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Boundless She was, a form of Infinity
Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*

Śraddhā

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The Mother and Sri Aurobindo*

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Editorial

100 years ago, on a windless sunny afternoon, Mirra Alfassa, ‘the finest flower of European culture with deep spiritual filiations with India and the East as also with Africa,’ and the incarnation of ‘a practical genius of a rare order, with powers of wide yet precise organisation’ met in the then ghost town of Pondicherry “the ‘Krishna’ she had met so often in her dream-experiences, ... the Master of her occult life”, Sri Aurobindo, ‘an embodiment of the East-West synthesis’ containing within himself ‘the multi-dimensional spiritual consciousness of India’. How should we look upon this meeting or why should we at all consider this encounter as something memorable? This momentous coming together of two very rare spiritual personalities ‘represents’, as K D Sethna (Amal Kiran) so luminously puts it, ‘the coming together of the necessary creative powers by whom a new age would be born. Sri Aurobindo’s main movement of consciousness may be said to have been an immense Knowledge-Power from above the mind The Mother’s chief movement may be said to have been an intense Love-Power from behind the heart. When she and Sri Aurobindo met, they completed each other, brought fully into play the spiritual energies in both and started the work of total earth-transformation from high above and deep within’, ‘blending them’ and leading ‘to a common all-consummating goal’. Let us then salute to the coming of the new dawn which will gradually light up the lives of ‘thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance’(CWM, vol.1, p.113) and usher in a world ‘when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth’(Ibid.)

It is known that after the accident to Sri Aurobindo’s leg in Nov 1938, — which he said was due to the attack of the hostile forces – the two subsequent Darshans, that of 24 November and February 21 had to be put off. Finally when, responding to the pleading of her children, the Mother requested Sri Aurobindo if 24 April, the day of her second and final coming to India in 1920, could be considered as Darshan day He consented. From that time onward, 24 April became the fourth Darshan day and it is often held that this day, being the anniversary of her second and final coming to India, is ‘the tangible sign of the sure victory over the adverse forces’. It is as if the work of New Creation

which Sri Aurobindo had started single-handedly from 1910 viz. that of building ‘a solid firm and immovable foundation’ (Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works*, vol.7, p.407) took him till 1920. With the second and final coming of the Mother in 1920, this work of installing permanently in an earthly form, the presiding deity, the Mother Divine, the Supreme Adya Shakti (Ibid, p.408), indispensable for the work of transformation, gathered pace and strength and 24 April Darshan could therefore be viewed as the final sanction and seal of their joint endeavour at bringing down the supramental Truth-Consciousness in this earthly atmosphere and fixing it there forever as a transforming power to change this earthly life into the life divine. Let us on this blessed day renew once again our pledge to make a total and unreserved surrender of ourselves in all the parts of our being to this supreme and benevolent Power and firmly resolve to reject all the movements of the lower nature – all its littlenesses, pettiness, its stupidity, laziness and unwillingness to change, hostility to the Truth, its desires, doubt and disbelief, jealousy and lust and passions and greed and envy (Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*). Let us ruthlessly tear these up from their ‘bleeding roots’ and offer them to the Supreme Mother to bear her ‘touch immaculate’; let us invoke along with the Mother the fervent prayer she made in her New Year’s Message in 1943

The hour has come when a choice
has to be made, radical
and definitive. Lord, give us
the strength to reject falsehood and
emerge in Thy truth
pure and worthy of Thy victory

and sincerely pray that she can fill us up with her ‘calm, the light, the power, the bliss, the freedom, the wideness, the heights of knowledge, the seas of Ananda’(Sri Aurobindo).

We wish to record our grateful thanks to the *Overman Foundation*, Kolkata, for letting us publish the text of the inaugural Subhas K Mukherjee Memorial Oration by Prof. Murali Sivaramakrishnan, organised on October 15, 2013. We are also grateful to the Editor, *Mother India*, for permitting us to use a few lines taken from Amal Kiran’s answer to an ‘inquiring outsider’ published in *Mother India* in February 1973, pp.11-12. Last but not the least our sincere thanks to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for

— the passage by Sri Aurobindo entitled ‘*The need of a Spiritual Change*’ taken from ‘*The Life Divine*’, SABCL, vol.19, pp.1053-60, which later

- appeared on the website of the e-magazine, *Next Future*, on 13 Nov, 2013,
- a few lines occurring in vol.7, pp.407-8 of the *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, and *The Mother* by Sri Aurobindo
 - the photograph of the Mother from the Ashram catalogue of photos.
- Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgement and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry.

Erratum: Our sincere apologies for a grave oversight on our part in our last issue, February 2014. The passage entitled *Transformation* is by the Mother and not Sri Aurobindo, as wrongly printed, and was taken from her writing *On Education*, CWM, vol.7, pp.80-81. The error is much regretted.

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श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं
Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

The Need of a Spiritual Change

Sri Aurobindo

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the external life has been raised up by man's ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organised collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it. This new fullness of the means of life might be, by its power for a release from the incessant unsatisfied stress of his economic and physical needs, an opportunity for the full pursuit of other and greater aims surpassing the material existence, for the discovery of a higher truth and good and beauty, for the discovery of a greater and diviner spirit which would intervene and use life for a higher perfection of the being: but it is being used instead for the multiplication of new wants and an aggressive expansion of the collective ego. At the same time Science has put at his 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. The evolution of human mind and life must necessarily lead towards an increasing universality; but on a basis of ego and segmenting and dividing mind this opening to the universal can only create a vast pullulation of unaccorded ideas and impulses, a surge of enormous powers and desires, a chaotic mass of unassimilated and intermixed mental, vital and physical material of a larger existence which, because it is not taken up by a creative harmonising light of the Spirit, must welter in a universalised confusion and discord out of which it is impossible to build a greater harmonic life. Man has harmonised life in the past by organised ideation and limitation; he has created societies based on fixed ideas or fixed customs, a fixed cultural system or an organic life-system, each with its own order; the throwing of all these into the melting-pot of a more and more intermingling life and a pouring in of ever new ideas and motives and facts and possibilities call for a new, a greater consciousness to meet and master the increasing potentialities of existence and harmonise them. Reason and Science can only help by standardising, by fixing everything into an artificially arranged and mechanised unity of material life. 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 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. The evolution of Mind working upon Life has developed an organisation of the activity of Mind and use of Matter which can no longer be supported by human capacity without an inner change. An accommodation of the egocentric human individuality, separative even in association, to a system of living which demands unity, perfect mutuality, harmony, is imperative. But because the burden which is being laid on mankind is too great for the present littleness of the human personality and its petty mind and small life-instincts, because it cannot operate the needed change, because it is using this new

apparatus and organisation to serve the old infraspirtual and infrarational life-self of humanity, the destiny of the race seems to be heading dangerously, as if impatiently and in spite of itself, under the drive of the vital ego seized by colossal forces which are on the same scale as the huge mechanical organisation of life and scientific knowledge which it has evolved, a scale too large for its reason and will to handle, into a prolonged confusion and perilous crisis and darkness of violent shifting incertitude. Even if this turns out to be a passing phase or appearance and a tolerable structural accommodation is found which will enable mankind to proceed less catastrophically on its uncertain journey, this can only be a respite. For the problem is fundamental and in putting it evolutionary Nature in man is confronting herself with a critical choice which must one day be solved in the true sense if the race is to arrive or even to survive. The evolutionary nîsus is pushing towards a development of the cosmic Force in terrestrial life which needs a larger mental and vital being to support it, a wider Mind, a greater wider more conscious unanimised Life-Soul, Anima, and that again needs an unveiling of the supporting Soul and spiritual Self within to maintain it.

A rational and scientific formula of the vitalistic and materialistic human being and his life, a search for a perfected economic society and the democratic cultus of the average man are all that the modern mind presents us in this crisis as a light for its solution. Whatever the truth supporting these ideas, this is clearly not enough to meet the need of a humanity which is missioned to evolve beyond itself or, at any rate, if it is to live, must evolve far beyond anything that it at present is. A life-instinct in the race and in the average man himself has felt the inadequacy and has been driving towards a reversal of values or a discovery of new values and a transfer of life to a new foundation. This has taken the form of an attempt to find a simple and ready-made basis of unity, mutuality, harmony for the common life, to enforce it by a suppression of the competitive clash of egos and so to arrive at a life of identity for the community in place of a life of difference. But to realise these desirable ends the means adopted have been the forcible and successful materialisation of a few restricted ideas or slogans enthroned to the exclusion of all other thought, the suppression of the mind of the individual, a mechanised compression of the elements of life, a mechanised unity and drive of the life-force, a coercion of man by the State, the substitution of the communal for the individual ego. The communal ego is idealised as the soul of the nation, the race, the community; but this is a colossal and may turn out to be a fatal error. A forced and imposed unanimity of mind, life, action raised to their highest tension under the drive of something which is thought to be greater, the collective soul, the collective life, is the formula found. But this obscure collective being is not the soul or self of the community; it is a

life-force that rises from the subconscious and, if denied the light of guidance by the reason, can be driven only by dark massive forces which are powerful but dangerous for the race because they are alien to the conscious evolution of which man is the trustee and bearer. It is not in this direction that evolutionary Nature has pointed mankind; this is a reversion towards something that she had left behind her.

Another solution that is attempted reposes still on the materialistic reason and a unified organisation of the economic life of the race; but the method that is being employed is the same, a forced compression and imposed unanimity of mind and life and a mechanical organisation of the communal existence. A unanimity of this kind can only be maintained by a compression of all freedom of thought and life, and that must bring about either the efficient stability of a termite civilisation or a drying up of the springs of life and a swift or slow decadence. It is through the growth of consciousness that the collective soul and its life can become aware of itself and develop; the free play of mind and life is essential for the growth of consciousness: for mind and life are the soul's only instrumentation until a higher instrumentation develops; they must not be inhibited in their action or rendered rigid, unplastic and unprogressive. The difficulties or disorders engendered by the growth of the individual mind and life cannot be healthily removed by the suppression of the individual; the true cure can only be achieved by his progression to a greater consciousness in which he is fulfilled and perfected.

An alternative solution is the development of an enlightened reason and will of the normal man consenting to a new socialised life in which he will subordinate his ego for the sake of the right arrangement of the life of the community. If we inquire how this radical change is to be brought about, two agencies seem to be suggested, the agency of a greater and better mental knowledge, right ideas, right information, right training of the social and civic individual and the agency of a new social machinery which will solve everything by the magic of the social machine cutting humanity into a better pattern. But it has not been found in experience, whatever might have once been hoped, that education and intellectual training by itself can change man; it only provides the human individual and collective ego with better information and a more efficient machinery for its self-affirmation, but leaves it the same unchanged human ego. Nor can human mind and life be cut into perfection, – even into what is thought to be perfection, a constructed substitute, – by any kind of social machinery; matter can be so cut, thought can be so cut, but in our human existence matter and thought are only instruments for the soul and the life-force. Machinery cannot form the soul and life-force into standardised shapes; it can at best coerce

them, make soul and mind inert and stationary and regulate the life's outward action; but if this is to be effectively done, coercion and compression of the mind and life are indispensable and that again spells either unprogressive stability or decadence. The reasoning mind with its logical practicality has no other way of getting the better of Nature's ambiguous and complex movements than a regulation and mechanisation of mind and life. If that is done, the soul of humanity will either have to recover its freedom and growth by a revolt and a destruction of the machine into whose grip it has been cast or escape by a withdrawal into itself and a rejection of life. Man's true way out is to discover his soul and its self-force and instrumentation and replace by it both the mechanisation of mind and the ignorance and disorder of life-nature. But there would be little room and freedom for such a movement of self-discovery and self-effectuation in a closely regulated and mechanised social existence.

There is the possibility that in the swing back from a mechanistic idea of life and society the human mind may seek refuge in a return to the religious idea and a society governed or sanctioned by religion. But organised religion, though it can provide a means of inner uplift for the individual and preserve in it or behind it a way for his opening to spiritual experience, has not changed human life and society; it could not do so because, in governing society, it had to compromise with the lower parts of life and could not insist on the inner change of the whole being; it could insist only on a credal adherence, a formal acceptance of its ethical standards and a conformity to institution, ceremony and ritual. Religion so conceived can give a religio-ethical colour or surface tinge, – sometimes, if it maintains a strong kernel of inner experience, it can generalise to some extent an incomplete spiritual tendency; but it does not transform the race, it cannot create a new principle of the human existence. A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself. Another possible conception akin to the religious solution is the guidance of society by men of spiritual attainment, the brotherhood or unity of all in the faith or in the discipline, the spiritualisation of life and society by the taking up of the old machinery of life into such a unification or inventing a new machinery. This too has been attempted before without success; it was the original founding idea of more than one religion: but the human ego and vital nature were too strong for a religious idea working on the mind and by the mind to overcome its resistance. It is only the full emergence of the soul, the full descent of the native light and power of the Spirit and the consequent replacement or transformation and uplifting of our insufficient mental and vital nature by a spiritual and supramental Supernature that can effect this evolutionary miracle.

At first sight this insistence on a radical change of nature might seem to put off all the hope of humanity to a distant evolutionary future; for the transcendence of our normal human nature, a transcendence of our mental, vital and physical being, has the appearance of an endeavour too high and difficult and at present, for man as he is, impossible. Even if it were so, it would still remain the sole possibility for the transmutation of life; for to hope for a true change of human life without a change of human nature is an irrational and unspiritual proposition; it is to ask for something unnatural and unreal, an impossible miracle. But what is demanded by this change is not something altogether distant, alien to our existence and radically impossible; for what has to be developed is there in our being and not something outside it: what evolutionary Nature presses for, is an awakening to the knowledge of self, the discovery of self, the manifestation of the self and spirit within us and the release of its self-knowledge, its self-power, its native self-instrumentation. It is, besides, a step for which the whole of evolution has been a preparation and which is brought closer at each crisis of human destiny when the mental and vital evolution of the being touches a point where intellect and vital force reach some acme of tension and there is a need either for them to collapse, to sink back into a torpor of defeat or a repose of unprogressive quiescence or to rend their way through the veil against which they are straining. What is necessary is that there should be a turn in humanity felt by some or many towards the vision of this change, a feeling of its imperative need, the sense of its possibility, the will to make it possible in themselves and to find the way. That trend is not absent and it must increase with the tension of the crisis in human world-destiny; the need of an escape or a solution, the feeling that there is no other solution than the spiritual cannot but grow and become more imperative under the urgency of critical circumstance. To that call in the being there must always be some answer in the Divine reality and in Nature.

(Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vol. 19, pp.1053-1060. Reproduced with thanks and acknowledgement from *Next Future*, 13 Nov, 2013)

Path of the Isha

Alok Pandey

The *Isha Upanishad* is a masterly work that lays for man the foundations of a Divine Life here upon earth. It shows us the way to live life in a truer way. Long before the Buddha's middle path came to be known, the Isha had laid the foundations of another kind of middle path, a path that not only avoids extremes but also reconciles world and God, matter and Spirit. In the deepest sense, the middle path would mean that we are carrying the world and nature together towards God even as our soul ascends to its native home. Towards this grand aim, the *Isha*, instead of giving us a set of proscriptions and prescriptions, provides us with a set of reflections or rather meditations, kindles in us the right aspiration, the seeking for a Truth that would harmonise Heaven and Earth.

The greatest of all Upanishads, the *Isha* undoubtedly occupies the place of crowning glory among spiritual scriptures. It has been said and rightly so that even if all the beautiful works of the Ages were lost, even if the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas* and the other smritis were lost, the *Isha* alone is sufficient to rescue the world out of chaos and darkness. One may add without any exaggeration that even the first verse of the *Isha* alone is enough to rescue out the rest of the truths ingrained within it.

In fact, the first verse starts with a powerful statement, a matter of spiritual fact, a revelation so obvious that we are likely to miss it. The *Isha* emphasises upon it with the right stress in its opening verse thus:

1. All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy; lust not after any man's possession.

The very first step on the great path of the Spirit is to reorient our being. Right now we live an egocentric life. We think almost instinctively that this world is meant for our personal and private enjoyment, that even God, if there

is one, is meant to serve our egoistic interests, to provide for our desires and satisfy our egoistic demands. This is a wrong and false attitude and brings much suffering and pain. It is this false view of things that we remain bound by the dualities of pleasure and pain, good and evil, thereby forever confused in knowledge and confounded in our actions. Truth lies beyond dualities and for transcending this fragmented state we need to remind ourselves of this central liberating Truth that there is none else but the One, eternal, Sole and Unique who alone is and for whom and by whom the stars whirl into Space and the atoms weave the dance of Time. To concentrate upon this central idea of the Vedas, to remember this Truth at all times is to find the widest door to freedom.

The truth of the matter is that nothing belongs to anyone but the Lord, the *Isha*, from whom all has emerged and by whom all comes to life and is created, sustained and destroyed. We possess nothing but are only trustees in Time. Things, people, positions, wealth and whatever else we wrongly claim as our own are simply given to us for the moment. It is with us today, tomorrow it will be with someone else. This is the ever moving world, *jagatyam jagat*, where everything is in motion and therefore changing all the time or rather creating the sense of Time through the incessant movement. The illusion of stability is simply because they turn in a groove out of habit. Laws are merely repetitive patterns. Nothing remains ever the same. It changes with each moment. But there is Something or Someone who remains unchanging within the change, Someone who is the sole witness of the flow and flux of life, Someone untouched with its changing appearances. He, the sole doer and enjoyer, the eternal Cause of all is the Lord, *Isha*. All this and we ourselves, and this world with its myriad moods and many façades are meant for Him. Nature is constantly dancing and putting on different masks as it were to simply please and attract Him. Even the sentient and insentient, living and non-living are an illusion of our limited vision for indeed He dwells in all things and from His secret Presence and by His secret breath sets all things into motion.

Therefore is our sense of possession, acquisition and appropriation foolish. It is a delusion to believe 'this' is mine and 'that other' too I can have. Rather we must use things as trustees, as good trustees, who act on behalf of the Lord. When things are with us we should treat them well without desire for our egoistic demands. When they go away from us we should not hold on or cling to them but simply let go of them. They never were ours. They belonged to the Lord and have returned back to Him. This brings a state of inner felicity. We begin to enjoy life truly. Having nothing as our own we no more fear losing anything. And yet all belongs to us through Him since we too belong to Him. He can grant us whatever we may need and take away whatever we do not. It is His

Will, for He is the Lord. When we thus lead life we are freed from the snare and illusion of a false egoistic individuality and that brings us an abiding joy and peace.

2. Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years. Thus it is in thee and not otherwise than this; action cleaves not to a man.
3. Sunless are those worlds and enveloped in blind gloom whereto all they in their passing hence resort who are slayers of their souls.

Next, the *Isha* bids us to live and live long and with fullness. Not to escape from life as a disillusioned and disenchanted person but to enjoy it, to battle and conquer and live and grow, not for our own sake but for the sake of God, for *Isha*, the Lord; to work and serve and love and live for His sake. This is the path of works of which the Gita brings the grand culmination, the great and wide path to Truth that becomes the starting point of a new synthesis. Thus alone the path of progress opens for man. If we look at it closely, this second command springs naturally from the first. For if everything belongs to the Lord, does not this world too belong to Him? If He dwells in all things as the *Isha* reveals, then is He not dwelling within this world and in all beings? Is not every situation and circumstance of life merely a mask concealing behind it a Divine Purpose and a Divine significance to be explored and discovered by the seeking soul? It means that we can realise Him everywhere and in everything. If we go deep within anything we shall find God as its indwelling inhabitant. All idea of escape from life because it is a vanity, a delirium and an illusion is itself an illusion that springs from the illusion of our separate self. The will to escape is simply a trick of the ego that finds this world vain since it does not meet our standards or defies human logic. Instead we should toil to shape it in God's image since the Lord Himself is engaged in this work. If we live with this attitude that all belongs to God and work with this idea that God dwells in all beings and things, then our actions will not bind us or give rise to dualities of pleasure and pain and other reactions born of the ignorant ego. Our brief successes and failures will then belong to Him alone who in His infinite Wisdom chooses to conceal Himself now in the dress of success and now again in the garb of failure to fulfil His grand design that transcends our human notions of both. In other words, it is not action that binds us but the attitude with which we act. When we act egoistically for some personal gains then we get bound to the dualities. We rejoice and we suffer, we succeed and we fail. Our hopes and despairs born of desire carry forward as seeds for another life. But if we adopt the attitude of a good trustee then we would like to work for the Lord in whatever

field He may decide for us and do the work diligently with an eye for perfection, expecting nothing but His growing closeness. Such works will not only not bind us but take us closer and closer to Him through works itself.

On the other hand, as the third sloka reveals, there are those unfortunate ignorant beings who, driven by an extreme egoistic state of despair, end up their lives. They may end it by cutting the thread of life short in a state of gloom or end it by sinking into a state of increasing obscurity that comes from acute egoism. They forget the larger and deeper truth and only lament and complain and grumble about their little self. Such persons enter slowly into worlds of gloom and depression. Their consciousness gets veiled for a while from the Light and Joy and Peace that comes through wideness and opening to the Divine Presence in all things. The Upanishad bids us to be careful against the intrusion of such a state even if it comes wearing acceptable and spiritual garbs of disillusionment with the world.

4. One unmoving that is swifter than Mind, That the Gods reach not, for It progresses ever in front. That, standing, passes beyond others as they run. In That the Master of Life establishes the Waters.
5. That moves and That moves not; That is far and the same is near; That is within all this and That also is outside all this.

Now the *Isha* touches upon a crucial question. Is the Divine who dwells within all things and persons and events and circumstances merely a witness or is He the dynamic impulsion behind all things that move? In the next two verses the *Isha* takes up this question. It resolves this riddle not by positing one against the other as if the Divine has to be either this or that. These rules of our mental logic do not bind the Reality that far exceeds our human reason and transcends us even while embracing it. He is both at the same time. Just as we exist and act at the same time, we see and we walk at the same time, and the two do not contradict but complement each other. So too the Divine is the eternal Witness as well as the eternal Doer. He is the Source of all life even as all life refers itself back to Him. Life has sprung from His eternal Existence just as waters stream down from the snow-clad peaks of the mountains. The purity and power of the snow are carried down into the plains by the rivers that nourish and fertilise the soil. Even when the river gets sullied and dirty carrying with it the dust and mire of low-lying earth, still it carries within it the music of the mountains that eternally flow into it giving it fresh life and washing it of the dirt that accumulates in its underbelly.

But who can understand the Divine action? The swiftest minds and the

greatest and widest intelligence are incapable of understanding His ways. We live in the brief will of a single life and experience of the moment but the Divine Will at once carries within it the past formations that drag into the present and the future prints that are drawing near us. While we are stuck to the past or at most to the present, the Divine Consciousness within the individual and the collectivity is already far ahead weaving the future. Even the gods cannot fathom His purpose and His methods baffle our intelligence. He uses death to build immortal life, uses pain to drive us towards Bliss, cruelty to strengthen and purify the power of love in us, error to carry us towards the home of Truth. All is contained and prefigured within Him, — the past, the present and the future. There is a secret pressure from within that compels things to lead us towards some supreme Good even when our ignorant assessments of the moment cannot understand it. Such is the faith and understanding that an aspirant must carry, a faith that is consistent with the logic of spiritual things that if the mind could understand Him, then He would be something less than the mind. Instead of trying to analyse and understand His actions we should instead open ourselves to the Intuition that dwells within all things and with that power we can glimpse something of His occult Wisdom even though the complete Truth will still escape us.

6. But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught.
7. He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?

Wisdom therefore consists in learning to feel and see the Divine in all persons, things, events and circumstances even when they appear dark and terrible to our limited vision, even when they baffle our understanding. This state develops when we practise this Idea as a meditation in our everyday life. We must concentrate, reflect, meditate upon this greatest of all ideas that the One Divine is in all beings and all are in the Divine. Thus we begin to see Him everywhere and shrink from nothing.

Extending this state further we come to feel and experience that it is indeed the One Divine who has become all things. These seemingly separate objects are the mute and dumb expressions of the One who dwells within all as their secret Reality and has become this dangerous and delightful universe. As this state gets perfected in us, we begin to love what common hearts repel and dread, we begin to discover the beauty in the hideous and the utility of what we

in our ignorance call pain and suffering. Then we are no more deluded by appearances however dark and difficult they may appear to us. We shrink from nothing since we find the One everywhere and in all things. Everything henceforth appears to our unsealed vision not only a mask of the Divine Beloved but the Beloved Himself who extends in all things by the power of His secret Yoga.

8. It is He that has gone abroad — That which is bright, bodiless, without scar of imperfection, without sinews, pure, unpierced by evil. The Seer, the Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere, the Self-existent has ordered objects perfectly according to their nature from years sempiternal.

The *Isha* bids us to perfect this state, affirming again and again that it is the Divine who has gone forth into the universe. This creation has not only sprung out of Him but is also contained within Him. Nay this too is He. Within all things He dwells as their pure essence, the Light that casts no shadow and which no evil can touch. That is why there is hope for all since the Divine Purity is the secret core of all. It is He at whose call the winds blow and the stars are arranged in Space as so many watch-fires of the Eternal. It is He who hides in the mask of the old man crouched and bending. It is He who smiles in the boy and blushes in the girl. The cosmos is His poem that He writes without sinews; the suns and galaxies drift in Space for fear of Him and at His beckoning and will do so until He withdraws them within Himself, to cast again in another cycle of His progressive manifestation. Nay, He is nearer still, He is in us, He is us.

9. Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.
10. Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Knowledge, other that which comes by the Ignorance; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.
11. He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality.

This vast wisdom does not come to those who regard this world as an accident or a deceitful Maya and thereby try to find ways and means to escape from this. Nor does this high Wisdom come to those who are lost in appearances alone and seek no further.

The true and widest possible understanding comes when we have gone through the play of multiplicity even while keeping our gaze fixed upon the Eternal. The experience of worldly life is a preparation for the next step. When we try to cut short this step by avoiding the difficulty then we get blinded by the Light for which we were not yet ready. Instead we should try to seek Him in all things and beings and turn all experience, whether worldly or other-worldly into a means to reach Him, touch Him, clasp Him. Then the world itself begins to disclose its Divine essence and we begin to see the Divine Intent in creation itself. We see how even what seemed to us terrible and evil was also a needed step, how error was His footstep upon the way and how each and every experience came to take us one step closer to Truth. Even Ignorance becomes a means for the gradual disclosure, a preparation for the coming Light.

That is why many lives are needed. Passing through the portals of Death and Birth again and again, the soul grows and matures and a time comes when it is ready to shed its dark attire of lower nature and assume its true and luminous robe. Or rather the dark attire changes into a luminous robe under the prolonged pressure of the Light of Truth just as a block of carbon (coal) changes into diamond if it consents to remain buried deep within the earth, under hazardous pressures and temperatures for a very long period. So too when our soul journeys through earth over millennia bearing the pressure of complex forces, then is it chiselled to manifest the Divine Glory from which it came. Such a person is free even when he lives and acts in the world as an ordinary man doing ordinary everyday things. But those who are in haste to cut the knot and unable to bear the pressure of evolution, those who are only looking for doors of escape actually cut short their evolutionary possibility and end up only in a blind alley.

The soul must pass through the state of ignorance, consent to live and act in the world of division and suffering and evil and pain to gain strength and manhood. Then ascending beyond division into Unity and Oneness it can yet enter into the earthly play of multiplicity, no more deluded by appearance or frightened by darkness but to work upon it, to bring more and more Light and Love and Truth unto the earth.

12. Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Non-Birth, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Birth alone.
13. Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Birth, other that which comes by the Non-Birth; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.
14. He who knows That as both in one, the Birth and the dissolution of Birth, by

the dissolution crosses beyond death and by the Birth enjoys Immortality.

Once again we are reminded of this fallacy of trying to escape from the 'snare of birth'. Birth and Non-Birth are simply two conditions of the One Being. The One, Eternal and Infinite, limiting Himself in Space and Time, experiences birth. Going beyond this self-limitation He experiences a state of Non-Birth. But who compelled the One to thus limit Himself. None but Himself. It is He who chose to thus limit Himself for the sake of the play. Instead of trying to escape from birth we should therefore turn it into a conscious play. By regaining our true stature of Oneness, by reclaiming our unity with the Infinite and the Eternal we can experience a state of continuity. We are no more unconscious when we pass away from one sheath to another but are perfectly conscious of all the worlds simultaneously. In this 'unified' state, all division and its consequent limitation cease and life and death become simply a conscious passing off from one sheath to another and return without losing anything of the past experience as well as with full awareness of the future that is shaping itself in the present. This state of 'Unity and Oneness' is the highest condition envisaged for man, a state in which *'the world and God grow true and one.'*

15. The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid; that do thou remove, O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for sight.

Therefore the seer of Truth should aspire to live fully with full consciousness of the Law of Truth that determines all things. This law is not known to us since our minds cover it with preferences, ideas, opinions, attachments. Even our most brilliant thoughts are a shield that cut off the Integral Reality. We must aspire not so much to escape from this world but to discover the right law of things as ordained by the Truth, the *Sanatana Dharma* that resides within all things. Instead of fixed and rigid mind-born and man-made rules of life we should aspire to know the Law of Truth or the Will of God at each moment and execute It without preference or prejudice. That Law of Truth, of Right is revealed to us as we free ourselves from the various mental constructs that surround and cabin our life. This Law of Truth is beyond percepts and concepts, even beyond opinions, ideas and beliefs. Our ideas and idealisms are like rays whereas Truth is the parent Sun whom these lesser things try to imperfectly reproduce and reflect in the limited mind. Out of the limited fields of our human mind we must leap up to the wider realms and vast expanses lit by the Supramental Light. Then only we can discover the Law of Truth. When we thus act in accord with the Law of Truth then are we ever free and, what is

best, we help in the world march towards Light and Truth and Beauty and Bliss.

16. O Fosterer, O sole Seer, O Ordainer, O illumining Sun, O power of the Father of creatures, marshal thy rays, draw together thy light; the Lustre which is thy most blessed form of all. The Purusha here and there, So am I.

We can experience the Divine at many levels and depending upon the level and the veil through which we see Him we form an idea of who and what He is and who we are and what this world is. But the most auspicious seeing, the highest of all forms is that vision which reconciles and resolves all things and their mutual relation into the One. All differences are then dissolved into this constant vision of the Highest that light into which all other Lights dissolve and resolve as many streams unite in the vast ocean and a million rays return to their parent sun. It is this highest vision of Truth towards which the seer aspires, not only to 'see' and behold that Blessedness and that Glory but to identify with IT so as to be able to feel and see the highest truth of our being which is one with God. We too are the Divine covered with many masks of Ignorance. And when this ignorance is slain we discover ourselves in the Light of Truth that we are none else but a part and parcel, an eternal portion of the Divine whom we adore and worship, aspire and seek. We are 'That' in our deepest Self and by the boon of that Sublime Vision we discover this truth of our being. This is the state to which man can aspire and arrive following the path of the *Isha*.

17. The Breath of things is an immortal Life, but of this body ashes are the end. OM! O Will, remember, that which was done remember! O Will, remember, that which was done remember.

But what then of this temporal personality which we habitually regard as ourselves? We wish to see this personality centred around a name and form to become immortal. But the immortality to which the seers aspired and realised was not the personal survival of a brief personality but that state of consciousness where we become one with our immortal essence, the Fire, the Divine Will and Force that builds all forms and knows all our past and future formations yet to come. Thereby comes this great and solemn reminder that forms change but the Force that resides and moves the forms does not dissolve with the dissolution of the form. Nature is immortal and outlasts the death of forms. And within these ever-changing appearances resides the Will that moves all things towards a high predestined end. It holds within it the key to all our changing forms and

appearances that are like so many scenes staged by the Eternal for His Delight, for His play. When we unite with that Will then we too can participate consciously in the play. This 'Will' dwells in man, deep within his heart as a 'Fire' that holds the secret of all our past and future forms.

18. O god Agni, knowing all things that are manifested, lead us by the good path to the felicity; remove from us the devious attraction of sin. To thee completest speech of submission we would dispose.

Therefore the seer now prays to this inner Deity, the Fire hid in the heart of man, to lead us by the right and the light towards the supreme Good that is also one with the supreme Felicity. That straight and sunlit path opens deep within our soul. Our surface being is, however, lost in appearances, deviated and distracted by many influences and contrary pulls that deflect and distort the Divine Will in us. It is this deflection and distortion of the Divine Will by the ego-driven movements of nature that constitute sin and create evil and confusion in the world. It takes us far away from the sunlit path. There is in fact no other error or sin but a deviation from the Divine Will, not being in accord with the Law of Truth. This creates confusion, stumbling, error and its unfortunate consequences.

Therefore the seer aspires and invokes that 'Will', that Divine Force and Light residing in our depths and prays that It may remove from his consciousness the tendency towards error and sin that arise from this deflection. To invoke this Will in our life and submit ourselves to it gladly is the highest wisdom. Instead of desiring that things should be this way or that, instead of wanting that events and circumstances should take this shape or that we must learn to take refuge in the Law of Truth, in the Divine who knows best and does what is needed at each moment for all beings. We must surrender, not to our fanciful ideas of what should be and should not be, not to our ignorant notions and opinions of what is right and what is wrong, not to our limited and partial viewpoints, however great and idealistic they may seem, but to the Divine Will who alone knows and acts with the vision of the Whole.

Thus comes the grand close of this greatest of all Upansihads that combines within just 18 verses, the greatest Wisdom of all times. It lays the main lines of a future synthesis, the triple paths of Knowledge, Works and Devotion into a single grand path, a widest gate of entry into the One who is also the Infinite, a steady journey that keeps reconciling Heaven and Earth avoiding both extremes, — on one hand a life of blind indulgence driven by desire and despair and on the other extreme a life driven with the sole and selfish motive of personal

salvation into some felicitous Beyond. We are children of God and must be even as He. Shrinking from nothing we must live and act in this world as free beings. This freedom, the only possible freedom for man, comes by a conscious and integral union with the Integral Divine who is at once this world as well as transcends it. To Him our fullest obeisance, To Him our utmost submission.

Sri Aurobindo reveals to us this great vision in several places in *Savitri*:

All here where each thing seems its lonely self
Are figures of the sole transcendent One:
Only by him they are, his breath is their life;
An unseen Presence moulds the oblivious clay.

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

.....
The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
Has entered with his silence into space:
He has fashioned these countless persons of one self;
He has built a million figures of his power;
He lives in all, who lived in his Vast alone;
Space is himself and Time is only he.

.....
Ourself and a high stranger whom we feel,
It is and acts unseen as if it were not;
It follows the line of sempiternal birth,
Yet seems to perish with its mortal frame.
Assured of the Apocalypse to be,
It reckons not the moments and the hours;
Great, patient, calm it sees the centuries pass,
Awaiting the slow miracle of our change

In the sure deliberate process of world-force
And the long march of all-revealing Time.
It is the origin and the master-clue,
A silence overhead, an inner voice,
A living image seated in the heart,
An unvalled wideness and a fathomless point,
The truth of all these cryptic shows in Space,
The Real towards which our strivings move,
The secret grandiose meaning of our lives.

(*Savitri*, Book 1, Canto 4)

Mind is not all his tireless climb can reach,
There is a fire on the apex of the worlds,
There is a house of the Eternal's light,
There is an infinite truth, an absolute power....

.....
There is a being beyond the being of mind,
An Immeasurable cast into many forms,
A miracle of the multitudinous One,
There is a consciousness mind cannot touch,
Its speech cannot utter nor its thought reveal.
It has no home on earth, no centre in man,
Yet is the source of all things thought and done,
The fount of the creation and its works,
It is the origin of all truth here,
The sun-orb of mind's fragmentary rays,
Infinity's heaven that spills the rain of God,
The Immense that calls to man to expand the Spirit,
The wide Aim that justifies his narrow attempts,
A channel for the little he tastes of bliss.

(*Savitri*, Book 11)

The Mother Image in Sri Aurobindo

Prema Nandakumar

6. Mother in the Vedas

It was not only in politics but even in literature, life and yoga the Mother-idea gives the Indian a rare power to stride forward. Again, this was realised quite early in our culture. Contrary to the generally held view, the Vedas not only hailed the Mother Goddess idea, but some of the hymns themselves were heard and recorded by women. Many of the verses invoked Gayatri who is described as the Mother of Vedas and paid homage to Saraswati. The *Rig Veda* alone has several seer-poetesses (Rishikas) like Ghosa Kaksivati who was a granddaughter of Rishi Dhīrghatamas. Godha, Vasukrapatni, Indrasnusha, Sarama, great names all. There is even Ratri and of this poetess, Swamini Atmaprajnananda Saraswati says:

“She is the sister of Ushas, and like her is called a daughter of heaven. She is not conceived as the dark, but as the bright starlit night. Decked with all splendour, she drives away the darkness. At her approach, men, animals, and birds go to rest. She protects her worshippers from the wolf and the thief, guiding them to safety.”ⁱ

When Sri Aurobindo retired from politics and settled down in Pondicherry, he took up the study of the Vedas in a big way seeking clues for progress in his yoga. The Bande Mataram Movement had brought to the fore various Mother images from ancient Itihasic-Puranic literature – Durga, Bhavani. These images had electrified the land and united the nation. Now Sri Aurobindo would go to the roots of the Mother idea that had enriched the land in ever so many ways. The Bhakti poets of Bengal had produced emotionally charged verses on Mother as power. Sri Aurobindo had translated several medieval Bengali poets like Nidhu Babu, Horu Thakur and Bidyapati. As one who was familiar with the Sri Ramakrishna-Swami Vivekananda phenomenon, the Kali ideal was no doubt

close to him. As an associate of Sister Nivedita he would have read her brilliant essay ‘*Two Saints of Kali*’ on Ramprasad and Ramakrishna. Among Sister Nivedita’s pellucid translations of Ramprasad, is one that gives an image of surrender:

“Tho’ the mother beat him,
The child cries, ‘Mother, O Mother!’
And clings still tighter to her garment.

True I cannot see Thee,
Yet am I not a lost child!
I still cry ‘Mother, Mother!’”ⁱⁱ

In Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo had the leisure to go to the fount of Mother-idea, the Vedas. Every atom of Indian culture must needs trace its beginnings to the Vedic mass. That is why the Vedas are themselves called the “*Veda Mata*”, Mother Veda. Sri Aurobindo’s studies in the Veda yielded rich dividends for us, since they permeate all that he wrote afterwards, and Savitri is also a child of Veda. Sri Aurobindo’s Vedic exploration in Pondicherry has gifted us with two brilliant works: *On the Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. Both of them were written originally as a series of essays for *Arya*. Yet, they are both riveted to a central vision that revealed to Sri Aurobindo the inner significances of the hymns, assuring us that the ancient Indian mystics excelled in the “twilight language”. There was a surface meaning and an inner connotation that no doubt helped Sri Aurobindo draw out the coiled implications in the ancient tale of Satyavan and Savitri.

It is *On the Veda* that takes us to the Mother idea in the ancient hymns in a big way. At the head of the Vedic gods and goddesses is their mother, Aditi, referred to as *deva mata* in traditional writings. According to Sri Aurobindo, “Aditi is the indivisible consciousness, force and Ananda of the Supreme; the Mother, its living dynamis, the supreme Love, Wisdom, Power.” There is plenty of literature on the myth of Aditi in the Vedas. According to the legends, she is the daughter of Daksha Prajapati who married Rishi Kasyapa, son of Marichi. They are the parents of the Dwadasha Adityas (Twelve Suns) and the incarnation of Vamana.

Sri Aurobindo, however, goes to Aditi as the female energy at the head of all creation. He writes:

“There are also female energies; for the Deva is both Male and Female and

the gods also are either activating souls or passively executive and methodising energies. Aditi, infinite Mother of the gods, comes first; and there are besides five powers of the Truth-Consciousness, -- Mahi or Bharati, the vast Word that brings us all things out of the divine source; Ila, the strong primal word of the Truth who gives us its active vision; Saraswati, its streaming current and the word of its inspiration; Sarama, the Intuition, hound of heaven who descends into the cavern of the subconscious and finds there the concealed illuminations; Dakshina, whose function is to discern rightly, dispose the action and the offering and distribute in the sacrifice to each godhead its portion. Each god, too, has his female energy.”ⁱⁱⁱ

What is this variety, why so many deities and their female counterparts would be a legitimate question. Sri Aurobindo says they are essential for attaining perfection. A human being has so many limbs of existence, physical, vital, mental, psychic, spiritual. He must attain perfection in every one of the components of his personality and these facets have their own inspirational godheads as recorded in traditional scriptures. Surya (the sun) is hailed as the presiding deity of the eyes, Soma (the moon) is said to be the presiding deity of the ears and Saraswati herself is seen as the presiding deity of the tongue. By propitiating the respective deities, meditating upon them, following their lead, man achieves perfection in that aspect of his personality.

Sri Aurobindo’s Vedic studies seem to have been specially tuned to the mother energies when he was writing the serial on the Vedic hymns in *Arya*. So we draw closer to the five female energies in this series. The writing is poetic, research-oriented, and often trembles upon a thriller-touch! Saraswati has the pride of place in these studies. There is no ambiguity about her presence:

“The symbolism of the Veda betrays itself with the greatest clearness in the figure of the goddess Saraswati. In many of the other gods the balance of the internal sense and the external figure is carefully preserved. The veil sometimes becomes transparent or its corners are lifted even for the ordinary hearer of the Word; but it is never entirely removed...But Saraswati will submit to no such treatment. She is, plainly and clearly, the goddess of the Word, the goddess of a divine Inspiration.”^{iv}

But, of course, Saraswati is more than a mere myth. She is also a physical presence, a stream of water that keeps moving all the time. And a spiritual signpost. Again, she stands out, because of her ‘connections’, says Sri Aurobindo.

“Saraswati is not only connected with other rivers but with other goddesses who are plainly psychological symbols and especially with Bharati and Ila. In the later Puranic forms of worship Saraswati is the goddess of speech, of learning and of poetry and Bharati is one of her names, but in the Veda Bharati and Saraswati are different deities. Bharati is also called Mahi, the Large, Great or Vast. The three, Ila, Mahi or Bharati and Saraswati are associated together in a constant formula in those hymns of invocation in which the gods are called by Agni to the Sacrifice.”^v

Going deeper into the Vedas, Sri Aurobindo realised that the mother-idea had spread widely and the Indian looked upon existence itself as created by Aditi who had innumerable images that touched each part of human existence. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s was no fancy listing of names but an experienced reality for the race:

“tumi vidya, tumi dharma
Tumi hridi, tumi marma,
Tvam hi praanaah sareere
Baahuthe tumi maa sakti
Hrudaye tumi maa bhakti
Tomaarayee pratimaa gadi
Mandire, mandire ...”^{vi}

So we come to know a great deal about the variations of Shakti in the Vedas brought to us through Sri Aurobindo’s intuitive interpretation in *The Secret of the Veda* series of articles. “*Saraswati and her Consorts*” is an amazing research work that sees the East-West presence in man’s view of inspiration. Having told us how the stream-idea is very much present in Greek mythology (Pegasus, *pege*, a stream), he proceeds to speak of Saraswati, “she of the stream, the flowing movement”. She is connected with psychological symbols like Bharati, Ila and Mahi. We read with ease Sri Aurobindo’s intuitive translation of two verses in the Veda that underline the use of mother-symbols by the ancients:

“May Ila, Saraswati and Mahi, three goddesses who give birth to the bliss, take their place on the sacrificial seat, they who stumble not,” or “who come not to hurt” or “do no hurt.” The epithet means, I think, they in whom there is no false movement with its evil consequences, *duritam*, no stumbling into pitfalls of sin and error. ..

“May Bharati come speeding to our sacrifice and Ila hither awakening our consciousness (or, knowledge or perceptions) in human wise, and Saraswati, — three goddesses sit on this blissful seat, doing well the Work.”

Watching the way in which Sri Aurobindo ‘connects’ is itself an education in research. As his argument for the wide presence of the mother goddess idea in Vedic hymnology proceeds, we effortlessly glide into accepting Saraswati (Word) as descending from the Sanskrit Ritam that stands for Truth-consciousness. The presence of motherhood in the illuminations that come to the human being are further strengthened by Sri Aurobindo’s drawing our attention to Vedic descriptions of the Saraswati idea. *Sunruta* (the word of a blissful Truth), *varutri disana* (a widely covering or embracing Thought-power), *cetanti sumatinam* (awakener of right thinking), *suvira* (energetic), *śruti* (truth-audition), *dristi* (truth-vision). When Sri Aurobindo says that *śruti* and *dristi* are the two powers of the Rishi (Kavi, the inspired poet), we realise the highest position accorded to the mother image in the Vedas.

We now slip into another great symbol in the Vedas: the number Seven. There are seven Thoughts, seven Rivers.

“The seven rays or cows are Aditi the infinite Mother, the Cow unslayable, supreme Nature or infinite Consciousness, pristine source of the later idea of Prakriti or Shakti, — the Purusha is in this early pastoral imagery the Bull, Vrishabha, — the Mother of things taking form on the seven planes of her world-action as energy of conscious being.”

Not surprisingly the image of the Cow acquires great importance in the Vedas. The beginning of the Vedic civilisation was obviously pastoral, which goes to prove that from then on the worship of the cow as Mother Goddess has been present. The Cow, the female energy is constantly associated with Ushas, a goddess and we get to have some exquisite translations of the Vedic hymns on the deity by Sri Aurobindo:

“Dawn in her plenitude like one that lets fall from her a sewn robe moves, the bride of the Bliss; creating Swar, perfect in her working, perfect in her enjoying, she widens from the extremity of Heaven over the earth. Meet ye the Dawn as she shines wide towards you and with surrender bring forward your complete energy. Exalted in heaven is the force to which she rises establishing the sweetness; she makes the luminous worlds to shine forth and is a vision of felicity.”^{vii}

The deity Ushas is described by Sri Aurobindo as the one who awakens other gods and hence “she is the first condition of the Vedic realisation.” So it is in earthly life too, as we daily watch mothers as the first facilitators for children. Now it is easier to understand why and how the Vedic Rishi intuitively zeroed in on the mother image and gave us the honeyed word, “Ushas”, and how she makes the sky and the earth (*dhyava-prithvi*) move on the same wavelength. Sri Aurobindo writes:

“As this divine Dawn pours out widely its light upon them, so have men by submission to the law of her divine act and movement to bring forward for her the fully energised **completeness of their being and their capacities as a vehicle for her light or as a seat for her sacrificial activities.**

The Rishi then dwells on the two capital works of the divine Dawn in man, — her elevation of him to the full force of the Light and the revelation of the Truth and her pouring of the Ananda, the Amrita, the Soma Wine, the bliss of the immortal being into the mental and bodily existence.”^{viii}

Man must aspire, and the Mother will pour upon him Her answering grace! Another mother image from the Vedas which has been presented to us by Sri Aurobindo is Sarama. The title he has given to the essay on Sarama has a connectivity with Francis Thompson’s classic, the poem, ‘*The Hound of Heaven*’. There is a terrible power about the poem that describes the manner in which the Divine stalks the individual self through the life’s journey, relentlessly as a hound would pursue its prey:

“I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes, I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy ...”

Sri Aurobindo seems to have found this kind of a relentlessness in the image

of Goddess Sarama as one who travels to find what has been lost, like the individual being in Thompson's poem that has exiled itself from Christ-consciousness.

"These are the two essential characteristics of Sarama; the knowledge comes to her beforehand, before vision, springs up instinctively at the least indication and with that knowledge she guides the rest of the faculties and divine powers that seek. And she leads to that seat, *sadanam*, the home of the Destroyers, which is at the other pole of existence to the seat of the Truth, *sadanam ṛtasya*, in the cave or secret place of darkness, *guhāyām*, just as the home of the gods is in the cave or secrecy of light. In other words, she is a power descended from the superconscient Truth which leads us to the light that is hidden in ourselves, in the subconscious. All these characteristics apply exactly to the intuition."^{ix}

There are other verses too in the Vedas which refer to Sarama in such a manner that Sri Aurobindo finds them to refer to the intuitive faculty of man. She is the image of the illuminations that reveal the Truth to the Rishis. "In other words, she is a power descended from the superconscient Truth which leads us to the light that is hidden in ourselves, in the subconscious. All these characteristics apply exactly to the intuition."

Studying the hymns in the Vedas which refer to the image of Sarama, Sri Aurobindo had aptly titled his essay, for Sarama is also described as a hound in the Vedas. The Phanis desire her, the dog, to guard their cattle. Sri Aurobindo doesn't find this appropriate, though. He thinks it is an apt image to underline the purpose of the Phanis. But brilliant goddess or Hound, Sarama remains the "power of the Truth that seeks and discovers", helps us gain immortality.

There is then the image of Aditi, the mother of gods referred to earlier in the essay. We get some revelations about her in *The Secret of the Veda* too, when Sri Aurobindo proceeds to speak about the hymns of the Atris. The Vedic poesy posits the constant struggle between Light and Darkness and the hymns to Ushas are about the ultimate victory of Light on earth. Aditi is the mother of Gods, and she is the Infinite, the undivided consciousness, the Whole. Diti is the mother of the divisive consciousness.

"Aditi is originally the pure consciousness of infinite existence one and self-luminous; she is the Light that is Mother of all things. As the infinite she gives birth to Daksha, the discriminating and distributing Thought of the divine Mind, and is herself born to Daksha as the cosmic infinite, the mystic

Cow whose udders feed all the worlds.

It is this divine daughter of Daksha who is the mother of the gods. In the cosmos Aditi is the undivided infinite unity of things, free from the duality, *advaya*, and has Diti the separative dualising consciousness for the obverse side of her cosmic creation, — her sister and a rival wife in the later myth."^x

It is fascinating, this roll-call of legends seeking a rational explanation for human existence and evolution. For, there are any number of variations of these myths, especially that of Aditi. Sri Aurobindo notes that at the head of it all is placed the Mother Image of Aditi. No matter she is used in different ways in some of the hymns as when we get troubled by a hymn that shows her as having Surya as her second husband or as the wife of Vishnu who is said to be her son, what remains is the familiar picture of Aditi as the Supreme Mother. Sri Aurobindo takes care not to deny any of the other myths. He only says that they too must have a mystic significance and we will have to wait till the key to understand them is recovered. Meanwhile she remains the power at the head of creation.

"Aditi is the infinite consciousness in the cosmos espoused and held by the lower creative power which works through the limited mind and body, but delivered from this subjection by the force of the divine or illumined Mind born of her in the mentality of man. It is this Indra who makes Surya the light of the Truth rise in heaven and dispel the darknesses and falsehoods and limited vision of the separative mentality. Vishnu is the vaster all-pervading existence which then takes possession of our liberated and unified consciousness, but he is born in us only after Indra has made his puissant and luminous appearance."^{xi}

Such is the power behind the Mother Goddess image of Aditi. The power that creates the light which alone can dispel the darknesses that attack creation. The power that would be visualised by Sri Aurobindo 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.”^{xii}

Evolution - Part II

Debashish Banerji

Savitri, Book II, Canto V: The Godheads of the Little Life

References

- i. *Rsikas of the Rgveda* (2013), p. 99
- ii. When he began reading about the Alvars, the Vaishnava hymnologists of Tamil Nadu, Sri Aurobindo must have been pleasantly surprised with their use of familiar images to convey deep truths. It would also have revealed to him how the images of bhakti poetry had travelled from the far South to the rest of India. He translated ten verses on surrender by Kulasekara Alvar (7th century), one of which has this image:
 “Though thou shouldst not spare me the anguish of the world, yet I have no refuge but thy feet.
 O Lord of the city of the wise begirt by gardens full of sweet flowers, if, in a keen-edged wrath,
 the mother cast off the babe, what can it do but cry for the mother’s love? I am like that babe.”
- iii. *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, SABCL, p. 62
- iv. *The Secret of the Veda*, Ibid, p.86
- v. Ibid, p.89
- vi. Thou art wisdom, thou art law,
 Thou art heart, our soul, our breath
 Thou the love divine, the awe
 In our hearts that conquers death.
 Thine the strength that nerves the arm,
 Thine the beauty, thine the charm.
 Every image made divine
 In our temples is but thine.” (*Bande Mataram*, tr. By Sri Aurobindo)
- vii. *The Secret of the Veda*, Ibid, pp.281-82
- viii. Ibid, p.285
- ix. Ibid, p.204
- x. Ibid, pp.421-22
- xi. Ibid, p.422
- xii. Book III, canto ii

In Canto V of Book II, Aswapati, Savitri's father explores one of the worlds of Life, what Sri Aurobindo calls the "lower vital," where life emerges precariously and struggles in a fierce competition to survive. Sri Aurobindo makes this an occasion for describing and commenting on the process of evolution, starting with the evolution of matter out of a seeming non-being and moving to the evolution of the grades of consciousness in plants and animals, the emergence of the human being and the individualisation in him of this cosmic power of evolution. This is followed by a description of the human condition as one in which we find ourselves as hapless bearers of cosmic evolution in an ignorant and false world. Finally, we are given a passage which talks about the overcoming of human ignorance in the true emergence of free will and agency. The canto ends with two passages, one dealing with the ignorance of the human being and the other with the emergence of knowledge.

At the outset of this enigmatic world
 Which seems at once an enormous brute machine
 And a slow unmasking of the spirit in things,
 In this revolving chamber without walls
 In which God sits impassive everywhere
 As if unknown to himself and by us unseen
 In a miracle of inconscient secrecy,
 Yet is all here his action and his will. (*Savitri*, 4th ed, 1993, p.154)

Sri Aurobindo starts this passage by drawing our attention to the appearance of this world in which, on the one hand everything seems to be mechanical, "an enormous brute machine," and, on the other hand, it is full of symbols of the emergence of spirit, "a slow unmasking of the spirit in things." One may intuit

footprints of the emergence of consciousness in time; all around, at every level are coded symbols of higher realities. Sri Aurobindo calls this world "a revolving chamber without walls," a description of the earth as an open revolving sphere on whose surface we live. At a symbolic level, it is an undefined space, where no limit can be placed on the possibilities of consciousness, yet it is a chamber which has its own sense of closure, a world with laws. Within this chamber sits the Inhabitant, as Sri Aurobindo refers to the immanent Divine Presence in *The Life Divine*. It is his will that guides the progress of the evolution unseen and invisible.

In this whirl and sprawl through infinite vacancy
The Spirit became Matter and lay in the whirl, (Ibid, p.154)

Empty space here becomes the symbol of Non-Being, an infinite vacancy in which 'the Spirit became matter and lay in the whirl'. Yet is this seeming non-being a virtuality of extension and energy (whirl and sprawl). 'Sprawl' is the self-extension of Being appearing through a symbolic Non-Being. It is the spread out infinity of space, making "room" for the cosmos. The 'whirl' is the virtual presence of polarity, an energy field making possible the 'clash and clasp' of dynamis. Infinite vacancy, extension and polarity, these are the first properties of the manifest cosmos. The self-representation of radical infinity proceeds at first through a seeming quantitative void, the "nothing" or absolute vacuum of Space. At the other end of cosmic becoming, we will see this duplicated as a qualitative zero, the Inconscience of Matter. But in both cases, this "nothingness" becomes the adequate condition for the "housing" of infinity, in Space as extension, in Matter as consciousness. Elsewhere, Sri Aurobindo has related these properties of emergence to the elements of Vedic meta/physics. Space as pure extension is here the etheric element, *vyoman*; this is followed by the denser aerial element, *vayu*, characterised by polarity which sets up attraction/repulsion and promotes movement; further successive condensations of Substance yield the radiant and fiery element *tejas*, the watery element *apas* and the material element *kshiti*. As a cosmic field potential in space (sprawl), it is the power of *vayu* that sets up the invisible "grooves" of movement in which cosmic matter moves. *Vayu* carries electromagnetic force and at the material level, inheres as particulate charge and gravitation. In its essence, Space (*vyoman*) and Matter (*kshiti*) are attributes of Being (*sat*), while the electromagnetic, the fiery-radiant plasmatic, and the liquid state-elements are attributes of Consciousness (*chit*). Thus *Vayu* in its essence is conscious-force that has turned habitual, expressing itself as predictable movements in space.

Into this principle of electromagnetic field patterns, there emerge quantised material particles successively in plasmatic, liquid and solid forms. Thus *tejas* is the first coming to appearance as Matter. The transition from *vayu* to *tejas* is a critical one characterised by Sri Aurobindo here as "the Spirit became Matter and lay in the whirl." Though *tejas* as fiery force can be seen as an attribute of *chit*, it is also the first emergence of a plasmatic materiality and thus also an attribute of *sat*. In this sense, the line "The Spirit became Matter and lay in the whirl" also suggests the image of *chit* carrying *sat* in her lap as a mother her child. Thus this line hints at the birthing of the Divine, the *Sat-chit* or Ishwara-Shakti pair quantised in particles of plasmatic matter brought into appearance by the Mother and supported on her lap.

A body sleeping without sense or soul. (Ibid, p.154)

After hinting at the process of cosmogenesis, Sri Aurobindo begins by presenting the material cosmos as its final condensate, inconscient matter. Sense and soul, though absent in its self-presentation, yet are latent within it, asleep. Here sense is the indication of consciousness, *chit*, Shakti, while soul is the indication of personhood, *sat*, Purusha or Ishwara. From the inception of Matter, subject and subjectivity are present and waiting to individuate.

A mass phenomenon of visible shapes
Supported by the silence of the Void
Appeared in the eternal Consciousness
And seemed an outward and insensible world.
There was none there to see and none to feel; (Ibid, P.154)

Once more, soul and sentience are reinvoked — there is visibility but no seer, sensibility but no sensor.

Only the miraculous Inconscient,
A subtle wizard skilled, was at its task.
Inventing ways for magic results,
Managing creation's marvellous device, (Ibid, p.154)

Cosmogenesis is accomplished by impersonal means, using principles that seem miraculous but follow invisible laws.

Still consciousness was hidden in nature's womb,

Unfelt was the bliss whose rapture dreamed the worlds. (Ibid, p.155)

The metaphor of the Mother of God with the Divine asleep on her lap, whose hint we have already encountered is made explicit here. Consciousness is hidden in this inconscient, making it insentient. The waking of sentience will bring pleasure and pain, the duality of affect and the subjective life. Behind both these experiences is a primordial Bliss. The journey of cosmogenesis and its evolutionary drive are motivated by an excess of bliss (*Ananda*) using the Real-Idea (*viñāna*) of involution and evolution to express itself. Here for the first time in this canto, Sri Aurobindo introduces the primordial agency of Bliss (*Ananda*) to "explain" the play of *Sat* and *Chit* in the cosmos. It is the rapture of Bliss that had dreamed these worlds.

Being was an inert substance driven by Force. (Ibid, p.155)

We are returned here to the play of *Sat* and *Chit*, Being and Force, but covert and inconscient in a purely material cosmos. Matter is unconscious being, pure inert substantiality and Force is brute force, not conscious force but blind dynamis.

At first was only an ethereal Space:
Its huge vibrations circled round and round
Housing some unconceived initiative: (Ibid, p.155)

From this presentation of the inert beginnings of the cosmos, Sri Aurobindo draws back into a more detailed consideration of cosmogenesis in terms related to both Vedic metaphysics and modern physics. Ether becomes the first substantiality, the first medium, the subtlest of the subtle media in which Being makes its emergence as a manifest reality out of the Unmanifest. Always already in this emergence, the excess of Bliss which is intrinsic to radical infinity expresses itself as a rippling of the Conscious Force (*chit*) generated infinitely and spreading perpetually in a continuous interminable inertia of movement, waves which eternally vibrate in etheric space. This is why, in Vedantic metaphysics, the primordial sense of Sound is connected with this etheric space. This is the origin of the cosmos as Vibration, represented by the sound syllable 'AUM'.

Upheld by a supreme original Breath
Expansion and contraction's mystic act

Created touch and friction in the void,
Into abstract emptiness brought clash and clasp: (Ibid, p.155)

Here we have the emergence of the second principle or element of cosmogenesis, the aerial principle in which will move the act of the dynamis of pure force as the 'breath' of the spirit. Its primary property is polarity, attraction and repulsion, setting up invisible field patterns that cause the primordial vibrations or waves to take certain forms, a spread or distribution and patterns of intensity and attenuation resulting in quantised effects. These vibrational patterns operate as through an etheric friction, whose related sense is touch.

Parent of an expanding universe (Ibid, p.155)

As with electromagnetic oscillation, the cosmic patterns of the aerial element proceed from a primary oscillation like the inhalation and exhalation of the cosmic purusha. This represents itself as the tendency to expression, *pravritti* and the tendency to withdrawal *nivritti*. The idea of an expanding and contracting universe is related to this notion of the aerial principle of attraction and repulsion, effecting the perpetual rhythm of cosmic breathing.

In a matrix of disintegrating force (Ibid, p.155)

Expansion and disintegration, *pravritti* and *nivritti*, are the day and night of *brahma*, a pattern that repeats perpetually, but also develops continuously through progressive births, deaths and gestations. This is what keeps the image dynamic, a static image made dynamic through the immanence of a non-duality, holding together and being represented in the inhalation and exhalation of the cosmos.

By spending it conserved an endless sum. (Ibid, p.155)

Here Sri Aurobindo introduces the three primary principles within this cosmos – creation, preservation and destruction, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Here we find the creative power is the parent to the expanding universe, the destructive power the matrix of disintegrating force and the preservative power is the conservation of an endless sum, achieved through "spending." The word 'sum' here means an addition but also refers to the idea of the same, the One, the only Being there is. The 'sum' is the One who is infinite, so can spend himself infinitely and yet not exhaust himself, since he is inexhaustible. That is why by spending unendingly he conserves his oneness.

On the hearth of Space he kindled a viewless Fire (Ibid, p.155)

This is the emergence of the third principle or element, the radiant or plasmatic principle, which is responsible for the movement out of this oscillating etheric and aerial continuity into the particulate reality of matter. It brings to appearance that which is invisible. The fire also represents the primary principle of consciousness, awakening aspiration in the heart of matter. This original Fire is the first, the seed of evolving consciousness, the mother of evolution.

That, scattering worlds as one might scatter seeds,
Whirled out the luminous order of the stars. (ibid, p.155)

This is the origin of the material profusion that arises through the distribution of the particulate nature of primordial matter.

An ocean of electric Energy
Formlessly formed its strange wave-particles
Constructing by their dance this solid scheme, (Ibid, p.155)

Sri Aurobindo transitions from the fiery/radiant element to the watery (*apas*) and earthy (*kshiti*) in a vein more directly referencing modern physics. This material transition is shown in terms of an "ocean" of electrons and other charged particles (quarks) that function simultaneously as waves and particles. From the interactions of these fluid particles, the properly material (atomic) substructure of the cosmos emerges:

Its mightiness in the atom shut to rest;
Masses were forged or feigned and visible shapes;
Light flung the photon's swift revealing spark
And showed, in the minuteness of its flash
Imaged, this cosmos of apparent things. (Ibid, p.155)

Photon, electron and quark, those mysterious subatomic "wave-particles" interact to create the appearance of the material world. This successive condensation of Matter may be seen as the involution of Spirit. This now sets the stage for evolutionary emergences.

But when the Inconscient's scrupulous work was done
And Chance coerced by fixed immutable laws,

A scene was set for Nature's conscious play. (Ibid, p.156)

In what seems a random process of the emergence of Matter, there are yet laws that result in patterns of fixity which co-exist with a chronic instability acting constantly to dissolve each new emergence. Yet, though instances are dissolved, others take their place and types are preserved, validating the stability of the emergence.

Then stirred the Spirit's mute immobile sleep;
The Force concealed broke dumbly, slowly out.
A dream of living woke in matter's heart,
A will to live moved the Inconscient's dust,
A freak of living startled vacant Time,
Ephemeral in a blank eternity,
Infinitesimal in a dead Infinite. (Ibid, p.156)

Sri Aurobindo now describes the inverse process of evolution acting from within Matter. From the stable fixity of general material patterns, there appears a will to live. This is the principle of Life involved in Matter, which senses its own imprisonment and wishes to emerge. At first it emerges as a sporadic possibility, like a "freak of living." It's a 'freak' because its mode of being is other than that of Matter. It is also a freak because at first it emerges as something alien, which cannot endure as a type but only as a sporadic possibility. Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution is based in a metaphysics that may be called panentheistic. This supposes the co-existence of transcendental and immanent modes of consciousness forming an evolutionary gradation. A mode of consciousness such as Life, immanent and involved in Matter, becomes modified and compromised by Matter and would be substantially deformed were it not for an image of its own perfection transcendently present, which it can invoke. Thus a mode of consciousness immanent in Matter can aspire to its own transcendental existence to be liberated, causing a descent of its origin and a consequent manifestation of its native forms in Matter.

A subtler breath quickened dead Matter's forms;
The world's set rhythm changed to a conscious cry;
A serpent Power twinned the insensible Force. (Ibid, p.156)

Matter represents the movements and circulations of an inconscient force. This "insensible Force" was now twinned or coupled to the more conscious

Power of Life which Sri Aurobindo is referring to as the 'serpent Power', the power of an evolutionary animism or vitalism at the base of the material universe.

Islands of living dotted lifeless Space
And germs of living formed in formless air.
A Life was born that followed matter's law, (Ibid, p.156)

Living forms appear in a material universe, modifying Matter's law of Inconscience, but also being modified themselves because subject to the inertia of their host. At first, life's existence is precarious and unstable and yet it manages to persist from life-form to life-form. Even though there is death, another instance of life is born and so it persists.

Ever inconstant, yet for ever the same,
It repeated the paradox that gave it birth:
Its restless and unstable stabilities
Recurred incessantly in the flow of Time
And purposeful movements in unthinking forms
Betrayed the heavings of an imprisoned will. (Ibid, pp.156-57)

So it is through the appearance of life-forms and their persistence and repetition, their stabilisation in Matter and ability to stay alive as types, that we intuit the existence of an 'imprisoned will' as the essence of the life-force becoming manifest in Matter.

Waking and sleep lay locked in mutual arms;
Helpless and indistinct came pleasure and pain
Trembling with the first faint thrills of a World-Soul. (Ibid, p.157)

With the emergence of Life in Matter, we now have a principle of active consciousness and a principle of Inconscience cohabiting, "locked in mutual arms." With the emergence of consciousness, comes also the awakening of sentience, the responses of pleasure and pain, dualities which form the basis of the manifestation of Bliss (*Ananda*) in the Ignorance (*Avidya*).

A godhead woke but lay with dreaming limbs;
Her house refused to open its sealed doors.
Insentient to our eyes that only see
The form, the act and not the imprisoned God,

Life hid in her pulse occult of growth and power
A consciousness with mute stifled beats of sense,
A mind suppressed that knew not yet of thought,
An inert spirit that could only be. (Ibid, p.157)

Life in its first manifestations houses consciousness, intelligence, spirit, but these are either unmanifest in her or manifest only in a rudimentary way. There is a kind of mind, not yet the mind of thought but a subconscious mentality, capable of registering sentience. Following the ancient Sankhya psychology, Sri Aurobindo calls this '*citta*', the subconscient mind stuff within the forms of Matter and Life.

At first she raised no voice, no motion dared:
Charged with world-power, instinct with living force,
Only she clung with her roots to the safe earth,
Thrilled dumbly to the shocks of ray and breeze
And put out tendril fingers of desire; (Ibid, p.157)

A rudimentary life consciousness in plant forms is introduced here, the appearance of life in plants following its settlement in colonies of protozoans and metazoans and the varied microbial life. In plant life, there is a greater abundance of consciousness, yet subconscious, receiving the shocks of the universe as forms of experience and responding to them.

The strength in her yearning for sun and light
Felt not the embrace that made her breathe and live;
Absorbed she dreamed content with beauty and hue.
At last the charmed Immensity looked forth: (Ibid, p.157)

The life of sense in living things is at first subconscious. The first of the senses to awake is the haptic, the sense of touch, most intimately tied to the body. It cannot sense beyond the sense of touch; touch is its only power. The senses of taste, smell, hearing and sight are progressively more independent of the boundaries of the body and represent the increasing power of Life over Matter and the emerging presence of Mind.

Astir, vibrant, hungering, she groped for mind; (Ibid, p.157)

The 'Immensity looked forth' refers to the beginning of a greater world of

sensing. The evolution of sense organs appearing in animals reflects a groping for greater mind. Organised senses are already evidence of the emergence of mental consciousness. In consciousness terms, behind the senses is the sense mind, '*manas*', just as in biological terms, there is an organisation of nervous substance and the beginnings of a brain.

Then slowly sense quivered and thought peered out;
She forced the reluctant mould to grow aware.
The magic was chiselled of a conscious form;
Its trained vibrations rhythm'd a quick response,
And luminous stirrings prompted brain and nerve,
Awoke in Matter spirit's identity
And in a body lit the miracle
Impelled by an unseen Will there could break out
Fragments of some vast impulse to become
And vivid glimpses of a secret self, (Ibid, pp.157-58)

Organised forms of consciousness make their appearance with the animal creation.

And the doubtful seeds and force of shapes to be
Awoke from the unconscious swoon of things.
An animal creation crept and ran
And flew and called between the earth and sky,
Haunted by death but hoping still to live
And glad to breathe if only for a while.
Then man was moulded from the original brute. (Ibid, p.158)

This is the animal creation that appears in its great variety and haunting beauty in all its varied manifestations on water, earth and sky. The animal prepares the ground for the full-fledged appearance of another grade of mind, that of the power of Reason. In Sankhya psychology, this is *buddhi*.

At this point we find a description of the beginnings of the mind of man, the rational mind. At the same time universal nature finds the means to become individualised through the human. This leads to an interchange between universal nature and the human individual that amounts to an occult reflexive turn in assessing cosmic progress.

A thinking mind had come to lift life's moods,
The keen-edged tool of a Nature mixed and vague,

An intelligence half-witness, half-machine, (Ibid, p.158)

Sri Aurobindo describes the emergent mental property of intelligence or *buddhi* here as a hybrid being, part automaton and part conscious. Sankhya recognises this duality of the mental consciousness and divides its inner constitution (*antahkarana*) into a mechanical part (*prakriti*) and a conscious part (*purusha*). Sankhya's purpose becomes one of accentuating this division and allowing the conscious part to be free of the mechanical part, dominating it and putting it to sleep. Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, prescribes the separation of these two parts only as a temporary device towards establishing a revised relationship, in which the mechanical part becomes a creative supplement of the conscious part. This thinking becomes particularly important in our times, in which the overwhelming determination of consciousness by technicity has opened up the area of thinking on technology, culture and consciousness. According to this thinking, the acknowledgement of the co-constitution of consciousness and technology in human beings is the foundation towards a rethinking of their cultural relation. Sri Aurobindo's recognition of the internal constitution of intelligence can be an important starting point in such thinking.

He raised his eyes; Heaven-light mirrored a Face. (Ibid, p.158)

In its given relationship, the conscious part of the individual feels uncomfortably tied and compromised by its mechanical part. "Raising the eyes" here refers to the natural drive within human beings to seek freedom by looking for succour to a transcendent source. What the human sees when s/he turns above is not merely the stars above but a cosmos which affirms a heavenly kinship, a perfect archetype of the human asserting the ancient teaching that man is made in the image of God.

Amazed at the works wrought in her mystic sleep,
She looked upon the world that she had made:
Wondering now seized the great automaton; (Ibid, p.158)

This is the co-reflexivity of man and cosmos. The human turn towards a transcendent source awakens the self-Consciousness of the Creator within the human. This is the "She" which comes to recognise herself and think in the human. The machine is here assimilated into consciousness. This automaton, this mechanical freak, this toy, this machine is filled with the most divine of conscious experiences, the experience of wonder, which is the heart of the

delight of the Infinite in the Infinite.

She paused to understand her self and aim,
Pondering she learned to act by conscious rule,
A visioned measure guided her rhythmic steps;
Thoughts bordered her instincts with a frame of will
And lit with the idea her blinded urge. (Ibid, p.158)

The immanence of Mind in Nature is now recognised in human thought. Idea makes its appearance in the field of inconscient nature, recognising the truth that the world has a rationality to it, the intuition of an ideal constitution to Nature.

On her mass of impulses, her reflex acts,
On the Inconscient's pushed or guided drift
And mystery of unthinking accurate steps
She stuck the specious image of a self,
A living idol of disfigured spirit; (Ibid, p.158)

Though the human intuites the divine creator as the original in whose image he has been made, he attributes to himself her acts. As an amusing corollary to the ancient wisdom teaching we have encountered, we have the saying, "God made man in his image and man returned the favour." Of course, the fact is that even such a return is God's device. This is how Sri Aurobindo describes it here, a "specious image of self" grafted on Nature's "unthinking accurate steps" or unconscious creative intelligence. This is the presence of the ego; in Sankhya, the emergence of *ahankara*, literally sense of self as doer, a property of mental consciousness following the intelligence or *buddhi*. This is also the beginning of human reflexivity, a finite and separative, hence disfigured immanent image of God.

As we noted earlier, in Sri Aurobindo's view, there are two kinds of evolution, the cosmic evolution and the evolution of personhood, or the evolution of *prakriti* and *purusha* respectively. So far, we have seen the description of the evolution of *prakriti*, but with the appearance of *ahamkara*, the evolution of personhood begins to become self-conscious.

Sticking an "image of specious self" on a "mass of impulses and reflex acts" is also a good description of the relation between the id and ego in Freudian psychology. Here a "living idol of disfigured spirit" is another kind of automatism, a puppet mask that nature puts on the surface to give a semblance of order to

those 'mass of impulses' and 'reflex acts' that are the automatisms of human existence.

A creature insignificant and small
Visited, uplifted by an unknown Power,
Man laboured on his little patch of earth
From means to last, to enjoy, to suffer and die.
A spirit that perished not with the body and breath
Was there like a shadow of the Unmanifest
And stood behind the little personal form
But claimed not yet this earthly embodiment. (Ibid, p.159)

The appearance of self-consciousness, though "specious" in the ego takes its support from a true self, the Atman, which is an individual centre of prospection of the transcendental and cosmic Divine. Sri Aurobindo introduces this mysterious double of the human as "a shadow of the Unmanifest" that accompanies him through his life of joy, struggle, ignorance and death and persists from life to life. This self also represents the individualisation of the cosmic evolution.

Watching the works of his own Ignorance,
Unknown, unfelt the mighty Witness lives
And nothing shows the glory that is here. (Ibid, p.159)

At first only a witnessing shadow, the divine Inhabitant is secretly present in each human being, guiding invisibly his growth from life to life.

A Wisdom governing the mystic world,
A Silence listening to the cry of Life,
It sees the hurrying crowd of moments stream
Towards the still greatness of a distant hour. (Ibid, pp.159-60)

Sri Aurobindo has described the evolutionary emergence of the components of mental consciousness composing the automatism of the human machine or instrument (*antahkarana*). These are *chitta*, *manas*, *buddhi* and *ahankara* according to the Sankhya system which he is drawing on. The conscious part or soul, tied to the mechanical part, yet independent of it, according to Sankhya, is Purusha. Though, in Sankhya, Purusha exists in and for itself, with no cosmic significance, and its realisation becomes purely a mean to escape the automatism

of nature (*prakriti*); following the Gita, Sri Aurobindo sees this as a divine centre of self-prospection or individuation. Having introduced this Purusha to us, Sri Aurobindo proceeds to expand on the human condition, what it means to be human and the various forms of ignorance that beset human beings, evolving from ignorance to knowledge. The very first problem comes with the intuition of automatism, the sensing of ourselves and cosmos as machines. This is related to nature and its "dumbness", as he says, the Inconscience which is the seed of nature.

This huge world unintelligibly turns
In the shadow of a mused Inconscience;
It hides a key to inner meanings missed,
It locks in our hearts a voice we cannot hear. (Ibid, p.160)

The cosmos presents itself to us as a huge automatic rotating machine. Yet this automatism is the spectral manifestation (shadow) of a trance-like condition of consciousness (mused Inconscience). Though it seems to run in its fixed grooves, it tantalises the intelligence with hints of meaningfulness. It is full of symbols, correspondences and synchronicities which seem to hide the elusive keys to a lost mystery. Yet this intuition of meaning has its individual counterpart, a secret knower within, '*jñātā purusha*', silent and asleep in our hearts. This inner knower is the immanent presence (*antaratman*) of the shadow Self that accompanies us.

An exact machine of which none knows the use,
An art and ingenuity without sense,
This minute elaborate orchestrated life
For ever plays its motiveless symphonies. (Ibid, p.160)

But in spite of these elusive hints of esoteric significance, our lives and the cosmos in which they fit present the *façade* of a meaningless machine that plays the same tune over and again. It is marked by regularity or fixity within the passing transience of things.

The mind learns and knows not, turning its back to truth;
It studies surface laws by surface thought,
Life's steps surveys and Nature's process sees,
Not seeing for what she acts or why we live; (Ibid, p.160)

Sri Aurobindo turns now from the appearance to the instrument of knowledge that supports this appearance. This is our intelligence, *buddhi*. When it applies itself systematically, it is the builder of our science, through which we understand processes, the cause and effect sequences of surface phenomena, of which we take ourselves to be part. This is our constitutional ignorance. We take our surface consciousness to be the totality of consciousness. It is also part of our cosmic ignorance. We have no knowledge of what the cosmos is about, only of how it operates in appearance.

Inscrutable work the cosmic agencies.
Only the fringe of a wide surge we see;
Our instruments have not that greater light,
Our will tunes not with the eternal Will,
Our heart's sight is too blind and passionate.
Impotent to share in Nature's mystic tact,
Inapt to feel the pulse and core of things,
Our reason cannot sound life's mighty sea
And only counts its waves and scans its foam; (Ibid, pp.160-61)

Our normal instruments of knowing, being and willing are too inadequate to plumb the truths of cosmos or self. Sri Aurobindo touches here on three kinds of defects, the defect of the intelligence, the defect of the will and the defect of the emotions. All these defects arise from identification with the limited separative ego. The intelligence works only on the senses' evidence and accumulates only surface facts, "counting waves" and "scanning foam". A deeper knowledge hides in our hearts. Sri Aurobindo has hinted at this "knower within." But our unquiet emotions, tossed between attractions and repulsions, are the theatre of a crowded commerce that leaves no room for the emergence or action of that faculty. An evolutionary will works out the significances of a progressive emergence, but our human will, tied to selfish desire, is unconscious and unequal to its needs.

We are lost in the cosmos and confront it as a minute finite intelligence. This is part of our egoistic ignorance and our practical ignorance. We attempt to handle it piecemeal but ill understand our effects on the whole. We treat it as a machine without concern for its consciousness and its drift.

Unseen here act dim huge world-energies
And only trickles and currents are our share.
Our mind lives far off from the authentic Light

Catching at little fragments of the Truth
In a small corner of Infinity.
Our lives are inlets of an ocean's force. (Ibid, p.161)

The cosmos is a vast infinite being, a cosmic purusha with its infinite cosmic energy. The human being, in its nature (*prakriti*), is a miniscule particle of this cosmos and receives only a trickle, a small channel and inlet of its energy. But in its truth, as *purusha*, the cosmos lives in each human being as a form of self-awareness, an individuation of cosmos.

Our conscious movements have sealed origins
But with those shadowy seats no converse hold; (Ibid, p.161)

But we are unaware of this hidden life of the Purusha as well as of the occult forces and beings that act invisibly behind the surface. Our psychological and constitutional ignorance prevents us from knowing how we are designed in truth and what our occult influences are.

No understanding binds our comrade parts; (Ibid, p.161)

Even within our own personal instrumental selves, there are discontinuities of consciousness. The human body, will, emotions, thoughts, aspirations and idealisms are not in consonance with each other. Each has its independent existence with its own wants and fulfilments.

Our acts emerge from a crypt our minds ignore. (Ibid, p.161)

There is a disjunction between our thinking and our actions. Even their hidden and obscure origins are different. Thus we do one thing but think another (and vice versa).

A thinking puppet is the mind of life:
Its choice is the work of elemental strengths
That know not their own birth and end and cause
And glimpse not the immense intent they serve. (Ibid, p.162)

Sri Aurobindo returns us here to the notion of the *ahamkara* or ego which initiated this consideration of the human condition. The ego is a thinking puppet,

which takes itself as agent and doer, but is moved by hidden forces of which it is unaware. These forces serve cosmic purposes ("the immense intent"). Yet, these lines suggest two levels of concealment — not only is the "thinking puppet" (*ahamkara*) unaware of the forces that drive it, these cosmic forces are themselves unaware of the purpose they serve. What confronts our surface intelligence is a random collision of forces and personalities resulting in events. Behind this surface is a play of cosmic forces that takes on the appearance of a struggle between the forces supporting Inconscience and those supporting Consciousness. A further level removed is the Real-Idea of Supermind whose evolutionary Will is at work in the cosmic struggle and the play of surface individuals. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo writes of seven kinds of Ignorance and seven kinds of Knowledge. We have encountered some of these forms of ignorance here. The ignorance of the cosmic forces regarding the transcendental intent that they serve is related to the Original Ignorance, ignorance regarding the origin and purpose of the cosmos. Subsidiary to this and pertaining to the surface consciousness' ignorance of the cosmic forces driving it invisibly is the Cosmic Ignorance, the ego's illusion of being an independent agent.

Yet filled with poignant small ignoble things,
The conscious Doll is pushed a hundred ways
And feels the push but not the hands that drive. (Ibid, p.162)

In these lines, Sri Aurobindo hones in on the life of the ego and its relation with the cosmic forces. The "thinking puppet" is now referred to as a "conscious doll." It is unaware of the agencies that push it though it feels pushed in all directions by various internal and cosmic forces.

For none can see the masked ironic troupe
To whom our figure-selves are marionettes, (Ibid, p.162)

Once again, our attention is drawn to the two levels of concealment, that of the puppet, that doesn't know that it is being used, and that of the wearers of masks, the cosmic forces that conceal the intent of the play. This cosmic level is referred to here as an "ironic troupe" since, from the viewpoint of the Original Knowledge, all these are the masks of the One Player. The irony is that the One struggles with the One in a deadly life and death combat that seems interminable. Humans are puppets in the hands of this 'masked ironic troupe', these disguised powers that are playing with our lives.

Our deeds unwitting movements in their grasp,
Our passionate strife an entertainment's scene. (Ibid, p.162)

We are so invested in our personal hopes, dreams, desires and acts that we take ourselves as their originators and executors, we are willing to stake our lives for these things. But, seen from a certain vantage, that of the cosmic vital, all this passion play of the human being is a scene of entertainment for cosmic powers; our joys and our sorrows are spice for their enjoyment.

Ignorant themselves of their own fount of strength
They play their part in the enormous whole.
Agents of darkness imitating light,
Spirits obscure and moving things obscure,
Unwillingly they serve a mightier Power. (Ibid, p.162)

Of course, the cosmic stage also has its levels and degrees of consciousness. In these lines, Sri Aurobindo has parted the curtain on the cosmic vital, which reveals a field of power. The cosmic forces belong to a second order of disguise, where they serve as archetypes playing certain roles. Here Sri Aurobindo focuses on the "agents of darkness" that empower a reversion to Inconscience and oppose the evolution of consciousness. Using deception ("imitating light") these forces are not merely those of Ignorance but of a willed opposition that is Falsehood. The autonomy granted to Falsehood at the cosmic level makes of the play of cosmic forces a true measure of Divine Power to validate the victorious emergence of Consciousness from its seeming opposite. Yet, in spite of their determined intentional opposition to Truth, these Powers were also contrary or perverse masked appearances of Truth, ultimately serving its purpose ("unwillingly they served a mightier power").

This is the ephemeral creature's daily life. (Ibid, p.163)

The quotidian existence of human beings, seemingly ordinary and habitual, is yet marked by such a double disguise, a petty mixture of desires and accidents traversed by large embattled cosmic forces, serving a divine purpose of evolutionary emergence.

As long as the human animal is lord
And a dense nether nature screens the soul,
As long as intellect's outward-gazing sight

Serves earthy interest and creature joys,
An incurable littleness pursues his days. (Ibid, pp.163-64)

Turning his gaze upon the human condition, Sri Aurobindo diagnoses it as one whose hapless subjection is contingent upon a self-identification. Putting it tautologically, we are puppets because of our own choice of remaining puppets. Our chronic self-identification as animals and narrow mental selves, the acceptance of such an ontology as our humanism, keeps us bound to remaining little inconsequential pawns in the game of cosmic powers.

If new designs, if richer details grow
And thought is added and more tangled cares,
If little by little it wears a brighter face,
Still even in man the plot is mean and poor. (Ibid, p.164)

We have developed a civilisation which marks great advances in the exploitation of material resources; our technologies have multiplied human comforts, conveniences and pleasures. Contemporary civilisation is poised on the threshold of further unthinkable advances in material possibility. But the subjective quality of human lives remains pathetic and shows no sign of improvement. Even at its best, our human plot is 'mean and poor'.

A gross content prolongs his fallen state;
His small successes are failures of the soul, (Ibid, p.164)

A sated material and vital life, made up of excesses of comfort and pleasure is the sign of a sleeping soul. One is reminded in this line of Circe's pigs in Homer's Odessey, transformed through enchantment into creatures of base enjoyment that have lost their humanity. Whatever we think, our material successes, advances, little enjoyments and little victories in the play of life, mask the need of the soul for its emergence. However great in seeming, they are 'failures of the soul'.

His little pleasures punctuate frequent griefs:
Hardship and toil are the heavy price he pays
For the right to live and his last wages death.
Trivial amusements stimulate and waste
The energy given to him to grow and be.
His little hour is spent in little things. (Ibid, p.164)

In the mass, however, it is not sated or satisfied lives, but difficult lives of toil and struggle that is the lot of humans. Our content of happiness is matched by an equal content of sorrow and the majority of human lives are spent labouring tirelessly merely to maintain one's own or perhaps one's family's lives. There is little energy left to dream of greater things and before one realises it, one's short span is spent. Each of us is granted a quantum of shakti as initial investment for the evolution of consciousness, but we fritter it in inconsequential desires.

A brief companionship with many jars, (Ibid, p.164)

Even a single enduring friendship is hard to achieve in this lifetime, every 'companionship' is marked 'with many jars', distrust, misunderstanding and ill-will.

A little love and jealousy and hate,
A touch of friendship mid indifferent crowds
Draw his heart-plan on life's diminutive map. (Ibid, p.164)

Human beings accept their lot of petty compromised relationships. They carry in their souls the power of oneness by which they can know a perfect sympathy and harmony but what they meet in their lives is a general indifference and perhaps a rare friendship or two; and even these are marked by trouble and heartache.

If something great awakes, too frail his pitch
To reveal its zenith tension of delight,
His thought to eternise its ephemeral soar,
Art's brilliant gleam is a pastime for his eyes,
A thrill that smites the nerves is music's spell. (Ibid, pp.164-65)

The windows of greatness in our lives fail to endure. The touch of intensities is too much for us. The doors of divinity opened by art or music are treated by us as temporary pastimes, consumed within life's mundane demands.

The Spirit's breath moves him but soon retires:
His strength was not made to hold that puissant guest. (Ibid, p.165)

Occasionally, the call of the Divine reaches us and we are visited by giant aspirations or heightened intensities of bliss, but these exceed our expected

limits and we drop them all too soon.

All dulls down to convention and routine (Ibid, p.165)

As we have seen, Matter is characterised by the law of inertia, routine and habit. The material basis of human lives stamps it with this need for unconsciousness and inertia, giving us comfort in "convention and routine." We make easy compromise with the law of Matter.

Or a fierce excitement brings him vivid joys: (Ibid, p.165)

Alternatively, some opt for the law of Life, the vital force. A blind dynamis characterises the life-force, a seeking for thrills, dramatic excitements and violent passions.

His days are tinged with the red hue of strife
And lust's hot glare and passion's crimson stain;
Battle and murder are his tribal game. (Ibid, p.165)

The vital force revels in wild extremes. Even though we are supposedly sophisticated humans wearing name-brand accoutrements of social status, yet the primitive savage dwell within us; we are driven by animal passions and kill our own kind in battle and murder.

Time has he none to turn his eyes within
And look for his lost self and his dead soul. (Ibid, p.165)

Trapped between a petty or base material and vital satisfaction, our intentional life is pulled by externalities and cannot find the time or peace to turn within and seek for a deeper source of existence, the soul that waits unseen. In the Upanishads, it is brought home that the doors of the senses are fastened so as to open outwards. This is part of the natural reason for our absorption in the external world. Only by reversing the natural direction of the senses can we search for the roots of our existence but we seldom find the means to discover this turn.

All tunes to a low scale and conscious pitch. (Ibid, p.165)

We have grown accustomed to a definition of the human which accepts its most mediocre pitch. Anything of height is considered exceptional; we dumb it

down to the most petty interests and the lowest common denominator of human existence.

His knowledge dwells in the house of Ignorance;
His force nears not even once the Omnipotent,
Rare are his visits of heavenly ecstasy. (Ibid, p.165)

Our natural ignorance and common average mediocrity are what we take as the norm and refuse a belief in any higher possibility. The contrast of human knowledge dwelling in the house of Ignorance here is a reference to Vedantic epistemology where all indirect knowledge — i.e. knowledge by deduction or induction — is ignorance, while the term knowledge is reserved for self-evident knowledge, knowledge by identity of consciousness. All rational knowledge is indirect knowledge and hence ignorance in the Vedantic sense, while the possibility of Knowledge in the Vedantic sense is held to be generally impossible.

Tomorrow's hopes and his old rounds of thought,
His old familiar interests and desires
He has made into a thick and narrowing hedge
Defending his small life from the Invisible; (Ibid, pp.165-66)

Habitual human responses are subconsciously crystallised into a sense of expectation which is then defended as identity. We hug our limits refusing a transformed self-definition. This is our condition. We have a small life, we have little ambition, we have little pleasures and pains, we trifle away the energy that the Divine gave to us, we can hardly experience even a little intensity of the god-life.

And if this were all and nothing more were meant,
If what now seems were the whole of what must be,
If this were not a stade through which we pass
On our road from matter to eternal Self,
To the Light that made the worlds, the Cause of things,
Well might interpret our mind's limited view
Existence as an accident in Time,
Illusion or phenomenon or freak,
The paradox of a creative Thought
Which moves between unreal opposites,
Inanimate Force struggling to feel and know,

Matter that chanced to read itself by Mind,
Inconscience monstrously engendering soul. (Ibid, p.166)

Is it that this human life is just an epiphenomenon, an accident of matter? This is what we might easily conclude were our common mediocrity and little toiling lives all there was to life. But Sri Aurobindo tells us that these are just stumbling steps of the God waiting to grow into its own.

Yet was this only a provisional scheme,
A false appearance sketched by limiting sense,
Mind's insufficient self-discovery,
An early attempt, a first experiment.
This was a toy to amuse the infant earth;
But knowledge ends not in these surface powers
That live upon a ledge in the Ignorance (Ibid, p.167-168)

These are all the powers of Ignorance. This is the sevenfold ignorance of man, but in response man carries within himself the sevenfold knowledge. In Sri Aurobindo's view, if we consider the human condition in isolation, a doubtful uncertainty surrounds his future, but seen from the viewpoint of cosmic evolution, he lives on the summits of an overhanging cliff of Ignorance waiting to climb one more rung to Knowledge.

And dare not look into the dangerous depths
Or to stare upward measuring the Unknown,
There is a deeper seeing from within
And, when we have left these small purlieus of mind,
A greater vision meets us on the heights
In the luminous wideness of the spirit's gaze. (Ibid, p.168)

One more step in the evolution of consciousness, one step beyond our mentality and we enter the domain of spiritual life, 'the luminous wideness', vastness, infinity, cosmic reality of the universal mind becomes our vision's gaze.

At last there wakes in us a witness Soul
That looks at truths unseen and scans the Unknown;
The all assumes a new and marvellous face:
The world quivers with a God-light at its core,
In Time's deep heart high purposes move and live,

Life's borders crumble and join infinity. (Ibid, p.168)

After this long interlude considering the human condition in the Ignorance, Sri Aurobindo returns to the witness shadow Self to which he introduced us after describing the emergence of the ego as a characteristic of human existence. The witness soul supported the individual existence from behind. But once we wake to the insufficiency of our habitual nature, we may grow conscious of this spiritual double. We overpass the little ego and enter the domain of the universal being, the cosmic Purusha.

Our seekings are short-lived experiments
Made by a wordless and inscrutable Power
Testing its issues from inconscient Night
To meet its luminous self of Truth and bliss. (Ibid, p.168)

There is a universal Force in Nature (*Shakti*) that tests every step of the growth of consciousness on the ground of matter. It will not let it overpass its limits too quickly because it seeks firm foundations for the stages of the evolution. Thereby alone can a continuous and gradual ascension be established in the evolution of consciousness, necessary to the descent of a higher power that can spiritually integrate Matter, Life and Mind in the individual. The experiences of the human being, accumulating from life to life, prepare albeit slowly, such a foundation.

It peers at the Real through the apparent form;
It labours in our mortal mind and sense;
Amid the figures of the Ignorance,
In the symbol pictures drawn by word and thought,
It seeks the truth to which all figures point;
It looks for the source of Light with vision's lamp;
It works to find the Doer of all works,
The unfelt Self within who is the guide,
The unknown Self above who is the goal. (Ibid, p.168)

The world is full of the sense of work as a labour and struggle. We take ourselves to be the worker or doer, but the cosmic evolutionary force, the Divine Shakti is the true worker or doer in all beings. All that nature has produced so far are instruments (*karana*), but the cause (*kaarana*) is the hidden Divine Being (*purusha*). This is what Nature seeks.

Across the cosmic field through narrow lanes
Asking a scanty dole from Fortune's hands
And garbed in beggar's robes walks the One. (Ibid, p.169)

Standing behind each being, through all the struggle and poverty of life, it is the Divine Being alone who is self-multiplied. Sri Aurobindo gives us here the image of the *sannyasi* beggar of India who has renounced life and walks from street to street, bowl in hand. He is socially useless but has surrendered himself to and dwells in the nude reality of the Spirit. The conveniences and desires of normal human life have no meaning for him. His beggary is the sign of his infinite possession. That Guest, eternally free of needs, walks with each of us, and is our naked self. He is knocking at our door, awaiting our recognition.

An Infant nursed on Nature's covert breast,
An Infant playing in the magic woods,
Fluting to rapture to spirit's streams
Awaits the hour when we shall turn to his call. (Ibid, p.169)

From this reiteration of the witness Purusha or Atman, spirit Self accompanying each form of nature as an individualisation of the Transcendent Being, Sri Aurobindo moves to an invocation of what he calls the "psychic being," the immanent and evolving aspect of the Atman, the *kshara purusha* of the Gita or *chaitya purusha* in his own Sanskrit adaptation. In the depths of our being, in a centre behind the mystic heart chakra, there dwells this child image of divinity. This, according to Sri Aurobindo, is what gives meaning to the evolution of Purusha or of Personhood as an individuation of cosmos in the human being. Not only is this the image of the potential individuation of the cosmos, it is the Transcendent Child, the owner of the House of Being, the One whose Bliss has created the wonder of the universe and who is forever at play in the world.

In this investiture of fleshly life
A soul that is a spark of God survives
And sometimes it breaks through the sordid screen
And kindles a fire that makes us half-divine. (Ibid, p.169)

Our great acts of heroism, our acts of grandeur or of beauty are among rare examples that mark or dot the history of humanity as high points because the psychic being has touched our life and revealed something godlike in it.

In our body's cells there sits a hidden Power
That sees the unseen and plans eternity. (Ibid, p.169)

This psychic being is the master of our destiny, it is the key to the integration of our nature. Once discovered, its presence can be invoked in all our instrumental parts, even each of the body's cells.

Our smallest parts have room for deepest needs; (Ibid, p.169)

Invoking this divinity in all our instrumental parts, down to the cells of the body, we find our true fulfilment, for in the integral truth, the indivisible infinite Whole lives in every part and thus each part, however small, is fulfilled only when it realises itself in consciousness to be That. In every cell of our existence, divinity is already foreseen.

There too the golden messengers can come;
A door is cut in the mud wall of self;
Across the lowly threshold with bowed heads
Angels of ecstasy and self-giving pass, (Ibid, p.170)

Just as in the condition of Ignorance we are like puppets driven hither and thither by cosmic hostile forces; so, once a psychic transformation is initiated in us, a channel is opened for the angels of God to enter into our life. We can become conscious agents of the divine ecstasies.

And lodged in an inner sanctuary of dream
The makers of the image of deity live.
Pity is there and fire-winged sacrifice,
And flashes of sympathy and tenderness
Cast heaven-lights from the heart's secluded shrine,
A work is done in the deep silences; (Ibid, p.170)

In the invisible silence of our spirit, the One creates his harmony of compassion, pity, self-giving, sacrifice and eternal oneness.

A glory and wonder of spiritual sense,
In the sealed hermetic heart, the happy core
Unmoved behind this outer shape of dearth

The eternal Entity prepares within
Its matter of divine felicity, (Ibid, p.170)

The evolution of Purusha integrates the nature, divinising mind, life and matter. In an alchemic transfiguration, a spiritualised Matter is prepared as part of this transformation.

Its reign of heavenly phenomenon.
Even in our sceptic mind of ignorance
A foresight comes of some immense release,
Our will lifts towards it slow and shaping hands.
Each part in us desires its absolute,
Our thoughts covet the everlasting Light,
Our strength derives from an omnipotent Force,
And since from a veiled God-joy the worlds were made
And since eternal Beauty asks for form
Even here all is made of being's dust,
Our hearts are captured by ensnaring shapes,
Our very senses blindly seek for bliss. (Ibid, p.170)

This is what our deepest aspirations demand. In every part of our being, they demand their divine counterparts. Ignorance demands Light, our impotence demands Force and our suffering demands the divine Delight that no sorrow can mar.

And when that greater Self comes sea-like down
To fill this image of our transience,
All shall be captured by delight, transformed;
In waves of undreamed ecstasy shall roll
Our mind and life and sense and laugh in a light
Other than this hard limited human day,
The body's tissues thrill apotheosised,
Its cells sustain bright metamorphosis.
This little being of Time, this shadow soul,
This living dwarf-figurehead of darkened spirit
Out of its traffic in petty dreams shall rise. (Ibid, p.171)

This will be our full evolution into godhead, accomplished through a Divine Descent. But for this descent of the Divine into our lives, we must first ascend

out of our humanity through our integral psychic aspiration. This is the double movement of Sri Aurobindo's yoga of integral transformation with which he ends this passage:

But first the spirit's ascent we must achieve
Out of the chasm from which our nature rose.
The soul must soar sovereign above the form
And climb to summits beyond mind's half-sleep;
Our hearts we must inform with heavenly strength,
Surprise the animal with the occult god.
Then kindling the gold tongue of sacrifice,
Calling the powers of a bright hemisphere,
We shall shed the discredit of our mortal state,
Make the abyss a road for Heaven's descent,
Acquaint our depths with the supernal Ray
And cleave the darkness with the mystic Fire. (Ibid, pp.171-72)

This is the goal of the cosmic evolution individualised in human beings who will achieve through the power of yoga, through the integral aspiration of the psychic being, the great descent of Godhead into their lives and the Life Divine which is what Savitri represents in this epic.

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

Sadhana of sounding the Word

Vikraman Balaji

Ā devānāmapī panthām agnam yat śaknavām tat anu pravolahuṃ
We have come to the path of the gods, may we have the power to tread it,
to drive forward along that road.¹ (Trita Aptya, Rig Veda 10.2.3)

We open with some magnificent lines from Sri Aurobindo's foreword to the *Hymns of the Atris*,² which is the source of our inspiration in the Sadhana we wish to describe.

“To enter into the very heart of the mystic doctrine, we must ourselves have trod the ancient paths and renewed the lost discipline, the forgotten experience. And which of us can hope to do that with any depth or living power? Who in this Age of Iron shall have the strength to recover the light of the Forefathers or soar above the two enclosing firmaments of mind and body into their luminous empyrean of the infinite Truth? ... Small is the chance that in an age which blinds our eyes with the transient glories of the outward life and deafens our ears with the victorious trumpets of a material and mechanical knowledge many shall cast more than the eye of an intellectual and imaginative curiosity on the pass-words of their ancient discipline or seek to penetrate into the heart of their radiant mysteries. ”

The *sādhana* we take up in this article is a *śabda upāsanā*, an assiduous dwelling on the “Word”. The Vedic Word or *śabda brahman* is the plenary creative substance which embodies the inmost truth of all that exists, ‘a voice of the rhythm which has created the worlds and creates perpetually’.³

This *śabda upāsanā* is carried out by a process, which for want of a better word, will be called “translation”. In the context of sacred literature, translation is usually taken to be an adaptation of sacred speech in a language accessible to the uninitiated. Normally, such an adaptation distils the mental elements from

the entire substance of its experience as a means to conceptualise and philosophise. But for us “translation” is sounding the Word in silence as a means to plumb our own depths. Translation and dwelling on the Word are a process which we use to enter into the core of the Word to allow its substance to transfigure our being. Each translation is a journey by itself and no translation is taken as final. The choice of what to dwell on or translate is also dictated by the inner guide and not any preconceived theme or philosophy. Each word is received in a crest of a rising tide of consciousness from within an ocean of possibilities. Each word occultly and mysteriously forges and fashions another, resulting in a garland of jewels to be meditated upon. The search begins with the mind but imperceptibly the Word enters the heart of the seeker and eventually modifies his very substance.

The following passage from Sri Aurobindo is the Divine touchstone in our endeavour.

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

For ultimately, as I have already insisted, we can know the subject of the Veda only by the soul and its pure faculty of knowledge, not by verbal scholarship, metaphysical reasoning or intellectual discrimination. By entering into communion with the soul of the thinker which still broods behind the inspired language, we come to realise what he saw and what he put into his words, what waits there to make itself known to us. By communion with the soul of the Universe which is behind the soul of the thinker and one with it, we get those experiences which illumine and confirm or correct by amplifying our vision of truth in the Sruti. And since no man should lightly hope that he has been able always to think, act and know by the supreme method, it is fitting always to bow down in utter self-surrender to the Master of All, the Lord, who as the Knower dwells in Himself as name and form and offer to him the truth we have found in the Sruti and the error we have imported in it to do both with the truth and the error whatever He wills in His infinite power, love and wisdom for the purpose of His eternal and infinite Lila.”

We will outline in a few strokes the process in terms of the *dharma* and *bhāva* involved in the *upāsana*. A word is taken and meditated upon to enter into its core or root-sound. Then one seeks to clothe this core-sound in a new language, which happens in our case to be English. Great care must be taken in this investiture; if the apparel is too loose, burdened with the mental trappings of the translator, it tends to obscure the body of the word, sometimes even completely clouding it. The mind on the other hand, priding on its economy of expression and scientific temper may try to close-knit the garment to fit the word. Even the best of fits is transitory since each word is living and embodies the Rishi’s substance and is verily Truth in movement. The Word expands even as it permeates our substance and soon outgrows any vesture that one may have designed.

In the plenary Vedic sense, the Kavi (or poet) is a “maker”, a “fashioner of forms”; the latin “poesy” as also the Sanskrit root “*ku*” mean, “to make”. Brahman is both the original Word and the original Poet and Artist. And the Rishi, who is also a Kavi, forges the Word from his own substance, even “*embodies his very substance in the Word*”⁴, Sri Aurobindo’s “*Savitri*”⁵ being the pinnacle of such an embodiment.

The Rig Veda says that the mantras were “fashioned in the heart and impelled by the mind”, *hrdā taṣṭéṣu, manaso javéṣu* (*Rig Veda*. 10.72). The Word is fashioned into a vehicle bearing the Truth-seeds which fertilise the soil of human growth across all time-barriers. And there is a realm where the Vedic verses are permanently housed as living entities. In Sri Aurobindo’s words:

There in a hidden chamber closed and mute
Are kept the record graphs of the cosmic scribe,
And there the tables of the sacred Law,
There is the Book of Being’s index page;
The text and glossary of the Vedic truth
Are there;⁶

And Rishi Dirghatamas says,

ṛcaḥ akṣare parame vyoman yasmin devā adhi viśve niṣeduh. (*Rig Veda*, 1.164.39)

The luminous Word,
In the changeless Summit Space,

Wherein, seated above the universe,
Are the beings of Light.

Our journey to this temple of Knowledge is led by the mind, *manomayah puruṣaḥ prāṇa śarīra netā*, but with our entire substance as the *samit*⁷ to be offered up for the permeation by the Rishi's word-substance. Our first approaches commence with the gross *vaikhari*, gradually ascending to *madhyama* and the *paśyanti*, and finally reaching the *parā*. A sublime verse of *Mundaka Upanishad* (I.2.3-4) epitomises this process in the image of archery, highlighting the identification of the substances of the target and the archer:

Grasping the bow, the mighty weapon of the Upanishad, set there (*sandhayīta*) an arrow sharpened by assiduity and adoration (*upāsā niśitam*); draw with a consciousness of the same nature as That (*tadbhāva gatena cetasā*); the target (*lakṣyam*) is That Imperishable; pierce it (*viddhi*) O Fair one (*Somya*)! The *praṇavaḥ*, Om is the bow, the self the arrow, Brahman the target they say; 'tis penetrable by the undistracted one (*apramattena*); like the arrow, do thou become of one substance (*tanmayo bhavet*) with the target. *Mundaka Upanishad* (I.2.3-4)

There is a waiting patience at the portals of the temple and the seeking arrow of aspiration is unloosed. Energised and guided by a secret *śraddhā* the divining arrow of belomancy⁸ is shot at a target hitherto unseen. Slipping soundlessly through the silent space of the mind, it penetrates the veil of the Word.

The arrow is then patiently extricated from the target and the first trickle of knowledge begins to gradually cascade into an "inexhaustible fount of a hundred-streams", *śatadhāram utsam akṣīyamāṇam* (*Rig Veda*, 3.26.9).

As to the transformative experience that follows, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof". The imagery of food and eating is not a mere figure of speech. As we partake of the Word with our substance, the Divine in turn participates in our substance. Indeed, in Sri Aurobindo's magnificent Upanishadic phrase

*The eater eating is eaten!*⁹

We now dwell on the word *sādhana* itself. It comes from the root *sādh*, which in turn has its origins in archery and it means "to go straight to the goal, or attain an object sought after". The word *sādh*, derived from *sādh*, therefore means "hitting the mark" and so *sādhana* keeps us on the *rju panthāh*, the path which goes "straight in concordance with the *ṛta*" for *ṛta* is the ordered

Truth of active being¹⁰. The speech of the Rishi is in complete harmony with this principle of *ṛta*, and is thus an embodiment of "truth", *satyam*. In the *parā vak* we see the synthesis of *satyam*, *ṛtam* and *br̥hat*, the Truth of Being, the dynamis of Reality and the Immense Vast.

As we dwell on the Immense Vast, our contemplation turns to Brahman, 'the word of creative Power welling upward out of the soul'¹¹ and our cry of adoration rises to the one Reality, the Eternal, the Absolute, the Spirit, the Supreme Being:

That, which rises and goes far in the wakeful, which descends in the One in deep sleep, that Divinity; that, by which the deep contemplators, and the Ones whose thoughts have the energy and the impulsion, who make by the toil of their labour their formations in the fields of knowing and in the offerings; that occult power stored within the peoples from times gone by, that which is the knowledge that seeks, the awareness and the firmness of intent, the undying light within everyone; that Truth, by which the yesterday the today and the morrow, all are embraced and comprehended; that, by which the offerings are extended across the worlds by the seven priests; that in which the consciousness in all this is woven as their warp. May That be sculpted in my mind as a blessed intention.¹²

Our meditation now turns to the profound word *ṛta* or Truth-dynamis. In the fathomless depths, in the foundation of Truth (*ṛtasya budhnaḥ*), when Time was not and there was no room for Space, darkness engulfed in greater darkness, all was an unmanifest ocean and all this that exists was overlaid by total fragmentation, total chaos (*tuchyena abhu apihitam*); from thence emerged the first born of *ṛta*, *prathamajā ṛtasyā*. *Ṛta* is also the Will, the Grand Design of Brahman, the Self-intention, the tapas of Brahman. The emergence of Order in the chaos is the coming into being of the Cosmos.

Up in the vast empyrean, from the world of *Satya*, of the Truth of Being, emanates the flow of *ṛta*, *ṛtasya dhārā*, and its flow-lines become the cosmic order. *ṛta* is the Dynamic Reality in the Universe, the Universal Rhythm manifested under the Sun of Truth. This World is truly whatever is beheld by the Eye of the Divine.

In the highest seat, the supreme stride (*paramam padam*) of the All-pervading Divine, the home of *ṛta* (*ṛtasya dhāma*), all is Light. There this Sun shines not, nor this Moon nor these stars; there these lightnings strike not and this Agni burns not; there all shines by the glory of the Divine alone and there is

the Ever-present Day. There too the Rishi beholds with his eye extended in heaven, Order overlaid by a Higher Order (*ṛtena ṛtam* apihitam), the Truth covered by a vaster Truth.

Nearer to us, *ṛta* pervades everything — you flow with it; born of it, you are seated in it, and indeed, you are It. You feel it pulsating in every breath, every thought, every activity, every perception, every sensation. You feel it flowing behind every thought as the silence that supports all sound. You sense it in the throb of the heart. It manifests as the sap of the plant, the ebb and rise of tides, the rhythmic changing of seasons, the inexorable rising and setting of the Sun; indeed anything that exists, that breathes or breathes not in this cosmos expresses *ṛta*.

Sarasvati, the Divine inspiration, the river of Consciousness, impels us along the perfected path of *ṛta*. *Agni*, the Divine Will, the intention, the design, is the urging of *ṛta*. *Indra*, the illumined Mind, leads us by the path of *ṛta*. *Mitra* and *Varuṇa*, possessed of *ṛta*, express the Truth and the Vast, *ṛtam-br̥hat*, and unyoke the horses of the Truth. *Usha*, the Dawn announcing the Truth, engirdles all worlds following the pathways of *ṛta*, *ṛtasya panthāh*. *Brahmanaspati*, the Master of the expanding Word, founds the plane of illumination by expressing *ṛta* in his cry.

We close with Rishi Vamedeva's magnificent Swan-chant:¹³

*Hamsaḥ śucisad vasur antarikṣhasad hotā vedisad atithir duroṇasad
Nṛsad varasad ṛtasad vyomasad abjā gojā ṛtajā adriajā ṛtam. (RigVeda
4.40)*

The Swan,
seated in the Pure,
the shining One,
seated in the mid-worlds,
in the wide empyrean,
The Caller of the Gods,
seated in the sacrificial seat,
The Guest,
seated in the body,
seated in Man,
and in the Void,
Born of the Waters,
Born of Matter,
Born of Light,

Seated in *ṛta*,
Born of *ṛta*,
The *ṛtam*.

And we sign off, the Mother having the last Word (or the first among the many to come), *śrotavyasya śrutasya ca*:

“Thou wantest that breaking all the old conventions of language, there may arise a Word fit to express Thee, a Word never heard before”;¹⁴

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6. *Savitri*, I, Book Canto V, p.74.
7. The faggots for the fuel.
8. The beautiful English word 'belomancy' stands for “divination by means of arrows”.
9. A phrase usually considered “pregnant and terrible”; see page 66 *The Secret of the Veda*, Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo, (Birth Centenary Library), Volume 10, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972.
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12. Inspired from the Madhyandina recension of the *Shukla Yajurveda*, Hymn 34, 1-6.
13. The “shape” of the translation is an attempt to give a visual effect to the sound of the Vedic word. We owe this approach to A.K. Ramanujam (*Hymns to the Drowning*, Penguin).
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Ethics in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Philosophy

R.C.Pradhan

In this essay I will address the question regarding the place of ethics in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. It is true that Sri Aurobindo did not write his works by dividing them into metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, etc. However, he did address the questions belonging to these areas of philosophy. Sri Aurobindo has an integral vision of philosophy and so all areas of philosophy are integrated into one grand system of philosophy. The central concern of his philosophy is the spiritualisation of man's nature and the supramentalisation of the universe at large. Given this broad metaphysical picture of the universe and man, it goes without saying that Sri Aurobindo is concerned with the moral perfection of man as a part of the overall spiritual perfection of the human race.

Ethics as a theory of human conduct in the light of ethical ideals of universal nature has been a part of the philosophical enterprise the world over. From the Upanishads to modern Indian thinking, and from Socrates to the recent most Western ethical thinking, there is a continuous effort in the human mind to arrive at universal moral standards of human life. Though there is no unanimity on the nature of the universal moral standards and values, there is nonetheless a near unanimity regarding the need of a universally acceptable moral life above and beyond our natural biological life. Sri Aurobindo, like the great moral thinkers of mankind like the Buddha, Shankara, Plato and Kant, has given a moral vision of life with emphasis on man's moral ascent to the ultimate goal of spiritual perfection.

I FOUNDATIONS OF ETHICS: THE INTEGRAL PERSPECTIVE

Ethics concerns the ideals and values which guide and transform human life. It defines the way human beings have to pursue a higher form of life leaving aside the natural and biological needs and propensities. The latter are accepted by the ethical way of living as natural and inevitable, but up to a certain limit.

Ethics perceives man's moral life as transcending these natural needs and desires and takes man to a higher level in the ascending spiral of human life. The Upanishadic ideal of *Shreyas*¹ (Good) beyond *Preyas* (Pleasant), the Socratic-Platonic Idea of the Good and Contemplative Life beyond the life of earthly desires and the Kantian Ideal of Moral Duties beyond the fulfilment of selfish desires² are all part of the same moral vision of elevating mankind beyond its earthly nature to a higher level of leading a life of moral perfection.

Sri Aurobindo is in agreement with all the great moral thinkers in providing a theoretical and practical framework for the moral elevation of man and his ultimate spiritual perfection. He sees ethics as both a theory and a practice in the sense that moral life is a practical concern of man and needs to be integrated into the larger scheme of social and political life. Morality is the foundation of life in the sense that it is on the moral foundations that we can establish our social and political life. In this sense, the Indian concept of Dharma provides the clue to the universal moral Good that lies at the foundation of the social and political life of mankind. Sri Aurobindo takes moral life not only as the foundation, but also as an integral part of life as a whole both in the individual and collective sense. The entire human civilisation is viewed by him as a moral and spiritual evolution of mankind³. For Sri Aurobindo, ethics cannot be divorced from man's other concerns such as intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, psychological, physical, social and spiritual because all these aspects constitute the integral human life. Ethics is central to all these and so cannot be looked at in isolation. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Intellectual, volitional, ethical, emotional, aesthetic and physical training and improvement are all so much to the good, but they are only in the end a constant movement in a cycle without any last delivering and illuminating aim, unless they arrive at a point when they can open themselves to the power and presence of the Spirit and admits its direct workings⁴.

Here the moral and other aspects of life together unfold the movement of man towards the realisation of the Spirit. The moral aspirations along with other aspirations are part of the overall spiritual aspirations of man to open up to the Spirit.

Sri Aurobindo's view of life and universe is spiritual in the sense that the entire goal of his philosophy and Yoga is the spiritual transformation of the human nature. So Sri Aurobindo does not limit his vision to the realisation of the Good in the moral sense, but goes beyond it to the realisation of the Spirit. It is because he thinks that the realisation of the moral Good is also in a way the realisation of

the Spirit which is the ultimate Truth and Good. The Spirit or the Divine Being is the Absolute Truth and Good. Man has only a partial vision of the Absolute Good because of his earthly nature; good and evil, from the human point of view, are only partial and relative. As Sri Aurobindo says:

There can therefore be no absolute of falsehood, no absolute of evil; these things are a by-product of the world-movement: the sombre flowers of falsehood and suffering and evil have their root in the black soil of the Inconscient. On the other hand, there is no such intrinsic obstacle to the absoluteness of Truth and Good: the relativity of truth and error, good and evil is a fact of our experience, but it is similarly a by-product, it is not a permanent factor native to existence; *for it is true only of the valuation made by the human consciousness, true only of our partial knowledge and partial ignorance*⁵.

This unfolds the way Sri Aurobindo approaches the problem of Good and Evil in moral life in the light of his idea of Absolute Good and Truth. The realisation of the Absolute Good and Truth is the acme of spiritual perfection. That is why, for him, ethics is a part of the overall effort to reach the spiritual goal of life divine.

II THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH AND GOOD

Sri Aurobindo's ethics is absolutistic in the sense that it posits the Absolute Good as the central concern of all ethical endeavour. The Absolute Good is the Absolute Truth which is the object of our moral consciousness. In this sense our moral consciousness is the Truth-consciousness which is the Divine Consciousness in the ultimate sense. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

We call it the Supermind or the Truth-consciousness, because it is a principle superior to mentality and exists, acts and proceeds in the fundamental truth and unity of things and not like the mind in their appearances and phenomenal divisions⁶.

That is to say, the Good is itself Divine⁷ because of the fact that nothing can be ultimately Good except the Divine Reality itself. The Good in the absolute sense points to a Reality that surpasses all mental divisions germane to our earthly existence. Hence it is supramental in nature, according to Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo considers his absolutistic ethics as founded on an absolutistic metaphysics because he considers it impossible to conceive of ethical values

and standards in independence from the Reality of which human beings are a part. Human existence is part of the cosmic existence which is itself a Divine Reality. The cosmos is a Divine manifestation and is pervaded by the Divine Reality. In that sense, man himself is a part of the Divine Reality. From this perspective, ethics which deals with man's higher life is inalienably related to the metaphysics of the Divine Reality. The Good which the moral man pursues is also the Divine Reality which the metaphysician is searching for. Therefore ethics necessarily converges on metaphysics.

Sri Aurobindo accords a transcendental status to both ethics and metaphysics in the sense that what they deal with surpasses all human consciousness. The content of ethical consciousness is human from the immanent point of view, but it is divine from the transcendental point of view. Values like Truth and Goodness which we grasp in our human consciousness are really transcendently located in the Divine Consciousness. We realise these values in a very partial manner because we are limited beings on earth, but if we rise to the Divine Consciousness, we can realise them in the absolute sense beyond all duality, divisions and disharmony. Sri Aurobindo writes:

there is a self-law of supreme Truth which is above all standards; there is a supreme and universal Good inherent, self-existent, self-aware, self-moved and determined, infinitely plastic with pure plasticity of the luminous consciousness of the supreme Infinite⁸.

The supreme Good, as suggested here, surpasses all human Good in the sense that all human Good is only a pale reflection of the suprahuman transcendental Good. It is in this sense that the latter is infinitely and eternally Good. Such a conception of Good is not ordinarily found in what we call individual and social ethics. Only transcendental ethics⁹ can provide us with the Absolute and Supreme Good beyond all human consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo's transcendental ethics, unlike Kant's and Wittgenstein's, gives us a clear definition of the Absolute Good in terms of the Divine Reality. For him, the Divine Reality is not a matter of moral presuppositions, as it is in Kant¹⁰ who calls God's existence only a postulate of morality, but it is the ultimate Reality that is the Good and Truth in the absolute sense. For Wittgenstein, the Divine Reality is completely transcendent¹¹ to the universe and man, but for Sri Aurobindo, the Divine Reality is present in the cosmos itself. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo's ethics does not just make indirect reference to the Divine Will, but makes the Divine Will itself the prime force in the human aspiration for a higher divine life. Man's moral will is a reflection of the Divine Will.

Sri Aurobindo's transcendental ethics is not theological ethics in the ordinary religious sense. In religious ethics, moral commands are God's commands and hence man must surrender to these commands at any cost. The biblical story of Abraham sacrificing his son according to God's commands is part of the Christian moral theory where God is the Absolute commander and man the commanded in terms of obedience to moral injunctions. Sri Aurobindo's Divine Reality, on the contrary, is not the moral commander, but the inner Divine Will present in the human moral will for greater manifestation. Therefore there is no external relation between God and Man as in theological ethics, e.g. Christian ethics, but an inner relation of the Divine Being and its human manifestation in the earthly nature. Man is already in the process of realising the Divine Truth and Good because of his unique relation with the Divine Reality.

III MORALITY AND SPIRITUALITY

Sri Aurobindo establishes a deep relationship between morality and spirituality in view of the fact that for him morality is an inalienable part of spirituality. Morality itself is a part of man's spiritual life in the sense that man approaches the life divine through the moral life and its ideals. Since to be moral is to lead a higher form of life, it is essential to know that this higher life itself is a spiritual life. The higher form of life called ethical life is already a form of spiritual life. This is how the Gita¹² has explained the concept of Yogasastra or ethics in the exposition of the moral ideals of a Karmayogin. The Karmayogin performs his actions as a sacrifice to the Divine without attachment. Sri Aurobindo has taken the central message of the Gita as one of divine works to be performed with utmost self-surrender. In his words:

Works must be done as a sacrifice to this Lord of our works, and we must by growing into the Self realise our oneness with him in our being and see our personality as a partial manifestation of him in Nature. One with him in being, we grow one with all beings in the universe and do divine works, not as ours, but as his workings through us for the maintenance and leading of the peoples¹³.

The gist of the ethics of Karmayoga is the selfless divine works which must be performed with all moral seriousness and dedication. The doing of the divine works is the Dharma of the individual in the sense that it leads him to freedom from bondage to the ego and the world and to the ultimate union with the Divine and all the beings in the universe.

The concept of Yoga in the Gita epitomises the ethical conduct envisioned in

moral life. It is this conduct which is otherwise called the *Svadharm*a of the individuals which consists in performing all actions in the spirit of sacrifice to the Divine. The *Svadharm*a is the moral duty prescribed in the Gita and it is the essential nature of every moral being to perform his moral duty according to one's own nature. Sri Aurobindo explains this as follows:

To act with right intelligence and, therefore, a right will, fixed in the One, aware of the one self in all and acting out of its equal serenity, not running about in different directions under thousand impulses of our superficial mental life, is the Yoga of the intelligent will¹⁴.

All the Yogic acts of sacrifice are the moral duties which the moral individual performs with the steadfast wisdom as prescribed in the Gita. For Sri Aurobindo, the Gita is no prescriber of social ethics for the attainment of the social good, but the ethics of divine works for the Good which is embodied in the spiritual perfection.

Sri Aurobindo's view of life as a field of moral struggle and the field of Yoga is the first step towards the higher perfection in divine life. Human life is not a bed of roses but of intense Sadhana, since "all life is either consciously or subconsciously a Yoga"¹⁵, according to him. It is because without Yoga, life itself remains chained to the earthly existence which is steeped in ignorance. An ignorant life is a negation of the spiritual aspiration latent in life. Sri Aurobindo observes:

The true business of man upon earth is to express in the type of humanity a growing image of the Divine; whether knowingly or unknowingly, it is to this end that Nature is working in him under the thick veil of her inner and outer processes¹⁶.

This business of the manifestation of the Divine in man's earthly nature is undertaken under all modes of life including the physical, vital, mental and spiritual. This progressive ascent towards the Divine is mapped through man's practice of Yoga and the performance of other associated moral duties. Moral life is a way forward in this grand scheme of spiritual life prescribed by Sri Aurobindo.

IV MORALITY AND LIFE-NEGATION

It is assumed, though wrongly, that Indian ethics in general is life-negating because it emphasises the denial of the natural side of life such as the biological and psychological needs. The spiritual life has been built on the denial of the so-

called material side of life. The ascetic moral and spiritual values enshrined in Buddhism and Vedanta have the appearance of denial of life¹⁷. On the surface there is definitely a negation of the material side of life which Sri Aurobindo calls the “ascetic denial”¹⁸ of life. But that is not the whole of ethics from the point of view of Buddhism and Vedanta. Even the latter look at life from a higher point of view which culminates in the attainment of spiritual enlightenment. The Buddhist Nirvana and the Vedantic Moksha are affirmation of a higher life which necessarily calls for a renunciation of the material needs of life.

Sri Aurobindo, however, disagrees with both Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta on their emphasis on the complete denial of the material side of life and therefore arrives at a new synthesis of both the material and spiritual needs of life. He evolves an integral vision of life in which both matter and consciousness have a place as both are part of the same Reality. The Reality is of the nature of Brahman or Sachchidananda of which matter and mind are manifestations. Like mind, matter also expresses the same Reality though in different degrees. Thus mind and matter have the same underlying Reality because of which there is a harmony possible between the two. Sri Aurobindo writes:

We have found already in the cosmic consciousness a meeting-place where Matter becomes real to Spirit, Spirit becomes real to Matter. For in cosmic consciousness Mind and Life are intermediaries and no longer, as they seem in the ordinary egoistic mentality, agents of separation, fomenters of an artificial quarrel between the positive and negative principles of the same unknowable Reality¹⁹.

Sri Aurobindo aims at a new vision of life in which our material needs and the spiritual aspirations meet and are in perfect harmony. This gives rise to an ethics of integration between two sets of values: one consisting of the values relating to material satisfaction such as *Artha* and *Kama* and the other consisting of the moral and spiritual values such as Dharma and Moksha. Sri Aurobindo gives an integral status to both types of values in the larger scheme of life and gives a new meaning to such values. For him, ethics is not a mere instrument of satisfaction of the egoistic values regarding the satisfaction of the natural needs of man, but it goes beyond these individual and social values and brings about a spiritual transformation of the individual and social self. Ethics in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy becomes a transcendental and transformational ethics that aims at bringing about the spiritualisation of the individual self. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

Man, too, becomes perfect only when he has found within himself that absolute

calm and passivity of the Brahman and supports by it with the same divine tolerance and same divine bliss a free and inexhaustible activity²⁰.

Thus the aim of ethics is the attainment of the spiritual wisdom which consists in living the life of the Spirit or Brahman. That is the great culmination of all ethical endeavour, both at the individual and the collective level.

Here one may raise the question, what has ethics to do with the attainment of spiritual wisdom? If ethics is a mere instrument of spiritual experience, then ethics has no autonomy of its own and thus gets dissolved into the trans-ethical domain of spiritual experience of the Divine Reality. From this one can go further to argue that in the scheme of Divine Reality ethics itself a mere matter of human behaviour which has no ultimate significance. The ethical man is after all the transitional man who is bound to his earthly existence. Therefore ethics has only an ephemeral value and must be transcended in the spiritual life. However, Sri Aurobindo rejects this interpretation of ethics in his integral philosophy. First of all, ethics is not instrumental and transitional; it is absolutely necessary for the higher life. It is the foundation on which spiritual life is built. It releases us from our ego-centric life and opens up the way to life divine. Therefore, if ethics is the first step on the way to the higher life, spiritual life is the culminating step. As Sri Aurobindo suggests,

The ascent of man from the physical to the supramental must open out the possibility of a corresponding ascent in the grades of substance to that ideal or causal body which is proper to our supramental being, and the conquest of the lower principles by Supermind and its liberation of them into divine life and a divine mentality must also render possible conquest of our physical limitations by the power and principle of supramental substance²¹.

The ascent to the supramental life is the ultimate goal of man and that is ensured by a moral life that is wedded to the higher values of life. Sri Aurobindo never claimed that the higher divine life is possible by a mere wish or desire; it is the culminating end of a rigorous life of moral practices and yogic transformation.

V THE SUPERMAN: THE NEW IMAGE OF A MORAL BEING

Sri Aurobindo's concept of the superman is the new image of a morally perfect being who is also the “Gnostic Being”²² in whom there is the highest manifestation of the Divine. The superman is the supramental being on earth embodying all that is perfect in mind and spirit. Sri Aurobindo describes the

nature of such a supramental being in the following words:

In the gnostic being this self-determining knowledge freely obedient to self-truth and the total truth of Being would be the very law of his existence. In him Knowledge and Will become one and cannot be in conflict; Truth of spirit and life become one and cannot be at variance: in the self-effectuation of his being there can be no strife or disparity or divergence between the spirit and the members²³.

In the gnostic being, there is the unification of Knowledge and Will in so far as he is guided by his free will to execute its own actions in submission to the Divine. There is no gap between his thought and actions because of the fact that he is his own being and is in complete conformity with the supreme Divine Reality. Further:

The evolved gnostic being would have entered into this Truth-Consciousness of the Infinite and Universal, and it would be that which would determine for him and in him all his individual seeing and action. His would be a consciousness of universal identity and a consequent or rather inherent Truth-knowledge, Truth-sight, Truth-feeling, Truth-will, Truth-sense and Truth-dynamis of action implicit in his identity with the One or spontaneously arising from his identity with the All²⁴.

The above description of the nature of the gnostic being or superman leaves no doubt as to what the superman feels, knows and does. That all his knowledge, feelings and actions are centred on Truth or the highest Being suggests that he is the one who has transformed himself into a supramental being. Such a being carries the new message of divinity and morality in the human world.

The human world has seen the emergence of great men like the Buddha, Jesus, Moses and Mohammad who have changed the world and taken it towards a better future. All of them were moral and spiritual giants — all of them supermen according to the standards set by Sri Aurobindo. These supermen did cross the boundary of ordinary consciousness and went beyond the conventional standards of Good and Evil. They set new standards of morality. Sri Aurobindo, like Nietzsche, hailed the arrival of such men on earth to reaffirm the Will to Power over the forces of darkness of their times. Nietzsche's supermen are not the vital and mental giants²⁵, as it has been wrongly perceived. They are in a sense spiritual giants manifesting the Will to Power. However, Sri Aurobindo goes beyond Nietzsche in making the human will the manifestation of the Divine

Will beyond all its biological and psychological limitations. Therefore Sri Aurobindo's supermen are the spiritual beings on earth carrying the message of the Divine on earth and expressing the Divine Will.

The superman, according to Sri Aurobindo, goes beyond the earth-bound consciousness and embodies the Divine Consciousness. Therefore the notions of Good and Evil that are available in the human consciousness are bound to be limited and rooted in our ego-consciousness. That is the reason why Sri Aurobindo cannot see much validity of the morality of the human world established through our conventional wisdom. In view of this he thinks of a new morality and new wisdom which is founded on the Divine Consciousness. This new morality transcends the boundaries of the mental life which we humans share. In that morality, the moral values become spiritual values giving a new meaning to our life on earth. Sri Aurobindo observes:

All spiritual life is in its principle a growth into divine living. It is difficult to fix the frontier where the mental ceases and the divine life begins, for the two project into each other and there is a long space of their intermingled existence. A great part of this interspace, — when the spiritual urge does not turn away from earth or world altogether — can be seen as the process of a higher life in the making²⁶.

What this interspace of mind and supermind shows is the transition from our human morality to the supramental morality. This morality can best be characterised as the morality of the new man which can dawn on earth after a complete transformation of our mental life.

VI CONCLUSION

To unfold the fundamentals of Sri Aurobindo's ethics we must understand the overall project of his integral metaphysics. Those who see ethics through the prism of reason and intelligence, cannot agree with Sri Aurobindo's vision of a supra-rational morality because of the limitation of their vision. Such a limitation is built into the human intelligence which can be overcome only through a gnostic revolution. Sri Aurobindo is talking about such a revolution in ethics and metaphysics.

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

Deepti Tewari

(Continued from the previous issue)

PART II

Experiments in Integral Education

The Sri Aurobindo Ashram School

From the early '40's, families began to be accepted at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. There grew to be a small collectivity of school-age children who required some sort of structured education. And that is how the school at the Ashram was born — quite organically, as a necessity of life. The teachers were requisitioned by Mother from the diverse body of sadhaks. Those selected suddenly found themselves with a wholly new element introduced into their sadhana. From the beginning, the school was rooted in the spiritual ethos of the Ashram. The children bloomed in that rarefied atmosphere, created by the seeking for a highest perfection in all the planes of the being from the most physical to the highest spiritual. And brooding over all these developments was the luminosity of Sri Aurobindo and Mother's effulgent presence. The children were given the best — the finest in music, the arts and poetry, the humanities and the sciences, the education of the body — no domain of human knowledge was excluded from the scope of their study and all was infused with the deepest spiritual culture.

It is from this golden seed-time, that in 1951, the idea of creating an International University Centre based upon Sri Aurobindo's teaching emerged. The Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education has today completed more

than half a century of existence. The student body ranges from nursery to advanced levels and the subjects include the humanities, languages – including Sanskrit, various other Indian and other important languages of the world, fine arts, sciences, engineering, technology and vocational training. A great stress is laid upon the perfection of the body and the physical education programme of the school is deservedly famous. The Centre of Education seeks to develop every aspect of the individual, rather than to concentrate exclusively on mental training. It employs what is called the “Free Progress System” which Mother spoke of as a progress guided by the soul and not subject to habits, conventions or preconceived ideas. The student is encouraged to learn by him/herself, choose subjects of study, progress at his own pace and ultimately to take charge of his own development. The teacher is much more an adviser and source of information than an instructor. In practice, the system is adapted to the temperament of teacher and student. The Centre of Education does not award degrees or diplomas, since it seeks to awaken in its students the joy of learning and an aspiration for progress that is independent of outer motives. From the beginning the aim of the centre has been to create living souls; brilliance in studentship is a secondary characteristic. This short note does not in any way claim to do justice to the enormous, robust even radical, experimentation that has been undertaken here, especially in all the years when Mother’s direct guidance was always available. That story has been told elsewhere. But this great and innovative experiment has demonstrated its results in the lives of the many generations of students who can be found today, bringing to bear, wherever they are, the unique perspective they imbibed here.

Auroville

Then in the year 1968, an experiment much vaster in its scope was born. Auroville, the city that wants to serve the Truth came into being on the 28th of February 1968, in a marvellous ceremony where a boy and a girl from all the countries of the world, 121 at that time, and all the 23 states of India, brought a handful of their country’s soil and placed it in a lotus-shaped marble urn symbolising and invoking the human unity that Auroville wants to embody. The endeavour of Auroville is to create a society that aims at an ever-increasing perfectibility (seen as a progressive balance and equilibrium) for the human being until conditions are created that will give birth to a next species — a spiritual being who will have conquered all trace of egoism within. Auroville wants to be a place of accelerated evolution harnessing the capacity for self-consciousness and growth that is unique to the human species. To live in Auroville, a reversal of perspective must take place within individuals; and they

are called upon to begin to change themselves by harnessing the power of the inner spirit so as to change their world.

Today Auroville is a bustling society of over 2500 persons gathered together from all corners of the world (50 nationalities at last count). These members are subjecting themselves to a voluntary apprenticeship in a ‘workshop’ which lies within – in each of their own psychological natures, and the tools they must employ are introspection, self-analysis and growth of consciousness brought about through a tapasya of work and action in a collective human environment. Auroville is a field of experiments, for research and study into all the means both outer and inward by which the individual and the society can grow in an accelerated manner. It is not an individual realisation; it is built upon a ‘fraternity of collaboration’, a working together in unity, which could result in a collective realisation of a new society, constructed upon a new basis and employing new methods in the structures of its collective life. In the measure that Aurovilians can successfully grow in consciousness and change their mental, vital and physical nature by bringing in the light of the inner psychic consciousness, the spiritualised collectivity may take birth. There can be no artificial changes, no half-measures – either one has demonstrably grown inwardly or one is still the selfish, concentered, egoistic human being that contributes to the unconsciousness of the world; and the life of Auroville would reflect that!

What sort of educational patterns should such a society have? With regard to Auroville, Mother has given few detailed directions. But the few things she has said are worth a host, so pregnant are they with significance. There is first and foremost, *The Charter of Auroville* — the core document that invokes and delineates Auroville’s future programme of action. It constitutes a simple, comprehensive and all-embracing description of how Auroville should grow individually and collectively.

It is Auroville’s Mantra:

The Charter of Auroville

1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular; Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.

2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress and a youth that never ages.

3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.

4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living

embodiment of an actual Human Unity.

To be a true Aurovilian

In addition, there are the six points in which The Mother outlined the content and methodology of the psychological programme of action which each of the residents would subject themselves to, if they wished to attempt to grow into true Aurovilians. A complete Yoga is included in these simple points, one that would take a lifetime of concentrated attention to achieve.

To be a True Aurovilian

1. The first necessity is the inner discovery, in order to know what one truly is behind social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At the centre there is a being, free, vast and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the effective centre of our being and our life in Auroville.
2. One lives in Auroville in order to be free from moral and social conventions; but this freedom must not be a new slavery to the ego, its desires and ambitions. The fulfilment of one's desires bars the way to the inner discovery which can only be achieved in the peace and transparency of perfect disinterestedness.
3. The Aurovilian should lose the sense of personal possession. For our passage in the material world, what is indispensable to our life and to our action is put at our disposal according to the place we must occupy. The more we are consciously in contact with our inner being, the more are the exact means given to us.
4. Work, even manual work, is something indispensable for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does not put one's consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. To let the consciousness organise a bit of matter by means of one's body is very good. To establish order around oneself helps to bring order within oneself. One should organise one's life not according to outer and artificial rules, but according to an organised inner consciousness, for if one lets life go on without subjecting it to the control of the higher consciousness, it becomes fickle and inexpressive. It is to waste one's time in the sense that matter remains without any conscious utilisation.
5. The whole earth must prepare itself for the advent of the new species, and Auroville wants to work consciously to hasten this advent.
6. Little by little it will be revealed to us what this new species must be, and meanwhile the best course is to consecrate oneself entirely to the Divine.

Education in Auroville

One finds few specific directions with regard to Auroville Education in Mother's remarks and messages for Auroville. Yet it remains one of the core areas of the Auroville Experience. The very Charter of Auroville states clearly: "Auroville will be the place of an unending education, constant progress and a youth that never ages."

The educational experiment that was attempted in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram under her inspiration and guidance ought to be continued, even taken further in Auroville. Certainly her remarks in the text entitled *A Dream* are deeply applicable to Auroville:

"...In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their souls; education would be given not for passing examinations or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich existing faculties and bring forth new ones."¹

Schools in Auroville

It is in this context that the somewhat mysterious list of names given by her for the Auroville schools assumes significance:

LAST SCHOOL;
AFTER SCHOOL 1;
AFTER SCHOOL 2;
AFTER SCHOOL 3;
SUPER SCHOOL;
NO SCHOOL

For many years, this list was understood largely in its physical dimension — as a list of names of buildings in the school campus at Aspiration, the construction of which was started in 1971. (In fact it is still the name of one of the buildings and the whole campus is still known as the Last School Campus).

It was when its physical base was more or less secured, that Auroville, as a collectivity, began to consciously explore some of the deeper psychological dimensions of these names. The paramount question of an education, not imitative but rather built upon the spirit of Auroville, is more and more emerging to the forefront of the collective consciousness. These names given by Mother begin to acquire a great significance. As we dwell upon them we discover the complete and unique educational programme that can be built around them. It is immediately clear that each name is linked in a necessary progression to the

next and from the first school which is significantly called Last School to the final No School one discerns a pattern of psychological development, the clues to which are contained in the names themselves. We thus find that what we have here is a Sutra — not a mere list — and the moment is ripe in Auroville's collective growth to explore its meaning.

The education that The Mother envisioned was called by her "Free Progress", — in itself a term pregnant with meaning — the accent being on the word 'progress', with 'free' as the modifier that defines the method by which one progresses. Much can be written on the term but here is one answer The Mother gave to define what she meant by Free Progress: "A progress guided by the soul and not subjected to habits, conventions or preconceived ideas."

An exploration of 'Mother's Sutra'

The first School in The Mother's list is called "Last School" — clearly this suggests that it is the **last** school. But as it begins the list, it must correspond to the point where schooling actually commences which is necessarily post-Kindergarten. It is the first years, when the child is learning, is being trained to read and write languages and make calculations, which may be conceived as the years of last school. The teacher is there to train, to develop further and to awaken innate faculties so that as quickly as possible the child may learn how to learn independently.

Subsequently, we enter into the years of After School, which has three phases according to Mother's list. These can be understood literally to refer initially to the period when the youth consolidates and develops the knowledge and skills gained in the Last School phase. It is when this has been achieved that he automatically tries to experiment and apply through a process of repeated experimentation and demonstration, the knowledge learned. Finally, ready to move further, the youth enters a period of further exploration in which he widens his horizons and discovers newer vistas and worlds to learn and know about. In these three phases of After School, which can be defined broadly as stages of: Development; Demonstration; Exploration, the teacher's role, informed by keen observation and deep understanding, is more and more that of friend, guide and helper and less of instructor. And he/she uses the triple method of suggestion, influence and example — never of imposition — to work with the developing personality of the youth.

It must also be understood that each of these stages of development can exist simultaneously, based as they are on the varying level of advancement that a youth may have in any given domain. And one can conceive of a person being at the Last School stage, that is, the level of basic training, in one subject;

and of self-development or skills training and in another, i.e., After School 3 which is the stage of further Exploration. It is only that each stage emphasises one approach over and above the others. Free progress necessarily implies a great plasticity. All methods are valid — one has to find the right method for a given person or situation, which may be valid only for that particular person/situation.

We come then, in Mother's list, to the term Super School. This name seems to suggest a certain amount of intensive, i.e., accelerated schooling again. But, as the youth should have learned to progress on their own by this time, it must imply a wholly other sort of schooling. Thus it must be schooling at a higher level or dimension. This can be conceived of as the stage when the youth comes into contact with great movements of world thought and action; where they can summarise in their awakened thought all the vast ideas as also the fields of human endeavour. Yet the orientation of their beings must remain turned towards the future. A teacher or a guide becomes essential at this stage to help pick up the pace of the process of learning. The aim is integral personality development, and someone is needed who can help to point out the essence of each domain. Schooling is intensive but of another order. This is also the phase of apprenticeships and the acquisitions of skills and/or professional training. Super school can be defined as a school where the subjects are of the higher levels of human thought and action and are treated in a holistic manner. The aim is to "summarise" the human past so quickly that one can have all the energies to pursue the development of the future. This requires a great deal of "schooling". Super School prepares the being to enter into "No School" which is the condition when the instrumental nature is fit to pursue on its own integral growth towards a fourfold personality in the four parts of the being: Wisdom; Heroism; Harmony; Skill in Works.

Once Super School has finished its work of preparation, the being is ready to enter into the stage of No School which can be conceived of as the moment when the awakened consciousness needs no other guide than the one within. Mother saw Auroville as a learning society and each unit necessarily should be a learning environment. In the future we can envision that possibilities for apprenticeships and professional/skills training will be available in all units. Everyone will be then a teacher and a learner simultaneously and Auroville will indeed be the place, materially, psychologically and spiritually, of an unending education, a constant progress and a youth that never ages.

But till then the 'schools' and the society have a work to do in growing into the dimensions indicated in Mother's Sutra for Auroville education. Such are the ideas arrived at as of now but obviously more will be discovered and

developed as the underlying truth of Auroville grows and manifests. Much of what has organically developed in Auroville's schools so far can be viewed through the perspective of Mother's list of names. A certain conscious analysis and rationalisation still needs to be undertaken, but already each of these stages exists in practice. Auroville's most recent initiative has been the establishing a few years ago of Super School, attempting to base itself upon the lines already indicated.

Auroville is a young society; many of its aims are so vast and so high that it is hard for the apprentice Aurovilians to even hold them constantly in the consciousness. But the aspiration to grow and to change is the flame that stokes the élan of growth, and if the collectivity can keep faith, realisation is certain, now rather than in the hereafter.

PART III

An illustration of Free Progress methodology

As an illustration of the effort to put in practice some of the above ideas, there is presented here as a work in progress, an analysis of the Art and Creativity classes at Super School.

An exploration of the Art and Creativity classes in Last School/Super School as a document of research in progress.

What is presented here is a report of one particular area of rigorous experimentation over the last few years. This is in the domain of the training of the aesthetic faculty of the youth. In a Free Progress system, the divisions and differences between one subject and another necessarily blur, yet in its own domain each area can produce definite results that may influence all the other areas. The training of the aesthetic faculty has brought with it interesting consequences for all the other classes. It has been observed that those youth who have discovered a love of beauty and are attempting to express this beauty through complex artistic creations, bring a certain settled calmness into their other classes too. Art and artistic expression, pursued rightly as a *tapasya*, seems to bring a maturity, a refinement and an ability to take responsibility for the inner and outer environment that is quite astonishing to behold.

Recently, a group of six students in the 16-18 age group, ran a two-day workshop for everyone in the school, the teachers and all the other students included. Thus, for two full school days all the other students and the teachers, with their varying artistic abilities, rubbed shoulders as equal participants and

were led through a range of exercises and assignments that were created, presented and run through by this group of six. The youth had taken many hours to collectively plan, agree on and prepare the workshop. For days they were at the Art Centre from early morning to late evening arranging the place and the exercises. Through the duration of the workshop (6 hours each day) they watched over every individual as guides and as helpers and demonstrated a maturity and ability that was exceptional.

It is extremely important that occasions are created where the teachers present themselves as learners too. While blurring the separation between the 'teacher' and the 'taught', this truth creates an immeasurable bond between the adults and the youth. But more importantly, it is greatly empowering when a youth finds he/she is more competent in one domain as compared to a teacher who may have hitherto presented a picture of knowledge and of capability.

Art and creativity are a very important part of the Free Progress programme in Auroville. These aim to awaken in the youth a sense, perception, conception and intuition of Beauty. In the following pages the basic principles by which the art classes are approached and the reasons for this as well as the broad methods by which the emotional, vital, aesthetic being is awakened and refined are also traced.

Indeed the whole school's programme is covered by these aims, for Beauty is attempted to be awakened in every class offered at Last school/Super School. What differs in different subjects is the part of the instrumental nature that is touched upon. Each subject represents a door of entry that, rightly approached, can lead the youth to absolutes such as Truth, Beauty, The Good and The Vast.

"In the physical world, of all things it is beauty that expresses best the Divine. The physical world is the world of form and the perfection of form is beauty. Beauty interprets, expresses, manifests the Eternal. Its role is to put all manifested nature in contact with the Eternal through the perfection of form, through the harmony and a sense of the ideal which uplifts and leads towards something higher."

"True art means the expression of beauty in the material world. In a world wholly converted, that is to say, expressing integrally the divine reality, art must serve as the revealer and teacher of this divine beauty in life."

"...if you want to have the sense of beauty in itself ... you must have a universal consciousness ... to know true beauty independent of all form, one must rise above all form. And once you have known it beyond every form, you can recognise it in any form whatsoever."

The aim is to make beauty the constant ideal of the youth. Not just beauty in the work they do but also beauty in action, beauty in thought, beauty of sentiments so that finally the students may discover the beauty of the soul. Therefore it is important to note that the discipline of awakening Beauty is not just confined to the art classes but is something that the school aims at through all the subjects and domains of human knowledge. The overarching aspiration for Beauty which is Truth, which is The Good, which is The Vast, serves as the thread that can guide, orient and unify every activity and subject and person in the school.

Stages of development; Methods; Course contents

In Last School's art centre, students from many of the other schools are received. Working with Auroville youth of all ages (approx 8 years to adulthood) has helped in formulating the following stages in development and the methods that are appropriate to each.

Stage 1

At this stage the child/youth has little contact with his aesthetic being as also with the materials of Art. The first effort must be aimed at building self-confidence. A great deal of care as well as constant support and guidance is needed to help the youth reach the thresholds of Art. The youth are encouraged to do free painting and drawing, as also to develop a contact with the materials. They often learn to copy pictures such as photographs of animals. They learn to do simple creative and imaginative work, first in drawing then in other fields. This is the stage of first development (which could correspond in Mother's list to After School 1).

Stage 2

At this stage a certain level of interest has been awakened which often results in the spontaneous evocation of the primary quality necessitated: Concentration. All the development that is encouraged is based upon a freedom which aims at awakening the innate powers of the youth's own will. The students are repeatedly told that it is not what you do but how you do it. They are told to practise, and to practise and to practise again — if necessary to repeat the same work in new colours, new forms, new approaches. The teacher, at this second stage, puts more pressure, becomes more exigent, in an attempt to call forth the latent capacities of the being. But the basis of freedom is not lost for it is through freedom that the youth must discover their own will. The youth are introduced to Graphics, to still-life in pencil — an activity which awakens the power of observation, they learn to copy from great masters, and they are

initiated into the domains of colour. This is the stage of Demonstration and exploration (corresponding to After School 2 and 3)

Stage 3

At this stage the teacher reverses the approach and begins to require more, to limit and to create a stricter frame of reference, always and only with the conscious collaboration of the student. The student discovers the *tapasya* of creativity. The aim is to enlarge, to deepen and to widen the being. The students are trained to become objective. Here the critical faculties of the mind are awakened as the students learn to reflect, analyse and discriminate through the kind of exercises they are given.

This stage can come about when both concentration and will are already manifest elements in the developing being. The major focus is on the harmonies of colour and the students' research through practice, these various harmonies. They learn the 7 contrasts of colour as well as their laws, their powers and their interactions. Finally they learn to apply, through personal creative expressions, these discoveries.

The students enter into the world of series. Everything that is done is meant to be a research into the practice of infinite variations. The students discover 10 or 15 or 20 different ways of doing a single work. The attempt is to go always deeper. The research also covers the field of graphics where the students have to develop compositions that cover the harmony of contrast. They learn, at the opposite pole, to work only with black and white and yet create both originality and beauty. They learn to work with material textures, when for example on a single sheet of paper they create endless variations of textures by either making holes, by poking or cutting or tapping or scratching, using any instrument such as a hammer a cutter or a pair of scissors, to create an endless variety of beautiful, artistic, graphic patterns. They discover that these patterns are mirrored in the world of material nature too. And they learn to work with natural materials to create things of beauty. This stage corresponds to the period when the students have explored and discovered their concentration their will and their many capacities and are now ready for an intensive and rigorous training to widen, deepen and heighten the expressive abilities of their being. Some attempts have been made to create work that leads towards these directions. At this stage the teacher demands that the students enter into the 'meaning' of what they do and to find this meaning through reflection and translate it into an objective piece of creative self-expression. Exercises have been given that are so formulated as to call forth the critical reason to observe the subjective imaginative process. This is done by creating a whole series of technical constraints within which a

particular exercise must be fulfilled and the only way the students can liberate their imaginative and creative genius is to first analyse and reflect then to go within and awaken an inner enlargement that leads to a wider solution while at the same time attempting to rediscover and apply all that has been learned previously in the earlier three stages. (corresponding to Super School).

Stage 4

This stage has not yet been fully explored or manifested by the experiment which the Last School/Super School Arts centre has embodied, working with the students who have grown with the experiment over the last many years. It is only in recent times that some of the older youth and young adults who have undergone many years of *tapasya* have crossed this threshold. These moments represent the future lights which have flashed forth their periodic illuminations in the work and expressive capacities of the students and which give the promise of future possibilities. At this stage the aim would be to enter into domains of intuition, to know through experience the capacity to fly high and see far, so that finally one can identify with the object of work. This is the stage which can be described only in anticipation not from systematic experience of working with and observing and analysing the youth. But the earlier stages represent a clear distillation of the observations made through long years of work and contact and discovery with the youth. (This stage can be said to correspond to the No School phase of self-development).

(Concluded)

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The experience of the Psychic Being and its Becoming

Alain Grandcolas

(Continued from the previous issue)

SECTION 5

HOW TO FIND ONE'S PSYCHIC BEING

Is there any specific method/process to trigger the bursting of the psychic being? At the end of this survey, is it possible to recommend some method/process to find one's psychic being, to identify with it? In the *Science of Living*, published in 1950, referring to the psychic being, the Mother defines a gradation in the knowledge of the psychic being, as four phases.

It is . . . of capital importance to become conscious of its presence in us, to concentrate on this presence, until it becomes a living fact for us and we can identify ourselves with it.”³⁴

Identification is the last phase, “we do not reach it little by little, it is not through a little constant and regular effort. It is something which arrives suddenly”.

By which method do we know it? The Mother said:

In various times and places many methods have been prescribed for attaining this perception and ultimately achieving this identification. Some methods are psychological, some religious, some even mechanical.

In reality, everyone has to find the one which suits him best, and if one has an ardent and steadfast aspiration, a persistent and dynamic will, one is sure to meet, in one way or another — outwardly through reading and study, inwardly through concentration, meditation, revelation and experience —

the help one needs to reach the goal.³⁵

In fact, the Mother highlights here two common psychological conditions — aspiration and will. She considers that the inner or outer tools are many and each one must find those tools which are the most appropriate.

1. A strong craving for an inner contact seems to be the prime condition.

Among the people who participated in the survey and spoke of having a sudden psychic experience, all of them had a strong aspiration. It is as if it sucks the psychic being out of its shell, makes it grow and is a call to it which accelerates the moment when it bursts. The Mother mentioned something similar in 1955 when she said that:

if one intensifies his aspiration, there is a moment when the pressure is so great and the intensity of the question so strong that something turns over in the consciousness.³⁹

During a talk in 1956 the Mother described so well what is the needed attitude to find one's psychic being:

First of all, you must begin to seek Him, and then that must be the most important thing in life. The will must be constant, the aspiration constant, the preoccupation constant, and it must be the only thing you truly want. Then you will find Him.

But of course, if in one's life one thinks of Him for five minutes and is busy with other things for three-quarters of an hour, there is not much chance of success. . .

It must not be a pastime. It must be the exclusive preoccupation of one's being, the very reason of one's existence.^{39a}

An ashramite who has identified (several times) with his psychic being, once said "You must have a very strong aspiration, otherwise, no chance!"

2. The action of scrupulously following any psychic indication received is an important step forward.

In 1957, the Mother wrote:

in order to strengthen the contact and, if possible, the development of the conscious psychic personality one should . . . take great care, each time one receives an indication from it, and follow it very scrupulously and sincerely.⁴¹

But how are we to identify indications we receive as coming from the psychic being? In 1971, the Mother gave a key piece of information on this:

Communications from the psychic do not come in a mental form. They are not ideas or reasoning. They have their own character quite distinct from the mind, something like a feeling that comprehends itself and acts.⁴²

When you are faced with a problem and wonder what to do, one can ask the Mother, Sri Aurobindo, one's angel, the higher grace for an indication or a suggestion, but the psychic being is not to be asked. It is only when one has a solution, an orientation, an indication for action, that they can be put in front of the psychic being which may give an answer through encouragement or discouragement, through a feeling of inner harmony or an uneasiness. To understand the way the psychic being is expressing itself is very important:

The psychic has the true knowledge, an intuitive instinctive knowledge. It says: 'I know. I cannot give reasons, but I know.'⁴³ . . . It is a sort of inner certitude which makes you do the right thing at the right moment and in the right way, without necessarily passing through the reason or mental formation."⁴⁴

The Mother explained that it also discourages you with this "kind of capacity for foresight, but not in the form of ideas: rather in the form of feelings . . . For instance, when one is going to decide to do something, there is sometimes a kind of uneasiness or inner refusal."⁴⁵ Its manifestation is quite subtle, "the tiny, very quiet indication of the soul which says: 'Don't do it'."⁴⁶

3. The practice of concentration is a basic tool.

Sri Aurobindo wrote in some letter: "the first necessity is the practice of concentration of your consciousness within yourself . . . The concentration in the heart opens within and by following this inward opening and going deep one becomes aware of the soul or psychic being."³⁶ Another person received the following letter: "It is by concentration of whatever kind and the experiences it

brings that one opens and becomes aware within and the new consciousness and nature begin to grow and come out.”³⁷

During one of the evening gatherings with the disciples, the Mother gives one practical method:

For those who have the power of concentrating with images, they have one more facility. To sit in meditation before a closed door, as though it were a heavy door of bronze . . . and to pass to the other side; the whole concentration, the whole aspiration is gathered into a beam and pushes, pushes, pushes against this door, and pushes more and more with an increasing energy until all of a sudden it bursts open and one enters. It makes a very powerful impression. And so one is as though plunged into the light and then one has the full enjoyment of a sudden and radical change of consciousness, with an illumination that captures one entirely and the feeling that one is becoming another person. This is a very concrete and very powerful way of entering into contact with one’s psychic being.³⁸

4. Other processes /methods for finding the psychic being.

Sri Aurobindo and Mother have basically highlighted these three methods: a development of the aspiration, an active obedience to indications received from the psychic and the practice of some concentration. Some other methods are being explored.

One Aurovilian, who had followed a 10-day course of Vipasana, was wondering if the wonderful tool for concentration developed in this method could not be useful for people who are really concerned about their psychic being. In the Vipasana philosophy, the eternal soul or the psychic being does not exist; everything is impermanent. The practice of concentration is used to rid ourselves of our samskaras, our past negative actions. The practitioner is advised to concentrate successively on all parts of his being from top to bottom and from bottom to top, without stopping on the way. However, this method could probably be used in a fruitful manner to concentrate on the psychic space and become aware of any psychic feeling which comes to the surface, such as any psychic uneasiness or any psychic encouragement.

One Ashramite has organised some one-week workshops, conducted in residence without leaving the campus. The focus on the psychic being is outstanding, and the teaching includes some practical exercises. The feeling of the psychic presence and the aspiration for it must have increased within each participant, as well as some knowledge of how to identify it. Unhappily, the

return into the normal life seemed too abrupt, even aggressive. It may be advisable during the second part of the workshop to return for some hours into one’s social and working environment in order to learn how to keep the concentration on the psychic space in the midst of the normal life.

To conclude this section, we do not resist quoting again the powerful description of the Mother’s “first contact” which happened while She was crossing the Boulevard Saint-Michel in Paris:

To have it (just to give you an idea) took me a year of exclusive concentration on finding that within myself. . . I did nothing but that, thought of nothing but that, wanted nothing but that . . . 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 . . . suddenly, for no apparent reason — I was neither more concentrated nor anything else — poof! It opened . . .

SECTION 6

The Psychic Being and the Supramental Being

According to the Mother, the psychic being is going to “materialise” itself and become the supramental being. According to which process?

While “seeing with open eyes” a disciple’s psychic being, the Mother had an experience on the first July 1970: “I said to myself: ‘But it is the psychic being, it is that which will materialise itself and become the supramental being. . . So, one understands: the psychic being materialises itself . . . and that gives continuity to evolution.”⁴⁸

For many years, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have been exploring how the new race, the supramental race, would appear on earth, how the first supramental being would appear. As Sri Aurobindo writes in *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, the process of animal procreation which entails physical heredity and karma did not seem a proper process:

The first part of this essay has been dealing with the growth and the life of the psychic being within oneself. The second part will explain how this psychic being is meant to transform itself into the next species which will appear on this earth.

The necessity of a physical procreation could only be avoided if new means of a supraphysical kind were evolved and made available . . . If there is some reality in the phenomenon of materialisation and dematerialisation claimed to be possible by occultists and evidenced by occurrences many of us have witnessed, a method of this kind would not be out of the range of possibility . . . A soul wishing to . . . form for itself a body and take part in a divine life upon earth might be assisted to do so or even provided with such a form by this method of direct transmutation without passing through birth by the sex process or undergoing any degradation or any of the heavy limitations in the growth and development of its mind and material body inevitable to our present way of existence. It might then assume at once the structure and greater powers and functioning of the truly divine material body which must one day emerge.⁴⁹

In 1957, the Mother had spoken of Sri Aurobindo's conception of creation of the new being:

The supramental being as he conceived of it, is not formed in the ordinary animal way at all but directly, through a process that for the moment still seems occult to us, but is a direct handling of forces and substance in such a way that the body can be a "materialisation" and not a formation according to the ordinary animal principle.⁵⁰

Then, in 1966, while discussing with Satprem, she already hinted that the process could be original:

this would be a transformation infinitely greater than that from the animal to man; this would be a passage from man to a being who would not be built in the same manner, who would no longer function in the same manner, who would be like the condensation and concretisation of "something."⁵¹

What is that 'something'? The answer may be found in the talk of 1 July 1970, quoted in the beginning of this section.

If we retain such an assumption, it may be interesting to study how this precursor of the supramental being, the psychic being, is coming into existence, growing, developing, from its birth up to its present state in this 21st century.

SECTION 7

The Process of Crystallisation of the Psychic Being

In every being, a spark of the Divine comes out and crystallises to become the psychic being through our life experiences. The various stages of development may be gathered from several statements by the Mother.

1. The psychic being takes its mature shape through a process of crystallisation.

As the Mother said in 1953:

the psychic starts by being only a kind of a tiny divine spark within the being and out of this spark will emerge progressively an independent conscious being having its own action and will. . . For a long time, in most human beings the psychic is a being in the making.⁵²

Even earlier, in 1931, the Mother had written: "it is the psychic presence which little by little becomes the psychic being."⁵³ Later, in 1962, the Mother describes to Satprem, in a very living manner, the process of growth of the psychic being:

this divine flame exists inside each human being, and little by little, through all the incarnations . . . a being takes shape around it . . . And when the psychic being reaches its full development, it becomes a kind of . . . individual raiment (*revêtement corporel*) of the soul . . . through all the incarnations. Whatever has received and responded to the divine Influence progressively crystallises around . . . This is what we call the "psychic being."⁵⁴

2. Can this "crystallisation" be assisted by our human endeavour?

The human being can consciously assist the development of the psychic being by obeying its indications. Which actions or attitudes or behaviour develop the psychic individuality? Sri Aurobindo gives some indication in a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy:

The psychic being grows in the consciousness by godward experience, gaining strength every time there is a higher movement in us and, finally by the accumulation of these deeper and higher movements, there is developed a psychic individuality which we call usually the psychic being.⁵⁵

It looks as if an analogy can be drawn with a muscle which grows with

practice: the psychic being grows whenever its envelope follows a higher psychic movement.

3. The psychic being is quite different from the soul.

We like to highlight two outstanding differences.

First the soul does not evolve while the psychic being evolves, grows and becomes the sheath of the soul during its terrestrial incarnations and reincarnations. In 1960, the Mother wrote:

the soul is the divine spark that dwells at the centre of each being; it is identical with its Divine Origin; it is the divine in man.

The psychic being is formed progressively around this divine centre, the soul, in the course of its innumerable lives in the terrestrial evolution, until the time comes when the psychic being, fully formed and wholly awakened, becomes the conscious sheath of the soul around which it is formed.⁵⁶

Secondly, the soul remains a soul while the psychic being is meant to become the next species on this earth, the supramental being, after several incarnations. “It is that which will materialise itself and become the supramental being.”⁴⁸

We may wonder why, in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, the soul, that divine spark in man, is called ‘psychic being’ and not, for instance, ‘oversoul’ or ‘super soul’ or the ‘soul being’ since it is the “*individual raiment of the soul*”, once it has developed into an individualised form and shape.

In fact, the emergence of this “independent conscious being” is often perceived as a separate entity within our human frame through an unexpected and sudden experience, when the psychic being “bursts out of its veil.” At that time, we become aware of an entity which has always existed and we did not know it, which will always exist beyond the death of the physical body. We become aware that this entity is in fact the real Peter or Paul, more real, more physical than the physical body which is then felt as transient. Thus, the psychic being is experienced as a living “being” and it is a being which has emanated from a soul called “*psyché*” in Greek. This individual entity is in fact the being of our *psyché*, our psychic being.

SECTION 8

DESCRIPTION OF THE PSYCHIC BEING

Being the foetus of the next species, the psychic being is developing

an individual “body” within our human frame.

The psychic being is evolutionary and many features of an evolved psychic being can be individualised.

1. It is a being different from the human being!

During the 1 July 1970 conversation with Satprem, the Mother described a sadhak’s psychic being, seen with open eyes:

“it was clearly a being which was neither man nor woman, having the combined characteristics of both.”⁵⁷ Yes, a being, as it was mentioned earlier, defined by the Mother as: “an organised entity, fully conscious of itself, independent, and having the power of asserting itself and ruling the rest of the nature.”⁵⁸

2. This being has a form.

Some shape is described in the *Katha Upanishad* in which we can read about the *Chaitya Purusha*, that Sri Aurobindo identifies with the psychic being: “The Purusha, the inner Self, no larger than the size of a man’s thumb.”⁵⁹ But later he will write to a disciple that it is an image: “that of course is a symbolic image. For usually, when one sees anybody’s psychic being in a form, it is bigger than that.”⁶⁰ The Mother also said in 1951 that: “the psychic being is an entity which has a form . . . and having a form it has a dimension, but a dimension of another kind than the third dimension of the outer consciousness . . .”⁶¹ When it is fully formed, the psychic being has a distinct form which corresponds to our physical form.⁶²

It looks as if the psychic being grows and becomes bigger and bigger. Indeed, on that day, 1 July 1970, when the Mother saw a disciple’s psychic being she told Satprem: “I saw her psychic being, dominating over her by so much (gesture indicating about 20 centimetres) taller . . . It was an unsexed being, neither man nor woman... There was hair on the head . . . I had my eyes open.”⁶³

3. This being develops a material density.

The process of materialisation is described by the Mother in this manner in a letter to Shyamsundar on 1 February 1967:

“The soul is in fact like a divine spark which puts on many states of being of increasing density, down to the most material... These states of being take form and develop, progress, become individualised . . . and form the psychic being.”⁶⁴

An analogy can be done with the molecule H₂O which puts on many physical states of increasing density “down to the most material”. This molecule is found in vapour, then in water, then in ice which is the most material.

In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo used the word ‘substance’ when he described what happened to Aswapathy when his soul was released, which we understand to be the moment Aswapathy discovered his psychic being:

In the transient symbol of humanity draped
He feels his substance of undying self.⁶⁵

4. This being has a colour

The Mother described on 1 July 1970 how she saw the disciple’s psychic being: “I saw her psychic being... It had this colour . . . which if it became quite material would be the colour of Auroville [orange + red] . . . I had my eyes open.”⁶⁶

5. This being has a location within the body.

Sri Aurobindo wrote to Dilip Kumar Roy: “Its central place is... behind the heart, rather than in the heart.”⁶⁷ The Mother located it in the solar plexus, in a letter to Shyamsundar in 1967: “It is inside the body, within the solar plexus, so to say.”⁶⁸ Two years later, in the context of the psychic being, the Mother wrote to another sadhak: “generally it is in the heart, behind the solar plexus, that one finds this luminous presence.”⁶⁹ And to the following question: “Is the psychic being in the heart?” she replied: “not in the physical heart, not in the organ. It is in a fourth dimension, an inner dimension. But it is in that region, the region somewhat behind the solar plexus, it is there that one finds it most easily.”⁷⁰

A medical book will tell us that the solar plexus is located behind the stomach and ‘innerves’ the viscera of the abdomen. But the Mother locates the solar plexus in the region of the physical heart and states that it is behind the solar plexus that “one finds it most easily”.

Through the Sections VI to VIII, this anthology on the growth of the psychic being according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is clearly indicating that the psychic being is going to transform itself into a supramental being. How the passage can happen?

SECTION 9

THE ADVENT OF THE SUPRAMENTAL BEING

Is it possible to propose a chart for the advent of the supramental being? What follows may be considered as a spiritual fiction, although it is well supported by texts from Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. It is definitely one option in the process of the advent of the new species, the supramental being.

1. Has the psychic being started to “crystallise” during the 20th century only?

The growth and development of the psychic being is an original concept. In which other religious and spiritual traditions can we find mention of this specific “being”, a concrete and real individualised being which guides us and evolves? Some mention of a shape is found once, only one time, in the *Katha Upanishad* with a reference to a thumb. In the Christian tradition, the soul looks more like a theological description; it seems as if the soul is more a matter of faith than an individual concrete experience. Buddhism states that the soul does not exist, that there is nothing permanent in man; the concept of earthly evolution is foreign to it while emphasis is put on escape from worldly existence. Of all the esoteric traditions of humanity, only two speak specifically and in detail of a divine soul that specifically evolves and grows through successive reincarnations. These are the Theosophy of Madame Blavatsky and the Integral Yoga and Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. Interestingly, Madame Blavatsky was living in Chennai and came once to Pondicherry to meet Sri Aurobindo.

We are presently inclined to think that the psychic being has developed some maturity in the 20th century only. During this century, many people all over the world have surely experienced the bursting out of their soul and have had a full or partial contact with their psychic being, without having the opportunity to identify this new being with some of its characteristics since it was not described in their spiritual and psychological map. It looks as if the Mother has been the first person to describe the features of this “being” and its outstanding place in the evolution pattern.

Unless a person, who has the psychic sudden bursting, knows the characteristics of the psychic being and can grasp the ones he has experienced and individualised during the period of identification, there is a great chance that later he will forget many of its features except the sudden untriggered great joy, the blazing light (if any), the special vibration and warmth at the heart level. He

will remember that one day, in a specific place, at a specific time, something very important has manifested itself in the region of the heart, but the “being” as an individual entity may be forgotten, the “shape” also may be forgotten unless it has been recorded in writing during the moment when the experience was living, its “substance” may remain a vague memory since it has no point of recognition with known substance. This may explain why the psychic emergence is an experience which is not yet on the geographical map of spiritual seekers belonging to other traditions.

Therefore, we may wonder if the 20th century is not the period during which the future species, the supramental being, has manifested a new step in its development. How to define this new step?

2. What is the difference between a man and a superman? How a superman differentiates from a man?

The first specificity of the superman is that he has succeeded, according to the Mother, “a transformation of the physical body.”⁷² She remembers that Sri Aurobindo told: “The intermediary stage will be the duration of life at will.”⁷⁶ Such a statement may suggest that the process of degenerescence of the cells may be stopped.

It seems that The Mother was hoping to reach that “intermediary stage”. On 9.2.1972, She tells: “I have the feeling that if all goes well... at one hundred years I will be strong. The body itself has a conviction that if it lasts till one hundred, then at one hundred it will have a new strength and a new life.”⁷⁹ One month later, it is confirmed: “If I can hold on – if only I can hold on – at one hundred things will be better. That I know. I am absolutely convinced there will be a renewal of energy. But I have to hold on.”⁸⁰ Six months later, the Mother expresses the same confidence: “I’ll walk along in the street when I am hundred years old.”⁸¹ On the 19th May 1973, on the last day she received Satprem, she told him: “I was told that the beginning would take place when I am a hundred; but that’s a long way off!... My physical, my body is deteriorating very rapidly – what could stop it from deteriorating?”⁷⁸ Next day, from the 20th May onwards, the Mother stopped meeting people and we do not know anything about the transformation of Her body.

The second specificity of the superman is the development of a very strong consciousness. As early as 1958, the Mother told “An intermediate specimen between the mental and the supramental being... will transform his consciousness sufficiently to belong, in his realisation and activity, to a new race, a race of superman (*surhommes*)”⁷¹. In fact, during the last years, the Mother has often

mentioned to Satprem that Her consciousness has become stronger and stronger. Very interestingly, on this 19th May 1973, the last words She pronounced are: “the consciousness is clearer, stronger than it has ever been, and I look like an old. . .”⁷⁷ After that day, the Mother stopped completely and definitely to share Her inner life and Her endeavour to transform Her body.

3. Due to his occult powers, the future superman, the ‘surhomme’, may be the creator of the supramental being.

The advent of the superman, an intermediary being between the human being and the supramental being has been announced by the Mother in 1958 as well as his probable occult powers:

It can be asserted with certainty that there will be an intermediate specimen between the mental and the supramental being, a kind of superman who will still . . . belong in his most external form to the human being with its animal origin . . . One can foresee that it will discover the means of producing new beings without going through the old animal method.⁷¹

Therefore, one possibility is that a superman, that is, a human being who has transformed part of his human nature, may discover occult means to materialise a developed psychic being and create a supramental being. This assumption is based on a writing by Sri Aurobindo which has been published in his “*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*”. There is a mention of the “phenomenon of materialisation and dematerialisation claimed to be possible by occultists and evidenced by occurrences many of us have witnessed.”⁷²

Therefore, it may be conceived that the superman will elaborate a materialising process to transform a developed psychic being into a supramental being.

4. Are we surrounded by supermen?

Today, we may wonder if the Mother had reached the status of superman. A beginning of an answer is found in Her comment published in “*On Thoughts and Aphorisms*” and dated 30 August 1969:

The superman is now in the making and a new consciousness has very recently manifested on earth to bring this process to perfection. But it is unlikely that any human being has yet arrived at this fulfilment, especially since it must be accompanied by a transformation of the physical body, and

this has not yet been accomplished.⁷³

But three years later, on 15 April 1972, The Mother states that there are already some of them. Indeed, on that day, She tells to Satprem:

The change from the human into the supramental being is being achieved . . . through the superman. It may be that there will be some supermen – there are some – who will make the transition possible.⁷⁴

Today, we can state that the superman is no longer a fiction. He is among us.

EPILOGUE

This essay on the growth of the psychic being and its becoming will be concluded with this talk given by the Mother on 25th September 1957, in the Playground of the Ashram, in front of a gathering of residents and guests of the Ashram:

As we are, we have been created in the ordinary animal way, and therefore, even if we transform ourselves, there will remain something of this animal origin. The supramental being as he (Sri Aurobindo) conceived of it, is not formed in the ordinary animal way at all but directly, through a process that for the moment still seems such a way that the body can be a “materialisation” and not a formation according to the ordinary animal principle. It is quite obvious that intermediate beings are necessary, that it is these intermediate beings who must find the means of creating beings of the supermind, and, undoubtedly, when Sri Aurobindo wrote this he was convinced that this is what we must do. I think — I know — that it is now certain that we shall realise what he expects of us. It has become no longer a hope but a certainty. Only the time necessary for this realisation will be longer or shorter according to our individual effort, our concentration, our goodwill . . . and the importance we give to this fact . . .

It is for you to know whether this interests you more than everything else in the world . . . There comes a moment when the body itself finds that there is nothing in the world which is so worth living for as this transformation; that there is nothing which can have as great an interest as this passionate interest of transformation. It is as though all the cells of the body were

athirst for that Light which wants to manifest; they cry out for it, they find an intense joy in it and are sure of the Victory. This is the aspiration that I am trying to communicate to you, and you will understand that everything else in life is dull, insipid, futile, worthless in comparison with that: the transformation in the Light.⁷⁵

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(Concluded)

They First Met Hundred Years Ago

Ashoke K Sengupta

Time: Sunday 29th March, 1914, at 3.30 in the afternoon. Place: 41, Rue François Martin in Pondicherry, a small French colony located at the south-eastern coast of British-ruled India. The occasion was the first meeting of Mirra Richard née Blanche Rachel Mirra Alfassa from Paris with Aurobindo Gose, a revolutionary from Calcutta, who had taken refuge in Pondicherry for his yogic work.

As we are celebrating the centenary of the first meeting of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, we have to realise that this was the cardinal event in the effort for establishment of Life Divine on earth. But how were the two *dramatis personae*, Aurobindo, 42, and Mirra, 36, placed at that stage in their lives?

Outwardly, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were strangers to each other on that day and their lives had flowed in different directions. Yet there seems to be a strange meeting point as both pursued the same goal inwardly.

Avoiding Indian Civil Service, undoubtedly the most coveted job in the then India, as it meant serving foreign bosses, Aurobindo had first taken up a job with the Gaekwad of Baroda while keeping his secret connection with revolutionary movements in India; then left that job too and plunged himself in freedom movement, which took him to the jails. His spiritual sadhana continued in a parallel stream with the revolutionary political work. He had great siddhis like *Nirvana*, realisation of *Advaita Brahman*, and presence of Divine in all beings, while remaining in the thick of freedom movement. Most of his political compatriots took his retreat to the French territory of Pondicherry as an attempt to avoid arrest by British police. Sri Aurobindo had categorically stated that he was only responding to an inner call (*adesh*) for first going to Chandernagore (then a French territory) and then to Pondicherry, his cave of *tapasya*, where he totally dedicated himself to the sadhana for the establishment of Life Divine on earth. Mirra had a vibrant and accomplished life in Paris as a young painter of the impressionist school, played piano and tennis and had considerable intellectual development through a wide range of studies. Her inner life developed

in a parallel stream right from the age of five, she discovered the divine being in her heart, achieved awakening of *kundalini* rising up to the crown of her head (*sahasrara chakra*) and staying put in that summit permanently; she also explored the occult mainly through her association with Max Théon and his wife, Alma Théon at Algeria and achieved a mastery over these secret and hidden forces which very few spiritual persons would match.

A Passage to Pondicherry

Sri Aurobindo once told his early disciples:

When I came to Pondicherry a programme was dictated to me from within for my *Sadhana*. I followed it and progressed for myself but could not do much by way of helping others. Then came the Mother and with her help I found the necessary method.¹

While both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had the supramental vision before they met, the work of bringing down the supramental consciousness on earth and doing the concrete work of transformation of human life, called for a concerted effort on their part.

Let us now recall the chain of events that brought Mother to Pondicherry and then to her fateful meeting with Sri Aurobindo.

The external reason as to why Mirra undertook that journey to Pondicherry was connected with her husband Paul Antoine Richard. For the purpose of this essay, we are not elaborating on the point that she agreed to marry Paul only to convert him to the ways of the Divine (as she found him to be a representative of a great *Asura*, the Lord of Falsehood or the Lord of the Nations), an effort in which she did not eventually succeed. The pertinent point is that Paul Richard visited this overseas French territory more than once to participate in the elections for the Chamber of Deputies, during which he met (and was highly impressed by) a yogi from North India, Aurobindo Ghose. Mirra accompanied him during one of his trips to Pondicherry. It is to be noted that when she boarded the Japanese ship Kaga Maru on 7th March, 1914 for that fateful journey to India, there is no indication that she had any inkling of who or what was awaiting her at the end of the voyage. The Richards left the Kaga Maru in Colombo on 27th March, visited a Buddhist monk there (Mirra had considerable interest in Buddhism), took a train for Villupuram and arrived in Pondicherry in the morning of 29th March.

It is interesting to find out what was the ambience and external conditions in

Sri Aurobindo's residence on that day. Sri Aurobindo's biographer, Georges Van Vrekhem² writes:

Their coming was, of course, not unexpected. Even the house where Sri Aurobindo was staying with his young Bengali freedom fighters, had been cleaned up a bit. When K. Amrita, a follower of Sri Aurobindo from Pondicherry, visited the house shortly before the arrival of the Richards, he was told that 'two persons from the topmost cultural circle of France were coming to Sri Aurobindo for practising yoga'. Four electric lights, had been put up (before there were only candle), the weeds in the courtyard had been pulled out, the house was now being swept daily and acquired an 'almost gay appearance' because of these much needed changes.³

We have noted that Richards arrived in Pondicherry on 29th March morning. The appointment with Paul Richard was fixed in the morning itself, but for Mirra, a separate time was given at 3.30 p.m. This is what the Mother said about that fateful first meeting with Sri Aurobindo:

I came here But something in me wanted to meet Sri Aurobindo all alone the first time. Richard went to him in the morning and I had an appointment for the afternoon. He was living in the house that's now part of the second dormitory, the old *Guest House*. I climbed up the stairway and he was standing there, waiting for me at the top of the stairs.... EXACTLY my vision! Dressed the same way, in the same position, in profile, his head held high. He turned his head towards me ... and I saw in his eyes that it was He, The two things clicked (*gesture of instantaneous shock*), the inner experience immediately became one with the outer experience and there was fusion – the decisive shock.

But this was merely the beginning of my vision. Only after a series of experiences – a ten months' sojourn in Pondicherry, five years of separation, then the return to Pondicherry and the meeting in the same house and in the same way – did the END of the vision occur... I was standing just beside him. My head wasn't exactly on his shoulder, but where his shoulder was (I don't know how to explain it – physically there was hardly any contact). We were standing side by side like that, gazing out through the open window, and then TOGETHER, at exactly the same moment, we felt, "Now the Realisation will be accomplished." That the seal was set and the Realisation would be accomplished. I felt the thing descending massively within me, with the same certainty I had felt in my vision. From that moment on there

was nothing to say – no words, nothing. We knew it was THAT.⁴

What was her “vision”, the Mother was referring to in her talk quoted above? Although she had not known Sri Aurobindo in the past, the Mother used to have inner visions of spiritual masters, and Sri Aurobindo was very much there in those visions. Her biographer, Vrekhem writes:

In ‘a series of visions’ she saw Sri Aurobindo exactly he was physically, but more glorious. I mean the same man as I was to see him for the first time I met him: almost thin, with that golden bronze hue, that clear-cut profile the unruly beard, the long hair, dressed in *dhoti*, with one end thrown over his shoulder, arms bare, and hair floated.⁵ The Mother, when recounting this, would emphasise the fact that at the time she knew nothing of India, absolutely nothing at all – which was as much as her European contemporaries know. And in those visions she did something amazing to herself. She prostrated herself in the ways Hindus do before the apparition, whom she held to be Lord Krishna⁶. ‘I did that, and at the time my external being wondered. “What is all this!”’. She realised however, that her symbolic visions were at the same time spiritual *fêtes*, decisive spiritual expenses ‘of meeting and of a united perception of the Work to be accomplished’.⁷

In a talk recorded on another occasion but focused in her inner development since early in her life and indicated Sri Aurobindo’s role in that:

Between the age of eleven and thirteen, a series of psychic and spiritual experiences revealed to me not only the existence of God, but the possibility for man to find Him and to reveal Him integrally in his consciousness and action and to manifest Him on earth in a divine life. This revelation as well as the practical discipline to reach the goal were given to me during my body’s sleep by several teachers, whom I met afterwards in life, at least some of them. Later on, as the inner and outer developments progressed, my spiritual and psychic relationship with one of these beings became increasingly clear and fruitful ... The moment I saw Sri Aurobindo, I recognised him as the one with whom I was to work.⁸

The impact on the Mother of her first meeting with Sri Aurobindo, was overwhelming. She writes in her diary on the next day (30th March, 1914):

In the presence of those who are integrally Thy servitors, those who have

attained the perfect consciousness of Thy Presence, I become aware that I am still far, very far from what I yearn to realise; and I know that the highest I can conceive, the noblest and purest is still dark and ignorant beside what I should conceive. But this perception, far from being depressing, stimulates and strengthens the aspiration, the energy, the will to triumph over all obstacles so as to be at last identified with Thy law and Thy work.

It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, when Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.

O Lord, Divine Builder of this marvel, my heart overflows with joy and gratitude when I think of it, and my hope has no bounds.

My adoration is beyond all words, my reverence is silent.⁹

The Silent Implosion

The Mother met Sri Aurobindo again on the next day (30.3.1914) but this time along with Paul Richard. This time, a different kind of experience overwhelmed her, an implosion of silence changed her life forever. This is how the Mother herself narrated that tremendous experience:

I was sitting there on the veranda. There was a table in front of him, and Richard was on the other side facing him. They began talking. Myself, I was seated at his feet, very small, with the table just in front of me – it came to my forehead, which gave me a little protection... I didn’t say anything, I didn’t think anything, try anything, want anything – I merely sat near him. When I stood up half an hour later, he had put silence in my head, that’s all, without my ever having asked him – perhaps even without his trying.

Oh, I had tried – for years I had tried to catch silence in my head... I never succeeded. I could detach myself from it, but it would keep on turning... But at that moment, all the mental constructions, all the mental, speculative structures... none of it remained – a big hole.

And such a peaceful, such luminous hole!

Afterwards, I kept very still so as not to disturb it. I didn’t disturb it. I didn’t speak, above all I refrained from thinking and held it, held it tight against me – I said to myself, ‘Make it last, make it last, make it last..’

For years, from 1912 to 1914, I did endless exercises, all kinds of things, even *pranayama* – if it would only shut up! Really, if it only be quite!.. I was able to go out (that wasn’t difficult), but inside it kept turning.

This lasted above half an hour. I quietly remained there – I heard the noise of their conversation, but I wasn't listening. And then when I got up, I no longer knew anything. I no longer thought anything, I no longer had any mental construction – everything was gone, absolutely gone, blank! – as if I had just been born.¹⁰

About her experience of 30th March, while she was sitting in Sri Aurobindo's room, the Mother later explained its significance in relation to other spiritual experiences that she had earlier.

It was in 1910 that I had.. (a) reversal of consciousness... that is, the first contact with the higher Divine – and it completely changed my life.

From that moment on, I was conscious that all one does is the expression of the indwelling Divine Will. But it is the Divine Will AT THE VERY CENTRE of oneself, although for a while there remained an activity in the physical mind. But this was stilled two or three days after I saw Sri Aurobindo for the first time in 1914, and it never started up again. Silence settled. And the consciousness was established above the head.

In the first experience (of 1910), the consciousness was established in the psychic depths of the being, and from that poise issued the feeling of no longer doing anything but what the Divine wanted – it was the consciousness that the divine will was all-powerful and that there was no longer any personal will, although there was still some mental activity and everything had to be made silent. In 1914, it was silenced, and the consciousness was established above the head. Here (*the heart*) and here (*above the head*), the connection is constant.¹¹

The Mother had attained many siddhis by the time she met Sri Aurobindo, but the one that eluded her till then was achieving total silence of the mind. This was what happened to her on that day:

I had tried to get complete mental silence ... this kind of mental stillness he speaks of (when you have it, anything can pass through your head without causing the least ripple), but I had never succeeded. I had tried, but couldn't do it. I could be silent when I wanted to, but as soon as I stopped thinking solely of that, stopped wanting only that, the invasion resumed and the work had to be done all over again ... I sat down near him and he began talking with Richard, about the world, yoga, the future...

...I didn't listen... I don't know how long they went on, but all at once I felt

a great Force come into me – a peace, a silence, something massive!.. When they finished talking, I got up and left. And then I noticed that not a thought remained – I no longer knew anything or understood anything, I was absolutely BLANK. So I gave thanks to the Lord and thanked Sri Aurobindo in my heart. And I was very careful not to disturb it; I held it like that for I don't know how long, eight or ten days. Nothing – not one idea, not one thought, nothing – a complete BLANK. In other words, from the outside, it must have looked like total idiocy. But I was living in my inner joy – nothing stirring. I spoke as little as possible and it was like something mechanical, it wasn't me. Then slowly, slowly as though falling drop by drop, something was built up again. But it had no limits, it had no ... it was vast as the universe and wonderfully still and luminous. Nothing here (the head), but THERE (gesture above the head); and then everything began to be seen from there. And it has never left me – you know, as a proof of Sri Aurobindo's power it's incomparable! I don't believe there has ever been an example of ... such a total success: a miracle. It has NEVER left me. I went to Japan, I did all sorts of things, had all possible kinds of adventures, even the most unpleasant, but it never left me – stillness, stillness, stillness.¹²

It is significant that the Mother was engaged in vigorous activities while this complete silence and stillness pervaded her mind. It is similar to the yogic experience of Sri Aurobindo who was in a state of complete stillness, silence as he entered Nirvana when he was in the thick of freedom movement, engaged in overt political and covert revolutionary activities. One finds an interesting note from Sri Aurobindo regarding the way an important speech in Bombay on January ¹⁹, 1908 was made by him despite complete silence in his brain-mind. He writes that his spiritual guide of those days, Lele “told him to make *namaskara* to the audience and wait and speech would come to him from some other source than the mind. So, in fact, the speech came, and ever since all speech, writing, thought and outward activity have so come to him from the same source above the brain-mind.” The above experience of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother provide the proof that the yogin can harmonise the most vigorous action without with a total silence, inaction and detachment within.

In the realm of spirituality, there are two distinct modules of *sadhana*: one is that of an ascetic who has withdrawn from the world to pursue the spirit in his cave of solitude, the other is that of a *karmayogi*, the divine worker, who seeks God amidst all the din and bustle of the world. If a total silence, as experienced by both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, it does not disturb the life of the ascetic recluse, it may prove a great test for equanimity (*samatvam*) for the divine

worker. The second module is the archetype of a yogi of modern age. And by continuing his work despite a total inner silence the modern yogi would be a lesson in the effectivity of the two one-liner definitions of yoga we get in Gita, *Samatvam yoga uchyate* (equanimity is yoga) and *Yogah karmasu kaushalam* (yoga is the technique of work). Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother showed in their lives that total inner silence and an outer life of efficient and vigorous activity are not incompatible.

The Three Questions

When the Mother met Sri Aurobindo she asked him a number of questions that emanated from her effort for inner development. These and Sri Aurobindo's replies help us to understand Mother's intense aspiration for a holistic progress and what she was destined to do in this life.

One perplexing question, stemming mainly from traditional Indian spiritual wisdom was regarding the preponderance of *Samadhi* among spiritually advanced persons. She told the Ashram children in one of her playground tales:

In all kinds of so-called spiritual literature, I had always read wonderful things about this state of trance of *Samadhi*, but I had never experienced it. So I did not know whether this was perhaps a sign of inferiority. And when I came here, one of my first questions to Sri Aurobindo was: What do you think of '*samadhi*', of that state of trance one does not remember? One enters into a condition which seems to be blissful, but when one comes out of it, one has no idea of what has happened'. He looked at me, saw what I meant and told me: 'It is unconsciousness ... You enter into what is called '*samadhi*' when you go out of your conscious being and enter into a part of your being which is completely unconscious, or rather in to a domain where you have no corresponding consciousness: you go beyond the field of your consciousness and enter a region where you are no longer conscious. You are in the impersonal state, that is to say, a state in which you are unconscious, and that is the reason, why, naturally, you remember nothing, because you were not conscious of anything.' So this reassured me and I said: 'Well. This has never happened to me.' He replied, 'Nor to me.'¹³

A very unconventional reply indeed and it may shock people with traditional ideas of sainthood. We get a similar reference in another talk of the Mother. While in Paris at the turn of the century, she once got a copy of Swami

Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* and started practising it. It led to full awakening of her *Kundalini* reaching up to the crown of the head (*Sahasrara chakra*), where it stayed permanently. When she told this to Sri Aurobindo he replied that he also had the same experience, adding one generally dies in similar circumstance. The Mother observed that both of them survived despite their *Kundalini* remaining constantly at that high level.

There were two other questions which the Mother had asked Sri Aurobindo. Her questions and the replies she got, are thus commented upon in Vrekhem's¹⁴ biography of the Mother:

Another of Mirra's questions was why, in spite of her many talents, she had always been so 'mediocre' in everything she did: painting, writing, music ... Aurobindo's answer was simply that this was indispensable for her development. We may infer that people who are extraordinarily gifted in a certain field have to dedicate their life exclusively to the realisation of that one talent, while Mirra had to sample as varied an experience as possible and then engage in a totally new synthetic enterprise.

A third question – in reality her very first one – would prove to be of immense importance for the future. 'It was the very first question which came up when I met Sri Aurobindo,;' the Mother said later. 'Should you do your yoga, attain the goal, and then afterwards take up the work with others, or should you immediately let all those who have the same aspiration gather around you and go forward all together towards the goal? Because of my earlier work and all that I had tried out, I came to Sri Aurobindo with this question very precisely formulated. Because the two possibilities were there: either to practise an intensive individual *sadhana* by withdrawing from the world, that is, by no longer having any contact with others, or to let the group be formed naturally and spontaneously, not preventing it from being formed, allowing it to form by itself, and starting all together on the path. Well, the decision was not at all a mental choice, it came spontaneously. The circumstances were such that no choice was required. I mean, quite naturally, spontaneously, the group was in such a way that it became an imperious necessity. And so, once you have started like that, it is settled, you have to go on like that to the end.'¹⁵

Supermind Touched The Earth

It is said that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had ascended to the Supramental consciousness in their own *sadhana* before they met each other.

The miracle of 29.3.1914 was that the alchemy of their joining together made the Supermind descend on the earth and the eventual supramental manifestation almost a certainty. Mother said:

When I first met Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry, I was in deep concentration seeing things in the supermind, things that were to be but which were somehow not manifesting. I told Sri Aurobindo, what I had seen and asked him if they would manifest. He simply said, 'yes'. And immediately I saw that the Supermind had touched the earth and was beginning to be realised. This was the first time I had witnessed the power to make real what is true.

Going by the statements of the Mother, the century since 29.3.1914 has recorded considerable progress towards supramental manifestation upon earth. Mother had declared that on 29.2.1956, the supramental manifestation had taken place. Again in 1970, she said a Superman consciousness has descended. She also confirmed in 1970 that the work (relating to the Yoga of supermind), given by Sri Aurobindo to her, has been completed.

Once, when asked by disciples as to when some effect of supramental manifestation would be visible to all he said let us wait for 300 years. But what are a few centuries compared to billions of years of evolution in the past? The work that began a century ago after the meeting of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, may take some more time to be completed, but there is no doubt that the glorious consummation is near at hand. This is how Sri Aurobindo visualised it in his poem, *A God's Labour*:

A little more and the new life's doors
Shall be carved in silver light
With its aureate roof and mosaic floors
In a great world bare and bright.

I shall leave my dreams in their argent air,
For in a raiment of gold and blue
There shall move on the earth embodied and fair
The living truth of you.

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3. Nolini Kanta Gupta & K. Amrita, *Reminiscences*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, p.165.
4. The Mother, *Agenda for the Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, Paris: 1978 (hereafter *Mother's Agenda*), Vol.5, pp.405-406.
5. Sujata Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles II*, pp.180-181.
6. The Mother might have known little about India at that period of her life, but she knew about Krishna after reading Gita. Jnanendranath Chakravorty, then Professor of Mathematics and later Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University, met the Mother in Europe in 1898 or 1899 and gave her a French translation of the Gita. Chakravorty attended the World Congress of Religions in 1893 along with Swami Vivekananda. He told the Mother "Read the Gita and take Krishna as the symbol of the immanent God, the inner Godhead." The glorious apparition of Sri Aurobindo, repeatedly appearing in Mother's visions, might have been construed as that of Krishna in Mother's mind.
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Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo – a comparison

(Continued from the previous issue)

Kundan Singh

Awakening of India

Understanding and propagating the spiritual genius of India is a passion that Swami Vivekananda shares with Sri Aurobindo. The Swami, after spending a substantial period of time with his spiritual master, Sri Ramakrishna, travelled far and wide in India. He thus came in direct touch with the various living spiritual traditions of India, the message of which he spread in the United States and Europe, and then, later on in India. The Hindu spiritual traditions of India had suffered a major setback at the hands of the two persecuting Abrahamic religions (Shourie, 1998), and most Hindus were living in the survival mode — the Swami, however, does not lay the blame squarely on the proselytising religions but also on the Hindus who had turned away from constantly replenishing their own spiritual traditions. The commingling of the above-mentioned two factors resulted in the eternal truths of the Vedas and the Upanishads not being practised on a large scale setting forth rot and dross in the Indian society. Making Vedanta as the foundation, the Swami after returning from abroad spent his short life — he died at a young age of 39 in 1902 — to bring forth the spiritual awakening of India and correct the different kinds of social ills that the society had begotten. In his lectures, one finds him elaborating upon the rich and glorious spiritual heritage of India, educating and consequently putting people in touch with the various aspects of the Vedas and the Vedanta. Just like Sri Aurobindo, his idea was to bring about an awakening of India by making the practice of spirituality the foundation and by taking the best of the ideas and developments from the world and applying them for the regeneration of the Indian society from inside-out rather than the other way. He was convinced that India has a spiritual mission to fulfil in the world just like other nations have theirs, and in his opinion this could only happen when the younger generation took the wisdom and

accomplishments of their ancestors and forefathers seriously:

India's contribution to the sum total of human knowledge has been spirituality, philosophy. These she contributed even long before the rising of the Persian Empire; the second time was during the Persian Empire; for the third time during the ascendancy of the Greeks; and now for the fourth time during the ascendancy of the English, she is going to fulfil the same destiny once more. As the Western ideas of organisation and external civilisation are penetrating and pouring into our country, whether we will have them or not, so Indian spirituality and philosophy are deluging the lands of the West. None can resist it, and no more can we resist some sort of material civilisation from the West. A little of it, perhaps, is good for us, and a little spiritualisation is good for the West; thus the balance will be preserved. It is not that we ought to learn everything from the West, or that they have to learn everything from us, but each will have to supply and hand down to future generations what it has for the future accomplishment of that dream of ages — the harmony of nations, an ideal world. (Vivekananda, 1970c, p. 171)

He wanted the Indians to apply the principles of Advaita Vedanta in order to gain strength and to have faith in themselves so that they could resist and transform the miseries brought to India from within and without. He was most critical of the caste system in the ways that were being practised at that time, and he took his philosophy to all and sundry. He wanted the entire country to listen to his message, become strong and transform. He states:

Let every man and woman and child, without respect of caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind every one, there is that Infinite Soul, assuring the infinite possibility and the infinite capacity of all to become great and good. Let us proclaim to every soul: arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached. Arise, awake! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him! Too much of inactivity, too much of weakness, too much of hypnotism has been and is upon our race. O ye modern Hindus, de-hypnotise yourselves. The way to do that is found in your own sacred books. Teach yourselves, teach every one his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to

self-conscious activity.... Thus there is a great opening for the Vedanta to do beneficent work both here and elsewhere. This wonderful idea of the sameness and omnipresence of the Supreme Soul has to be preached for the amelioration and elevation of the human race here as elsewhere. Wherever there is evil and wherever there is ignorance and want of knowledge, I have found out by experience that all evil comes, as our scriptures say, relying upon differences, and that all good comes from faith in equality, in the underlying sameness and oneness of things. (Vivekananda, 1970c, pp. 193-194)

Contemporary to Swami Vivekananda, there were many different kinds of reform movements going on in India. Mostly they were inspired by the criticisms of the missionaries and by Indians who were primarily influenced by the philosophy of Western Enlightenment. However, the common theme of both these kinds was a denigration and depreciation of the “Hindu” way of life without actually understanding its foundations and fundamentals. The Swami did not disagree with them in that the Indian society was in state of decline and that a lot of rot and dross had set into the Hindu culture. Though he appreciated and respected the fact that most of these reformers were kind-hearted people, he disagreed with them over their method of reform which he called as the “method of destruction.” He was not convinced that by applying the western ways India would be able to reform itself — however, by being true to its nature, by letting out an uninterrupted flow of the fountain of spirituality India would gain its rightful place in the world and be able to take care of its problems. Only by taking into account the wisdom of its ancestors and further building upon them could India wash away the dirt and shine in its pristine purity. Chiding the reformers with the mind-set that all that was and has been in India but a mass of superstition and that the change could only come by bringing a radical change — by bringing about a change inspired by a complete break from the past, a kind of thought which is seen even today in the likes of the secularists, the leftists, and the Marxists in India — he says:

Did India ever stand in want of reformers? Do you read the history of India? Who was Ramanuja? Who was Shankara? Who was Nanak? Who was Chaitanya? Who was Kabir? Who was Dadu? Who were all these great preachers, one following the other, a galaxy of stars of the first magnitude? Did not Ramanuja feel for the lower classes? Did he not try all his life to admit even the Pariah to his community? Did he not try to admit even Mohammedans to his own fold? Did not Nanak confer with Hindus

and Mohammedans, and try to bring about a new state of things? They all tried, and their work is still going on. The difference is this. They had not the fanfaronade of the reformers of today; they had no curses on their lips as modern reformers have; their lips pronounced only blessings. They never condemned. They said to the people that the race must always grow. They looked back and they said, "O Hindus, what you have done is good, but, my brothers, let us do better." They did not say, "You have been wicked, now let us be good." They said, "You have been good, but let us now be better." That makes a whole world of difference. We must grow according to our nature. Vain is it to attempt the lines of action that foreign societies have engrafted upon us; it is impossible. Glory unto God, that it is impossible, that we cannot be twisted and tortured into the shape of other nations. I do not condemn the institutions of other races; they are good for them, but not for us. What is meat for them may be poison for us. This is the first lesson to learn. With other sciences, other institutions, and other traditions behind them, they have got their present system. We, with our traditions, with thousands of years of Karma behind us, naturally can only follow our own bent, run in our own grooves; and that we shall have to do. (Vivekananda, 1970c, pp.219-220)

Hence, what was his plan of action? Primarily, it was to bring out the eternal truths that were contained in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, the Tantras, and various other spiritual compendiums and deluge them among the masses of India. In his opinion consequently, the political knowledge and the secular knowledge would be taken care of by themselves. To achieve that end, he wanted to form institutions which would impart to the young the knowledge of the scriptures making them strong-willed, sincere, pure, Buddha-like compassionate, loving and believing individuals who would draw their inspiration from the spiritual fountainhead. He abhorred weakness and felt that it was weakness and the lack of faith in themselves that had made Indians and India weak and decrepit. Back to the Upanishads and to the practice of non-dual philosophy was the panacea of the ills being faced by his countrymen. Most of all, he wanted the people to realise the eternal truths and become the seers of the truth, of the Divine, of God — and not mere intellectuals and pundits. He wanted youngsters to appreciate the wisdom and knowledge that were discovered by the ancient seers and build themselves upon that pedestal to go even further.

He was not content with reviving the practice of spirituality in India alone, and wanted the message to be spread far and wide in every corner of the

world. Consequently, he stated it in very bold and strong words: to deluge the world with Vedantic spirituality. He wanted the message of “life-giving principles” comprising peace, oneness, love, and harmony among religions to be spread among people and countries using the channels established by the Industrial Revolution.

There is a very strong convergence between Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda with respect to the ideas that they both had towards India’s renaissance — even a fleeting comparison of this section between the two would remarkably draw this fact out. The only difference that I see is that the Swami was coming from the perspective of Practical Vedanta whereas Sri Aurobindo was approaching it from the vantage point of Integral Yoga — and in my understanding Integral Yoga is an extension and furtherance of the ideas of Swami Vivekananda. Even the idea of the Supermind, around which most of the ideas of Integral Yoga are conceived and organised, was allegedly given to Sri Aurobindo by Swami Vivekananda.

It seems to me that the yogis have supernormal ways of operation. Swami Vivekananda had left his body in 1902; however, in 1908 when Sri Aurobindo was interned in jail undergoing trial for sedition charges, he allegedly heard the Swami’s voice for a fortnight constantly and felt his presence. It was then that Swami Vivekananda had spoken to him about “intuitivised mind, the mind as it is organised by the Supramental” (Nirodbaran, 1966, p. 164). Giving details about the experience, he explains it to one of his disciples in a conversation, who kept a record and published it later:

Sri Aurobindo: I had no idea of the Supermind when I started and for long it was not clear to me. It was the spirit of Vivekananda who first gave me a clue in the direction of the Supermind. This clue led me to see how the Truth-Consciousness works in everything.

Nirodbaran: Did he know about the Supermind?

Sri Aurobindo: He didn't say "Supermind". "Supermind" is my own word. He just said to me, "This is this, this is that" and so on. That was how he proceeded - by pointing and indicating. He visited me for 15 days in Alipore jail and until I could grasp the whole thing, he went on teaching me and impressed upon my mind the working of the Higher Consciousness — the Truth-Consciousness in general — which leads towards the Supermind. He would not leave until he had put it all into my head.

Nirodbaran: Do Gurus come in that way and give teachings?

Sri Aurobindo: Why not? That is traditional experience from ancient times. Any number of Gurus give initiation after their death. But I had another

direct experience of Vivekananda's presence when I was practising Hathayoga. I felt this presence standing behind and watching over me. That exerted a great influence afterwards in my life. (Nirodbaran, 1966, pp. 161-162)

The claimed above-stated evidence is a strong ground to suggest that though Swami Vivekananda had left his body, possibly a part of the work that he had left incomplete in his lifetime, he had it accomplished through Sri Aurobindo. The continuity between Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo specifically becomes crucial if we transcend our logical-rational mind which usually is inspired by positivism and scientism, and makes room for the possibility of supernatural transmissions, for as we saw earlier Sri Ramakrishna reportedly transmitted his spiritual powers to Swami Vivekananda, who in turn gave spiritual instructions to Sri Aurobindo after having passed away.

Divergences between their thoughts, and some preliminary integration

In the following pages let us examine where contributions of Swami Vivekananda towards the flowering of Integral Yoga have been minimal. As identified before one of the key aspects of Integral Yoga is the integration of Vedanta and Tantra, and the issue of transformation within and without is the central concern in its system. Generally speaking, Vedanta is concerned with liberation whereas Tantra, while also seeking liberation, with possession and enjoyment of the world, achieved as a result of the gain of spiritual powers or siddhis — even though liberation, sought through the disciplines of Vedanta, almost always brings about a certain inner transformation and an acquisition of spiritual power for outer action. However, since Vedanta considers the world to be an admixture of relative qualities like good and evil, it does not intend a permanent change in the world for the progressive manifestation of the Divine — the central concern of Advaita Vedanta is to have its practitioners go beyond the relative into the absolute, which, although it supports good and evil is nonetheless beyond them. In other words, it mandates its seekers to have a union with the static Self, which according to Sri Aurobindo is just one side of the spiritual truth — the other side being the dynamic, which is the preserve of the Divine Shakti or the Divine Mother accounting for participation and perfection of spiritual life on earth in the midst of all activities. As far as the issue of liberation in Tantra is concerned, it is an individual exercise aiming at a unity with the transcendental. By requiring the sadhaks of Integral Yoga to participate in cosmic multiplicity as well as to have the experience of cosmic union with all the selves of the Self, Sri Aurobindo integrates the objective of Vedanta with

the goals of Tantra — in his scheme of things, the purpose of the yoga is to have a transcendental as well as a cosmic union with both the dynamic as well as the static aspects of the Divine.

Swami Vivekananda, being a Vedantin, however, leaves out Tantra from his scheme of things — at most one finds him invoking the Divine Mother for her blessings in his lectures and stating that the students in India should study Tantra. Therefore, all his contributions towards the growth of Integral Yoga have mainly been on the side of Vedanta and not Tantra. Consequently, though he was pained at the state of social, political, and economic affairs in India, he could not espouse a permanent and progressive change, for he was constrained by Vedanta's liberation-focused philosophy. Nevertheless, in tune with the central philosophy of the Gita, the followers of his Practical Vedanta were supposed to seek salvation while serving the world. In fact, the motto of the Ramakrishna Mission, which he established along with his brother monks, is *atmano moksartham jagaddhitaya ca* (while striving for one's own liberation, the seeker should work for the good of the world). However, there is a major contradiction that has gone unresolved in his system of thought, and that is if good and evil are not absolute but relative qualities, why does one do good to the world and how does one know what is good? In the backdrop of Sri Aurobindo's integration of Vedanta and Tantra, one finds a constant tension in the writings of Swami Vivekananda to reconcile the otherworldly orientation of Advaita Vedanta with the worldly matters.

Though a partial reconciliation is certainly possible by combining Advaita Vedanta with Karma Yoga, which in my opinion the Swami did, a more complete reconciliation was undertaken by Sri Aurobindo — this certainly does not mean final, for in my opinion the spiritual world is very open, and maybe in the future we will have systems which will build upon the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and take things even further — whose concern is the transformation of terrestrial life in an effort of progression towards the Divine and in whose view liberation or mukti is only the first step (Srivastava, 1965, makes similar observations, specifically pointing out that liberation or the transcendental union with the Absolute is the chief concern of Swami Vivekananda). However, the aforementioned dialectical tension itself was the ground for the larger integration to emerge.

Another major divergence in the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo is around the concept of Supermind and the possibility of various transformations — physical, vital, and mental — to be achieved in collaboration with the supramental force. If there was anything novel and unique that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother claimed in their system of yoga, it was the bringing

down of the supramental force into the earth's consciousness. Sri Aurobindo stated that, though the presence of the supramental realm was known to a few Vedic and Upanishadic seers, an effort to bring it down to earth and establish it in the terrestrial consciousness for collective evolution of humanity was not attempted in our history before — however there had been a few individuals who had brought it down for their individual transformation. Sri Aurobindo did not name these Yogis — one yogi that comes to my mind is Devaraha Baba, who left his body in 1989. He was considered an ageless yogi and is stated to have lived for more than 250 years (Daczynski, 2004).

There are three major stages of transformation in Integral Yoga: psychicisation, spiritualisation, and supramentalisation. Though Swami Vivekananda addresses spiritualisation, he has completely left untouched the processes of psychicisation and supramentalisation. This is understandable because his focus has been on liberation — transformation in the ideas of Swami Vivekananda is incidental not primary, though not completely unimportant. In Sri Aurobindo's thoughts, the transformation has to be brought about by the use of the supramental force, which he also calls as the Truth-Consciousness or the Force of the Divine Mother. The inclusion of the Tantric aspect makes Integral Yoga essentially different from Practical Vedanta although the former includes all the latter's ideas, goals, and objectives. However, we see that in the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda, the ideas of transformation — of physical and of mental, though not of vital aspects of our being — are present in a small measure.

Strength is the cornerstone of Swami Vivekananda's teachings and also in Sri Aurobindo's. However, there is a crucial difference: Since Integral Yoga is a synthesis of Vedanta and Tantra, Sri Aurobindo emphasises primarily on the use of the force of the Mother to achieve the transformation of consciousness and the gaining of strength for an integral living. On the contrary Swami Vivekananda exhorts one to have faith in oneself — the faith that one is in essence Brahman, which is everything and everybody present in the universe (Bishop, 1982, comparing the ideas of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo with respect to personal God, also states that the faith in the God is lacking in Swami Vivekananda's expositions whereas it is present in a substantial measure in Sri Aurobindo's). In his view if one keeps the aforementioned perspective in mind, substantial problems that plague the world disappear on their own. For example, if one constantly remembers that one is Brahman and that it is the same Brahman that is everybody, then who does one despise, who can one hate, who can one be jealous of or be angry with? All that will emerge from such a standpoint is love and compassion for all and sundry.

Since his philosophy is exclusively non-dualist, there is no reliance on the

Divine for strength. What constantly needs to be remembered and meditated upon is that “I am Brahman, I am everything in the universe, I am Infinite, I am the Self, I am eternal, I am deathless, I am the world and the world is in me, I am Existence, Bliss, and Knowledge absolute.” The Swami holds that by meditating on the above, weakness and fear wither away, and all that remains instead is a feeling of indomitable strength and power. We saw that in Advaita philosophy of Shankara, the reliance is on dis-identifying oneself from the body in order to know one’s non-dual Self. And we also saw in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, the need to perfect and transform the body so that it can be a fit instrument for the manifestation of higher Divine energy. Though Swami Vivekananda does not talk about the transformation of the body, he definitely does introduce the idea of having a physically strong body. Thus, we see again that the Swami is in-between Shankara and Sri Aurobindo with regard to the unfolding of Integral philosophy:

Be strong, my young friends; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita.... You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood in you. You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of the Atman when your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men. (Vivekananda, 1970c, p. 242)

Despite the fact that he does not talk about transforming the mind, he does impress upon his audience to make their mental faculties strong and supple so that they could understand the subtleties of the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Tantras, and other scriptures of antiquity. However, there is no record of the supramental perfection of the mind in his writings.

Summary

In this chapter we covered some of the main ideas of Swami Vivekananda and compared them with those of Sri Aurobindo. The focus was to examine if there is a connection between Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo with respect to the evolution of Integral Yoga. We found out that though Swami Vivekananda did not contribute much towards the integration of Vedanta and Tantra, which is one of the defining features of Integral Yoga, he made a substantial contribution towards the synthesis of different schools and thoughts of Vedanta. He was primarily a non-dualist — an Advaitin — and apparently was highly inspired by the non-dual thoughts of Shankara, though one finds in

his expositions a good familiarity with the other Vedantic schools as well, viz., the *Dvaita* and *Viśiṣṭādvaita*. Accordingly, he attempts to reconcile and integrate the different schools of Vedanta by stating that due to the prevalence of Maya the same truth has been seen differently by different sages and that *Dvaita*, *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, and Advaita are different stages in realisation of the supreme non-dual consciousness — a stance that, as his critics have pointed out, leads to the privileging of the non-dual philosophy of Advaita over all the rest.

As we saw in the previous chapters, Sri Aurobindo too reconciles and integrates the different schools of Vedanta. According to him, the closest formulation of the Supreme who is ineffable and indeterminable is *Saccidānanda* or Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, which has the Supermind, a plane of consciousness, as its creative medium of self-expression. The Supermind has a threefold function: that of comprehending consciousness, apprehending consciousness, and projecting consciousness. As a function of comprehending consciousness (*viññāna*) of the Supermind, *Saccidānanda* expresses itself as an all pervasive non-dual consciousness with an unbroken continuum and without any self-differentiation. The reflection of the *viññāna* function of the Supermind expressing the *Saccidānanda* in the aforementioned way on the mental plane gives birth to the *Kevaladvaita* or the Advaita philosophy. When *Saccidānanda* expresses itself through the apprehending consciousness (*prajñāna*) of the Supermind, then it appears as many though it is aware of its unitary non-dual oneness. Such a reflection on the mental plane gives rise to *Viśiṣṭādvaita* philosophy. Lastly, when *Saccidānanda* manifests itself through the projecting consciousness (*sanjñāna*) of the Supermind, then it appears as many, projecting itself as separate and individualised from its original oneness. A reflection on the mental plane of such a state of affairs leads to the philosophy of *Dvaitādvaita* or in short the *Dvaita* philosophy. Thus, we see that what Swami Vivekananda intuitively conceived with regard to the integrality of the three schools of Vedanta, Sri Aurobindo ontologically explained — thus, the more closely one examines the thoughts of the Swami with Sri Aurobindo, clearer the connection becomes with respect to the evolution of Integral Yoga.

In addition, we saw that though Swami Vivekananda does not synthesise Raja, Bhakti, Jnana, and Karma Yoga as Sri Aurobindo does by identifying the central principles of these yogas and harmonising them into a “Triple Path,” the former begins some preliminary integration of different yogas: like Jnana and Bhakti; Jnana and Karma; and Jnana, Bhakti, and Raja.

Swami Vivekananda was primarily an Advaitin, and his arguments are very much in line with that of Shankara. However, unlike Shankara, he does not hold the world to be *mithya* or unreal — he rather considers it as neither real nor

unreal. In the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, we find that he is very categorical in stating that the world is real. In that sense one can say that Swami Vivekananda is in-between Shankara and Sri Aurobindo. Swami Vivekananda makes a serious attempt to make spirituality world-oriented but the philosophy of *Māyāvāda* that he intermittently expounded upon becomes a serious handicap in reconciling a world-oriented vision of Practical Vedanta with a liberation-focused philosophy that Advaita Vedanta originally is. This dialectical tension, originating in the lectures of Swami Vivekananda, is taken care of by Sri Aurobindo who not only refutes the pronouncements of *Māyāvāda* but also integrates Vedanta with Tantra, thus making spirituality world-oriented and integral. In addition, in the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda we find that he gives substantial importance to having a strong body and a supple mind. In the Advaita philosophy of Shankara, the focus is on dis-identification from the mind and the body. As we saw before, in Sri Aurobindo's scheme of things, the emphasis is to completely transform the mind and the body so that when the Divine Shakti wants to use them for a spiritual purpose, there would be the least amount of resistance in the physical and the mental realms. It is, however, important to remember that the transformation that Sri Aurobindo is focusing upon cannot happen without the preliminary and mandatory dis-identification that Shankara enunciated (Sri Aurobindo has not invalidated any of the insights of Shankara — at best he would say that they are partial and that his are not the final authority in the matters of spirituality. For that matter, Sri Aurobindo never claimed that his words were final either. He has left his own system open to further improvements by future seers). When we analyse the position of Swami Vivekananda vis-à-vis Sri Aurobindo and Shankara, we again find him stationed in between them. On one hand there is a world to transform and make it better for which one needs a strong body and a flexible mind, whereas on the other hand there is the other-worldly orientation of Advaita Vedanta with its negation of mind and body — there is this constant dialectical tension that one finds in the ideas of Swami Vivekananda. Sri Aurobindo resolves them and takes spiritual practice and philosophy to the next level.

(Concluded)

The World: in its Becoming A Perspective of our Times

Aster Patel

The world has become a vast field of a 'transformative action'. And India is the epicentre! We no longer speak of mere 'change' – in capital letters – but it is a process of 'transmutation' that is taking place. The 'old' fights its battle for survival and the 'new' emerges all around!

As we look for the seeds of this process sown in ancient times, we recall two sayings of the early Rishis of the land: that 'Matter is Brahman', and "All this is for habitation by the Lord". These are the two poles that are today the terms of our actuality, of our 'present' concreteness....

Since those ancient times that we speak of, the Indian psyche has been conscious of the urge for 'self-exceeding', as being inherent in the human person, of the need to transcend existing limitations of consciousness and manifest qualitatively higher ranges at each point of our complex personality. There is not only the urge to do so but an awareness too of the actual possibility of arriving at it. Not only as possibility, but also as the sheer inevitability of this realisation as the very purpose of human existence – and its evolution.

This presupposed an exact and minute knowledge of the psychology of the human being in the richness of its complexity, and of the dynamis of interaction that worked within the many parts and levels of it, as also the dynamis of change and transformation in this upward effort at transcendence.

Such is the basis of the body of psychological knowledge that India holds and the nature of its dominant impulse. This knowledge of the microcosm, in its relation to the macrocosm, the greater Reality of which the universe itself is an expression – for the two are One – is the ground, which for millennia has been enriched by fresh experience and further corroboration.

This knowledge gave rise to the many disciplines of Yoga, disciplines that were experimented with and practised with continuing corroboration of experience over long periods of Time, disciplines that worked out detailed

psychological processes leading to a 'self-exceeding' that could develop, or unfold, the capacities of each part of our complex being to its greater possibilities. The attempt was to transcend existing limits and to realise concretely the greater potential of human personality and existence.

The many disciplines of yoga such as Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Hatha Yoga and the more specialised modalities within each of them, aimed at working on a specific part of our being and taking it up to its height of potentiality, such as knowledge, emotion, will and action, and the body itself. There were also other practices such as certain principles and processes of Tantra and the Yoga of the Gita that took up the total personality, in all its parts, and aimed at a transmuting change in them.

From the long practice of these disciplines came further corroboration based on actual experience. Nor was this practice a matter for the individual's pursuit – who chose any one of them as his high one-pointed endeavour. The collective too was drawn into this upward cycle and movement of life. It was offered a pattern of the 'stages of growth' in life, so that it might, in some measure, fulfil the purpose of existence. This patterning has been known as the 'asramas', which has a deep impress in the psyche of India. An inner attraction to this way of living and a sense of its great meaning abides, though in our times, little exemplified!

In well over a century now, India of the modern times, has, as it were, taken up – in the context of the world situation – this immense body of knowledge and the millennial practice of the yogic disciplines with a need to create afresh at a time when the natural sciences in the frontier areas of their research have made some amazing and unprecedented breakthroughs in their knowledge of Matter and the material universe – though not, in like manner, in the psychological and social sciences.

In this perspective it is the work of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother that stands like a high pinnacle for creating the future.

Sri Aurobindo foresaw the coming of this period of 'transmutation' that we spoke of earlier. He saw this as one of a great evolutionary transition when mankind, having explored richly the powers of the 'mind', the mental faculty, has arrived at great achievements but suffers equally from the severe limitations that the sole exercise and dominance of this faculty in man face him with and that hold him in the grip of problems that seem intractable in nature.

Such a situation in Time – of great achievements and of severe limitations – indicates that new powers, other potentialities are preparing to manifest as a general possibility for the entire species. And man, being self-conscious, can participate in this process of a 'self-exceeding', of a transcendence to a higher

order of living. This 'participation' is also necessarily imposed by circumstances of life – of this there is more than ample evidence! – but can be hastened, with greater result and a sense of joy and meaning, by pursuing a clear and precise process, a Yoga for journeying through the transition – to whatever is the next step in our onward march.

This is what Sri Aurobindo set out to create in the early years of the twentieth century with the collaboration of The Mother. They called this process the Integral Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo cast a penetrating eye of experience into the many disciplines of yoga that have existed through history, examined the workings of universal Nature in its acts of creation, foresaw and prepared the coming stages of the evolutionary process. From this vast wealth of inner experience, the process of Integral Yoga was put into practice and found its direction and a wide-ranging modality. At the same time, the precision of centrality and detail was perfect in its minuteness of psychological complexity – thus presenting an entire body of knowledge, which has come to be known as Integral Psychology.

The aim set before us in the practice of Integral Yoga is the transformation of Matter – and of the nature that constitutes our being in its total range, so as to reveal the Wholeness of the Real that matter contains.

Shall we say, Matter as form of the Spirit, as the ancient Rishis declared – and the natural scientists of today are discovering in their characteristic manner.

The world comes full circle in this process of 'transmutation' and India is the 'field' where the circle stands completed! A responsibility of solidarity rests with mankind in these moments of Time.

The Strength of Stillness: **The Relevance of Sri Aurobindo**

Murali Sivaramakrishnan

I have always been badly misunderstood, and many misunderstandings have constantly arisen, not only among people who were hostile to me, but even among those who were sympathetically disposed...

My philosophical thinking does not take a scientific form: it is not ratiocinative, it belongs intuitively to life. Spiritual experience lies at the very foundation of it...

— Nicholas Berdyaev

Quite blatantly and in no uncertain terms a recent newspaper article dismisses the great claims of the so-called major religions of the world thus:

All people deserve respect but not all ideas do. I don't respect the idea that a man was born of a virgin, walked on water and rose from the dead. I don't respect the idea that we should follow a "Prophet" who at the age of 53 had sex with a nine year old girl, and ordered the murder of whole villages of Jews because they wouldn't follow him. I don't respect the idea that the West Bank was handed to Jews by God and the Palestinians should be bombed or bullied into surrendering it. I don't respect the idea that we may have lived before as goats, and could live again as woodlice. This is not because of "prejudice" or "ignorance", but because there is no evidence for these claims. They belong to the childhood of our species, and will in time look as preposterous as believing in Zeus or Thor or Baal.¹

I cannot find any reason to disagree with the author, and I also believe that I share the same anxieties and tensions of any thinking sensitive sentient creature alive in the present times the same that one sees reflected in these agonisingly sincere lines. How could religion have any relevance in these troubled times at all? It only appears to serve the interests of those in power or those who blast and blow themselves up and the rest of the world inconsiderately, unconcernedly, and remorselessly. How could one ever even think or talk

about any divinity or spirit that is benevolent these days? And yet there does seem to be some abiding longing or so-called faith in the minds of at least some human beings in some remote possibility of certain values of the spirit which could one day redeem us from these dragon-ridden days of violence and horror. Spirituality is far from the practice of religion, it is a state of being that is definitely different from the ordinary and yet is not much different at all. Spirituality is neither homogeneous nor definitive. It is not exclusive either but includes everything and yet recognises difference and separateness. The spiritual at the heart of their being that transformed a prince into a Buddha, a Jesus into Christ or a Mohammed into a prophet or a little boy called Shankara into a mystic saint, may never be the same, could never be so either, but the general effect would be almost similar. They could perhaps see and feel and think a little deeper and broader than most of us; they could sense and comprehend a little more profoundly and inwardly than many among us. We do not have to ape them blindly, we do not have to follow them insensitively, we do not have to imitate them only to formulate terribly wrong ways of living and perpetrate crime, violence, and death around us and then get what they stood for to be blamed and condemned. We never have to organise beliefs round them and idolise them, and end up blaming them for being what they were. We needn't even justify them. They did what they felt was right, and they spoke and wrote and discussed in their times and in their tongues. Perhaps we need to reflect at a deeper level in order to reach them. We do not have to believe in them and their ways, all we need is to believe in ourselves. *Religion*, as A N Whitehead had aptly pointed out, *is what a person does in/with his/her solitariness*. When it becomes mass hysteria it becomes the danger that it is now. All religious practices are contemptible, all religious perceptions which raise jingoistic walls around themselves are vile, because no sensitive individual can and should harm his/her co-travellers in this our only-one space-ship earth! At the heart of all religion is this profound solitude and personal agony; at the heart of all spirituality is the strength to dream and the daring to seek the stillness, the immanence, and transcendence of the spirit. Doubt, scepticism, and uncertainty, are fellow-travellers on the path of the spiritual seeker. And no path already made leads to salvation or release from suffering. *Traveller*, as an Arab proverb aptly tells us, *there are no paths; all paths are made by travelling*. The spiritual seeker is one among us, the only difference is that he/she seeks a different path, a path usually filled with suffering and paradoxes. The search might lead him/her to a sanctuary or silence; nevertheless there is wisdom at the heart of the spiritual. It might be that the seeker shares the experience in articulate terms, speaks or writes about those, or it could be couched in the paradoxical language of poetry.

Whatever it might be the spiritual calls for a *difference*, and it requires our complete attention, for it bespeaks of a holistic transformation.

The situation of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) is certainly paradoxical; he occurs at the turn of the last century when India was under the political and colonial domination of the British, he masters the English language infused with the critical insights of the “western rationality” (in his own terms), writes and thinks like a European and feels and senses like an average Indian intellectual of the times, grows up in Great Britain and ends up in a small town like Pondicherry that was then a French colony. He had obviously no intention of setting up an Ashram and to begin a cult-belief with its own specialised practices attached, he never strove in that direction as his writings would bear ample testimony. He thought and conceptualised, wrote and discussed, read and translated the contradictory nature of the Indian mind. It was perhaps during his time that the great nationalistic revival reached its pinnacle. And all the while it was his complete surrender to the silence at the heart of all being that kept him going. It is to his credit that he discovered this strength of stillness so early in his life that would transform him completely:

In an early essay – *The Strength of Stillness* — he writes of the two great forces in the universe, silence and speech, and relates them to action in the world:

When we strive to act, the forces of Nature do their will with us; when we grow still, we become their master.... The more complete the calm, the mightier the yogic power, the greater the force in action.²

And the limits of action reach overt inaction and touch upon the deep roots of being. Here the access to the self-sustaining harmony of the Spirit begins, and all contraries and differences cease to be. Much later he writes:

When something expresses perfectly what it was meant to express, the completeness brings with it a sense of harmony, a sense of artistic perfection; it gives even to what is discordant a place in a system of cosmic concordances and the discords become part of a vast harmony, and wherever there is harmony, there is a sense of beauty.³

Action, silence, harmony and beauty — form the corner-stones of the aesthetic resolution that Sri Aurobindo drives towards conceptually. And it is out of a source of austere stillness that he seeks the will to *supramental transformation*. We read in one of his letters: *In my view a man's value does not depend on what he learns or his position or fame, or what he does but*

on what he is and inwardly becomes. And this inward becoming is the creative self, becoming conscious of its spiritual affinities.

The Discovery of Silence

Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose appears to have recognised the value of stillness and silence quite early in life. His father was a confirmed anglophile and had decided to keep his children away from any sort of contaminating Indian influence. Perhaps this factor propelled the young Aurobindo toward a recognition of what was Indian and personal for him. In England, as his official biographer Srinivasa Iyengar has shown, nationalist feelings awoke in him and he joined other groups of militant young men and women in working toward Indian independence. This desire to seek out the heart of India and to sort out a personal as well as a political identity propelled the later saint into a spiritual crisis. As he was to formulate in his later writings, the discovery of the spiritual at the heart of things led him to constitute a binary of national ethos as well: the great land of Bharat harboured a spiritual ethos while the apparent opposite the west was conceived in the material. Political action was but a thin crust on the surface of human's being while the deeper and the more profound was hidden in the stillness that was inner and transcendental at the same time. It is my contention that Sri Aurobindo had poetically realised this early in his life and came to postulate it philosophically only in his later mature years when he had the sumptuousness of time at his disposal.

We read in his contemplative work, *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

There is not and cannot be here any ascetic or contemplative or mystic abandonment of works and life altogether, any gospel of an absorbed meditation and inactivity, any cutting away or condemnation of the Life-Force and its activities, any rejection of the manifestation in the earth-nature. It may be necessary for the seeker at any period to withdraw into himself, to remain plunged in his inner being, to shut out from him the noise and turmoil of the life of the Ignorance until a certain inner change has been accomplished or something achieved without which a further effective action on life has become difficult or impossible. But this can only be a period or an episode, a temporary necessity or a preparatory spiritual manoeuvre; it cannot be the rule of his Yoga or its principle. A splitting up of the activities of human existence on a religious or an ethical basis or both together, a restriction to the works of worship only or to the works of philanthropy and beneficence only would be contrary to the spirit of the integral Yoga.⁴

Action and meditation were but two sides of the same paper; they were

inseparable yet were not mutually exclusive. At this higher level contemplation becomes action and action at the lower spheres becomes mere agitation.

And in *The Life Divine* he writes:

Aware of the Divine as the Master of our being and action, we can learn to become channels of his Shakti, the Divine Puissance, and act according to her dictates or her rule of light and power within us⁵.

This discovery of silence that lay at the heart of all action led Sri Aurobindo in the right direction of an integral being.

The Relevance of Sri Aurobindo

Each generation has to rediscover its own tradition and past. No amount of reiteration is going to help in this process. The younger generation needs to begin by doubt and disbelief — there is no apparent reason why they should take everything on trust. Therefore, each generation would begin by distrust and then generate its own path to self-awareness and wisdom. Sri Aurobindo is now more than the sum of what he had written and thought about, he has become an institution. The texts by themselves would make different readings possibly, but the established Ashram and its devotional discourse have served to create a specialised aura round the man and his works, so much so that no one could perhaps read him devoid of this multiple discourse. It is perhaps necessary to dislocate the saint from the thinker — this is a complicated task as the yogi is the obverse of the thinker and as two sides of the same paper. However, it is not hard if one were to contemplate the fact that silence is the natural extension of sound as darkness the absence of light — within the heart of silence there is sound just like darkness but harbours light. For Sri Aurobindo, the poet, all experience petered into the great silence and the mighty stillness of all being. Political action was but the tip of the iceberg and the greater action lay in the pursuit of the spiritual. This is far from mere escapism, neither is it the glorification of fascist idealism — but as Friedrich Nietzsche himself would say: the superman makes his own rules! Sri Aurobindo chose his own self-exile in French India at a crucial time of nationalist crisis. It is interesting that he continued to advocate activism as against Gandhian pacifism, and declined further invitations to chair the Congress committees. As his biographers have pointed out his life falls into three distinct phases: the early childhood to adult experiences in England; academic life and the nationalist phase; and life after acquittal in Pondicherry till his passing in 1950. Nevertheless what links all the three phases is his struggle to come to grips with poetry and poetics. The seed of his magnum opus *Savitri*

was sown quite early in his life and it continued to mature within him and he kept on redrafting its prodigious plan of action as he progressed in his inner life. The action of the poem is definitely interior and self-corroborative in its nature. Of course it is the poetic silence that has given it the final shape and form. *A yogi who writes is not a literary man, for he writes only what the inner will wants him to express!*

There are three major aspects of the Aurobindian thought that we need to keep in mind before we start exploring his poetic system.

1. the paradox of stillness and sound — the inexpressible and the articulated — the idea of Rishi and Muni:

Stillness and manifested sound are but both sides of the same paper: tear one and you cannot but tear the other. Sound is only what our sensory perception allows us to receive — there are obviously levels and dimensions beyond and below what we can receive and experience directly through our physical senses. Sri Aurobindo attempted always to reach beyond the perceivable and the audible. And of course the realm of the spiritual spreads beyond and below our little worlds of sensations. As a poet, endowed with Yogic senses, his perceptions and reach easily traversed multiple dimensions of experience. We have the two distinct concepts of the Rishi and the Muni — the former is the preceptor, the forerunner of evolving consciousness, who is ready to experience and articulate, while the latter is completely withdrawn from all kinds of human sensory articulation and expression. In Sri Aurobindo we have the coexistence of both Rishi and Muni. It is into the uncharted seas of spiritual experience that he ventures in order to “tease the inarticulate into expression”.

2. action and inaction — politics and spirituality:

Action is what often pertains to the visible and tangible world — the world of senses, sound and light. *When we strive to act*, Sri Aurobindo writes...

When we strive to act, the forces of Nature do their will with us; when we grow still, we become their master.... The more complete the calm, the mightier the yogic power, the greater the force in action.

As we have already noted, politics and spirituality are seemingly two distinct spheres of experience: while the former pertains to the order and anarchy in the experiential world where humans often play the pretentious power game, the latter relates to the underlying imperceptible dimensions of human or sometimes more than human experience. Perhaps this is where we need to

seek the reason why Sri Aurobindo withdrew from active political life at one point in his life and later slowly started withdrawing from any sort of visibly understandable action, and even from the public eye. As the perceptions of the yogic sight grew within him he recognised the smaller and trivial world of sensations as being what they are — mere aberrations on the surface of the greater world of the spirit — which he for want of a better terminology designated as the higher worlds relating those to the *Parardha* and *Aparardha* of the Vedic Rishis.

3. poetry and politics — the distinct range of works:

Sri Aurobindo continued to write poetry throughout his life — this shows the significance he attributed to the specific ordering of words and images which could lead the human ear and heart into the dimensions of the spirit eventually. Poetry worked as a sort of index to the evolving human's being. In general the major themes explored by him in all his works are that of life, love, death, faith and hope. In this Sri Aurobindo belongs to that generation of pre-twenty-first century writers and artists who continued to cherish hopes that the articulated word could aid in human evolution. He also framed a poetics of spirituality. What human beings engage with in the world of politics apparently is far removed from the world of senses that poets thrive on — but however, as we have seen, for the poet in Sri Aurobindo the grand synthesising process of a unified field theory was made possible by the abiding presence of the all-enfolding Spirit, that is approachable, apprehendable, and experiential. So the political and the poetic existed side by side for the seer. To engage with the visible world of the senses and at the same time to be sensitive to the vibrations of the greater dimension of existence was the double capacity he sought for the human mind. Of course here again the terminology that he adopted was derived from the Vedic ideas — Mental and Overmental. With the perspicacity of a greater craftsman, Sri Aurobindo classified the various points of nexus in the line of the evolving levels of the human Mind till it culminated in a possible synthesis with the Supermind. Perhaps on account of all this integrating process his system might appear a bit obscure and quite dense.

Poetry and poetics are integrally linked to the Aurobindian system. A still pool could also be deep and profound, and it is usually the shallow ones that ruffle and move easily. The strength of stillness was an early discovery. Let us explore his early romantic poems briefly and see how they also reveal his life-long preoccupations.

Among his early poems (1895-1908), there is one that has been my favourite for a long time. It is titled *Seasons*. Of course, at first reading it reads like a short amateurish experiment by a not-so-skilled learner. I have had several

occasions to share this poem with many eager minds scholarly and sensitive alike to romance and resonance.

Day and night begin, you tell me,
 When the sun may choose to set or rise,
 Well, it may be; but for me their changing
 Is determined only by her eyes.
 Summer, spring, the fruitless winter
 Hinge you say, upon the heavenly sun?
 Oh, but I have known a yearlong winter!
 Spring was by her careless smiles begun.

The images resorted to are easily predictable and the poem indeed is amateurish in its formal casing. However, on closer scrutiny we can discover the traces of a poetic insight — an eye that would later attempt to define the scope and level of the spirit. Especially in an outstanding line that might very well have been an echo of the English bards — *Oh, but I have known a yearlong winter!* Even a latterday guru is culpable of falling in love, and trace out her careless smile in the blossoming of spring! What is more significant is the acute sensitivity of a true poet in the making — an ability to internalise the meanderings of the sensual muse, and render her steps in the ordered mode of excellent poetry. However, for a little more depth of utterance we need to turn to *Revelation*:

Someone leaping from the rocks
 Past me ran with wind-blown locks
 Like a startled bright surmise
 Visible to mortal eyes,—
 Just a cheek of frightened rose
 That with sudden beauty glows,
 Just a footstep like the wind
 And a hurried glance behind,
 And then nothing, — as a thought
 Escapes the mind ere it is caught.
 Someone of the heavenly rout
 From behind the veil ran out.

The idea of revelation was to remain within him till it surfaces much later in critical terms as one of the major aspects of his poetics along with Inspiration: revelation pertains to the vision and inspiration leads on to the discovery of the word — together they constitute the mantra. The mantra according to Sri

Aurobindo, would proffer the ultimate discovery of the possibilities of the word in terms of expression and experience. To find that true word, that finest expression, would be the attempt of all great poetry. And to that extent the true poet would strive to seek that finest point of expression that would unify expression and experience. The distinction between the thought and the seat of experience — the mind, is finely wrought here in this early attempt. The occurrence of the idea of the veil in this early poem is also an interesting one — because years later he would write in his *The Life Divine*: The rending of the veil (that separates the *parardha* and the *aparardha*) is the discovery of the Overmind experience. The most intriguing part of the poem is the reference to the frightened rose:

Just a cheek of frightened rose
That with sudden beauty glows,
Just a footstep like the wind
And a hurried glance behind...

The quickness and evanescence of the experience are evocatively captured in these couplets. The poetic technique that is fine-tuned here finds its fruition and completion at a later stage. However, the poetic sensibility that is evidenced here was to remain even while the eye of the Rishi was slowly being opened to a world realising inside.

Transformation (1930): a poem that bears testimony to that three-part system of ascent, descent, and integration — a complete transformation — in a form that is so near perfect — a sonnet with an octet that poses the issue and a sestet that resolves the issue.

My breath runs in a subtle rhythmic stream;
It fills my members with a might divine:
I have drunk the Infinite like a giant's wine.
Time is my drama or my pageant dream.
Now are my illumined cells joy's flaming scheme
And changed my thrilled and branching nerves to fine
Channels of rapture opal and hyaline
For the influx of the Unknown and the Supreme.

I am no more a vassal of the flesh,
A slave to Nature and her leaden rule;
I am caught no more in the sense's narrow mesh.

My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight,
My body is God's happy living tool,
My spirit a vast sun of deathless light.

Here is an excellent example of *Poetry as Mantra* and soul's discovery — a system of intellectual and creative harmony — all this is constituted in silence — not in the turbulence of the visible and tangible but within the silent spaces of the self. The occurrence of the desire for change and the entire process of divine touch and the actual effect of transformation is all a matter of trust and understanding — there is a deep sense of desire and turbulence in terms of the touch of the divine and the resultant effect of inebriation.

Now let's move on to something less serious. This is an excellent example of how a serious poet concerned with the spiritual as the heart of that matters can also take a theme that's less heavy and deal with it in all the seriousness that poetry demands!

Mute stands she, lonely on the topmost stair,
An image of magnificent despair;
The grandeur of a sorrowful surmise
Wakes in the largeness of her glorious eyes.
In her beauty's dumb significant pose I find
The tragedy of her mysterious mind.
Yet is she stately, grandiose, full of grace.
A musing mask is her immobile face.
Her tail is up like an unconquered flag,
Its dignity knows not the right to wag.
An animal creature wonderfully human,
A charm and miracle of fur-footed Brahman,
Whether she is spirit, woman or a cat,
Is now the problem I am wondering at⁷.

The touch of the poet is seen in this sonnet that's a perfect expression of the higher mind in poetry! That poetry is a pleasurable occupation is what matters here. Devout Aurobindonians would certainly be shocked to find this poem cited in a serious essay like this one! But the point I am making all along is that Sri Aurobindo's was a poet's mind that was concerned with the poetic more than just anything else! The delight that poetry affords is often something that's felt in the deep silence of the soul. We usually distinguish between the *what* and the *how* of art — the content and the form. European Modernists were so

concerned with form. Sri Aurobindo was a self-reflexive poet who was so very aware of the formal aspect of poetry (there are umpteen examples which could be cited to prove that he was concerned with poetic form!) Let's now turn to one that's so very oft-quoted: *The Dream of Surreal Science*.

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink
At the Mermaid, capture immortality;
A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink
Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.
A thyroid meditating almost nude
Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light
And, rising from its mighty solitude,
Spoke of the wheel and eightfold Path alright.

A brain by a disordered stomach driven
Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell,
From St Helena went, perhaps, to heaven.
Thus wagged on the surreal world, until
A scientist played with atoms and blew out
The universe before God had time to shout.

Here's an excellent example again of the delight that creativity affords to the over-sensitive poet! Just see how the poet resorts to the now more obvious postmodern delight of irony and black humour with such causal ease and delight. Especially the closing couplet works as a magic charm. How genuinely simplistic! See how magnificently the poet is able to chisel out the over-reductive explications of the scientific temper!

Politics is not what is visible on the outside but what moves the greater things in life — the spiritual as not exclusive but inclusive. The abiding spirit of existence is most naturally the tragic sense: because that is all a sensitive self is able to discern at the outset — everything is reducible to that physical conditioning of the senses and the outer world. All actions are finely resolved in the scientific jargon that is mostly reductive and simplistic. Everything could be explained in terms of that action on the physical plane and then ultimately the universe is blown apart even before its creator and benefactor could even raise a shout of alarm! There is the touch of the mature poet in these short yet perfect sonnets — both in terms of content and form.

For Sri Aurobindo, all poetry is *inspiration, a thing breathed into the thinking organ from above; it is recorded in the mind, but is born in the*

higher principle of direct knowledge or ideal vision which surpasses the mind. It is in reality a revelation.

This is the process of poetry as he visualised it: Vision – Inspiration — Revelation. Revelation pertains to the discovery of that inner and deeper vision that the human mind can afford, and inspiration brings down the corresponding word. The ideal combination is the merging of vision and word — and this leads to the ultimate unity — *the mantra*.

In fact the Aurobindian idea of poetry is as the *mantra of vision*. For him, all art in its own way seeks to arrive at a concentrated expression of the spirit, and it is from the Soul that the expression originates and it is to the Soul that it unveils the Real. Soul is the aesthetic being the *antaratman*. (See *The Web of Yoga, SABCL*, vol. XVII for a discussion of *ananda* of being) [*Early and late definitions of poetry – The Sources of Poetry, SABCL*, III p.105]

In the final analysis, Sri Aurobindo's poetry is poetry of self-recovery and self-revelation. As poetry itself is an index of the evolving human consciousness, its realms are within the human's being. As he finely frames it in one of his sonnets:

In us too Krishna seeks for love and joy,
In us too Shiva struggles with the world's grief.
One Self in all of us endures annoy,
Cries in his pain and asks his fate's relief.
(*The One Self*, CP, p 168)

Sri Aurobindo's works reveal this inner struggle of the self for a complete revelation, his poetry and poetics form one comprehensive whole, where vision, inspiration and revelation constitute the arc of inner awareness. Silence and stillness are the path to self-reflexive awareness. And the ultimate realisation is the recovery of the wholeness of the spiritual self.

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Polemics of Decolonisation: the Art Criticism of Sri Aurobindo and Ananda Coomaraswamy

Sachidananda Mohanty

Shortly after August 1910, on exile from British India at the French enclave of Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo wrote a rejoinder to an article entitled '*Comment and Criticism: The Indian Fine Arts critics*', earlier published in *The Modern Review of Calcutta* (Vol.8, No.2, pp.207-13). The Review's editor identified the author of the article as 'a student of Ravi Varma, (1848-1906) the famous Indian artist.' While defending Varma, the article made disparaging remarks against critics such as Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Sister Nivedita.

Castigating the reviewer for his 'theatrical wit and schoolboy impertinence', Sri Aurobindo thought that 'the Ravi Varma superstition in India had received its quietus'. For the painter in question, 'is the grand debaser of Indian taste and artistic culture.' Sadly, 'a belated lance is lifted in the August number of *The Modern Review* for the fallen idol.' (ECW: 468)

The hostility displayed in the review, adds Sri Aurobindo, is baffling. After all, he says: 'Dr. Coomaraswamy is a critic of established reputation whose contributions to the study of Indian Art are valued in every country in Europe and Asia where the subject is studied. Sister Nivedita's 'literary genius, exquisite sympathetic insights and fine artistic culture are acknowledged by all who have the faculty of judging both in England and in India. Havell has a recognised position in the criticism of Art. One may differ from such authorities, but one is at least bound to treat them with some show of respect.' While the criticism of Nivedita and Havell are somewhat guarded, possibly because they are foreigners, Coomaraswamy's credentials, Sri Aurobindo suggests, are dismissed by referring to him, as a 'geologist' and a 'doctor'. The idea apparently is to project the Indian arts critic as an imposter. There is the display of a 'characteristic specimen of wit' in *The Modern Review*: 'We cannot expect anything better from a

Geologist, who naturally loves and is made to love everything rigid and stony.’ The text of Sri Aurobindo’s rejoinder was incomplete and the piece remained unpublished during his lifetime. However, its contents are worthy of critical attention since these are in line with much of what he wrote on the subject around this time. It illuminates our understanding of several issues of the day and draws attention to unresolved questions of postcoloniality, and contemporary cultural criticism. These include our understanding of the relationship between traditions and modernities, usable traditions and unusable modernities, religious nationalism and secular modernity, cultural continuities/universals vis-à-vis cultural specificities, and finally, the ‘Mission’ and ‘uniqueness’ of cultures versus cultures seen as socio-historical and political constructs.

While I shall allude to some of the above in the course of my essay, I shall primarily focus on the role of the arts in the polemics of decolonisation used by two kindred spirits of the early 20th century; namely Sri Aurobindo and Ananda Coomaraswamy.

While postcolonial critics such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Aizaz Ahmed, and others have unveiled the colonial cartography in ample measure, there seems to be a surprising omission of the earlier narratives of decolonisation during the early part of the 20th century. Many of these seem to belong to the dominant religious/spiritual traditions of the day. Later and more recent approaches have preferred the secular and cultural materialist position. Modern systems of thought have not paid adequate attention to the question of faith and the notion of the sacred. The upsurge in religious fundamentalism world-wide could be one of the many factors that may have caused an intellectual weariness to handle this question. I shall argue in this essay that there is a need to come up with an alternative theory, for the omission has impoverished postcolonial theory significantly. It has ignored a vital world-view and a significant part of the cultural history of South Asia. For my purpose, I shall therefore take up for closer study the art criticism of Ananda Coomaraswamy and Sri Aurobindo against the backdrop of decolonisation that was central to both the figures.

II

There are remarkable parallels (and notable differences) between Sri Aurobindo (15 August 1872 to 5 December 1950) and Ananda Coomaraswamy (22 August 1877 to 9 September 1947). Their life span makes them contemporaries. Both came from the upper class/caste background and both were products of the modern West. Coomaraswamy’s parents were the Ceylonese Tamil legislator and philosopher Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy and his

English wife Elizabeth Beeby. Young Coomaraswamy lost his father at the age of two and was educated and brought up abroad. Moving to England in 1879, at the age of 12, he attended a preparatory school in Stroud, Gloucestershire and graduated from University College, London in 1900 with a degree in Geology and Botany.

On 19 June 1902, Coomaraswamy married Ethel Mary Partridge and moved to Ceylon. His contributions to mineralogy led to the formation of the Geological Survey of Ceylon which he headed for some time.

After his divorce and second marriage to an English woman who performed on stage in the name of Ratan Devi, he moved to the United States to serve as the first keeper of Indian Art in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1917. He had two more marriages, to American artist Stella Bloch in November 1922 and Argentine Luisa Runstein in November 1930. He was a distinguished member of the art circle in New York City, and a close friend of the artist Alfred Stieglitz. In 1933 he became a Fellow for Research in Indian Persian and Mohammedan Art at the Museum of Fine Art.

He wrote more than thirty books on art, sculpture, art history, architecture, philosophy, metaphysics, and East-West Relations and undoubtedly ranks as one of the best known exponents of Indian arts in the West. His middle name ‘Kentish’, marker of a valorised English pedigree and culture, generally unnoticed in his later career, might signify a dethronement of one’s colonial past. Both in his life and vocations, he stands at the cross-roads between tradition and modernity, East and the West. He stood for values described as inalienably ‘Indian’ and yet chose places of work and life companions who went beyond national boundaries and political frontiers. He was synthetic and universal in outlook. Part of the close circle of Rabindranath Tagore, he chose the art galleries and museums of the advanced West as the place of work and dissemination of ideas. His many lives flowed effortlessly from nationalism to cosmopolitanism, based on the primacy of the arts. From the English soil he seems to draw sustenance from Victorian critics like Mathew Arnold, John Ruskin, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti in the latter’s faith in the centrality of art in the Victorian Society. There are also the influences of the earlier historical periods such as the Hellenic, the European Renaissance and other civilisations of the world such as the ancient, the pre-colonial India that underlined the importance of the arts and aesthetics in national life. Blake’s vision of a new Hellas or a New Jerusalem that marks the fusion between art and the New World would be a favoured ideal for Coomaraswamy.

Coomaraswamy’s ideas, beliefs and life values, both artistic and creative,

were not derivative. He assimilated influences both old and new and forged approaches that were innovative and creative.

III

Coomaraswamy's better known counterpart in this essay, Sri Aurobindo, had an equally anglicised upbringing and carried an English style middle name, 'Ackroyd', after his father's friend Annette Ackroyd, the founder of the Brahmo Girls' school in Calcutta (Heehs:7). Aurobindo's parents were Kristo Dhona Ghose (or K. D. Ghose) and Swarnalota, daughter of Rajnaryan Basu, a leading member of the Brahmo Samaj and Bengal Renaissance. K.D. Ghose who earned a degree of M.D from Aberdeen University, U.K. was thoroughly anglicised and wanted his children to follow his footsteps. Like Coomaraswamy, Sri Aurobindo and his brothers, particularly Manmohan and Barindra Kumar were denied maternal affection. Soon after Aurobindo's birth, Swarnalota showed signs of mental disorder which persisted till the end of her life.

At the Ghose household, no Indian languages including Bengali were spoken. The three children were admitted to the Loreto Convent, Darjeeling in 1877. Later in 1879, they were taken to Manchester and left under the care of a congregational Minister named William H Drewett who was asked by K. D. Ghose not to allow the children to 'make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence'. (Heehs:9) Although an agnostic, K.D. Ghose insisted that his children ought to be left free to decide about the question of faith. In his childhood, Aurobindo remained an agnostic. After spending five years at Manchester, Aurobindo studied at St. Paul's school, London in 1884 and King's College, Cambridge in 1890. In 1892 he passed the ICS but did not appear at a riding test and was disqualified.

Aurobindo arrived in Bombay on February 6, 1893 and joined the Baroda Service, first in the administration and then as a Professor of English and French at the Baroda College. By 1900, he turned attention to the National Freedom Struggle. He established contact with secret societies in Maharashtra and Bengal. On 30 April 1902 he married Mrinalini Bose. He plunged actively into the Swadeshi Movement in 1905 over the Partition of Bengal and became the editor of *Bande Mataram* in 1906. He joined as the Principal of Bengal National College. In 1908 he was arrested in the Alipore Bomb Case and after a year in jail he was acquitted on 6 May 1909. After his acquittal he edited two journals *Dharma* and *Karmayogin*. Following a divine command or 'Adesh' he reached Pondicherry on 4 April 1910. On 29 March 1914 he met, Mirra Alfassa, later known as the Mother, who became his spiritual collaborator. From 15 August

1914 to January 1921 the English monthly *Arya* carried his best known writings. On September 19, 1940, during the World War II, Sri Aurobindo declared support for Allies. He gave the Independence Day message on 15 August 1947 where he spelt out his vision of a new resurgent India and the future of humanity. Towards the end of his life, he devoted attention to his magnum opus, *Savitri*, and passed away on 5 December 1950.

I have spent some time in drawing attention to the key aspects of the life histories of the two figures because I believe the main trajectories of their lives have a bearing on the decolonising agenda they championed.

Sri Aurobindo is widely known as a nationalist, philosopher and mystic. He looked at himself primarily as a poet. His reputation as a spiritual Guru and Saint has somewhat eclipsed his considerable body of critical and cultural writings, a portion of which deals significantly with literature and the arts. As in the case of Coomaraswamy, Sri Aurobindo's conceptions of art and his significant art criticism are to be seen as the inextricable part of his larger view of life of which decolonisation plays a crucial role. While the Ceylonese thinker's writings on art are better known than his views on and participation in the political struggle for freedom, Sri Aurobindo's nationalistic writings are better recognised than his art criticism. Even the more celebrated *The Foundations of Indian Culture* which appeared in the *Arya* from November 1918 to January 1921 which contains a significant body of criticism devoted to sculpture, painting, music and architecture has not received the attention they deserve among students of art history and comparative aesthetics.

The chapter on Indian Art offers a comprehensive account on this subject. This and four other chapters gain significance from the opening chapter provocatively titled 'Is India Civilised?' The underlying argument is that all aspects of national culture including the arts have to be seen against the backdrop of the Indian nationhood. The discovery of the meaning of the Indian nation against the larger world civilisations is therefore an essential requisite for art criticism of both Coomaraswamy and Sri Aurobindo. There are at least three specific references to Coomaraswamy in the *Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo* (new edition), *Early Cultural Writings*, pp.468-69. *The Renaissance in India*, p.255 and *Karmayogin*, pp.244-48.

Coomaraswamy's best known work *The Dance of Shiva* was published by Sunwise Turn Press, New York in 1918 around the time Sri Aurobindo published *The Renaissance in India*, August-November 1918. The equally notable art criticism of Sri Aurobindo comprised the period between 1909 and 1910 and all of them, namely *The National Value of Art*, a series of six essays, 'Two Pictures', 'Indian Art and an Old Classic' and 'The Revival of Indian Art' appeared in the

Karmayogin. Similarly two other essays in the form of reviews appeared in *Arya*. 'South Indian Bronzes' was published in the journal in October 1915 and in *Views and Reviews* since 1941. Likewise, 'Rupam' was published in the *Arya* in July 1917 and in *Views and Reviews* since 1941. Since the journal *Arya* enjoyed a good circulation and was widely noticed in nationalistic, philosophical and cultural circles, it would be fair to assume that Coomaraswamy and Sri Aurobindo were broadly aware of each other's writings although we may not have enough knowledge regarding the actual correspondence between the two.

Aside from *The Foundations of Indian Culture* and *Early cultural Writings*, Sri Aurobindo underlined his approach to decolonisation in *The Secret of the Veda* where he gave a symbolic interpretation of the Vedas from the Indian point of view.

IV

Let me consider Coomaraswamy's *The Dance of Shiva* from the points of my arguments implicit in the title of my paper. The book is divided into chapters that include, among others, the following: Indian Philosophy of life, View of art: Hindu and Buddhist, the Dance of Shiva, Status of Indian Women, Sahaja and Young India.

Each race, contends Coomaraswamy, contributes something unique to the world's civilisations in keeping with its own spirit, its own *swabhava*. India's own contribution would be its Indianness. While there cannot be anything absolutely unique with regard to any nation's experience, 'its peculiarities will be chiefly a matter of selection and emphasis, certainly not a difference in specific humanity' (p.3). India's genius, he says, is found in a 'constant intuition of the unity of all life,' and 'the conviction that the recognition of this unity is the highest good and the uttermost freedom.' This view has permeated all aspects of her life and is the essential basis of sociology and education. Along with this view, there are several other concepts that lend uniqueness to this approach. *Moksha* liberates us from *Avidya* or ignorance. It believes in the will to power rather than the Will to Life that characterises the dominant commercialism of the modern West. Unlike the Hindu view, the Buddhist advocates an 'escape from the eternal recurrence' as the '*summum bonum*', the wisest purpose of life. There is the 'religion of eternity' (*Nirguna Vidya*) and the religion of Time (*Saguna Vidya*). The ideal is not to create a distinction between the Sacred and the profane but 'to illuminate daily life with the life of heaven.'

Other categories are equally noteworthy: *Pravritti Marga* typified by outward

movement, the path of pursuit and self assertion and *Nivritti Marga*, the path of return and inward self-realisation. While this world-view preaches equality among men and women, there cannot be absolute equality, because as Coomaraswamy argues, 'variation of temperament or inheritance... constitutes the natural inequality of men, an inequality that is too often ignored by the theories of Western democracies'. India's social institutions including the marriage systems, he adds, have wisely emphasised duties rather than rights. Here again, as in the case of the caste systems, Coomaraswamy seems to be less forthcoming about the pronounced inequity in the Indian society.

The character of the world process follows a rhythmic process; subject-object, self-non self, will-matter, unity-diversity, love-hate birth-death, evolution-involution, descent-ascent, *Sruthi* and *Samhara*.

The *Chaturvarna* that is the basis of the Indian caste system argues Coomaraswamy is 'designed rather to unite than to divide'. For the members of the different castes enjoy greater commonalities than differences. The system demands higher ethical and spiritual standards from the so-called upper castes. The higher the position in the caste hierarchy, the more stringent is the punishment for transgression. 'For, responsibility rises with intelligence and status.' We have here a body of collective privileges and responsibilities akin to guild socialism. There is unfortunately 'decay' in Asia because of the shift from cooperation to competition. Such a turn may spell doom for Europe. It will not be able to fight industrialism because this enemy will be entrenched Asia.²⁰ The objective of human life is not the pursuit of material life, physical objects and comforts, but to develop the 'mental, moral and spiritual powers latent in man.'

V

Sri Aurobindo's exposition of Indian culture, outlined in *The Foundations of Indian Culture* was written in response to 'an extravagant *jeu d'esprit*' by William Archer, the drama critic in his *India and the Future*. The latter volume was ably critiqued by Sir John Woodroffe in a defence provocatively entitled *Is India Civilised?: Essays on Indian Culture*. The epigraph to Woodroffe's opening chapter is a telling quotation from Archer that sums up the latter's view of India:

Barbarian, barbarism, barbarous — I am sorry to harp so much on these words. But they express the essence of the situation ... There are of course many thousands of individuals who have risen and are rising above it

(barbarism), but the plain truth concerning the mass of the (Indian) population — and not the poorer classes alone — is that they are not civilised people. (Woodroffe: XII)

How do we judge a culture asks Sri Aurobindo? The greatness of a culture lies in the manner it tries to effect a ‘natural harmony of spirit, mind and body.’ Spirituality is the keynote of Indian culture although others have also had spiritual components to their own. All cultures go through the stages of conflict, competition, concert and finally the spirit of sacrifice and mutual sharing.

We see the desire of Europe, argues Sri Aurobindo, to Europeanise the entire world in its self-image. Either India will be rationalised or industrialised out of all recognition or will be ‘the leader of a new phase.’ Indian Religion has passed through four principal stages. It comprises the following:

A belief in the highest conscious state of existence

A need for self-preparation by development and experience

An imperative to provide well-founded knowledge and self-discipline

A necessity to sustain an organisation of the individual and collective life for gradual progress.

While the *Chaturvarna* in its intention may have envisaged a flexible structure of the fourfold order, Sri Aurobindo is firm that the caste system of the later period was an utter caricature and ought to be discarded. He makes no compromises regarding systems he sees as outmoded and therefore must be cast off completely.

For the European mind there is the Indian ‘political incompetence,’ ‘despotism of the Brahmin theocracy’ and ‘absolute monarchy of the oriental’. In reality, however, the Indian polity was based on ‘communal freedom and self-discrimination.’

As Sri Aurobindo wrote insightfully in August 1919 in the *Arya*:

The mentality of the West has long cherished the aggressive and quite illogical idea of a single religion for all mankind, a religion universal by the very force of its narrowness, one set of dogma, one cult, one system of ceremonies, one array of prohibitions and injunctions, one ecclesiastical ordinance. That narrow absurdity prances about as the one true religion which all must accept on peril of persecution by men here and spiritual rejection or fierce, eternal punishment by God in other worlds (IR:146).

Both Sri Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy discarded a return to the past, to any form of revivalism, for the clock, they said, cannot be turned back. There is a paramount need for ‘creative introspection preparatory to renewed activity.’ ‘The first expression of national idealism is then a rehabilitation of the past.’ (DS: 166) As he declares aptly:

We would not and cannot return. In India, as in Europe, the vestige of ancient civilisation must be renounced: we are called from the past and must make our home in the future. But to understand, to endorse with passionate conviction and to love what we have left behind us is the only possible foundation for power. If the time has hardly yet come for the creation of new values — and it cannot long be delayed — let us remember that time and sufferings are essential to all creation. (DS:166)

Sri Aurobindo is equally futuristic in his approach while advocating a renewed understanding of our past. Writing in the *Arya* in May 1918 he outlined his vision of the future that clearly goes beyond nationalism and the project of decolonisation of the Indian Mind. It embraces his prophecy in the terrestrial evolution and the coming of a new spiritual society. He wrote:

Man’s road to spiritual Supermanhood will be open when he declares boldly that all he has yet developed, including the intellect of which he is so vainly proud, are now no longer sufficient for him. Light within shall be henceforth a pervading preoccupation. Then will this philosophy, art, science, ethics, social existence, vital pursuits be no longer an exercise in mind and life, done for themselves, carried in a circle, but a means of discovery of a greater truth behind mind and life and for the bringing of its power into our human existence (Sri Aurobindo:135)

VI

What then is the conception of art here? Since the defining features of Indian culture is the realising of the underlying unity of life and the dominant spiritual motif, as argued by Coomaraswamy and Sri Aurobindo, then art should be an integral part of the national spirit.

In the Vedas, Coomaraswamy tells us, the practice of art is viewed as ‘a form of Yoga’ (DS: 24). Art is viewed in deeply psychological terms. For instance, *Agni Purana* draws a connection between dream and art. The practice of visualisation as referred by Shankaracharya is seen identical in worship and art

(DS: 27). The artist in order to be effective must realise four required moods of friendliness, compassion, sympathy and impartiality (DS: 27). He must meditate upon *Shunyata* or non-existence of all things. For, Yoga is 'not merely a mental exercise or religious discipline, but the most practical preparation for any undertaking whatever'. For instance, Hanuman prays to the Gods before he attempts to rescue Sita in the Ashoka grove. In other words, art, ethics and spirituality go hand in hand in this scheme of things.

The aesthetic emotion — *Rasa* — in the spectator, *Rasika*, is carried through determinants (*Vibhava*) in Croce's words 'physical stimulants' to aesthetic reproduction, consequents (*Anubhava*), 'deliberate manifestation of feelings as gestures etc.', mood (*Bhava*)³³ in number, 'induced in the characters by pleasure and pain,' 'involuntary emotions', (*Satva Bhava*) 'emotional states originating in the inner nature. For the work of art to produce *Rasa*, one of the permanent moods must form a master motif in which all other expressions of emotions are subordinated. Degree of excellence in poetry is discussed in *Kavya Prakasha* and *Sahitya Darpana*.

As Coomaraswamy asks rhetorically:

What then is Beauty, what is it that entitles us to speak of diverse works as beautiful or *rasavant*? What is this sole quality which the most dissimilar works of art possess in common? Let us recall the history of a work of art. There is (1) an aesthetic emotion on the part of the original artist — the poet or creator; then (2) the internal expression of his intuition — the true creation or vision of beauty (3) the indication of this by external signs (language) for the purpose of communication — the technical activity; and finally (4) the resulting stimulation of the critic or *Rasika* to reproduction of the original intuition or of some approximation to it. (DS:48)

On the other hand, early Buddhist art is popular, sensuous and animistic. Gandhara art is a mixture of the Eastern and Western formula. 'Buddhist primitive' art exists in Amarnath in India and Anuradhapura in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), thanks to 'energy working in greater isolation'.

For Coomaraswamy, the dance of Shiva is a manifestation of primal rhythmic energy that represents Shiva's main activities: *Sruthi*, *Sthithi* and *Samhara*. The dance is also symbolic of the world cycle.

Coomaraswamy is at his critical best when defending the many armed images of Indian art. For instance, Vincent Smith finds Indian sculptures that adorn the medieval temples as 'hideous', and 'grotesque'. Similarly, Maskell speaks of

'these hideous deities with animal's heads and innumerable arms.' Sir George Birdwood suggests that 'the monstrous shape of the Puranic deities is unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic presentation.' (DS:80)

Coomaraswamy refutes these charges as completely unfounded. A basic lack of understanding of the spiritual traditions of Indian art is behind such abysmal condemnation. And thus, European viewers are apt to be repelled by the sculpture of '*Hiranya-Kashipu*'. The truth, however, is that it depicts the splendid rendering of the well-known themes of the impious king who met his death at the hands of the avenging deity in Man-lion form'. (DS:83)

In turning to music, Coomaraswamy sees a similar difference in the attitude to music in the cross-cultural context. There is the European tradition of 'Chamber music of an aristocratic society' vis-à-vis temple music where the musician is the 'Servant of God.' We can understand this tradition with the help of *Raga* and *Ragini*. The *Raga* is a selection of five, six or seven notes distributed along the scale but the *Raga* is more particularised than a mode, for it has certain characteristic progression and a chief note to which the singer constantly returns.' (DS:90). *Ragas* are associated with rhythmic ritual of daily and seasonal life. The examples cited here are most telling. There is the parable of the singer who was forced to sing the *Deepak Raga*, and tragically burst into flame, and the equally symbolic tale of Narada who sang badly and the musical notes in the form of men and women lay 'weeping over their broken arms and legs.' (DS: 92). After all, the 'Indian singer is a poet and the poet a singer.' Indian music is essentially impersonal.

This view of art also finds parallels in Tagore's conceptions spelt out in essays that are part of a collection called *Personality: Lectures Delivered in America* (1917). While arguing that art is created out of a Surplus of Emotions, Tagore went on to say:

The greatness and Beauty of Oriental Art, especially in Japan and China, consist in this, that there the artists have seen this soul of things and they believe in it. The West may believe in the soul of Man, but she does not really believe that the Universe has a soul. Yet this is the belief of the East, and the whole mental contribution of the East to mankind is filled with the idea. So we in the East need not go into details and emphasise them; for the most important thing is this universal soul, for which Eastern sages have sat in meditation and Eastern artists have joined them in artistic realisation. (Devy:46)

VII

Sri Aurobindo has a relatively smaller but equally significant body of art criticism that has been mentioned earlier. Of the art forms he does a closer analysis of forms of fine arts, sculpture and architecture while mentioning music in passing. Of literature, literary theory and criticism, he has written plentifully in his *The Future Poetry*, earlier cultural writings and in his letters to poet disciples. Although not trained formally in the artistic tradition, Sri Aurobindo was exposed to the best of the Western and Indian art during his education in England as well as his Baroda days. He kept himself abreast of developments in art especially regarding the Bengal School of Art.

It is in the series of essays under what came to be known as *The National Value of Art* that Sri Aurobindo defines his concept of aesthetic nationalism. 'The first and lowest use of art', says Sri Aurobindo 'is purely aesthetic, the second is the intellectual or educative, the third and highest the spiritual'. (ECW:439). Each plays an important role. The aesthetic aspect of life is of crucial importance. He observes: 'We do not ordinarily recognise how largely our sense of virtue is a sense of the beautiful in conduct and our sense of sin a sense of ugliness and deformity in conduct'. (ECW:442). However, ethics and aesthetics have had a troubled relationship in the West. There were four gradations Sri Aurobindo says in the Greek ethical thought — 'the *euprepês*, that which is seemly or outwardly decorous, the *dikaion*, that which is in accordance with *dikê* or *nomos*, the law, custom, standard of humanity based on the sense of fitness..., thirdly the *agathon*, the good based partly on the seemly and partly on the just and lawful, and reaching towards the purely beautiful; then finally the supreme *kalon*, that which is beautiful, the supreme standard... The progress of ethics in Europe has been largely a struggle between the Greek sense of aesthetic beauty and the Christian sense of a higher good (ECW: 443).

Beyond the aesthetic and intellectual utility of art, there is the spiritual. For, 'spirituality' he says, 'is a wider thing than formal religion and it is in the service of spirituality that Art reaches its highest self-expression.' (ECW: 450) Why is the cultivation of the arts important to the life of a nation? As Sri Aurobindo explains: It is not necessary that every man should be an artist. It is necessary that every man should have his artistic faculty developed, his taste trained, his sense of beauty and insight into form and colour and that which is expressed in form and colour, made habitually active, correct and sensitive. (ECW: 153)

Sri Aurobindo brings to bear on his essays and reviews such as 'Two Pictures', 'Indian Art and an Old Classic', 'The Revival of Indian Art', 'Rupam' and

'South Indian Bronzes', his understanding of a spiritualised aesthetics and the role it can play creatively in the new Indian nation. And thus in "*Shama 'a*" edited by Mrinalini Chattopadhyay, he singles out the English artist, J. D. Fergusson's 'Rose Rhythm' and the accompanying article on his work by Charles Marriot. Sri Aurobindo finds in this portrait 'a strong psychical truth'. 'The impression given is the materialisation of a strong and vivid astral dream.' The difference between this and the psychic manner in which the East will at once appear' by turning to the 'gracious and subtle Indian painting' in the first number. (ECW: 626).

The same aesthetic skill is displayed in Sri Aurobindo's review of O.C. Gangooly's *South Indian Bronzes*, 'an opulent collection of nearly a hundred fine plates proceeded by five chapters of letterpress, one side of the artistic work of the South'. Sri Aurobindo disproves the theory that divides the North and South on racial lines and posits instead the existence of two types of culture in ancient India. In discussing these bronzes, especially Nataraja, the Dancing Shiva in the 'self-absorbed concentration the motionless peace and joy', Sri Aurobindo alludes to the dominant spirit of Oriental art. 'All characteristic Oriental art', he declares, 'indeed seeks to go beyond the emotions and the sense; a Japanese landscape of snow and hill is as much as image of the soul as a Buddha or flame haired spirit of the thunderbolt.' (ECW: 581-2)

VIII

To conclude:

Ananda Coomaraswamy and Sri Aurobindo manifest close parallels and some differences with regard to culture and nationalism. Products of the modern West, both critics turned to Indian sources for fashioning out a new national imaginary. Decolonisation was central to both. Yet both rejected forms of nativism or insular chauvinism. Instead, they espoused a cosmopolitanism firmly rooted to a critical understanding of Indian traditions. Coomaraswamy spent most part of his career in the West with western companions. Sri Aurobindo after early life in Baroda, and an active political life (1905 – 1910) in Bengal, retired to Pondicherry to 'the cave of Tapasya,' where with the French mystic Mirra Alfassa, he worked out a new destiny for mankind, based on his theory of a future evolution of Man. While Sri Aurobindo is more versatile in a multi-disciplinary context, and takes up art criticism as part of his larger *oeuvre*, Coomaraswamy's knowledge of the history of arts is more focused and professional. Between the two, Coomaraswamy appears to be somewhat conservative in some areas of social living, yet both of them pioneered a radically new approach in the first half of the 20th Century.

Art historians need to make a fresh assessment of Coomaraswamy in the light of the criticism of Nihar Ranjan Ray, K.G. Subramanyan, Amritanayagam and others. The analysis of the art scene in this context must cover the days of the *Company School of Art* during the height of the Raj, the role played by Rabindranath Tagore, his nephews and the brothers Gaganendranath and Abanindranath, and others like Nandalal Bose. Yet others such as art administrators like E.B. Havell, the Principal of Calcutta School of Art, institutions like the Visva Bharati at Santiniketan, played an equally important role in the resurgent interest in Indian art

Although periodic assessment of the Bengal Renaissance continues to be made, art historians and critics need to make a similar evaluation of the contribution of early critics of Indian Art against the backdrop of *Swaraj* in ideas.

Sadly, both Sri Aurobindo and Ananda Coomaraswamy are neglected today, much to the detriment of theory and cultural criticism. It is hoped that a renewed interest in both vis-à-vis the role of the arts will help create a new meaning for the intellectual thought of modern India.

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