵

He also quotes a passage from the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2/6 stating

‘He desired, ‘May I be Many’, he concentrated in Tapas, by Tapas he created the world; creating, he entered into it; entering, he became the existent and the beyond-existence, he became the expressed and the unexpressed, he became knowledge and ignorance, he became the truth and the falsehood: he became the truth, even all this whatsoever that is. ‘That Truth’ they call him.’¹⁶

Sri Aurobindo establishes thus, evil and falsehood as by-product of the world movement; to quote from Sri Aurobindo,

‘the sombre flowers of falsehood and suffering and evil have their root in the black soil of the Inconscient’¹⁷

‘Falsehood and Evil are, unlike Truth and Good, very clearly results of the Ignorance, and cannot exist where there is no Ignorance.’¹⁸

Evils in relation to the individual

Evils, to be reckoned as evils, resulting out of interaction of consciousness, are episodic in nature. This intermittent or occasional aspect of evils, contra

absoluteness of the Supreme Reality has already been discussed. Since the cosmic manifestation of the universe is in Time, and whatever occurs in Time is historical phenomena, we may admit evils are in a sense historical phenomena. It is needless to admit that by maintaining Brahman is the Timeless and Time, Sri Aurobindo has given rise to lots of confusion. In this article, there is not much scope for discussing about Sri Aurobindo’s notion of Time. However, he has said distinctly that *Isvara*, the omniscient and omnipotent All-ruler by his Shakti, by his conscious Power, manifests himself in Time and governs the universe. To Sri Aurobindo’s viewpoint evils are just certain happenings, certain forms of cosmic manifestation of consciousness. Evil-like phenomena to be perceived as ghastly, obnoxious and threatening presuppose mental-consciousness. Sri Aurobindo admits that evils, suffering and falsehood are facts of the world-consciousness and strongly resisted the move to dump evils and similar phenomena as fictions and unrealities. The individual valuation of the movements of consciousness ‘one of the greatest powers of the human mentality.’¹⁹ Hence the role of human individual, especially that of human individual is significant and positive in our understanding of evils.

Sri Aurobindo has allocated a definite provision for individual also in his metaphysics of *The Life Divine*. The question may be asked, as to who is an individual?

‘Thus when we speak of an individual we mean ordinarily an individualisation of mental, vital and physical being separate from all other beings, incapable of unity with them by its very individuality’²⁰

‘If we go beyond three terms of mind, life and body, and speak of the soul or individual self, we still think of an individualised being, separate from all others, incapable of unity and inclusive mutuality, capable at most of a spiritual contact and soul-sympathy.’²¹

‘By individual we mean normally something that separates itself from everything else and stands apart, though in reality there is no such thing anywhere in existence: it is a figment of our mental conceptions useful and necessary to express a partial and practical truth.’²²

If we carefully go through these passages we may have some idea about the nature of individual in Sri Aurobindo’s metaphysics. The individual in his worldview has to be understood as the product of the creative, in the sense of self-manifesting action of Infinite Consciousness-Force.

‘There is a phase or movement of the self-manifestation, a descent into an

apparent material inconscience, an awakening of the individual out of the Inconscience...’²³

In the first place, the individual is an individualised being. Again Sri Aurobindo considers individual as ‘a practical constitution of our consciousness devised to centralise activities of Nature in us.’²⁴ Sri Aurobindo maintains that individualisation of our being exists because of our ‘world-being’ and further, ‘by virtue of a consciousness which uses the world-being for experience of its possibilities of individuality’²⁵ Thus he introduces a world-being and an individuating consciousness which is the cause of all our self-experience and world-experience. For him cosmic differentiations and the multiple individualities are the power of the Infinite being which is being constantly displayed by the Infinite being out of Delight. Here we need to be very cautious in distinguishing Sri Aurobindo’s position from that of Sankaracarya. For Sri Aurobindo our individualisation in the world is a becoming of that Self, and the world is also a becoming of that Self. Thus, in this philosophy, cosmos and individual are manifestations of a transcendent Self.

It should not be supposed that individual has been accorded an inferior status. Since individual has the power of self-transcendence and the power of self-transformation by self-knowledge, God cannot be held to be disastrous or ruthless. Sri Aurobindo offers an opportunity to individuals to understand their significance in the whole of cosmic process of manifestation. It is noteworthy to observe the following forthright remark,

‘In that power lies the justification of individual existence.’²⁶

According to Sri Aurobindo, that eternal Brahman, the Isvara is self-manifest by his *Yoga-Maya*, by the power of his Consciousness-Force. There is an Omnipresent reality above the cosmic manifestation and in cosmic manifestation and immanent in each individual. Broadly, this three-tier existence of Consciousness is Sri Aurobindo’s metaphysics.

‘We see then that there are three terms of the one existence, transcendent, universal and individual, and that each of these always contains secretly or overtly the two others.’²⁷

Why Should Brahman Throw Out Force of Consciousness into Forms?

In this case, the most baffling questions are the ‘why’ question and also the ‘how’ question. Sri Aurobindo also had these very questions in his mind in his

endeavour to explain the nature of ignorance and its consequent suffering. The vexed question as to why Brahman should throw out force of consciousness into forms, is nonetheless challenging. He has placed Ignorance

‘as a part of the movement of the One Absolute Being, a development of its consciousness knowingly adopted, to which it is not forcibly subjected but which it uses for its cosmic purpose.’²⁸

‘If then, being free to move or remain eternally still, to throw itself into forms or retain the potentiality of form in itself, it indulges its power of movement and formation, it can be only for one reason, for delight.’²⁹

The question as to why does this manifestation take place? Sri Aurobindo answers,

‘... the only reasonable explanation of such a paradoxical manifestation or creation is that it is a cosmic game, a Lila, a play, an amusement of the Divine Being’.³⁰

We may conjecture variously about such a paradoxical manifestation. It may be supposed to be a pretension of the Divine being to make itself appear as an undivine: the Divine being, presumably comparable with a stage performer or a film star who is enacting someone else’s role for the sole pleasure of a false show. It may be suggested that the Divine has created the undivine, created ignorance, created suffering and other evils to be ecstatic about its own abundance of creativity. Does it not sound to be ridiculous and vain? Some have portrayed the Divine Being in the image of a powerful but selfish and wicked human being. To retain God’s glory and power some inferior creatures have been created by God so that those creatures praise and glorify Him. When Sri Aurobindo is presenting his view of Divine Lila, it would be erroneous to suppose that any such rash, ‘crudely stated’³¹ viewpoint would receive any sympathy from Sri Aurobindo.

Some may propose an interpretation of Lila which is less obnoxious. Whatever explanation is offered it may sound awkward. Sri Aurobindo has made two points clear which are very much required in order to make sense of this Divine play or Lila. His first observation is that it has to be understood that imperfection is a necessary requisite for making sense of manifestation and secondly evolutionary manifestation requires an intermediate stage of manifestation for human consciousness, ‘a stage as the mental consciousness of man, part knowledge, part ignorance, a middle power of being still leaning on the Inconscient

but slowly rising to the all-conscious Divine Nature^{'32}, a stage that marks a decisive point of transition.

According to Sri Aurobindo, Maya of Brahman is at once the magic and the logic of an infinitely variable oneness.

‘As with being of Brahman, so with its consciousness, *maya*: it is not bound to a finite restriction of itself or to one state or law of its action: it can be many things simultaneously, have many coordinated movements which to the finite reason may seem contradictory; it is one but innumerably manifold, infinitely plastic, inexhaustibly adaptable.’³³

Sri Aurobindo’s *Maya* is the supreme, universal consciousness force of the Eternal and Infinite Brahman. As it is by its very nature unbound and illimitable, it can put forth many states of consciousness at a time, many dispositions of its Force without ceasing to be the same Consciousness Force for ever.

‘*Maya* is at once transcendental, universal and individual; it is the Supreme Supra-cosmic being that is aware of itself as ALL-Being, as the Cosmic Self, as the consciousness-Force of Cosmic nature, and at the same time experiences itself as the individual being and consciousness in all existences.’³⁴

Hence from this metaphysical perspective the Absolute One can see itself, experience itself triply, whether from above in the transcendent Existence, from between in the Cosmic Self or from below in the individual conscious being.

According to Sri Aurobindo, a being’s ignorance of himself and of the Self of all is the outcome of an original cosmic Ignorance. This cosmic Ignorance gives rise to self-limitation, divisions in living beings, division in consciousness, division in will and force, division and limitation in knowledge, egoism, misuse of knowledge and will, disharmony, weakness and suffering. Thus we find among many factors that owe their origin to cosmic ignorance, suffering as an exemplar of evil has its origin. Sri Aurobindo insists upon the feature of exclusiveness as the essence of Ignorance, in his language ‘exclusiveness is the very soul of Ignorance.’³⁵ In his metaphysical system if any thing is to be held responsible for suffering and evil is the ‘strange’ power of Consciousness. For him for that reason it appeared to be more important to find out details about the principle of operation of Consciousness, its power and process of operation. He enquires, ‘How is it that the Ignorance exists?’ The other pertinent question is that, ‘How has any principle or power in the Infinite self-awareness been able to put self-

knowledge behind it and exclude all but its own characteristic limited action?’³⁶ He puts the question a little bit differently, when he asks, ‘How could this manifold Ignorance or this narrowly self-limiting and separative knowledge arise and come into action or maintain itself in action in an absolute Being who must be absolute consciousness and therefore, cannot be subject to ignorance?’

Brahman’s Delight

According to Sri Aurobindo, we thus find that Brahman as an inherent self-consciousness inseparable from its being, throws itself out as a force of movement of consciousness which is creative of forces, forms and worlds. Neither compelled by its own nature, its potentiality is creative. Why should Brahman throw out force of consciousness into forms? It can be only for one reason, for Delight.

‘To loose forth and enjoy this infinite movement and variation of its self-delight is the object of its extensive or creative play of Force.’³⁸

Now the question may be raised as to how are we to account for the universal presence of grief, suffering and pain? It is well known that the very starting point of all schools of Indian philosophy, except the Carvakasa, life is fraught with suffering. No one can escape from suffering as far as his existence is bound with this world. But the universal existence of suffering does not justify its existence. To grasp the exact implication of this issue, we may further elaborate the question into the following subquestions:

1(A) ‘All being Sachchidananda, how can pain, suffering at all exist?’³⁹

1(B) ‘How came the sole and Infinite Existence Consciousness Bliss to admit into itself that which is not bliss, that which seems to be its positive negation?’⁴⁰

1(C) ‘All-Delight being necessarily all-good and all-love, how can evil and suffering exist in Sachchidananda?’⁴¹

Thus, the problem of evil may assume an ethical tone. Sri Aurobindo, however, has difficulty in accepting the meaning of the term ‘All-Delight’ be understood in terms of the ideas of love and good. He accuses human mentality for introducing this sort of dualistic and divisional conception of things. He opines that in the Vedantic concept of Sachchidananda which is one, the dualistic and divisional concept good and love are not to be found. He ridicules the attempt of human thought to force an ethical meaning into the whole of Nature. According to Sri Aurobindo, it is not correct for human beings to judge all things from the

standpoint to which he has evolved. Sri Aurobindo thinks that ethical viewpoint prevents human beings from arriving at real knowledge and complete sight. Sri Aurobindo pronounces clearly that ‘Material Nature is not ethical’⁴². In his view animal or vital nature is also non-ethical, although as it progresses it manifests the crude material out of which the higher animal evolves the ethical impulse. According to Sri Aurobindo blame and condemnation or rather self-blame or self-condemnation are the beginning of true ethics. When we blame others without applying the same law to ourselves, we are not speaking with a true ethical judgment.⁴³

In Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy all is a divine manifestation, hence what is marked as undivine must be essentially divine. Sri Aurobindo writes:

‘...A primal reality – the Self, the Divine, Brahman, - which is for ever pure, perfect, blissful, infinite: its infinity is not affected by the limitations of relative things’ its purity is not stained by our sin and evil; its bliss is not touched by our pain and suffering; its perfection is not impaired by our defects of consciousness, knowledge, will, unity.’⁴⁴

According to Shankara, there is one self which in *Maya* appears falsely as many individual selves. According to the view of Shankara, the individuality ceases to be real in the state of liberation. According to Sri Aurobindo, there is one Self who manifests Himself as many individual selves. In this view individuality is real and abiding though fundamentally the many selves are none but the supreme self. They are the many self-varied centres of the supreme Self of its self-knowledge and self-enjoyment.

Thus we find that the background of Sri Aurobindo’s metaphysics is Vedic and Upanishadic or vedantic. But though the basic categories of the integral advaita of Sri Aurobindo are found in the Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita, his worldview is more comprehensive and positive in its practical implications than is found in these ancient texts of spiritual philosophy and yoga. The main spirit of Sri Aurobindo’s *purnadvaita* view and the Vedanta view merge in their belief in an uncreated, immaterial principle of being which is free from the material force, vital force and mental force.

Evils are purposive

Sri Aurobindo is convinced that what are presented to mental consciousness as adverse and evil have individual utility and cosmic utility. This perspective of Sri Aurobindo may seem to be downright bizarre. Commonsense may revolt against this viewpoint as totally unfounded. How can we discover utility amidst

outpouring dismay of suffering, grief and other shapes of evils? The very notion of utility is ambiguous and evokes many questions. How do we measure utility? Should we interpret utility in the pragmatic sense, as practicality? In the domain of economics, business and other related studies interested in the language of profit and loss, utility is interpreted in terms of profitability. Utility is such a misnomer, which may give a false impression about what Sri Aurobindo meant by it. Let us proceed with Sri Aurobindo’s remark:

‘For without experience of pain we would not get all the infinite value of the divine delight of which pain is in travail, all ignorance is a penumbra which environs an orb of knowledge, every error is significant of the possibility and the effort of a discovery of truth;’⁴⁵

Sri Aurobindo further points out,

‘But at the same time our present feeling of this evil and imperfection, the revolt of our consciousness against them is also a necessary valuation; for if we have first to face and endure them, the ultimate command on us to reject, to overcome, to transform the life and the nature.’⁴⁶

Now evil, sufferings are creations of Mind consciousness but according to Sri Aurobindo it is not right to maintain that these are unreal circumstances, non-existent in God. Hence it may be suggested by some that it is better to be indifferent to these dualities and to get out of the manifestation into God’s being. In Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy evils are creations of Mind-Consciousness but Mind is only secondarily responsible. Sri Aurobindo harps on saying that these are all creations of the Divine consciousness. These functions of the Divine consciousness are not eternal, not in the fundamental truth of being. This does not imply that Divine manifestation is to be viewed as a mistake of the Divine Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo uses the concept ‘Lila’ to designate this self-creation of the Absolute Brahman. Sri Aurobindo’s view may be summed up in his words as follows:

‘A Reality of Oneness manifesting itself in reality of numberless forms and powers of its being is what we confront everywhere.’

Sri Aurobindo is confident in maintaining that ‘there must be some necessity’ or utility of wrong and evils in the working of the Omnipresent Divine Reality. Are not these remarks simply gibberish? Sri Aurobindo cites quotations from scriptural sources at the beginning of his chapter entitled ‘*The Origin of*

Falsehood and Evil’ to explain the existence beyond evil and for that matter of good. The following is the quotation from the Gita, II.50 maintaining :

‘One whose intelligence has attained to Unity, casts away from him both sin and virtue.’ (*buddhiyukto jahatiha ubhe sukrtaduskrite*)⁴⁷

The other quotation is from the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, II.9 :

‘He who has found the bliss of the Eternal is afflicted no more by the thought, “Why have I not done the good? Why have I done the evil?” One who knows the Self extricates himself from both these things.’

The question comes up : what happens to all sorts of evils? Sri Aurobindo refers to the Gita, V.15:

‘The Lord accepts the sin and the virtue of none; because knowledge is veiled by Ignorance, mortal men are deluded.’⁴⁸

It is difficult to resist quoting the following passage from Sri Aurobindo’s ‘*The Eternal and the Individual*’

‘For certain practical ends we have to say that a thing is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, just or unjust and act upon that statement;... A great war, destruction or violent all-upheaving revolution, for example, may present itself to us as an evil, a virulent or catastrophic disorder, and it is so certain respects, results, ways of looking at it; but from others, it may be a great good, since it rapidly clears the field for a new good or a more satisfying order.’⁴⁹

Instead of predicting doom for mankind, Sri Aurobindo reveals that evil can be overcome by man. Philosophical explanation of evils is to make man aware that, however devastating and traumatic evils may be, man bears within him the courage and capacity to go beyond these.

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1. ‘The Divine and the Undivine’ in *The Life Divine*, p. 423
2. ‘The Lord does not treat his creatures like a father or a mother. Rather he seems to be provoked by wrath like an ordinary person.’ *Mahabharata*,
3. ‘The Divine and the Undivine’, p. 414
4. ‘The Divine and the Undivine’, p. 423.
5. The Gita, IX.33
6. In the *Sankarabhasya* on the *vaisamyanirghrnyadhikaranam*, sutras 34-36 his response to the problem of evil is provided.
7. ‘*Brahman, Purusha, Ishwara*’, p. 340
9. ‘*Brahman, Purusha, Ishwara*’, p. 348
10. *The Life Divine*, p. 622
11. *The Life Divine*, p. 350.
12. Ibid., p. 350.
13. *The Life Divine*, p. 341
14. *The Life Divine*, Book II, Part 1, Chapter XII.
15. ‘The origin of the Ignorance’, p. 588
16. Ibid., p. 588.
‘*sohkamayata. Vahusyam prajayeyeti. Sa tapohatapyata. Sa tapastaptva. Idam sarvamasrjata. Yadidam kimca. Tat srstva tadebanprabisat. Tadanuprabisya. Saccatyaccabhavat. Niruktam caniruktamca. Nilayanam ca anilayanam ca. vijnananm ca avijnananamca. Satyam ca anrtamca satyamabhavat.yadidam kimca. Tat satyamityacaksate.*
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29. ‘Delight of Existence: The Problem’, p. 100.
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31. ‘The Divine and the Undivine’, p. 426
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34. ‘*Brahman, Purusha, Ishwara*’, p. 358
35. ‘The Knowledge and the Ignorance’, p. 506
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44. Ibid., p. 409
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47. 'The Origin of Falsehood and Evil', p. 620
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Towards a New Imagination

Anuradha Majumdar

Words have colours and images, they carry not just space but time and infinity, and even whole histories inside. Epics have grown from words, their poetry defined civilisations. Words have embodied cultures and shaped the imagination of Time over centuries. Where does that leave us today with the word in superfluous supply? Everyone talks: on cell phones, emails, internet, on televisions, in print media and social media, on management and marketing drives, in seminars and films, in news stories, opinion and comment: it's full of words. And yet, there are stories that people still feel impelled to tell.

A story, like life, comes out of silence. Perhaps the most fascinating thing about the old epics lies in their immediate power of narrative, the still unmatched ability to convey man's relationship with the greater universe as it impacts the unfolding events and is underpinned by a search for self-knowledge.

More than twenty years ago I saw Peter Brook's rendering of the *Mahabharata* as a powerful film. It shook me with the realisation that the old stories had possibly exhausted their purpose and it was time for a new myth or rather, a new imagination for humanity.

After the long dénouement of exile and war, of betrayals and jealousies, deceptions and revenge, of sly intrigues, curses and many, many deaths, we arrive at last at the final scene. As people walk through the battlefield quietly, taking leave of their loved ones who had died, Gandhari enters and heaps a fresh curse on the Pandavas for causing Duryodhana's death. I remember coming away with a sense of unbearable emptiness. It was a curse that defeated our minds allowing the same human story of vengeance to continue till today – a duty-bound retaliation to safeguard the pride and prejudices of a kingdom or nation, of a race or family or individual. It was a curse that reinforced the rigidity of human nature.

The old stories have been used and reused, re-interpreted and remixed and

yet we seem unable to move further from the set formulas of good and evil, of betrayal, revenge, us and them. The clash of egos, the set hierarchies perpetuate and always, war remains inevitable. Nothing seems to offer a shift in human nature.

Can this overriding story change? The notion of war itself and the deeply ingrained human ignorance that allows it, alter? Do we have the new words, rather, do we have somewhere a new vision to invent another imagination for humanity?

When the *Ramayana* was serialised on Indian TV some years ago, people wept with the noble heroes and their noble wives week after week. Each of them seemed helplessly caught by the snare of dharma right down to Sita's obligatory test by fire, all duty-bound by destiny. The great story narrowed its breath on TV and the space for the spirit seemed to shrink in that tearful struggle with destiny. It was a pitiful tribute to Valmiki, but people loved it and it was a phenomenal success. Likewise, stories of Sita and Draupadi's defiance have long been watered down with moral homilies and point to the many failures that infect the present fabric of society.

Here it becomes interesting to turn to Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. Through the excruciating Descent into Night and the hard battle between Love and Death, no tears are shed. The battlefield itself has shifted here. It is no longer an outer war; there is no clang of armour, no battle cry or whoops of triumph, but a vast inner war without escape. Through it the arena of human ignorance stands revealed, to be conquered or surpassed before Death can be met, face to face and transformed.

No victory is declared at the end in *Savitri*, nor revenge sought afterwards. Line after line, Sri Aurobindo lays the soul bare, opening it through the world's deepest marvels, and equally, through the darkest pit of human nature, its tragic waste and the indignity of human life. Only at the highest point of surrender, having refused to betray her Truth before every lure and intimidation of Death is *Savitri* finally set free. By that she changes destiny, not only for herself but for humankind. The real power of *Savitri*'s freedom was Love.

Is *Savitri* then a gateway to the new myth? The news everyday is still about war and love is fodder for soap operas that even the *Ramayana* has been reduced to.

Still, is Love the new imagination for the world? What does it demand of humankind? Can it overcome centuries of pride and prejudice that are only ego deep and no deeper? Is it freer than desire and its monumental potential for greed? Can it turn away from fear?

Beyond good and evil, pride and prejudice, fear and desire is another Consciousness which offers us the possibility of change. This Consciousness requires the freedom and equality of the soul, both of which then create unity. Can it be said that Unity is the new imagination of Love? It must be, for without it the world reels under the most massive poverty ever: the consumer is king, the soul in fragments, and war the main economy of the world.

Peace, it is said, is the opposite of war, but peace without power is a helpless thing. Could the opposite of War then be Unity? Not the handholding kind but something much more potent, founded in the Consciousness, capable of engendering a peace far more powerful than all the hypnotisms of war.

Auroville carries one such myth by birth which I have always found fascinating. The centre of the city was named Peace by the Mother and it houses the Matrimandir, a space for the Consciousness. On the 5th of June, 1968, the Mother made an interesting remark: 'Auroville, as Sri Aurobindo said, is a practical means of creating human unity that would be strong enough to stand up against war.' Auroville, she explained, was created as a last hope against war and catastrophe, to divert the force of destruction and allow the beginning of harmony: it was a template for the future. A radical imagination was carried in that hope which is now part of the adventure of all humankind. The new consciousness is already afloat in the world and belongs to whoever is willing to receive it.

As this new imagination grows it will create a natural displacement of old patterns of the mind, its ego and fears allowing a new kind of life to take shape along with new forms to express it. It is a beauty that the world carries in its heart, but it is not without difficulties.

When such a new imagination enters a world that is already defined, set in its ways, rooted in traditions and certitudes, it faces a different kind of war: walls of resistance, incomprehension and often hostility. It is an imagination which will be best nurtured individually, with the truth of a personal freedom and a personal intensity. To survive, it will need the daring of the soul, the power of joy and a tremendous amount of love.

The old collective patterns are easily subject to prejudice, egoism and divisions and rarely have the capacity to unify unless they are carried by the power of some individual souls. The new collective pattern will require that consciousness from each one to fulfil the changes to come.

Shifting the imagination from war and division to unity becomes the story of a much greater freedom, a change of consciousness and a comprehensive shift of values and attitudes as well as patterns of life. When inner freedom and outer freedom both come together, that unity will finally be achieved.

Will literature embrace this story or will it remain suspicious, rejecting it as bland utopia? But already, we see stories wandering in our midst, triggering changes that alter what we know as true and opening in us a greater breath that we will finally recognise without resistance. We will see the emergence of freer men and women and children who play, conscious of the unity of the world. Their conviction will erupt from many cracks and unexpected events, carving out new spaces of light and hope in between the jaded horrors and cynicisms of the world. The new imagination is shaping us quietly, sometimes surprisingly, as it steers the world towards a greater destiny.

(Paper presented at Sri Aurobindo Conference 2008, Bharat Nivas, Auroville)

Appreciating Beauty in Literature: an Aurobindonian Perspective

Shruti Bidwaikar

Quest for beauty is eternal and universal. All cultures and civilisations in all ages searched and defined beauty in their own way. Indeed there are differences in the perception of the beauty, but the quest and an eye for beauty have always been there. These days, where the beauty of the natural landscape is becoming a rare sight, there is an attempt to beautify the surroundings through gardens and parks. While the skyscrapers crowd the vision of the sky, there is an endeavour to build titanic concrete and glass structures which are architectural wonders and beautiful and awe-inspiring in their own way. While the urban noise tries to deafen our ears, we also come across interesting technological advancements ready to bring to us the subtlest of the sounds played by an instrument. There are different ways and channels to beauty in vision, imagination, rhythm, colour etc. What exactly do we perceive when we perceive beauty? For example when we look at a flower, it strikes us at once with its colour, texture, arrangement, size, pattern and fragrance. It pleases our senses. With a little more receptivity, we are struck by the vital energy it radiates. One might even be able to connect this energy of the flower to some beautiful idea or thought, or relate it symbolically to some spiritual aspect. This suggests that beauty exists and is perceived on different planes. There is a gradation in which the perception moves from the tangible to the intangible. Literature very subtly exemplifies this gradation. The paper studies these gradations in Sri Aurobindo's perspective.

Before taking up Sri Aurobindo's idea of beauty, some descriptions of beauty and its correlates may be briefly mentioned here. Appreciation of beauty is often related to truth, perfection, good, strength, delight, love, morality, form and the material it uses. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" says Keats. For him beauty and truth were synonymous. The Greek idea of beauty lay more in symmetry

and perfection of form. Aristotle says, “the essential constituents of beauty are symmetry, order and proportion.” (Angraj Chaudhary: 62) Beauty is also close to good. It is assumed that all that is beautiful has to be good and morally correct. Bacon related beauty to strength. According to him, great emperors and kings of the world were very beautiful and also had the strength to conquer the world. The material that an artist uses to beautify a situation or a form need not be beautiful and refined. He can make use of the crudest of materials to beautify his object. Delight and Love form an eternal relation with Beauty. Indian philosophers and aesthetes always believed that the purpose of art is to give delight and inculcate the love for the Higher power.

Sri Aurobindo makes a distinction between ‘aesthetics’ and ‘aesthesis’. “Aesthetics is concerned mainly with beauty, but more generally with *rasa*, the response of the mind, the vital feeling and the sense to a certain “taste” in things which often may be but is not necessarily a spiritual feeling.” (*Savitri*: 746) According to him aesthetics “belongs to the mental range” and aesthesis to the Overmind. He says, “The Overmind is essentially a spiritual power. Mind in it surpasses its ordinary self and rises and takes its stand on a spiritual foundation. It embraces beauty and sublimates it; it has an essential aesthesis which is not limited by rules and canons; it sees a universal and an eternal beauty while it takes up and transforms all that is limited and particular.” (*Savitri*: 746) By aesthesis he means, “a reaction of the consciousness, mental and vital and even bodily, which receives a certain element in things, something that can be called their taste, *Rasa*, which, passing through the mind or sense or both, awakes a vital enjoyment of the taste, *Bhoga*, and this can again awaken us, awaken even the soul in us to something yet deeper and more fundamental than mere pleasure and enjoyment, to some form of spirit’s delight of existence, *Ananda*.” (*Savitri*: 817) His explanation of the difference between aesthetics and aesthesis is a gateway to understand his conception of the beauty on the tangible and intangible levels.

Writing about the ‘Suprarational Beauty’ Sri Aurobindo gives the gradations in which the beauty manifests itself and is perceived. Essentially the perception moves from the visible to the invisible, from the concrete to the abstract, from the form to the formless, from the material to the soul. On the first level he says, “The search for beauty is only in its beginning a satisfaction in the beauty of form, the beauty which appeals to the physical senses and the vital impressions, impulses, desires. It is only in the middle a satisfaction in the beauty of the ideas seized, the emotions aroused, the perception of perfect process and harmonious combination. Behind them the soul of beauty in us desires the contact, the revelation, the uplifting delight of an absolute beauty in all things which it

feels to be present, but which neither the senses and instincts by themselves can give, though they may be its channels, — for it is suprasensuous, — nor the reason and intelligence, though they too are a channel, — for it is suprarational, supra-intellectual, — but to which through all these veils the soul itself seeks to arrive.” (CWSA, Vol 25:144)

These letters have been taken from the *Letters on Savitri* in the 1993 edition of the *Savitri: A Legend and Symbol* brought out by Sri Aurobindo Ashram. This volume contains the Epic poem as well as the Letters. Complete bibliographical reference is included at the end.

Each of these three stages of the perception of beauty will now be taken up separately in rest of the paper, along with some appropriate examples. It is my hope that the examples would speak for themselves the levels of beauty they convey. I begin with a few examples to exemplify beauty of form, that which appeals to the senses and impulses.

S.T. Coleridge’s ‘*Rime of Ancient Mariner*’ at once brings forth the beauty in form. The description of the hot and bloody sun, the stillness of the sea and the ship draws a picture before us. The sun, moon, sea and ship all at once capture our vision. These physical objects are at once present with their magnanimity. The form which is rigid and unchanging is stable. The idle ship here is compared to a ‘painted ship’, it gives the sense of stagnation and it is intensified with the growing heat of the sun and the fixity of breath and movement. This description is almost that of an inscription on the wall or of a painting. Just as in an inscription or in a painting one can discern each and every physical object, so do the lines suggest through word picture.

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.
Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

William Wordsworth’s description of the beautiful daffodils also draws a picture before our eyes. The beauty of the flowers is “the beauty which appeals to the physical senses”, to the eyes particularly. It is a word painting in ‘*Daffodils*’, a description so beautiful that a painter can draw with brush and colour the whole landscape.

I wander'd lonely as a cloud
 That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
 When all at once I saw a crowd,
 A host, of golden daffodils;
 Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
 Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
 Continuous as the stars that shine
 And twinkle on the Milky Way,
 They stretch'd in never-ending line
 Along the margin of a bay:
 Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
 Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

Through the sense of sight the imagination soars high with the clouds and vales and hills. An elegant movement in the nature is described in the lines here. The comparison of the abundance of the flowers to the Milky Way again takes our imagination into the vision of the Universe. Here, however far we imagine, the visual impact is very much there. Unlike in Coleridge's lines, here we find an appeal to the subtle sense of sight with its imaginary wings. This plasticity in vision gives the pleasure and beauty which is a picture drawn before the mind's eye.

Sri Aurobindo's '*Baji Prabhou*' is an example bringing forth the impulse of a warrior who is ready to serve his Motherland with the strength of the Divine within and demands nothing in return. His strength and courage and emotions and feelings overpower the consequences of the fierce war that would ask for his life.

And Baji answered him:
 "Tanaji Malsure, not in this living net
 Of flesh and nerve, nor in the flickering mind
 Is a man's manhood seated. God within
 Rules us, who in the Brahmin and the dog
 Can, if He will, show equal godhead. Not
 By men is mightiness achieved; Baji
 Or Malsure is but a name, a robe,
 And covers One alone. We but employ
 Bhavani's strength, who in an arm of flesh
 Is mighty as in the thunder and the storm.
 I ask for fifty swords." (*Collected Poems*: 283)

Here is a warrior Baji Prabhou who is desirous and impulsive to fight for his Motherland. Desires, emotions and impulsions form a part of the vital energies which are very important for life. But the desire, the emotion and the impulse here are for no lower motives. It is the beauty of life-force motivating and encouraging the warrior to go forward and fight. The life-force is so strong that it has risen out of his ego when he finds God in every man and animal. Baji does not fight for the name for he is sure that God's work will be done whether by his own instrumentality or by Malsure's. In these lines and emotions, the beauty lies in uplifting movement of the life-force. There is a force and a will to execute the Bhavani's Will, surrender to the Divine decision. This beauty and force are highly motivating to the reader as well. It immediately stirs one with patriotism and more so motivates one to living the ideal of working for the Divine Will.

From this most tangible and visible level of perception of beauty we move to a level where perception is a little more subtle. As we recall Sri Aurobindo's words quoted earlier – "It is only in the middle a satisfaction in the beauty of the ideas seized, the emotions aroused, the perception of perfect process and harmonious combination." (*CWSA*, Vol. 25: 144) Again a few examples may be taken to show how literature captures ideas, emotions and harmonises the inner and the outer principles of life.

There are ideas which are captured like a flash. They make us think and ponder. Such is an idea seized by Keats in his '*Ode on a Grecian Urn*' –

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," — that is all
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Coleridge also has captured such an idea in '*Rime of Ancient Mariner*'

He prayeth best, who loveth best
 All things both great and small ;
 For the dear God who loveth us,
 He made and loveth all.

Beauty, truth, prayer, and love — all these are abstract ideas or feelings. Yet Keats and Coleridge have caught the beauty in these ideas and have expressed them in a way which is appealing and convincing. In fact in the former, the poet talks about the high order of aesthesis, a stage where truth is beauty and beauty is truth. Sri Aurobindo writes about this elaborately in his *Letters on Savitri*. The conclusive lines of Coleridge highlight the beauty of prayer, love and the God's equability to all his creation. This idea at once brings peace and

contentment to the reader. Therefore, in the last stanza of the poem the poet remarks that the listener was wiser than before, perhaps because he learnt a greater truth. The beauty is conveyed through the idea of abstract concepts and yet it strikes the reader with conviction.

The memory of a beautiful scene makes one nostalgic and brings back those moments before the mind's eye. Wordsworth who recollects the beauty and emotions in tranquillity recapitulates the beauty of the daffodils in solitude and re-lives those moments. In '*Daffodils*' he says –

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

In the lines previously quoted from '*Daffodils*' we find a suggestion to the physical eye. Here is a recollection of those emotions and visions which soothed the poet once. The poet in a 'pensive mood' re-lives the beauty of the beautiful flowers he saw. They "flash upon that inward eye". The emotions are aroused when the poet recollects it in tranquillity; even then the beauty of the sight fills his heart with joy.

The 'harmonious combination' of the inner and the outer principles too brings forth the beauty of creation. Tagore's poetry '*Where the Mind is Without Fear*' brings out this beauty and harmonises the inner and outer principles of life.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action —
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Tagore longs for a perfect country where there is harmony between the inner and the outer principles of Nature. A perfect social, political, geographical and spiritual scenario where there is no place for negative elements and the positives have their own place. He prays that the mind should not go astray while reasoning as is its habit, neither the narrow limits of borders should bind the heart of men. He wishes for freedom and fearlessness – for the inner and the outer freedom. He wants the expansion of consciousness and hails the Lord to help his country awake from this horrifying somnambulism. The poet has very subtly intertwined the inner and the outer and the purport is complete and wholesome. Only a perfect harmony can help a nation progress. This harmony between the inner and outer is the essence of Indian spirituality and here lays its beauty too.

On the next level beauty becomes an expression of the soul. It then stands with truth, delight and tends to express the real beauty through form. Sri Aurobindo says that, "delight is the soul of existence, beauty the intense impression, the concentrated form of delight;" (CWSA, Vol. 26: 254) and the two are inseparable. An example of beauty and delight may be quoted from *Savitri*:

The life of the enchanted globe became
A storm of sweetness and of light and song,
A revel of colour and of ecstasy,
A hymn of rays, a litany of cries:
A strain of choral priestly music sang
And, swung on the swaying censer of the trees,
A sacrifice of perfume filled the hours.
Asocas burned in crimson spots of flame,
Pure like the breath of an unstained desire
White jasmines haunted the enamoured air,
Pale mango-blossoms fed the liquid voice
Of the love-maddened coïl, and the brown bee
Muttered in fragrance mid the honey-buds.
The sunlight was a great god's golden smile.
All Nature was at beauty's festival. (352)

This is the mood of Nature just before Savitri is born. The Nature is all happy to welcome Savitri. These lines suggest the delight felt by the Nature. It is in its best moods and colour to welcome the "secret Word". Here is the intertwining of Delight and Beauty, the supreme joy of Nature swaying and

smiling at the advent, in turn it has revealed beauty at its best. Every tree, flower and element of Nature has bloomed and expressed itself perfectly. The advent of Savitri is celebrated by trees, flowers, colours, rays and all the members of the Nature.

Beauty and delight are inseparable; similarly truth and beauty also become inseparable when the poetry is written from the intangible heights of consciousness. Its aesthesis perceives beauty and truth as a part of the whole. In one of his letters on *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo observes — “Truth is not merely a dry statement of facts or ideas to or by the intellect; it can be a splendid discovery, a rapturous revelation, a thing of beauty that is joy for ever. The poet also can be a seeker and lover of truth as well as a seeker and lover of beauty. He can feel a poetic and aesthetic joy in the expression of the true as well as in the expression of the beautiful.” (p.820) He has exemplified this in *Savitri* —

A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:
His nature we must put on as he put ours;
We are sons of God and must be even as he:
His human portion, we must grow divine.
Our life is a paradox with God for key. (p.67)

And also,

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. (p.61)

Sri Aurobindo gives out the deepest and highest truth wrapped in absolute poetic beauty. For the paucity of space the explanation of these lines has been eschewed here, but the reader can surely perceive the level of beauty that is expressed through these lines.

At the sublime height of consciousness, the seer-poet can have the vision of the future. This seer-poet was called Kavi in the ancient times because of this quality of vision. Sri Aurobindo as a seer-poet does not only perceive those heights in Vedas and Upanishads, his *Savitri* is a supreme example of the vision of future. The beauty of vision of future is marvellously explained in his epic poem:

All then shall change, a magic order come
Overtopping this mechanical universe.
A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world.
On Nature's luminous tops, on the Spirit's ground,
The superman shall reign as king of life,
Make earth almost the mate and peer of heaven,
And lead towards God and truth man's ignorant heart
And lift towards godhead his mortality. (p.706)

Through the various examples given in this paper, I hoped to demonstrate the gradations of beauty. The perception of beauty happens mainly on three levels, on the physical level, on the emotional, sensuous and the intellectual level, and on the higher, inner or spiritual level. This paper was an attempt to study the levels of beauty from the tangible to the intangible. Sri Aurobindo's definitions of aesthetics and aesthesis have helped to understand beauty through the mental process known as aesthetics, whereas aesthesis can only be felt and cannot be expressed in words unless one reaches the Overmental heights of consciousness where truth, beauty, knowledge, love and Ananda all become one. The purpose of discerning these levels is to sharpen our sensibility towards the perception of beauty. Appreciating beauty is a process where one can go deeper and deeper and reach a stage where beauty manifests itself. It applies to both the creator and the perceiver. I conclude with Sri Aurobindo's words, “To find highest beauty is to find God; to reveal, to embody, to create, as we say, highest beauty is to bring out of our souls the living image and power of God.” (CWSA, Vol. 25: 145)

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Moments that do not fade

Georges Van Vrekhem

I left Belgium on the 17th of January 1970 — that was 33 years ago. And then I flew to Frankfurt. Seventeenth of January, the airport was white, under the snow. And then we flew through the night on a Boeing 707 over Lhotse, one of the high mountain tops in the Himalayas — I'll never forget it, and then we landed in Bombay at 5 o'clock in the morning, 30 degrees centigrade — hot sunshine! Another world. Then Madras, in a bus. At that time, 33 years ago, it was not like it is today. Then I arrived in Pondicherry, in a state of shock. I did not even know whether my luggage was on the top of the bus or not. But luckily it was there. Then I landed in a small hotel at the seaside that is not there anymore, just next to the Ashram press. And after I put my luggage in my room, I took my jacket on my shoulder and went out to see the Ashram.

In my head, the Ashram was a white building with a palm tree next to it under a blue sky. Whether the Mother was there or not, I didn't know. So I went out. There was a church there and in front of that church was a European lady talking with somebody. A very fashionably dressed lady, in shorts, well done up. So I asked her, "Where is that Ashram here somewhere?" She answered in English with an accent. I said, "Oh, you are French!" "Oh, yes," she said. "See, you go on and you come to the Consulate with the French flag, and then you go to the left and you will be at the Ashram." So I did. It was Sunday afternoon, very quiet. You didn't see many people at that time. I entered the school courtyard, the gate was open. And there I saw all these timetables signed by the Mother, that very specific signature. I said, "Where am I!" All at once a voice behind me said, "Are you looking for something?" It was the voice of a young Frenchman, John Pierre, who afterwards became Guruprasad. He is still in Auroville — Goupi. "I'll take you to the Ashram," he said. But I understood '*La Chambre*' instead of '*L'Ashram*.' So I thought, "Oh, there must be a holy room here somewhere." And I went with him. He took me across the street, through a gate. You won't believe it. There on those chairs, known so well by

all of you, sat four old, grey bearded people. It looked as if that was the entrance to heaven and they were St. Peter and the other saints. Then Goupi asked somebody, "When can he come and where?" Behind me, behind my back, somebody answered. And it was the same woman's voice I heard in front of the church. And I turned around and there was that same lady, no longer in shorts and fashionably dressed, but in a white long robe, holding a plate full of flowers. I thought, "What is going on here?!" I didn't realise that I stood in the Ashram because I had understood '*La Chambre*.' So then, "You can have an appointment with the person you are looking for," and this, that, and the other.

I had the appointment, and afterwards I found a room in Goyle's New Guest House. There I heard that the Mother was still alive and that one could meet Her. You had to put your letter to Her in the box that is still there. They told me, "You go and put your letter to the Mother in that box." For three days I turned around the central Ashram building, asking everybody, "where is that Ashram?" Even though Prithvi Singh, who was sitting there in the balcony street, said, "It is here," I didn't believe him. The entrance gate for me was too small to be the Ashram of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. So when finally I was putting my letter in the box, a miracle happened. Behind me stood again that same Frenchman I had met before. I asked, "Where is the Ashram?" He said, "Come with me, it's here." I had seen a photo of the Samadhi and behind the Samadhi that kind of tiled roof under which is Nirodbaran's room. Therefore I had thought by myself, "If I see that, I am in the Ashram." And he took me to the Samadhi and I saw that and I knew that I was in the Ashram. And then I dropped my letter to the Mother, and She sent me in Her own handwriting an answer brought by Suresh Joshi who was Her messenger. And the answer was — I still have the letter — "You can come," — it was in French — "You can come...*mais ce sera une entrevue silencieuse* — It will be a silent meeting." What did that mean? I had already had so much trouble in writing my letter! For what should I write — Madame? Mother? I had great inhibitions against writing Mother! I had had a mother! My mother was dead! I have kept that letter also, because the Mother had written Her answer at the bottom. She invited me to go and meet Her.

Then there was the ceremony in the guesthouse. I didn't know anything about flowers. And a whole lot of flowers were laid out before me; from those I had to choose to take some flowers to the Mother. And I was not a flower man. For me this meant nothing but sentimentality. All the guests in the guesthouse were standing behind my back to see which flowers I would choose. I failed the test miserably. I had chosen several flowers, which I had found very beautiful — but I had not chosen 'Humility', which looks more like a herb than a flower. Then Michou, whom some of you may remember, whom I met 30 years later in

Montreal (a couple of years ago) and who still looks the same as in 1970, took me through the park to the Mother's room. After some time Champaklal-ji called my name and I went in. What was I to do? What do you do when you come in front of... I had a vague idea of who the Mother was... what do you do when you come in front of such a being? For in the meantime I had seen people meditating on the wall at the seaside, I had seen people on their belly at the Samadhi, I had seen people in all postures of religiosity and meditation and all that — I felt very much disoriented and insecure. So I went through that door of the Mother's room, known to all of you and what did I see? I saw that very thin arm of the Mother resting on the armrest of Her chair. And I went in front of Her... and the rest I cannot tell, because I don't know. And when I came to myself again, there was the Mother, smiling, giving me one packet of blessings and then another one.

Then after sometime when I had left the Mother's room, 'it' started working. In the body, in the spine, in the subtle body. And since I didn't want to be in the guesthouse with all those visitors at that time (I was a brand new visitor myself), I walked by the seaside for a couple of hours, with tears in my eyes. Then I lay down, with the tears in my eyes. Something had happened. I am such a naive fellow that everything that has happened in my life, spiritually, I understood only long afterwards. And I am happy for this, because if you interpret things at the very moment you distort them. You give them a fixed shape in your thought. You know where I got the explanation of what happened between the Mother and me on the 29th of January, 1970? I got it in the Temple of Freemasons in Ghent, a town in Belgium. I had given a talk in that Temple and after the talk I had conversations with many of those Freemasons. There were judges, professors, lawyers, priests, doctors, and they were extremely interested. And when I told them about that experience, one of them said, "Oh! This is the initiation." Later I read that the Mother said in one of Her conversations, "What I call initiation is when a person meets me and recognises me." I suppose that in those very seconds of eternities I had recognised something, which I knew from long ago and which is always with me.

Everybody at the guest house was having a ring. Everybody had to buy a ring with the Mother's symbol! A ring with a red stone, a ring with a diamond, a ring like this, a ring like that... And I also had to have a ring. And the next time when I went to see the Mother on my birthday, end of March that same year, I took my ring with me. I didn't dare to talk because, remember, "*Ce sera une entrevue silencieuse*," — our meeting would be silent meeting — or so I supposed. So I handed Her that ring. I presented it to Her and She looked at it. And I held my ring finger of the left hand like this, for Her to put the ring on it. This is one

of the very few times that the Mother talked to me. She said, "*A ce doigt — là? On THAT finger?*" I nodded dumbly without knowing why I held up that finger. And She put that ring on that finger and the ring is still there. It is the only one I have ever worn in my life. Afterwards I asked Her son André, with whom I had a good contact, "Why did the Mother ask, "On THAT finger?" "I'll ask Her," he said. So he asked Her and then I got the answer. I know that you all are curious to know the answer, it meant — 'Mystic Marriage'.

I had a return ticket valid for one year. The time had come when I had to make a decision. In those days India was not what it is today. After all I was 35 years old. I had been a journalist, working in the school, the manager of a theatre. Compare all that with the job the Mother gave me — "Go to Nandanam with the New Group children." You have no idea how idiotic I felt the first time I was walking with two six year old boys holding my hands on either side, going to Nandanam. Afterwards I saw that it had been the ideal occupation for me. So the time had come for me to decide whether to stay or go back. Actually I had already made up my mind — I wanted to go back. To the Belgian beer and the cheese and the steak with chips. So I wrote to the Mother that the time has come and I feel I have to go back. She didn't say anything. To André She said, "Let him come." Again stupid as I am, I didn't realise the meaning of such a significant gesture of Hers who was so busy all the time. I went, sat in front of Her and then the smile came and the blessings. Later I went downstairs and said, "Okay! I am going! I am free!" So I went to the guest house where I had been staying at that time. During the next one hour I went through a battle. I even dare to say I was attacked! And when Dining Room time came, I went to the Dining Room, (I often talked to Günther, whom some of you may know, he is still there) and I said to Günther, "I am staying." And I am still here!

In 1972 the first stone of the Matrimandir was laid. It still was the age of the bicycles — not yet the high season of the two wheelers, motorcycles, scooters, scooties etc. or of cars, buses. It was still cycling time. Auroville, Matrimandir is quite far from Pondicherry. 5 o'clock in the morning, puffing up the JIPMER hill, no, thank you very much! But I have seen that when I have to do something, somebody comes and tells me. That time who was it that came, sent by the Divine? Dick Hawk, the American tennis player, who in the meantime has left his body and who was a friend of mine. "Georges, hello, we are going to the first stone-laying ceremony of the Matrimandir." I say, "Okay." We rode up the hill, parked our bicycles. The order was being maintained by the captains of the Physical Education Department at that time. So, very obediently I went to stand where people like me were expected to stand. Then I didn't move anymore. Why? Because there was like a helmet of Force pressed on my head which

meant that I just stood there and underwent that Force. The Mother was in Her room physically, but the Force She had put there was so strong. Since then I have never had any doubt about Auroville. People ask so often and say, “How is Auroville?” I say, ‘Excellent, it can’t be better.’ “Ah! But we hear all these things and all these stories and so many incredible scandals are happening. And you say it couldn’t be better?” I say, “Yeah! I am sure it couldn’t be better.” Number one: people who are on a visit know a hundred times more than me, for they go around and I don’t. Number two: it is my faith that the Mother has founded Auroville and takes care of it. If She hadn’t done that for all these years, it wouldn’t have been there anymore. The circumstances are so difficult that Auroville would not be there anymore. People do not realise what a miracle, what a wonder it is that it is still there and developing. Number three: since a couple of years I have had a kind of an experience which I can tell here, as we are among brothers and sisters, otherwise I wouldn’t have even said all these personal things. A friend from a boarding school in Belgium, where I was studying forty years ago, had rediscovered me and I him. He came to India. He came to Pondicherry and wanted to see something of Auroville. I had to show him the Matrimandir, of course. But as I am a heart patient, I don’t go inside. I am like Moses: I am halted on the border of the Promised Land! So I said to my friend, “You go up, please. I am sitting here, no problem.” For me, if the Force is there, it is also here. The Ashram has become so busy that, usually, I remain sitting on my motorcycle under the Balcony and have my five minutes of concentration there. The very stones are drenched by the Force in the streets where Sri Aurobindo has been living and where the Mother has given so many Darshans. Therefore, no problem for me, inside or outside the walls. My friend went up and I sat down and closed my eyes. I saw red and golden light. Very active. I thought, “Oh, oh, the sun is shining in my eyes.” It was the time of the sunset. I opened my eyes. The sun was behind me. Since that day, when I go to the Matrimandir, I hesitate to close my eyes because it is as if I were asking, “Let me see that again.” But every time I do close my eyes, I see that light, red and golden. If you have read the Mother’s *Conversations* you would know what light that is. The same strong Force must have been there when the first stone of the Matrimandir was laid. Being humans, we are so small. And when you take up the Yoga, you go into yourself more and more, and more, and sometimes I am horrified by the littleness of the human being that I am, especially because we know the great perspective of what one has to become.

Then came the time of the last Darshan. I had six darshans with the Mother, personal encounters. When it was my birthday, end of March 1973, She had physical difficulties, if we may call it like that, and I could only see Her a few

days later, which means it was in the very last days when She still saw people. So I was standing there. As I said in the beginning, somewhere I must have known that splendourous Being that is the Divine Mother. Now She had become in Her physical body the Mother most of us have seen, and in me there was something that didn’t accept that physical condition. Yes, something in me realised what She was going through, what She was working on, and from my terrace in the Rue Suffren I did *pranam* to the Mother in the Yoga; but when I saw Her in that battered body... there was something in me that revolted. I was standing there at the end of the line in Her room and there were people in front of Her trying to look into Her eyes, doing this, doing that. And in my small ignorant being there was something that revolted. But suddenly, something happened: the Mother sitting became upright, as it were, and looked towards me. At once I became peaceful and full of Her presence. And then when my turn came to stand in front of Her, She gave me flowers and my birthday card. And She said, “*Bonne Fête*”. And with the birthday card and the flowers in my hands I bowed down with the intention to touch Her feet. But my hands were slowed down; in my movement my hands were slowed down so that they touched very lightly, which made me suppose that She must have suffered a lot just by rough, albeit very devotional touches of some hands. And when my hands touched Her feet, Her hand fell on my head, blessing me. There are so many people who read about the Buddha, about Christ, about Krishna and who think — if only I had been living at the time they were on earth, if only I could have met them, if only I could have been blessed by them. I have been blessed, like so many among you, by the Divine Mother. And that... remembering moments like that is by itself, I suppose, a whole Yoga.

Then one morning my French — Tamil neighbour on Rue Suffren came and knocked on the window of my room upstairs. “*La Mère est morte!*” he shouted. “*La Mère est morte!*” I got up... (I get up very late, I go to bed very late, I sleep very late — I have never taken up the Indian habit, that’s why I am very late here!) I got up very quietly, just knelt down and said, “Let Thy will be done.” And never anything has changed in my relation with the Mother, physically there or not there. Of course, practically speaking, Her physical presence meant a great difference, especially for an institution like the Ashram. But as far as I am concerned, nothing has changed in the least.

That was then. Now the situation is different. Let us never forget that the Supermind has come down and has been there in the atmosphere of the earth since 1956. Hasn’t the Mother said and repeated, “A New World is born”? She said, “*Un nouveau monde est né est né, est né.*” She repeated this later in one of Her most lyrical talks, and She said to the children of that time, “Please,

every morning when you wake up, remember that a new world is born.” Brothers and sisters, do we believe that? Are we living according to that? There has been so much confusion after Sri Aurobindo left His body, after the Mother left Hers, and we see so much friction (let us call it like that) in the present day.

Do we still believe that? If what the Mother said was true and if the Supermind is what it is supposed to be, the birth of the New World must have been absolutely true. The world is going in the right direction. It cannot go any other way.

Number two: on the 1st of January 1969, the Mother had one of Her great experiences. She reflected very carefully on it for days and came to the conclusion that it was the consciousness of the Intermediary Being, what She called “*la conscience du surhomme*.” This is an aspect of the Supramental Being to help all those who are turned towards the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. It is there, now, for that. She said that it is a very compassionate, very strong consciousness. We can all invoke it, we can all be open to it, and if we are turned towards Sri Aurobindo and the Mother it must be there with us. All Consciousness is a Being, every Being is a Consciousness — whether big or small, very big or very, very small.

Number three: Sri Aurobindo exists in a supramental body. The Mother has said this time and again. She said: “He is here. He did that. He was there. He goes into the world and helps.” The supramental body of Sri Aurobindo exists; it is essentially the transformation of His former physical, vital and mental. The Mother did the Yoga in the physical when He had left His body. She continued the avataric Yoga. This is the wonder, the miracle of the double Avatar. Sri Aurobindo said, “It is not my intention to repeat the old fiasco.” If the Avatar of the Supermind had not been a double Avatar, the work would have failed again. Sri Aurobindo said, “One of us has to go.” The Mother said, “I’ll go.” But no, He forbade Her to go because Her body was better for the Work than His, He said. And then He performed that miracle of letting Himself become ill, and fully conscious and with His immense power — Sri Aurobindo was so much farther than is normally supposed in the literature — he descended into death. Don’t forget that Sri Aurobindo, in one of the sonnets written around 1940 described how ‘Thy golden Light came down into my brain...into my heart...into my feet’ (from *The Golden Light*). We all know that the feet are symbols of the material. He had gone very far in the avataric Yoga. And the Mother took it up and continued it.

Number four, therefore, is this that the Mother exists in a supramental body. She has described Her new body. Supermind does not die. Supermind is Divinity, is immortality.

So if we take these four points together: The Supermind is there and can’t

go away. The consciousness of the Intermediary Being who helps all those who are turned towards Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is there. Sri Aurobindo is there and the Mother is there for all of us to invoke. But we have to go through a difficult process of self-analysis, of self-mastery. And the more you go into yourself the more you see the depths of the human incapability, of the animal in us. There was — to give an example — this Presence; years after the Mother had left Her body, as I was sitting near the Samadhi, depressed by my own limitations. It was evening, the time that the Ashramites and the Group members come to the Samadhi to do pranam. Normally I sat against one of the posts around the Samadhi. And on the ground fluttered a moth which probably had burnt one of its wings on a lamp somewhere. And there were all those trampling feet around the moth, and I said to myself, “See, this is exactly a picture of what I am. I am that moth, in that condition, and any moment somebody may step on it and crush it.” You won’t believe it. No sooner had I thought that a young girl came, took up the moth and put it on the Samadhi. There are things like that all of us could tell. All of us live in that Presence. Many surely have nicer experiences to narrate than the ones I have had.

Suppose I meet an old friend from the West one of these days, a friend whom I have not met for 45 years, and he says, “So you have been living so many years in India. Was it worthwhile?” I would answer, “Yes, it was more than worthwhile. I have found what I was looking for.” Which does not mean that I am or have become what I am looking for! It is the same when I am writing my essays, my books: I feel like a student who knows practically nothing and has so much, so much to learn. And there is so much that I have received. The vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother gives you the basis, the ground to start on. It gives you the perspective in which you can interpret the whole of Reality. This was exactly what the Mother said many times to the teachers, “Learn everything you can learn.” But if you do so from the standpoint of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, you will have a true basis of understanding. In today’s confused time, it is, I think, the only way to confront the world. That is a huge gift.

The second point: feeling so clearly that one is continuing in this life something that had started in another life is such a grace.

The third point: having met the Mother personally gives you the assurance that you can go on through everything that confronts you. As a heart patient, I am always walking with a shadow beside me. So you live turned toward Eternity, ready at every moment. But as there is that absolute protection, that Presence, everything is possible. This should remain written on the blackboard in our schools and remain there: ‘Everything is possible.’ Because Sri Aurobindo and

the Mother have done Their incredible Yoga. And it is only by studying other things that one gets more and more to appreciate the greatness of what They have done. And They, having done that, are there, here, and everywhere.

THE GOLDEN LIGHT

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

Thy golden Light came down into my throat,
And all my speech is now a tune divine,
A paean-song of thee my single note;
My words are drunk with the Immortal's wine.

Thy golden Light came down into my heart
Smiting my life with Thy eternity;
Now has it grown a temple where Thou art
And all its passions point towards only Thee.

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

(Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, Vol.5, p.134)

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

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Anuradha Majumdar discovered Sri Aurobindo while at university, in Calcutta. She joined Auroville in 1981 and began working at the Matrimandir. She also trained as a dancer, started the Auroville Dance Lab creating work like *Crossroads*, *Mantra* and *Speaking in Tongues*. Her books include: *Parallel Journeys*, *Refugees from Paradise* & *The God Enchanter*, poetry anthologies: *Mobile Hour* & *Light Matter*, and for young adults: *Island of Infinity* and the forthcoming *Infinity Papers*. She works at the Centre of Indian Studies, Bharat Nivas, Auroville.

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