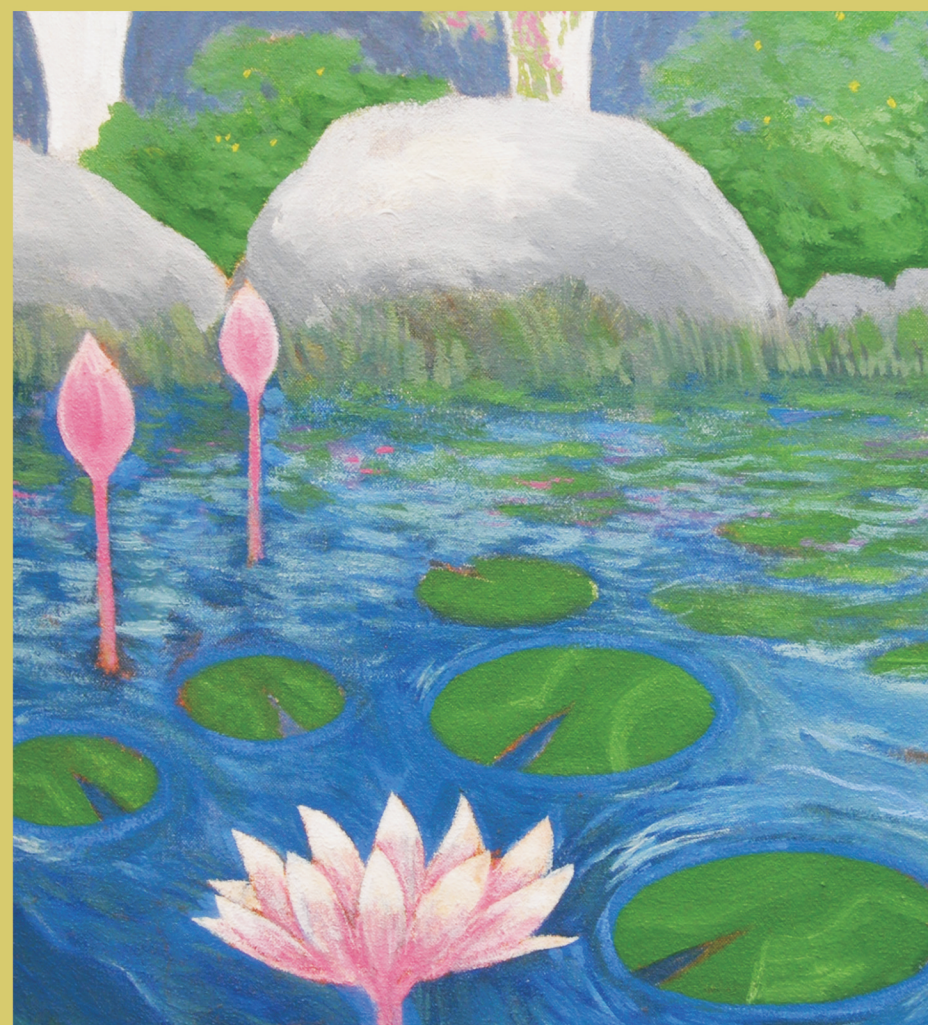


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Śraddhā श्रद्धा



Śraddhā



श्रद्धा



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15 August 2014

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15 August 2014



The youngest in age among those who stand in the forefront of the Nationalist propaganda in India but in endowment, education, and character, perhaps, superior to them all ... Nationalism is Aravinda's first passion, ...the supreme passion of his soul. Few, indeed, have grasped the full force and meaning of the Nationalist ideal as Aravinda has done. His only care is for his country the Mother, as he always calls her.

Bepin Chandra Pal

Śraddhā

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

Vol.6 No.1

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Editorial

This is the story of a youngster who recounts the first experiences of his early visits to Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. Not that such experiences are something exceptionally rare or extraordinary by any means, but that these should occur to someone seemingly contented and easily satisfied with the surface facts of life unseated his mental stability. A sudden stirring of the inner contents of life disturbed the balance of his inner being and left him confused, in wonder, awe, and mystery, even an unknown and impending fear. Even as he neared the main gate of the Ashram building and was about to step inside, all noise of the outside world seemed suddenly to fade away and ceased and just as dusk silently and inevitably descends before evening sets in even so a strange hush fell on him as he set his foot inside. Once within the Ashram precincts, he met with a thick doorless wall of silence which engulfed him all over; he pushed through this silent barrier and moved slowly towards the Meditation Hall as if in half a daze. In those days, nearly 50 years ago, it wasn't difficult to get permission to meditate in Sri Aurobindo's room. There were days when you could be the only one in the room. As he gradually mounted those familiar green-carpeted steps of the stairway leading to the sacred crypt, the silence that had greeted him at the Ashram entrance now deepened into a wonderful calm and poise. He sat down on the carpet near the door facing east towards the Darshan room and concentrated for a while. The entire room was a solid block of peace and silence, massive and concrete; he felt the weight of a stupendous force, held within the silence's core, inexorably pressing down on his limbs. At the same time, an overarching soft, gentle warmth, compassion and love and a large benevolence shrouded him with a protective wing. With a heart full of gratitude, he left the room and walked towards the gate moving still in a stupor. Only for a few griefless moments was he transported to the lustres and the 'emerald rapture' of the 'immortal spaces' that are within our reach. 'The rarity and wonder lived no more' (*Savitri*, 4th rev.ed., 1993, Bk.I, Canto I, pp.5). Once more he turned back to '... the common light of earthly day' and '... the rumour of the speed of Life', (Ibid, p.6) Yet in his bosom he gently nursed the '... diamond light of the Eternal's peace' and 'a crimson seed of God's felicity' (Ibid, p.712). Being totally foreign to such inner turbulences, he

was convinced that it could only point to the glorious and unmistakable fact of the existence of a living Presence, an Almighty Power, a Consciousness, a Being behind these visitations and glimpses of 'brighter countries than man's eyes can bear'.

Aptly has the Mother said in her invocation on 15 December, 1950

Sri Aurobindo is here, as living and as present as ever and it is left to us to realise his work with all the sincerity, eagerness and concentration necessary. (CWM, vol.13, p.7)

On this blessed day, let us then bow down before The Master and pray with the Mother that

... we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy sublime Work. (CWM, Ibid, p.6)

As the August issue coincides with the Independence of India, political and social issues tend to dominate in the papers presented. We are particularly grateful to the Overman Foundation for allowing us to reproduce the two talks given to the students of SAICE, Pondicherry, by Sri Surendra Mohan Ghosh, posted on its website. Our grateful thanks to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for granting permission to reproduce the extracts from the Mother's writings in vol.6, 12 and 13 of CWM and the photograph of Sri Aurobindo taken from the Ashram catalogue of photos and the few lines of *Savitri* used in the editorial. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgement and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry.

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श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṃl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Finding the psychic being

The Mother

Indeed the very act of genuine self-giving is its own immediate reward — it brings with it such happiness, such confidence, such security as nothing else can give. But till the self-giving is firmly psychic there will be disturbances, the interval of dark moments between bright ones. It is only the psychic that keeps on progressing in an unbroken line, its movement a continuous ascension. All other movements are broken and discontinuous. And it is not till the psychic is felt as yourself that you can be an individual even; for it is the true self in you. Before the true self is known, you are a public place, not a being. There are so many clashing forces working in you; hence, if you wish to make real progress, know your own being which is in constant union with the Divine. Then alone will transformation be possible. All the other parts of your nature are ignorant: the mind, for instance, often commits the mistake of thinking that every brilliant idea is also a luminous idea. It can with equal vigour trump up arguments for and against God: it has no infallible sense of the truth. The vital is generally impressed by any show of power and is willing to see in it the Godlike. It is only the psychic which has a just discrimination: it is directly aware of the supreme Presence, it infallibly distinguishes between the divine and the undivine. If you have even for a moment contacted it, you will carry with you a conviction about the Divine which nothing will shake.

How, you ask me, are we to know our true being? Ask for it, aspire after it, want it as you want nothing else. Most of you here are influenced by it, but it should be more than an influence, you should be able to feel identified with it. All urge for perfection comes from it, but you are unaware of the source, you are not collaborating with it knowingly, you are not in identification with its light. Do not think I refer to the emotional part of you when I speak of the psychic. Emotion belongs to the higher vital, not to the pure psychic. The psychic is a steady flame that burns in you, soaring towards the Divine and carrying with it a sense of strength which breaks down all oppositions. When you are identified with it you have the feeling of the divine truth — then you cannot

help feeling also that the whole world is ignorantly walking on its head with its feet in the air!

You must learn to unite what you call your individual self with your true psychic individuality. Your present individuality is a very mixed thing, a series of changes which yet preserves a certain continuity, a certain sameness or identity of vibration in the midst of all flux. It is almost like a river which is never the same and yet has a certain definiteness and persistence of its own. Your normal self is merely a shadow of your true individuality which you will realise only when this normal individual which is differently poised at different times, now in the mental, then in the vital, at other times in the physical, gets into contact with the psychic and feels it as its real being. Then you will be one, nothing will shake or disturb you, you will make steady and lasting progress... (CWM, Vol.3, pp.123-125).

Surrender is the decision taken to hand over the responsibility of your life to the Divine. Without this decision nothing is at all possible; if you do not surrender, the Yoga is entirely out of the question. Everything else comes naturally after it, for the whole process starts with surrender. You can surrender either through knowledge or through devotion. You may have a strong intuition that the Divine alone is the truth and a luminous conviction that without the Divine you cannot manage. Or you may have a spontaneous feeling that this line is the only way of being happy, a strong psychic desire to belong exclusively to the Divine: “I do not belong to myself,” you say, and give up the responsibility of your being to the Truth. Then comes self-offering: “Here I am, a creature of various qualities, good and bad, dark and enlightened. I offer myself as I am to you, take me up with all my ups and downs, conflicting impulses and tendencies — do whatever you like with me.” In the course of your self-offering, you start unifying your being around what has taken the first decision — the central psychic will. All the jarring elements of your nature have to be harmonised, they have to be taken up one after another and unified with the central being. You may offer yourself to the Divine with a spontaneous movement, but it is not possible to give yourself effectively without this unification. The more you are unified, the more you are able to realise self-giving. And once the self-giving is complete, consecration follows: it is the crown of the whole process of realisation, the last step of the gradation, after which there is no more trouble and everything runs smoothly. But you must not forget that you cannot become integrally consecrated at once. You are often deluded into such a belief when, for a day or two, you have a strong movement of a particular kind. You are led to hope that everything else will automatically follow in its wake; but in fact if you become the least bit self-complacent you retard your own advance. For your being is full of

innumerable tendencies at war with one another — almost different personalities, we may say. When one of them gives itself to the Divine, the others come up and refuse their allegiance. “We have not given ourselves,” they cry, and start clamouring for their independence and expression. Then you bid them be quiet and show them the Truth. Patiently you have to go round your whole being, exploring each nook and corner, facing all those anarchic elements in you which are waiting for their psychological moment to come up. And it is only when you have made the entire round of your mental, vital and physical nature, persuaded everything to give itself to the Divine and thus achieved an absolute unified consecration that you put an end to your difficulties. Then indeed yours is a glorious walk towards transformation, for you no longer go from darkness to knowledge but from knowledge to knowledge, light to light, happiness to happiness.... The complete consecration is undoubtedly not an easy matter, and it might take an almost indefinitely long time if you had to do it all by yourself, by your own independent effort. But when the Divine’s Grace is with you it is not exactly like that. With a little push from the Divine now and then, a little push in this direction and in that, the work becomes comparatively quite easy. Of course the length of time depends on each individual, but it can be very much shortened if you make a really firm resolve. Resolution is the one thing required — resolution is the master-key. (CWM, Vol. 3, pp. 126-127)

The starting-point is to seek in yourself that which is independent of the body and the circumstances of life, which is not born of the mental formation that you have been given, the language you speak, the habits and customs of the environment in which you live, the country where you are born or the age to which you belong. You must find, in the depths of your being, that which carries in it a sense of universality, limitless expansion, unbroken continuity. Then you decentralise, extend and widen yourself; you begin to live in all things and in all beings; the barriers separating individuals from each other break down. You think in their thoughts, vibrate in their sensations, feel in their feelings, live in the life of all. What seemed inert suddenly becomes full of life, stones quicken, plants feel and will and suffer, animals speak in a language more or less inarticulate, but clear and expressive; everything is animated by a marvellous consciousness without time or limit. And this is only one aspect of the psychic realisation; there are others, many others. All help you to go beyond the barriers of your egoism, the walls of your external personality, the impotence of your reactions and the incapacity of your will.

But, as I have already said, the path to that realisation is long and difficult, strewn with snares and problems to be solved, which demand an unflinching determination. It is like the explorer’s trek through virgin forest in quest of an

unknown land, of some great discovery. The psychic being is also a great discovery which requires at least as much fortitude and endurance as the discovery of new continents. A few simple words of advice may be useful to one who has resolved to undertake it.

The first and perhaps the most important point is that the mind is incapable of judging spiritual things. All those who have written on this subject have said so; but very few are those who have put it into practice. And yet, in order to proceed on the path, it is absolutely indispensable to abstain from all mental opinion and reaction.

Give up all personal seeking for comfort, satisfaction, enjoyment or happiness. Be only a burning fire for progress, take whatever comes to you as an aid to your progress and immediately make whatever progress is required.

Try to take pleasure in all you do, but never do anything for the sake of pleasure.

Never get excited, nervous or agitated. Remain perfectly calm in the face of all circumstances. And yet be always alert to discover what progress you still have to make and lose no time in making it.

Never take physical happenings at their face value. They are always a clumsy attempt to express something else, the true thing which escapes our superficial understanding.

Never complain of the behaviour of anyone, unless you have the power to change in his nature what makes him act in this way; and if you have the power, change him instead of complaining.

Whatever you do, never forget the goal which you have set before you. There is nothing great or small once you have set out on this great discovery; all things are equally important and can either hasten or delay its success. Thus before you eat, concentrate a few seconds in the aspiration that the food you are about to eat may bring your body the substance it needs to serve as a solid basis for your effort towards the great discovery, and give it the energy for persistence and perseverance in the effort.

Before you go to sleep, concentrate a few seconds in the aspiration that the sleep may restore your fatigued nerves, bring calm and quietness to your brain so that on waking you may, with renewed vigour, begin again your journey on the path of the great discovery.

Before you act, concentrate in the will that your action may help or at least in no way hinder your march forward towards the great discovery.

When you speak, before the words come out of your mouth, concentrate just long enough to check your words and allow only those that are absolutely necessary to pass, only those that are not in any way harmful to your progress

on the path of the great discovery.

To sum up, never forget the purpose and goal of your life. The will for the great discovery should be always there above you, above what you do and what you are, like a huge bird of light dominating all the movements of your being.

Before the untiring persistence of your effort, an inner door will suddenly open and you will emerge into a dazzling splendour that will bring you the certitude of immortality, the concrete experience that you have always lived and always shall live, that external forms alone perish and that these forms are, in relation to what you are in reality, like clothes that are thrown away when worn out. Then you will stand erect, freed from all chains, and instead of advancing laboriously under the weight of circumstances imposed upon you by Nature, which you had to endure and bear if you did not want to be crushed by them, you will be able to walk on, straight and firm, conscious of your destiny, master of your life.

(CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 32-35)

Kena or the Question of Questions

Alok Pandey

Man by his very nature is a seeker. One may almost say that to seek is the very stamp of our humanity for without this seeking, this restless urge to know we are hardly anything more than an animal in a human body. This seeking often takes the form of questions. But there are questions and questions, — questions that arise simply from the sense stimulus and our effort to understand the physical world around us. There are also questions that arise because we are face to face with a situation and wish to understand its meaning, import and some kind of solution to it. There are also questions that are more impersonal and universal like the one that Gautama the Buddha raised to himself on witnessing illness, old age and death. But there is also a question of questions, the question about the ultimate nature of Reality, the question that seeks to know what lies behind the many-layered façade of Nature, the parent colour behind the rainbow hues of life. After we have answered all other questions, this question awaits us. Or to put it differently all our answers remain incomplete unless we have answered this fundamental question, for based upon this answer the significance of our life itself changes.

What is the Source and Cause of life? What Power directs our Mind and governs our senses motivating them to function and come alive? What is that ultimate Mystery, the final seat of Power and Knowledge we are in search of? What is that Knowledge knowing which all else can be known and without which all our knowledge comes eventually to a nought, since the ultimate Cause remains hidden and unknown? These are the questions that mankind in its awakened thoughts has raised since it wandered under the sign of the stars. Man, the half-conscious creature seeks to complete his unfinished curve by a growing self-awareness and world-awareness. The moment his first animal preoccupations of food, shelter and procreation are over, he begins to wonder about his own origin and seeks for answers in the processes of Nature and the organs she has evolved as instruments for his use. This quest and questioning give birth to Science. But scientific knowledge takes a bottom-up approach. It

proceeds from the little known towards the much greater Unknown. It tries to understand the Unknown in terms of the known. By doing so it becomes a victim of its own knowledge. A seed of error is introduced at the very start of things as we proceed further on the crutches of our imperfect means of instruments. We try to fathom the vast on the basis of the small, the depths on the basis of the surface phenomenon, the heights on the basis of the ground realities. This is natural since implicit in this approach is the assumption that creation has emerged out of chaos and darkness and evolution are the play of blind chance that weaves our earthly destiny. It is also assumed that sensory knowledge is the starting point of all knowledge and the human mind is the ultimate power to unveil the hidden face of creation.

The *Kena Upanishad* however takes a different route altogether, almost an opposite one, if one may say so. It questions these assumptions by posing a counter question. What moves the mind itself? What power motivates the senses to function? Implicit in this is a top-down view of creation. To know the truth of things, says this Upanishad, we need to first get behind appearances, get past the data of the senses.

Still the mental activity that rushes at every appearance to arrive at knowledge, go behind to the very Source of all Knowledge, the Light that illumines the cosmos and look at the world in that Light which alone is true and whose wisdom is not prone to error. The *Kena*, like the *Isha* affirms that such a Light exists, a Truth that is there independent of the world, even though the world depends upon it. It starts with the right question and therefore is able to find the answer hidden within the question itself. The question it poses is not 'how do the senses and the mind function?' Instead it asks 'What motivates them to function?'

1. By whom missioned falls the mind shot to its mark? By whom yoked does the first life-breath move forward on its paths? By whom impelled is this word that men speak? What god set eye and ear to their workings?

Next, it straightaway proceeds on to tell us that it is by knowing 'That' ultimate Mystery we can be released from the bonds of Death. One may ask how does this knowledge help us to arrive at immortality? The answer is implicit within the question itself. For what else is Death but a certain trapping of the soul within the prison of the sensory apparatus and the mental structures we call systems and philosophies, cults and creeds, — religious, scientific or otherwise. Our mind builds an elaborate system based on sense data but we never question, — what if the reporting of the senses is not a complete seeing,

what if the knowledge arrived at through analysis is only a broken and distorted reflection of the true Reality that escapes us on every side? By showing us this larger possibility, the Upanishad is able to conclude that if we do not allow ourselves to be deceived by appearances woven for us by the sensory apparatus and the mind, then we have the hope of finding the Truth that stands behind creation and it is this Truth that sets us free into a limitless, vast and infinite Existence and liberates us from the prison of the senses and the ego-constructs of the mind. This knowledge declared of old by the seers who saw it rather than analysed it, cannot be known by the help of our senses nor by the powers of the mind nor can it be shown by the agency of speech. It has to be experienced by going past all that we claim to know and all that is still unknown to us. The secret is not to stop at any construction that the mind may offer in our quest for the Ultimate Reality but to continue seeking it until the last bedrock of Truth is seen, the final Home of Truth is found.

2. That which is hearing of our hearing, mind of our mind, the word behind the speech, that too is life of our life-breath sight of our sight. The wise find their release beyond and passing forward from this world they become immortal.

3. There sight attains not, nor speech attains, nor the mind. We know not nor can we discern how one should teach of That; for it is other than the known, and it is above beyond the unknown; so have we heard from men of old who have declared That to our understanding.

How are we to find and recognise it? By discrimination between the Real and the apparent, by diving deep below the surfaces of things in search of That from which all emerges and by which all is sustained and empowered to act. That is the hidden Truth covered and veiled by its own works. It is That which makes the speech climb upon wings of thought; it is That which makes the Mind move in a many-sided endeavour to know; it is That which fills the eyes with the power of light and sight; it is That which tunes the ear to the vibrations of sound to seize upon reality.

And yet we cannot know of That through any of these since That exceeds its works. We need to go behind and beyond these surface strivings in which we are trapped and aspire and search for That alone knowing which all else can be known.

4. That which remain s unexpressed by the word, that by which the word is

expressed, know that indeed to be the Brahman, not this which men follow after here.

5. That which thinks not by the mind, that by which the mind is thought, know That to be the Brahman, not this which men follow after here.

6. That which sees not with the eye, that by which one sees the eye's seeings, know That to be the Brahman, not this which men follow after here.

7. That which hears not with the ear, that by which hearing is heard, know That to be the Brahman, not this which men follow after here.

Indeed All-Power and Glory of form and movement, all Strength and Force that set us on our paths forward towards our goals comes from That. Yet our human power, like our human thought and speech cannot reach That. Our human power is penned within limits and stops short of That Reality which is the source of All-Power and is limitless and infinite.

8. That which breathes not with the breath, that by which the life-breath is led forward in its paths, know That indeed to be the Brahman, not this which men follow after here.

The second part once again affirms the truths revealed in the first part using a set of paradoxical aphorisms. It is the logical extension of the first, a style that the Upanishad often seems to follow. If Mind is not the last summit of things, if it cannot reach the home of Truth, if Thought can only circle about the image of Reality rather than knowing It in all its splendour, then we need to find some other way to arrive at Truth rather than the way of intellectual analysis and our human reason. That way lies in Intuition. It is through an intuitive vision and knowledge that we can know Truth and not through an intellectual analysis of data of all that so much impresses itself constantly upon our senses.

Even there is this danger of over-intellectualisation that we may be led to believe that we know the Truth simply because we can think, philosophise and talk about IT. This illusion of knowing can be very difficult to remove. But he who has seen or even had a moment's contact with That Reality knows that IT is infinite and therefore unknowable to the finite mind and irreducible to any fixed system of beliefs. Therefore he who knows knows how little he knows. It is only he who does not know It claims and believes that he knows. For Truth is infinite and greater than all that we can ever conceive or imagine: It can only be

experienced in the still luminous depths of our soul.

Brahman is formless and eternal. Yet It manifests through forms and is within each form as its secret essence. Thus we have to regard It. Form of course implies here not only physical and outer forms but subtler forms, constructs of truths that the mind weaves, forms of thoughts and ideas through which we try to conceptualise Truth. It is there in its essence and their secret immutable spirit. But the forms themselves are ever-changing, indeed ever-evolving so as to embody IT better and better.

1. If thou thinkest that thou knowest It well, little indeed dost thou know the form of the Brahman. That of it which is thou, that of it which is in the gods, this thou hast to think out. I think It known.

2. I think not that I know It well and yet I know that It is not unknown to me. He of us who knows it, knows That; he knows that It is not unknown to him.

3. He by whom It is not thought out, has the thought of It; he by whom It is thought out, knows It not. It is unknown to the discernment of those who discern of It, by those who seek not to discern of It, It is discerned.

What then is the way? Truth cannot be seized by the finite mind or the finite senses. But these inferior mediums can be attuned to It. By getting rid of all that hinders and distorts the One Reality that is Omnipresent and ever within everything, IT can be reflected through that medium.

The power to discover and uncover That Reality is given to us. The Force that we need to find the Truth which sets the spirit free and liberates us from the clutches of death is given to us. By quietening the mind and the senses, by stilling the desires and all that constitutes our false self, a pure perception, a pure Thought can awaken in us and help us arrive at the true Self and thereby discover Immortality.

Not only is it given to us to find the true Self hidden behind the surfaces of things but it is our most sacred work, the one thing needful, the most important duty if we like. For it is in the body that we can find IT. It is embedded here within the core of earth substance. It is the very purpose of our being upon earth. But if (through negligence, indolence, inertia, doubt or any such thing) we fail to find It while we are here, then great is the loss. It keeps us tied to the ordinary school of Ignorance and its badge of suffering and pain. Therefore the wise ones take to this supreme effort to discover It in the world and in all things.

Thus discovering they pass to the Beyond and becoming one with Brahman in their consciousness attain the supreme status of the soul.

4. When it is known by perception that reflects it, then one has the thought of It, for one finds immortality; by the self one finds the force to attain and by the knowledge one finds immortality.

5. If here one comes to that knowledge, then one truly is; if here one comes not to the knowledge, then great is the perdition. The wise distinguish That in all kinds of becomings and they pass forward from this world and become immortal.

In this great and difficult ascent we are not left alone. We are assisted at each step as it were by the Eternal Himself and his Power that has gone forth into creation in a labour of Love since earth began to pull it out of darkness and inconscience. The gods are Her cosmic powers, channels of Her Force, Knowledge and Will. They are ever engaged in this task of growth and the spread of Light and Consciousness and Peace and Harmony and Beauty upon earth. Towards this goal they are in constant battle with the forces of darkness that resist the advent of Truth and Light and surround our brief existence here. It is through the gods that the Divine mediates with the earth and it is through their help that humanity finds its journey made less difficult and the darkness more bearable. It is they who inspire hope and fill our hearts with love and faith even when everything around seems to indicate the opposite. They prepare man for the direct action of the Supreme. It is quite natural that man thinks these cosmic forces as the end-all and be-all, the summit of creation as it were. He does not yet know the direct touch of the Eternal and is content with the intermediaries that help him on the way.

This great and wonderful Upanishad now comes to reveal this deeper truth to us, a revelation that would automatically translate into the need of utter humility and surrender before the Divine who resides in all things and even the lowliest and weakest of creations carry something of his marvellous Presence. It is this Presence in things that secretly lifts the veil that hangs over creation and brings Light and Beauty where now there is only darkness and distortion. The gods alone cannot do this, however powerful they may be. It is the Divine Presence in matter that makes their efforts fruitful and blesses their work with success. If He were not already concealed in darkness, hidden behind the mask of Death, pushing it from within, then no power could ever rescue creation out of its blindness and all efforts, however great, would be condemned to failure from

their very inception.

It is this subtle but all important truth to which the Upanishad now turns our gaze.

The gods are the powers of the Eternal who are engaged in an evolutionary struggle against the forces and powers of darkness. The gods bring Light and Hope and the Strength to endure and fight against darkness and obscurity. They also bring Peace and Harmony and Love to the human heart. The gods work from behind, hidden behind the surface phenomenon. The victory of the gods means the triumph of these beautiful elements, of Truth and Light in creation. In this sense they are the intermediary powers, links in an ascending chain of beings. Yet even the gods are sustained and supported from behind by the One and only Power, the power of the Eternal.

1. The Eternal conquered for the gods and in the victory of the Eternal the gods grew to greatness. This was what they saw, "Ours the victory, ours the greatness."

The gods, driven by the sense of 'personal power' believe themselves to be the victor. This is dangerous and may well lead to their downfall. Therefore the Eternal appears before them in disguise, as incognito. The gods are keen to know as to who is this 'being' who appears at the threshold of the kingdom of the gods. Hence they first send Agni, the knower of all births since it is Agni who is the builder of all forms..

2. That marked this thought of theirs; to them That became manifest. They could not discern of That, what was this mighty Daemon.

3. They said to Agni, "O Knower of all Births, what is this mighty Daemon,". He said, "So be it."

A dialogue ensues between the two and the Divine in disguise questions his identity. Agni reveals his powers, presumably with a sense of pride that it is he to whom this power belongs. But the Eternal determined to teach him a lesson in humility bids him to show his power by consuming a blade of grass. Agni rushes but lo and behold, he fails and failing returns back baffled at his defeat.

4. He rushed upon That; It said to him, "Who art thou?" "I am Agni," he said, "I am the knower of all Births."

5. “Since such thou art, what is the force in thee?” “Even all this I can burn, all that is upon the earth.”

6. That set before him a blade of grass; “This burn;” He went towards it with all his speed and he could not burn it. Even there he ceased, even thence he returned; “I could not discern of That, what is this mighty Daemon.”

Now it is the turn of Vayu, the god who permeates all that exists with the breath of life and makes them grow (expand) and withdrawing its support makes them collapse. A similar dialogue follows and once again he too fails defeated by the sheer presence of the Mighty Being. With all his powers he is unable to lift the blade of grass held by the Eternal.

7. Then they said to Vayu, “O Vayu, this discern, what is this mighty Daemon.” He said, “So be it.”

8. He rushed upon That; It said to him, “Who art thou?” “I am Vayu,” he said, “and I am he that expands in the Mother of things.”

9. “Since such thou art, what is the force in thee?” “Even all this I can take for myself, all this that is upon the earth.”

10. That set before him a blade of grass; “This take.” He went towards it with all his speed and he could not take it. Even there he ceased, even thence he returned; “I could not discern of That, what is this mighty Daemon.”

It is now the turn of Indra, the god of gods, himself. Agni is the divine force that works in matter as the very soul of matter, the physical Purusha so to say. Vayu is the force of life that animates matter and makes it come alive. Indra, their god, is the force of mind that makes all things conscious and seek what is beyond the mere grasp of the senses. Since the power of matter and the vital force are unable to find who is the Eternal it is now the turn of the mental powers, the energies of the mind. Therefore now Indra rushes to find and seize. But the Mighty One vanishes before his eyes.

11. Then they said to Indra, “Master of plenitudes, get thou the knowledge, what is this mighty Daemon.” He said, “So be it.” He rushed upon That.

That vanished from before him.

Indra, then enters from the gross to the subtle and the subtler world until he comes to the threshold of the subtlest of the world of forms melting into the formless essence of creation. He follows the Mighty Being there, in the subtle ether, that primary extension of Space in which all things are born that exist in Time. And what does he discover? His subtle sight beholds the Mother of the worlds, the womb of all things, the very fount and source of creation, the One Original Power. Known by many a Name, the *Kena* calls Her by the Name of *Uma Haimavati*, the daughter of the mountains signifying that She is revealed (born) through severe austerities. She sports and abounds on the glorious peaks of Nature where it meets and mingles with the vast infinity of endless Space. It is She who holds the key to the gates of the Eternal, the supreme Secret, the highest Truth. To Her now Indra, the god of gods turns to know of the Mighty Being following whom he has come to Her.

12. He in the same ether came upon the Woman, even upon Her who shines out in many forms, Uma daughter of the snowy summits. To her he said, “What was this mighty Daemon?”

The gods cannot seize upon Him. Supported by His Puissance even a blade of grass, the humblest of creations becomes mighty with His might. All Glory, all Power, all Light and Strength are but a flash from His eyes. The gods and many other countless forces are merely His intermediaries, powers and aspects of His infinity. It is His Knowledge and Power that is the eternal womb of all things, the ultimate Cause. But to find that Source and Origin we have to learn to be humble; we have to dare to surrender to Her, the Divine Glory and Grace, the Divine Light and Love, the Shakti of the Eternal. She has the key and can give it to us if we seek rightly and pursue Him by moving from the gross to the subtler and thence to the subtlest of the subtle. This is the great discovery that Indra made, the Lord of the Mind, the power that presides over the gross and the subtle worlds motivating the gods to function according the secret law of their nature. It is he who brings this knowledge to the other gods. The Mind passing from the gross to the subtle intelligence, from the formed to the formless, universal Force can arrive at that Truth which is hidden even to the eye of the gods.

1. She said to him, “It is the Eternal. Of the Eternal is this victory in which ye shall grow to greatness.” Then alone he came to know that this was the Brahman.

2. Therefore are these gods as it were beyond all the other gods, even Agni and Vayu and Indra, because they came nearest to the touch of That...

3. Therefore is Indra as it were beyond all the other gods because he came nearest to the touch of That, because he first knew that it was the Brahman.

4. Now this is the indication of That, — as is this flash of the lightning upon us or as is this falling of the eyelid, so in that which is of the gods.

The path of the *Kena* can be therefore summarised in a series of steps that proceed from the logic of creation itself. First of all we have to disengage ourselves from the surface phenomenon since these are but effects of the play of forces that act from behind. To know 'Reality', the Truth as it were, we must dive deep. There we meet the countless forces and energies that are constantly at work to keep the creation going, moving forward, evolving in spite of all the resistances and obstacles. These are the gods of which the greatest are Agni, the power that builds forms out of the formless, Vayu, the power that carries all things forwards in their appointed course and Indra, the power that lifts creation from the gross to the subtle levels through thought and knowledge.

But one must go further. One must cross the domain of the gods and ascend still higher or dive still deeper. The Brahman Consciousness is to be found only when one has passed beyond the realm of the Gods. The home of Truth lies beyond the domain of the Gods who are but only powers and projections of the One. One needs to universalise oneself and know all powers as emerging out of the one ultimate Source. This brings about the much desired state of Oneness and pulls us out of the state of division and its resultant ignorance. All belongs to the One and refers back to the One. This is what the mind must always remember and remembering, be always full of humility and surrender. Once we touch that state and realise it, we have only to confirm it again and again through an act of will and constant remembrance.

5. Then in that which is of the Self, — as the motion of this mind seems to attain to That and by it afterwards the will in the thought continually remembers It.

This spontaneously leads us to the Delight that is hidden at the root of things. We may also say that the very nature of the Eternal is Delight and His touch brings Delight to our being. Indeed His very body is the body of Light and Bliss and it is thus that we should know and follow after Him; not this which men call

delight which is but a shadow but the Delight of That which is the sole Cause, the occult Reality, the hidden Truth behind all things.

6. The name of That is "That Delight"; as That Delight one should follow after It. He who so knows That, towards him verily all existences yearn.

The Upanishad closes with a suggestion that is pregnant with deep and profound meaning. Upanishad means inner knowledge, that which enters into the final Truth and settles in it. This knowledge cannot be acquired by any of the usual mental processes that we use to understand physical things. The knowledge that the Upanishad reveals is not the knowledge of any transient physical thing but of the Eternal Himself. All our instruments and processes cannot help us reach there. What then is the path to the gates of the inner knowledge being spoken of here? The Upanishad reiterates that the path is found by austerity that leads to self-conquest. We may have conquered the world, known everything about everything of the world through books and other sources. Yet we may be bereft of this deeper, higher and inner knowledge. To acquire this we have to take the difficult road towards self-mastery which means a mastery of the sense-bound existence, the mastery of the ever restless mind that is always leaping at appearances. Then the Light of the ageless Vedas dawns upon us and carries us to the home of Truth.

7. Thou hast said "Speak to me Upanishad"; spoken to thee is Upanishad. Of the Eternal verily is the Upanishad that we have spoken.

And what are the effects of this knowledge? We are freed from evil and grief and sin which are born from the primal ignorance. We dwell in the vastness of the Infinite and therefore arrive at the status of immortality. We find our abode in the Eternal and our life starts afresh basing itself on this firm and secure foundation of the highest Truth that is also one with the heavens of highest felicity and peace.

8. Of this knowledge austerity and self-conquest and works are the foundation, the Vedas are all its limbs, truth is its dwelling-place.

9. He who knows this knowledge, smites evil away from him and in that vaster world and infinite heaven finds his foundation, yea, he finds his foundation.

Thus we find that this great Upanishad leads us step by step to the home of Truth that lies above in some infinite Consciousness from where this seemingly finite creation with all its finite movements proceed forth. But the finite is only a seeming. Each finite, however small it may be, is supported within and from behind by this infinite Consciousness. All powers emerge from this infinity. The gods are the intermediary powers who help us move towards That whose very nature is delight and Peace.

Gitanuvachan

Second Series
(Chapters VII & VIII)

Srimat Anirvan

[**Translator's note:** It is after more than a year that Mother's Grace has worked to bring about the second series of Sri Anirvan's *Gitanuvachan*. The second series consists of the second '*shataka*' or cluster of six i.e. from Chapter VII to Chapter XII incl. Needless to mention that Sri Anirvan's writing is way beyond my capability of translating, yet the pure ecstasy that I derived while studying *Gitanuvachan* made me forget my limitations. We are all aware that some Sanskrit words cannot be translated and so they have been left in their original forms.]

Question:

In the opening sloka of Chapter VII of the Gita, the Lord has mentioned about knowing 'Him' in totality. Is there nothing else to know, once *jnana* is accompanied with *vijnana*? Knowledge cannot reach Infinity. Why then does the Lord say, 'there remains nothing else to be known' (7/2)? What are the inner meanings of these three words *jnana*, *vijnana* and *savijnana*?

Answer:

In the first *shataka* the Gita propounds self-knowledge which includes both *Raja Yoga* and its subsidiary *Kriya yoga*. Once you know yourself, then only you know God. You develop devotion and a yogi with devotion is the greatest of all yogis (6/47).

Arjuna did not raise any further questions after that at that point. Self-Knowledge — devotion as a result of that — and eventually Realisation of the Godhead within oneself — this is the progressive sequence and ultimate aim of sadhana. But following this path we know Him and have Him within ourselves but not in the Cosmic Nature. This *jnana*, though regarded as of a very high calibre, is yet incomplete. Hence, to make the pupil aware of the 'totality', the World Teacher, even without being asked, now wants to carry him into the realm of *vijnana*, beyond *jnana*.

Vijnana can mean both specific as well as general Higher Knowledge. The perception of Divinity that we get by going deep inside might not always be strong enough to repudiate the blows of the outside world. Therefore, in order to have a firm and secure footing in the higher state of being, there is the strong need of cultivation of samadhi even in the waking state. That Arjuna had had a glimpse of it can be easily surmised from his questions regarding ‘*sthitaprajna*’ in the second chapter (2/54). But even there, we have seen that a *sthitaprajna* is rather submerged in Atman, devotion or divinity is in the background. In the second *shataka*, Self-Knowledge is culminating in Brahmic Knowledge. The Reality of you is being purified and having the possibility of getting an access to the Reality of That, Atman is getting the chance of being expanded into the vastness of Brahman. Therefore, *jnana* or Knowledge is Self-Knowledge — to know oneself and in that light to have Him within oneself; and to have Him in the universe and in that light have oneself in the vastness of the universe is *vijnana* or Knowledge of ‘totality’. He is residing in me — this is *jnana*, and He is residing in the cosmos — this is *vijnana*. Self-Knowledge becomes mature with *vijnana*.

Note, the Lord has mentioned about Nature at the very onset. This topic never surfaced earlier. For the sadhana of Self-Knowledge, a general idea about individual nature is needed. That is the knowledge of the lower (*apara*) nature of the Divine not of his higher (*para*) nature. The concept of the higher nature is a unique aspect of the Gita. This too is a part of *vijnana* after *jnana*.

In the context of *vijnana*, he has given some references to his *vibhuti*, about which we will know more in detail in the tenth and eleventh chapters. This also gives us some hints about knowing him in ‘totality’. The zenith of this *vijnana* or total knowledge has been hinted at towards the end of chapter seven and expounded in chapter eight (7/29-30). There is no end of knowledge and nobody can know him completely. But as the pitcher, submerged in ocean, can have nothing more to ask for, similarly, when Pure Knowledge with its expression of infinity manifests in us, we feel there is nothing else to know yet the endless ocean is dancing around my pitcher that is already filled with It to the brim.

Question:

What is the underlying meaning of the expression, ‘Few know Me in Reality’ (7/3)? The term ‘real’ automatically brings in mind its opposite ‘unreal’. The higher Nature that has been manifested as Creation evidently belongs to the Lord. ‘Nothing is higher than Me’, ‘all this is imbedded in Me’ (7/7). Does this ‘Me’ indicate the Lord Himself or his Higher Nature? What is the relation

between the Lord and his Higher Nature? It is evident that the Lord is beyond the Higher Nature, then again is not everything strung in the thread of Higher Nature?

Answer:

For a human being, the knowledge of reality is the knowledge of his own self — a knowledge of whatever he is in own nature. But for the Divine, the knowledge of Reality is the knowledge both of the Supreme Self and Nature. Both are Divine Reality. Only Self is Real and Nature or Power is not — that is not true.

Actually, his Nature is threefold — lower, higher and supreme. The lower nature is the same as the one mentioned by Samkhya, which has here been described as eightfold because earth, water, and other elements are only indicative here. For example, as there are the five elements, so are the five contacts (*tanmatras*), five senses of action, and five senses of knowledge — all are the gradual ascension of the five fundamental elements (*mahabhuta*). There is another cluster of five other than these — mind, ego, intelligence, nature and God.

Other than the lower nature of God, there is His ‘manifested’ higher nature. ‘*jiva*’ or all embodied manifestation is His eternal ‘*amsha*’ (15/7), meaning rays — like each individual ray of the Sun. In the Veda, the ‘*amsha*’ is one of the seven adityas (sons of Aditi, the Divine Mother). ‘*Amsha*’ does not mean part, *jiva* is *amshu*; there is no conflict between one *amshu* and the other; every *amshu*, by nature, wants to expand and the aggregation of all *amshus* forms the condensed yet manifested effulgence of the Divine. All these are told by the Veda and the Upanishads. This Shakti to diversify (as each *jiva*) the condensed effulgence is verily termed as his Higher Nature and that is the Universal Womb in which the Sire casts his seeds (14/4). In one aspect, the Higher Nature is expressing Herself in the form of multitudinous creation and in the other as ‘*Mahat Brahman*’ (14/3).

Other than these, is his ‘own Prakriti’ with whom he is eternally united (4/6). This is his Supreme Prakriti, another name for *Yogamaya* (7/25), meaning Maya that is ever united with Him. The Prakriti at waking state is Becoming and at closing is Non-Becoming. The latter state embodies the doctrine of *Kumari* in Tantra which has been compared to a barren cow in the Veda. His Supreme Nature is his Shakti behind Becoming and Non-Becoming; Higher Nature represents his mastery in manifestation and the lower Nature is the mechanical Shakti and rotates as the wheel of birth and death. Here ‘Me’ denotes the Purusha, the Lord, the Eternal Father.

Question:

‘Oh, Great in the clan of Bharata, I am desire in the creatures, who follow

the path of Dharma(7/11)’. What is the significance of this statement in the Gita? What desire is not against the Dharma? Who is the Law-giver here? What does ‘power void of attachment and desire’ mean?

Answer:

Desire has double propensities. One is desire to enjoy and the other is desire to create. Both the propensities have primitive forms. When creation means expansion of self, it is something like flowering of a plant, which has been described in the Veda as the birth of the One as many. That is the primordial desire (*adikama*). The Veda has described it as ‘the first seed of mind’- the urge of creation of the Supreme Being by dispersion of his Power. The ecstasy he derives out of that dispersion of Power by offering himself as the manifested universe is also desire — a satisfaction, an enjoyment of self by the Self. And this is the primal form of desire, a fulfilment of self by the Self.

The enjoyment of self and dispersion of self are the two aspects of original desire. This can be called in harmony with and in accordance with Dharma, where dispersion is controlled by contentment in Self. When this desire is applied by the manifested beings for the purpose of creation, it takes the form of infatuated sensuality. Procreation derives out of that. Man, driven by the lower nature becomes a prey to this infatuated sensuality and forgets his true self as it happens when smoke covers fire. This desire is against the Dharma. The Gita has termed this as the personified *Kandarpa* or the amorous god for procreation (10/28). Desire is natural but has to be checked under the guidance of Dharma. The seat of Dharma is in discrimination — by establishing Purusha over Prakriti. Absence of Dharma is in Non-Discrimination — in intermixture of Purusha with Prakriti. Under the influence of sensuality, when man forgets his true self as Purusha, he becomes a prey to that.

The Gita has indicated three seats of desire in our being — senses, mind, and intelligence. ‘The senses, mind and intelligence are called the seat of that (desire)’ (3/40). Sensuality is the desire of senses; when the object of desire is outside of me and I want to sink into that without discrimination, I become a prey to sin. But if I can draw the outer object within and transform the taste of material objects to a taste for inner feelings, then the lower urge transcends to a higher one and physical desire becomes mental. When mental desire deepens and ascends further and extends all over, it changes to intellectual desire. For a human being this is the desire conducive to and sanctioned by Dharma.

The original Desire is just one step further up. The Guide who leads desire to transcend itself is none but the Lord seated in the inmost cave of my heart. He imposes the eternal Universal Rule that we must transcend the present state of lack of Dharma and reach the state of perpetual Dharma. Desire and

attachment are the obverse and the reverse sides of the same coin. The basis of attachment is likings. Whatever we like that attributes a kind of hue in our mind and we do not want to give that up. This tinted condition of mind is attachment. No one can always possess the object of attachment. When mind becomes restless for the thing unobtained, desire arises and looks for the fulfilment. The sequence is like this: From likings to desire; from desire to indomitable cravings; to fulfil the cravings comes effort; then comes power. Eventually we want to own the object of desire by using force. But there is a sense of defeat in the effort to control the outer objects by violence. A mighty hero, in the true sense of the term, would never apply violence, because he has neither likings nor desire for the sense objects. But an object appears to him, by its own accord, rather as a source of ecstasy — as Uma approached Siva Maheswar. The power of Maheswar is the true Power.

Question:

Why has the *jnani* (a wise man) being called the best among the four kinds of people that worship the Lord, namely, the afflicted, the one who comes to him with a latent desire, the inquisitive and the wise. He has said, furthermore, ‘According to Me, a wise man is like my own Self’ (7/16-18). It is also said that a wise soul is in constant yoga with the Divine and steadfast in his devotion. Is a *jnani* Bhakta the highest of all?

Answer:

The Divine Maya consisting of the three gunas is encompassing us all and it is very hard to go beyond her realm. Yet, hard as it might be, that can be achieved by knowledge and devotion. Devotion means to surrender to Him absolutely and unconditionally, to cling to him as the only resort (7/14). But this unconditional surrender is not easy to achieve — it can come only through his Grace. Of course, Grace is being showered on us now and ever but we have to do something to make ourselves a fit vessel to receive that. That ‘something’ is called ‘*sukrit*’ or ‘good deed’. Whatever we do, forgetting him and under the control of Maya is ‘bad deed’. The doers of ‘bad deeds’ or ‘*dushkritas*’ are ignorant and contemptible (7/15). They are under the influence of Asuric tendencies and have been described in detail later (16/4, 7-18).

Whenever, one’s ‘*dushkrita*’ is over and mind bends towards ‘*sukrita*’, devotion tinges the horizon (7/16). Usually, this turning takes place when one receives shocks from the *samsara*. Abandoning him, whatever I cling to, gives me hurting blows sooner or later. Yet that is Grace too. Affliction or grief makes me turn towards him. This is the beginning of devotion — though at the lowest rung of ladder. A devotee with latent desire is better than the afflicted one. He

wants something, though he does not know what, but is not content with whatever he has. For him, the delusion is getting lighter, yet he does not get whatever he wants. Outer objects do not satisfy him anymore. The search now turns from outward to inward.

But initially, at the root of the search lies the desire to satisfy the vital self, a subtle satisfaction of the senses. Still the devotee searches for objects, not him in Reality. But the inward search purifies his mind. Outer objects do not bring contentment any more. Once the sense objects are given up, mind goes further inward and tries to find out the subject. This inward movement and search for Self give rise to the questioning spirit. I want to know him, want to know myself, want to know the relation between him and me. This is the symptom of an inquisitive devotee. He definitely is a greater *bhakta*.

When I love more because I know more, I become a *jnani* devotee. Search for him started with *bhakti* and the same *bhakti* carried me to Knowledge or *jnana*. Knowledge and Devotion now mingle together. I do not think there is any necessity to minimise this as ‘*bhakti* mixed with *jnana*’ and consider this as less than ‘*bhakti* without *jnana*’ The Gita has propounded the Knowledge of ‘All is Vasudeva’ (7/19). As ‘All this is verily Brahman’ is the motto of a *jnani*, so is ‘Vasudeva is All’ the motto of a *bhakta*. Is there the slightest difference between the two? The highest love is the one that erupts from seeing him everywhere. Then I understand that all the three *gunas* — *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*— all ensued from him, yet he is not involved in any (7/12).

This concept is a sign of steadfastness as well as of constant unification with the Divine. ‘All this is I’ and ‘All this is He’ are different expression of the same Truth — in one it is subjective and in the other it is objective. One is the vision of a *jnani* or a wise person and the other of a *bhakta* or a devotee. When the *jnani* utters, ‘That Atman is all this’ — he means Him, not his own ego — his Atman has transformed to Divine Atman or the Divine is verily his Atman. When the Lord has confirms, ‘A *jnani* is my Self’ — he is being classified as the highest among devotees. Actually knowledge (*jnana*) and devotion (*bhakti*) are like the obverse and reverse sides of the same hand and neither can be without the other.

Question:

‘After many births a *janavan* comes to Me’(7/19). Does this saying of the Gita indicate that a human cannot reach God by doing sadhana in a single birth? And the siddhi can only be achieved by a gradual ascension through sadhana along various births?

Answer:

The Lord has mentioned about four kinds of *bhaktas* immediately before this sloka. He also has mentioned that though all of the four categories of *bhaktas* are great in their own rights, yet the one who wants to know (*jijngyasu*) and the one who already knows (*jnani*) are higher in rank than the afflicted (*arta*) and one with a latent desire (*artharthi*).

From the *arta* to *jnani* — there is a sequence. By *janavana*, both the *jnani* and *jijngyasu* are indicated. From suffering or affliction to desire — this is a step of mental progress. The next step is to free oneself from desire and ask for ONLY Him and nothing else. This does not happen easily. The following slokas elaborate that vividly. The Lord says, ‘Desire conceals Knowledge and human beings forget Me and worship other gods to propitiate their desire. That is their nature. I never challenge, rather strengthen their faith in those gods. As a result their desire is fulfilled, though they do not understand that that is also under My Guidance.’

This lack of understanding is another word for ignorance. It takes many a birth to cut through that ignorance. With advent of the radiant dawn of knowledge a *jiva* starts questioning and gradually the illumined sun cuts asunder all the veils hiding him from Reality. And there comes the real surrender.

In the realm of Prakriti, there always will be consequences and sequence. And sadhana is always to be performed under the guidance of Prakriti. Hence sadhana, has to be sequential.

Question:

‘The ignorant (one without *buddhi*) ones consider Me, the inexpressible One, as a human being’ (7/24). Is it only the ignorant minds that consider the supreme inexpressible One as a human being? Is *avyakta* (inexpressible) aspect the Highest Truth? What is the method of worship by the people of Higher Intelligence?

Answer:

The Unmanifest is the Eternal, Supreme, Ultimate attribution of the Highest. This Unmanifest has been manifested in the universe. In spite of being in his Real Self, He has manifested himself in a human body among us (9/11), The ability to conceive simultaneously his unmanifest Self as well as the manifested forms is the work of *buddhi* or higher Intelligence. The people of lesser intelligence either worship the manifested forms, excluding the Unmanifest or ignore the manifested aspect by being too much attached to the unmanifested aspect (12/5). Both are extremely one-sided views.

When he manifests himself, He appears as ‘*devatiryangnara*’ (god, lower

animal and human). All gods are his manifestations; likewise He descends as animals and human beings. But unless we realise the highest inexpressible Reality - which he has described in detail in various places, especially at the beginning of *Bhaktiyoga* in chapter XII, we can never know him in totality, even in the worship of our personal deity.

In Gita, '*buddhi*' is a part of a special terminology and a unique expression. It is the same as '*pratibodha*' in Upanishad, '*bodhi*' in the Buddhist scriptures and '*prativajana*' of Patatanjali. The Veda has used various terms for the same like, '*veda*', '*sambit*', '*vidatha*', etc. *Buddhi*, here, is definitely an attribute much higher than the one in Samkhya. Here, *buddhi* is not immersed in the *gunas* but beyond the *gunas*.

Question:

What is the significance of knowing him along with *adhibhuta*, *adhidaiva* and *adhiyajna*? Only people absorbed in such knowledge do not forget the Divine in their final moments (7/30). Why can most of the people not remember the Lord in their last moments?

Answer:

This sloka has to be considered as complementary to the previous one. Comprehensive knowledge consists of seven segments of reality — a gist of which has been given at the very beginning of the next chapter.

The test of what I have learned in life is taken at the time of death. Precisely, the whole life is a preparation for being able to embrace *vaivaswat mrityu*. If living is *vaivaswat*, then only there is possibility of death being *vaivaswat*. *Vivaswan* is god of the highest effulgence. Our aim is to live as well as die amidst that effulgence. This is the vedic ideal.

The first phase of life is the phase of ascension — like the rising of the sun. There is neither decay nor death. But as the sun starts to decline westward once it reaches the meridian, so also we do after reaching the meridian of our life. There comes the shadow of decay and death. We want freedom from that. The whole life is an effort to achieve that freedom — an effort that can only be successful if we take resort to him and feel him as All.

The first and foremost of feelings is the feeling of his Brahmic qualities. As Brahman he is supreme, he is immutable. He is all-encompassing and beyond all mutations, an existence like *akash*. Atman is just a condensed vibrant existence in that Brahman — like stars in the vast firmament, like sparks of an earthly fire. Of course, the Atman has, no doubt, an identity and carries specific consciousness, but this individuality is a part of the eternity of Brahman, like the

thousand rays coming out of the same sun. Thus the manifested cosmos, representing the Eternal, actually is nothing but the self-expression of Brahman. This manifestation is his *karma* (action). This is the threefold reality of *jnana*, consisting of Brahman, Atman and Universe. The other threefold Reality consists of *adhibhuta*, *adhidaiva* and *adhiyajna*.

Creation evolves as a result of manifestation of *Akshara*. Created beings are essentially impermanent and eternally consequential. At the centre of all the turmoil created by the law of cause and effect, stands the Atman with its own Nature. All manifestation is changeable. The nature of Self though unchangeable goes through a conscious evolution which culminates in the expression of the higher Prakriti (7/5). The higher Prakriti travels towards the divine Nature. This is the how it works: God is involving in Matter — from Matter awakens Consciousness, both in individual as well as in universe. The Veda has named these *adhyatma* and *adhidaivatva* respectively.

In simple language, holding onto the mutability of universal manifestation, my nature is being divinised. The Purusha is being evolved in me. This way my life becomes a confluence of *adhibhuta*, *adhyatma*, and *adhiyajna*.

I become god through the medium of *yajna* — my whole life is a *yajna*. *Chhandogya Upanishad* gives us a vivid description of how Sri Krishna received this lesson from Angirasa Ghora. But it is verily He, who is the *yajneswara* (lord of *yajna*) of my *yajna*. I am merely a *yajmana* (performer of the *yajna*). He is enjoyer of my *yajna* as well as of all my penance. Therefore, in my *adhidaivatva* sadhana, He is the *yajneswara* in my five elemental body. This is his form as *adhiyajna*. The last ceremony of *somayag* is *ababhrita* — to let afloat all ingredients and elements of *yajna* in the current of Ananda. Death is the *ababhrita* of the *yajna* of life. To float in his *vaivaswat* effulgence towards him and with him.

But if we do not know him as the Lord of Sacrifice during every moment of life, no wonder we would forget Him at the time of death. And once we forget, we fall into the never-ending cycle of birth and death — *samsara* — and no salvation or *moksha*.

Question:

In the first sloka of the eighth chapter of the Gita Arjuna asks about Brahman, *adhyatma*, *karma*, *adhibhuta*, and *adhidaiva*. What is the significance of these terms? Arjuna has asked the question to the Purushottama. Is he the knower of *Kshara* as well as *Akshara* Brahman?

Answer:

These terms have already been mentioned and discussed in the last part of the seventh chapter. Brahman is at the root of everything. The realisation of Brahman is possible only by the maximum expansion of consciousness of Self. Again, Brahman has two aspects — as *Vak* or Word (6/44) and as the Absolute or *Paramam Brahman*. The manifested universe is nothing but the *ksharan* (precipitation) of the Absolute (*Rig.* 1/164/42) which is termed as *Vak* in the Veda (*Rig.*1/164/41). *Vak* is verily the Word or Sound. Creation ensues from there which results in the manifold universe — '*bhutagrama*' (8/19). This manifested universe is born again and again and ultimately ends up in dissolution (8/19). Thus Purusha assumes the role of mutability (*kshara*).

Again, the Unmanifest exudes itself as the vibration in the *akash*. That vibration is verily *Vak* or Sound — not as *vaikhari* or the lowest form of *Vak*, but as the highest or hidden *Para Vak*. *Bhava* or the innate quality, the seed of all manifestation is hidden within *Vak*. The individual *bhava* of each creature is its *adhyatma* — meaning everything that comprises Atman. Here the term Atman, in the old Vedic way, denotes the inseparable union of body (*tanu*) and soul (*atman*). Hence 'the total *adhyatma*' (7/29) means everything from body to soul or the 'own nature' (*swabhava*).

At one end is the manifested creation is the extreme pole of existence or Matter. The *akshara* expresses itself in a specific way through that medium. That specific mode is *kshara* — the changeable — but the innate quality or the *bhava* lies as seed deep inside all creatures (*Bhuta*). That urge for the seed to sprout and bloom to its fullest comes from the highest and results in *karma*. *Karma* is actually *visarga* — the overflowing of Brahman — precipitation of the impervious.

The seed of manifestation (*bhuta*) is immortal but all manifested beings are mortal. Gods are the condensed form of immortality as Purushas. The highest of them — the source and origin of all the gods is the Divine Being, or the highest Purusha (8/22). He is the Lord and Master of all the devas — the Purushottama — but in a special way — as the condensed form of *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*.

The journey of life for an embodied being is a *yajna* and the Lord of that *yajna* is verily Purushottama. This is his aspect as the *adhiyajnana*.

This is the first time that the term Purushottama has been used in the Gita (8/1) but here it is used in a customary way. The real meaning has been expressed in the fifteenth chapter. (15/18). There is has been used in the Vedic way. Purushottama is All.

Question:

'Giving up the body with the thought of Me' (*mameva*) (8/5) - who is the Me? 'He attains My state' (8/5). What is this state? 'Being immersed in his thought' (8/6). Here is it being asked to dwell on thought and not on any form or *vigraha*? 'Offering mind and intellect in Me' (8/7). Is it in theory, or emotionally or in Form?

Answer:

The Purusha hinted at by '*mameva*' (only Me) has been introduced to some extent in the following ninth sloka. He is the divine Supreme Being (8/8), because he is the origin of the universe so he is the primordial Purusha, stationed in the heart of every creature as *antaryamin*, being smaller than the smallest particle; the supreme preceptor or *Chaitya Guru* and upholder of all. His form is beyond mind, yet one can think of him as effulgence beyond all darkness. The Veda describes him as *Kavi* (the poet). This universe is his evergreen immortal lyric. This is the fundamental reality. This fundamental reality expresses itself in the form of spiritual emotion. The supreme *Akshara*, in reality, is expressing himself as *adhibhuta*, *adhyatma*, and *adhijnyana* (8/3-4). Again, the reality along with the spiritual emotions has been manifested in the form (*vigraha*) through a human body. The Lord will talk about it later (9/11).

Form is comprehended by senses. Spiritual emotions are beyond senses and comprehended only by intellect and reality is beyond intellect. Reality is his supreme *bhava* that is beyond all *lokas*. And He is to be realised inclusive of all his 'aspects' — '*sarva bhavena*' (18/62) — in all three — form, emotion and reality. Then only our knowledge will be complete.

Not everyone is capable to conceptualise the All. At the time of death, one clings (8/6) to the faith formed as a result of lifelong habit and *samskara* (8/8). But the habit has to be formed by lifelong practice — '*sarva kaleshu*' (8/7). Again, it will never be enough to practise while renouncing work. It is a must to carry his thought every moment while acting in the *kurukshetra* of life (8/7). Mind, intellect — everything has to be offered to Him — in solitude as well as in crowd, in inner self as well as in outer.

By and large we need an object, a form — like Arjuna had Sri Krishna: a devotee has his personal *vigraha* with a particular *bhava*; a disciple has his guru. But one should never limit oneself to a form only — be it gross or subtle — one has to enter into the pure *bhava* and ultimately to the supreme emotion and reality. Otherwise it will just be disrespecting him like an ignorant fool (9/11).

Question:

What is *Abhyasayoga*? Is it *Hathayoga* or *Rajayoga*? Are the supreme Purusha and the Purushottama the same?

Answer:

The question is how to have him at the time of death. I have already mentioned that if one does not have him in life, it is hard to have him at the time of death. There is one way of having him in life and that is having him the natural way. The Veda and the Upanishads have elaborated that profoundly. The Veda has named it *Dhi yoga*. It falls in the same category as *Buddhiyoga* of Gita but with a fine difference.

Besides, there are two other methods of yoga. One is the rejection of mind and the other is the control of the vital (*prana*). The former is the subject of *Rajayoga* and the latter of *Hathayoga*. Both have the same object — to draw oneself inward. Even the Upanishad says that at the time of death, the consciousness is drawn inwards, though in *vaivaswat mrityu* (solar death) the consciousness might explode too.

Practice or *abhyasa* is the life breath of both *Rajyoga* and *Hathayoga*. One of Arjuna's questions was how to control the fickle mind. Sri Krishna said, 'With the help of discipline (*abhyasa*) and detachment (*vairagya*) (6/35). Even Patanjali has said the same thing — 'control of that (mind) with discipline and detachment' (*Samadhipad*; Sutra 12). Control of the vital (life-breath) might effectuate control of mind too — this is the directive of the Hathayogins. The Gita indicates that in order to master, the breath has to be controlled and concentrated mindfully (8/12). For that too discipline and practice are absolutely needed.

The Lord is giving instruction to control both mind and breath, while explaining the science of death. Hence, here the yoga of discipline is used for both mind and vital — this particular sadhana is a combination of both *Raja* and *Hathayoga*. There could be another way for the great departure — with the conception of the vast Void (*mahavideha dharana*). But that needs lot of practice and has not been mentioned here.

'*Parama Purusha* (8/8), *Parah Purusha* (=Paramatman 13/23), *Uttamah Purusha* (15/17) and *Purushottama* — all are the same. We find the reference of *Parama Purusha* also in the Upanishad. In the Veda, the word 'Purusha' always carries the suggestion of a form. Sometimes his is the universal form as in *Purusha Sukta*; somewhere he is all golden as in *Chhandogya*; somewhere is his highest benevolent form as in *Ishopanishad*. Again, we come across such expressions as Formless or Unmanifest also. The *munis* have put emphasis on the Unmanifest aspect of the Purusha. In their vision, the Lord is all-pervading. There cannot be any possibility of a form or *vigraha*. Similarly, the *bhagavatas* or the devotees have put emphasis on the *vigraha*.

But he is with form as well as without form — and according to Sri Ramakrishna so many others that cannot be fathomed by human intellect.

Question:

From the divine instructions, we find that in order to attain the Divine Being, it is absolutely needed to have the power of yoga coupled with devotion (8/10). Practice of *pranayam* is essential in order to hold the life breath in-between the eyebrows. 'Bhakti coupled with the valour of yoga — not mere bhakti' it seems there is some mystic interpretation of this divine utterance. How do you interpret that?

Answer:

Yoga is the universal way for sadhana. *Karma, jnana* or *bhakti*, whichever way you choose you have to take refuge in yoga.

The common goal for all branches of yoga is to raise consciousness to the level of one-pointed concentration (*ekagrabhumi*), which is better known as *vijnanabhumi* — Overmind — beyond physical, vital and mental states. Unless and until securely established in that state beyond mind, no one can reach perfection either in *karma, jnana* or *bhakti*. I find it confusing if somebody says that he/she would attain *bhakti* without following the path of yoga. Normally, in such cases, the followers of *bhakti* mean either *Raja* or *Hathayoga*. But the Gita, in all eighteen chapters propagates eighteen kinds of yoga.

The Hathayogins want to ascend the *ekagrabhumi* with the help of *asana, pranayama, mudra* etc.; the Rajayogins want the same with the help of controlling the mind and they follow certain methods to achieve that. But concentration and absorption of mind are the main objects of the *bhakta* as well. According to Uma of Kalidasa, 'mind is saturated with one and only one *bhava*'. Otherwise how can one reach Siva?

The success in the outer disciplines of the eightfold disciplines of Patanjali's yoga can be achieved by the followers of *jnana* and *bhakti* school by different methods. Even the crux of *Hathayoga* — the yoga of *Kundalini* — can be mastered by them following their own sadhana.

Have you noticed in the same sloka, the combination of *bhakti* and *shakti* of yoga has been based on the inner disciplines of *Raja Yoga*? These are *dharana*, (impression) *dhyaana* (meditation) and *samadhi* (total absorption). These are parts of *jnana* as well as *bhakti* yoga. The Gita did not mention about the six *chakras*. Heart, in-between the eyebrows and top of the head —only these three places have been prescribed for restraint, concentration and absorption of mind and vital. This is the way of the Upanishad. The *Aitareya Upanishad* refers to these stations as the abode of Atman. In the Gita, Sri Krishna has referred to this age-old Yoga.

The ultimate test of a lifelong sadhana takes place at the time of final departure. At that time all the latent *samskaras* can rise up and make the whole life's effort null and void. That is why there is a common saying, 'no matter how much japam (taking the holy name), no matter how much *tapam* (penance), one has to know how to die.' The darkness that covers the whole consciousness at the time of death cannot be removed without the power of yoga. The Gita has mentioned that yoga can be based on suppression as well as by expansion and they are not poles apart. In the Upanishad emphasis is on the latter one, the former is secondary there. By and large, the path of bhakti too puts more stress on expansion of *bhava*, though to some extent restraint is equally needed. It is better not to create any artificial differentiation between the two, particularly while trying to understand the dictum of Gita.

As *prana* or life-breath can be controlled by *pranayama* of *Raja Yoga* so also it can be controlled by the yoga of *bhava* (spiritual emotions). *Bhava* is beyond mind — it is the wealth of *vijnana* — and can only be obtained by wisdom or pure understanding. From the seat of heart to the region of in-between the eyes and from there to the great void — this is the natural way of advancement of consciousness. With pure understanding the path can easily open to a *jnani* or a *bhakta*. Then the Purushottma, hidden deep in the cave of my heart, can easily take me upwards at the time of my death.

Sometimes, depending on the skill and *samskara* of the individual sadhaka, *Raja Yoga* or *Hathayoga* might be needed as means to reach the goal of pure understanding.

To sum up, as we cannot say that *Raja Yoga* is absolutely imperative for *bhakti*, similarly we cannot say that yoga has no place whatsoever in the path of *bhakti*. Yoga has various ways and in the Gita, the term yoga has definitely not been used in the traditional way.

Question:

Could you please explain the mystic significance of slokas 12 and 13 of the eighth chapter? Hasn't the Lord explained in full a method of sadhana to reach the ultimate goal? What have we to do to achieve that?

Answer:

I have already mentioned a few aspects of that method. Along with 12 and 13 one has to combine the mode of sadhana expressed in the 10th sloka. In this context, even 11th and 14th slokas are also to be discussed.

It has been mentioned earlier that this method of sadhana is an age-old one and there are quite a few references of it in various Upanishads. Sri Krishna himself has termed this as '*yogadharana*' (8/12). *Dharana* is a spiritual practice

belonging to the first part in Patanjali's *Inner Yoga* denoting holding the life-consciousness at heart and other higher planes (in the vast Void in the out-of-the-body consciousness). One has to start with heart and then go upwards to the area in-between the eyebrows (8/10) and then to the top of the head. Beyond that is the 'abode' (8/11) or the highest place (*pada*) or highest Purusha (8/10) or *Akshara* (8/11). Both '*pada*' and '*akshara*' have more than one meaning and hint at both the Absolute Brahman (*Para Brahman*) as well as the Word (*Sabda Brahman*). The Divine Word '*Om*', the monosyllable Brahman (8/13) is the denotative term for the Absolute Brahman. *Om* — the life-vibration of the Great Void — is to be felt as a kind of jingle or twang all over the body. Its expansive function (*vyarhiti* - 8/13) is to guide the consciousness upward with the help of the uprising *udana prana* (one of the five *pranas*) through the upper channel of the heart.

I have already mentioned that without practice in life, it is not possible to direct upward movement of the great expansive force in the form of *Om* at the time of death. This is a mandatory practice to be performed every single day in life during the time of sleep when as a rule all the senses are naturally subdued. During that time mind has to be concentrated in the heart and the life-consciousness to be sent upward to the head. Once pierced through between the eyebrows, the consciousness expands in the great Void and the body-consciousness during *sushupti* becomes like *akash*. That is yogic sleep or *yoganidra*.

Again, this can also be possible by constant remembrance. The sign of constant remembrance (*anusmriti*) is to remember the Effulgent Being — the *Adityavarna Purusha* — everywhere and always as the smaller than the smallest in every particle of being and greater than the greatest in every aspect of the cosmos (8/13-14). Along with the remembrance will continue the mental utterance of *Om* in the rhythm of inhalation and exhalation. This is *Kriyayoga*, meaning yoga in daily life.

During *yoganidra*, one has to think of the flow of life as going upwards. As a result, the sense of the flow of respiration will become lesser and lesser and eventually both *prana* and *apana* would equalise and be felt moving through the nostrils only (5/27). There will be a sense of constant presence of the great life-force at the top of the head (8/12). All individual lives would appear like surf on the great all-encompassing ocean of Life.

To transform this yogic sleep to the ultimate sleep at the time of death is the highest eventual goal (8/13)

Question:

The Lord has said that He is easily available to a yogi, constantly united with him with constant remembrance (8/14). Does the highest salvation mean to go beyond the cycle of birth and death? What is the mystery underlining the sloka, ‘Once coming to Me, there is cessation from rebirth’ (8/16)? If cessation from birth is absolutely needed to achieve the highest goal, then is there no meaning of the term ‘*jivanmukti*’ (freedom in life)?

Answer:

This sloka has to be understood in accordance with the two previous slokas. While describing a way to reach him at death, the Lord has already told that if this yoga is not practised in life, he is not easily reached at the time of death. To do that one has to remember him ALWAYS and WITHOUT THINKING of ANYTHING ELSE. One has to be eternally united with him. All these have already been discussed.

Every word of the following sloka has to be meditated on. It is an ancient Vedic theory (note the *Yamasukta* of the tenth mandala of *Rik Samhita*) that a yogi passes to the eternal life through death. According to Upanishad this is *vaivaswat mrityu*. In *vaivaswat mrityu*, death occurs only once and never again. Hence in the *Brahmanas* and the older Upanishads it is called ‘victory over recurrent deaths’. The god-lovers describe it as effulgence merging into Effulgence; self-radiance dissolving into Brahmic radiance. In the Gita that is mentioned as ‘attaining the highest Being’ (8/10) or attaining the ‘highest goal’ (8/13 *parama gati*) — an effortless merging into him.

This is like a bubble merging into the ocean. Though bubble is like an atom and the ocean is huge, yet the huge ocean is deeply infused into that atom. As a result of that the bubble gets so enlarged that it becomes one with Brahman. In the language of Upanishad, this way the *jnana atman* of the atom enlarges into the *mahan atman* (*Katha* 1/3/13). The *mahan atman* is the same as the sun (*Taittiriya* 1/5/2) and beyond the sun is the Void or *akash* and that is silent or *shanta atman* of *Katha Upanishad*. *Jnana atman* is the eternal *jiva*; the *mahat* and silent atmans are the two aspects of Brahman or the highest Being — the cosmic and the transcendental. At the time of death, holding on to lustre of heart (*hardya jyoti*) the eternal *jiva* can attain both of these aspects. The Upanishad has mentioned that (*Brihadaranyaka* 4/4/2) and so does the Gita here.

Elsewhere, this journey has been referred to as one going beyond the solar region (*Mundaka* 1/2/6, 11). The highest below the solar is *brahmaloka*. That is the ultimate boundary of samsara or the region of birth and death (8/16). The yogi attaining *vaivaswat mrityu* go beyond that. He does not have to be born again and again into the region of suffering. Up to the *brahmaloka* all regions

are transient — rise at the time of creation and dissolve at the time of dissolution. The *mahatma* or the great atman is beyond this; He is Sun, He is Void. The sun is his dazzling radiance (*shuklam bhah*) and the Void or *Akash* is surrounding him as the supreme blue black (*parah Krishna*) (*Chhandogya* 1/6/6). The yogi dissolves into this deep blue of the Supreme at the time of death. The bright radiance and the deep darkness of blue are both eternal.

This is his highest abode — like an ocean of unmanifest radiance. In that ocean innumerable bubbles are rising and falling — those are the bubbles of births and deaths. The life of bubble is ephemeral, its rise and fall both bring suffering. The yogi of *vaivaswat mrityu* observes all that and feels this rise and fall within his own self, but since he is constantly united with the all-pervading Reality, like the supreme Purusha, he feels no pain, nor any suffering.

This way to go beyond the world of transient creation yet observing the swing of birth and death within oneself is to reach the ultimate goal (*parama siddhi*) for a yogi. This is something even higher than the *parinirvana* of Buddha. In the language of the Upanishad, this is gnostic death (*savijnanana mrityu*) (*Brihadaranyaka* 4/4/2)

The followers of gnostic death may come back here, if they will. As the death is gnostic, so is the birth. Like Sri Krishna, they witness both birth and death (4/5). Their births cannot be termed as rebirth — transient and cause of suffering. They are the chosen few. After *vaivaswat mrityu*, the *jivatma* has no more functions, but the *mahatma* remains the same.

Question:

What is the mystic interpretation of the word ‘Knower of day and night’? What again is the eternal beyond the Unmanifest? The *Akshara Brahman* might be the ultimate goal for the *jiva* but what about the supreme Lord (8/17-21)?

Answer:

You may consider the fact that the primary sadhana of the Vedic Rishis was the comprehension of the mystery of day and night. The Veda says, ‘days belong to *Mitra* and night to *Varuna*’, *Mitra* and *Varuna* are the famous dual deity of the Veda.

The Aryas were worshippers of the sun — the symbol of the highest effulgence. But the radiance of the sun that encompasses our life rises as well as sets. From dawn to noon is the period of upward movement of the sun and increase of light and just after that starts the period of setting of the sun and decrease of light. Eventually the night takes over for the equal time of the day. As light decreases after the midday, the same way it starts increasing after midnight.

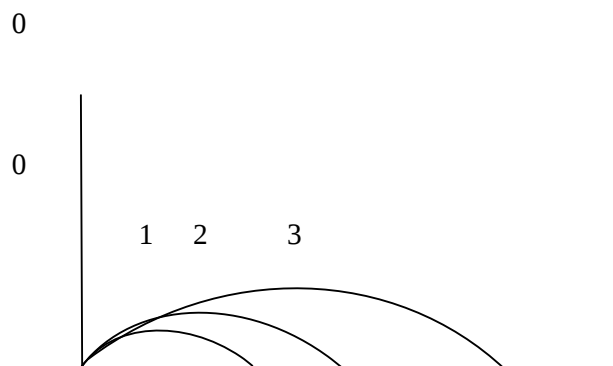
The deities for these periods are successively the black and white Horse (*Nirukta*).

This way, in one complete cycle, half is light and half is darkness. When there is plenitude of light, life is joyful; with the advent of darkness appears the shadow of death. As the day gets eclipsed by night, so does life by death. Again as light pierces through darkness of night, in the same way life evolves freed from death. These thoughts have been repeated in the Veda again and again.

But we do not want the mélange of light and darkness, day and night, life and death. We want eternal effulgence (*amrita jyoti* — *Rik Samhita*), we want only day (*sakrit diva*), where there is only day and no night (*Upanishad*).

Where is that? *Samhita*, *Brahman*, *Upanishad* — all say it is there. The upward movement of the sun (that we observe due to the rotation of the earth) might enlarge to such an extent that there may not occur any downward turn; as if the Sun can rise straight up and up from the horizon. This movement is called ‘*adhvar*’ movement which leads to the ultimate abode of Vishnu. Beyond the visible and volatile movements is the ultimate station of Eternity. There lies *Go-loke*, the abode of the herds of multi-horned cows (*Rik Samhita*). Whoever goes there, sees the rotation of day and night at his feet (*Taittiriya Brahman*). Aditya is singular (*ekal*). There he does not rise nor does he set. (*Chhandogya*). The Gita says, ‘The place, attaining which nobody comes back, is verily my ultimate abode’ (8/21).

A linear diagram might make things clearer:



The half circles are the path of the sun’s journey. 0 is the rising point, 1, 2, 3 are the points of setting. The bigger the diameter of the half-circle, the straighter goes the circumference of the circle eventually reaching to infinity indicating

rise and set by the straight line 0-0. The half circles are the recurring or repeated movements of the Sun as well as our limited life. There is light as well as darkness. Eventually, when the half circle changes to a straight line, the diameter will measure up to eternity. At that point there is no recurring movement — only straight *adhvar* (Veda) or non-recurring — *anavritti* (*Upanishad*, *Brahmasutra*).

As long as there is this curved movement of the sun Brahma rules. The measurement of the period of time has been given in details in Puranas and other scriptures in terms of earthly day and night. The calculation is beyond human concept. Yet, there is the rotational movement of time in it. Hence there is creation and dissolution; day and night.

The universe manifests itself in the course of this rotation of time and beyond that is the Unmanifest — unmanifest Purusha as well as unmanifest Prakriti (8/20). The Two are inseparably locked in that unmanifested state. There the universe expands to infinity as ‘greater than the greatest’ and infinitesimally contracted as ‘smaller than the smallest’. And both are the same. The points of rise and set are also the same — zero or Void. In the Veda, this state has been described as the void of *Varuna* — ‘His kingdom of mysterious ocean’. In the Gita, this is *akshara* — the ultimate goal of *jiva* (8/21). But the supreme Lord himself is the unmanifest supreme *Akshara* (8/20-21). Hence He is static while moving and dynamic while still.

Question:

‘These two paths — one lighted and the other dark — are eternal in creation’ (8/26). I would like to hear a lucid explanation of the recurrence and non-recurrence. Is there not a third state beyond those two? Does not ‘the highest state’ indicate that (8/28)?

Answer:

The reference of two ‘*Sritis*’ or paths of movement occurs in *Rik Samhita* itself (10/88/15). There they are mentioned as ‘*Sruti*’. It is said that one is for the terrestrial and the other for the divine fathers. Note that in Gita, both are mentioned as the path for yogis. *Brihadaranyaka* calls one ‘*pitriyan*’ and the other ‘*devayan*’ (6/2/2) Gita is definitely closer to *Samhita*.

The whole thought process has been derived from the concept of worship of *aditya*, the root of which lies in the Aryan concept of worship of Light. The perceptible divine effulgence is the effulgence of the sun. In the God-vision of the Rishi, *aditya* is not an inert cluster of rays, ‘*Surya* is the soul (*atman*) of both animate and inanimate objects’ (*Rik* 1/115/10). This supreme Soul has to be contemplated in one’s own soul, which is a combination of ‘*tanu*’ (body) and

‘atman’ (spirit). The aim of Vedic yoga is to be ‘sun-skinned’ by a continuous meditation on this concept.

The sun in the sky, the moon in the intermediary region and Agni in the Earth — by and large these three lustres have been taken as the means of Vedic sadhana. Agni is the terrestrial god — lustre of our own self. The offerings of oblations in the Agni is *Yag* — in the language of the Gita — *Dravyayajna* or material sacrifice (4/28). When the offering is done inwardly, with deep contemplation on the inner meaning of the whole performance but without material assistance, then it becomes *jnanayajna* or *yogayajna*, which is higher than the material sacrifice (4/18, 33). Here in the above mentioned paths of sadhana the Gita has mentioned both to *Yag* or material sacrifice and *yajna*.

The offerings in the sacrificial fire are actually the ransom for the worshipper — meaning that in reality he is offering himself. The thought behind the offering is this that the material offerings to the fire turn into ashes and the upward flame reaches to *Aditya*. This way my individual spark merges with the supreme Effulgence and I feel the Purusha in *Aditya* and the Purusha in me are one and the same. (*Isha* 16, *Taittiriya* 2/8). This is the individual salvation for a yogi.

But this could very well happen that not all of the offering is turned to fire and most of it is turned to smoke. Smoke does not reach *Aditya*. It goes up for a little while and then comes down. We do not want that to happen, but it does.

Actually fire and smoke, light and darkness are intertwined in life and in the world. In the twenty-four hour span of day and night half is lighted part and half is in darkness; a month consists of a bright and a dark fortnight; in one solstice the daytime increases and in the other decreases. But we want only radiance in life; let there be no smoke; let there be only light and no darkness. This craving can be fulfilled only in thought, not in reality. But in real life we find that there is a rhythm — especially in increase and decrease of light. There is a victory of light from midnight to midday as well as in the lighted fortnights and summer solstice. These are the periods conducive to perform *yag*. Actually all Vedic *yags* were performed during these periods aiming to enhance the call for light in consciousness. Since radiant consciousness is nothing but the innate symbol of Brahman, or Divinity or Atman, then by nourishing the growth of inner light with the help of outer Prakriti we will be able to defeat the darkness gone deep inside our nature and *yag* will be converted to yoga. And then, since the effulgence of the midday sun would brighten my atman, hence even when the physical sun sets and night creeps in, its inextinguishable flame would still burn within me. At the same time, the unit of time measurement would expand from day to month, from month to season and from season to solstice. The rites conducive to this sadhana of expansion are *agnihota*, *dashpurnamas*,

chaturmasya and *gabamayan* as per the Veda. A year is the largest unit in the measurement of time since regular rotation of various natural phenomena occurs annually. That is why the Veda has named a whole year *prajapati* or *prajapatya surya*.

Now, the aim of a yogi is to enhance in consciousness the propensity for radiance to such an extent that it defeats darkness and eventually attains a state which is beyond the cycle of light and shade. I have mentioned about it earlier saying that this is the Upanishdic state of ‘sakrid diva’ or only day — where the sun is singular — neither does he rise nor does he set.

The way to reach that state is to separate (*vichayan Rik* 4/2/11) fire from smoke and effulgence from darkness in the physical world. If a yogi, with the lightning speed of aspiration, can do that especially at the time of death, goes beyond the region of Sun. To be successful he needs the help of Agni, daytime, the lighted fortnight and summer solstice (8/24). One who cannot do that comes back from below that point. *Taittiriya Brahmana* says that all the lokas beyond *Aditya* are eternal and all the lokas below are transient like the phases of the moon. That is why here in Gita (8/25) as well as in the Upanishad this lower field below the sun is called ‘effulgence of the moon’. The Yogi might come back from that point, being deviated from the path of yoga, but he is never lost (6/40). And after coming back here, with increased aspiration, he advances even farther. May be he would come back again but again would he move forward. This is his cycle. But the one who goes straight up crossing the solar region, does not come back again. That is his freedom — freedom from the cycle of birth and death. But at the root of both the processes of rebirth and the freedom from rebirth, lies the sincere yearning for an upward surge, which has been especially described in *Samhita*, *Brahmana* and *Upanishad*.

In the Gita, the way leading to freedom from birth has been called the lighted one and the other has been termed as the dark one. Both are ‘eternal’ paths (8/26). Both have the same goal — the supreme Brahman. But he is beyond the two — in his highest original abode. From there he is the Lord of both. As he is the Master controlling the process of rebirth, so is he controlling the process of freedom from rebirth. And since He controls the process of rebirth from his supreme abode, it is possible for Purushottama to have as many incarnations as he wishes (4/5,6,9). As the fully realised yogi understands both the paths and their goals, he rises beyond all illusions — of births and rebirths (8/27). That is the characteristic of a chosen one.

(Translated from the original Bengali by Smt. Kalyani Bose, a long time devotee of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, now resident in New Jersey, USA)

[End of Chapters VII and VIII]

The Mother image in Sri Aurobindo

Prema Nandakumar

7 The Shorter Poems

The mother image is spread all over the shorter poems of Sri Aurobindo. Often it is not easily visible to our understanding. This is not surprising since after his involvement in the Bande Mataram Movement, the mother-idea became his consciousness. Whatever he wrote, the lightning shadow of the Divine Mother crossed it. In that grand poem of interrogations, ‘Who?’ which is ‘He-centric’, we come upon one line suddenly:

“A woman is lord of us, naked and fierce.”

Mother Durga is close to our heart, is part of our consciousness, “had we vision to see”. Unfortunately, we are still bound by the mind and do not have the above-mental vision to see her. Hence, the Divine Mother, with maternal love comes to us as dreams. We may not be able to interpret the dreams exactly, but they do provide the needed inspiration to achieve. Certainly, dreams are not vain shadows. They do have natal connections to our own experiences when we are awake, our connections in lives past, our possibilities in future lives. The poem ‘*Bhawani Bharati*’ is itself a dream-vision in which Bhawani wakes up Sri Aurobindo to fight and free the land from the grip of the British. Sri Aurobindo hails the Mother who works through this mechanism of dreams in a short, but utterly beautiful poem, ‘*The Mother of Dreams*’.

“Goddess supreme, Mother of Dream, by thy ivory doors when thou standest,
Who are they then that come down unto men in thy visions that troop,
group upon group, down the path of the shadows slanting?
Dream after dream, they flash and they gleam with the flame of the stars
still around them;
Shadows at thy side in a darkness ride where the wild fires dance, stars glow
and glance and the random meteor glistens;

There are voices that cry to their kin who reply; voices sweet, at the heart
they beat and ravish the soul as it listens.”

Ah, this Mother is standing ready waiting for us to close our eyes and fall into sleep. Then she opens her ivory doors and we ‘see’, leaving behind our body, prone, seemingly lifeless. We watch and go through a variety of emotions in this *svapna-avastha*. Perhaps our unconscious in this dream-state gets the directions for a future course of action. This poem written just before he came to Pondicherry has also several interrogatory lines. What is it that the Mother wants him to do? She is showing him a new world, a world which is not the one in which he has been living till now: the world of ideas, the word of action, the world of patriotic endeavour. Some wonderful denizens from a finer, a more luminous world seem to be coming towards him to hold hands. Is this the promise of a new heaven? Or the earth transformed into a heaven? Is this a picture of the serried planes above the mind, indicated by Swami Vivekananda to Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Jail?

“Who are they coming thy Oceans roaming with sails whose strands are not
made by hands, an unearthly wind advances?
Why do they join in a mystic line with those on the sands linking hands in
strange and stately dances?”

Sri Aurobindo would not dismiss dreams as meaningless. They were surely harbingers of a coming world. They brought a message of hope and perhaps an indication of some transformation of this world for the better. *The Future Poetry* brings us Sri Aurobindo’s views on this matter as he finds germs of the future possibilities in some of the new poets like Walt Whitman. He speaks of Whitman as a “prophetic mind which consciously and largely foresaw and prepared the paths and had some sense of that to which they are leading.” He quotes Whitman generously in this book to show how the spiritual idiom is come at last into the English language.

“These passages – one of the seers of old time reborn in ours might so have expressed himself in a modern and intellectualised language, — send forward an arclight of prophetic expression on what is at the very heart of the new movement of humanity.” (*The Future Poetry*, SABCL, vol.9, p.183)

Interestingly, Whitman too has written a brief poem of five lines on how dreams indicate the possibilities of a greater world:

“I dream’d in a dream, I saw a city invincible to the attacks of the whole
of the rest of the earth;
I dream’d that was the new City of Friends;
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love — it led the rest;
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city,
And in all their looks and words.”

Much later, such ideas would blossom as the canto, “*The House of the Spirit and the New Creation*’ in *Savitri*. Sri Aurobindo the lover of Shakespeare is not unaware of the sardonic approach to dreams exhibited by the Bard of Avon. As when Prospero says:

“We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.”

However, though the dreams may disappear but remain an inspiration for us to move forward, struggle, strive and not slow down till the ideal is reached. Man’s journey is an upward movement, and the maternal love is what gives it the affectionate push to adventures unknown. People may be frightened or elated by their dreams, for such is the apparel she wears when she comes to the sleeping figure, and Sri Aurobindo creates a vivid poetic image to personify *The Mother of Dreams*:

“Thou in the air, with a flame in thy hair, the whirl of thy wonders watching,
Holdest the night in thy ancient right, Mother divine, hyacinthine, with a
girdle of beauty defended.
Sworded with fire, attracting desire, thy tenebrous kingdom thou keepest,
Starry-sweet, with the moon at thy feet, now hidden now seen the clouds
between in the gloom and the drift of thy tresses.”

How many times we do wake up from nightmares! And countless are the sweet dreams from which we wake up to the ugly reality around us. But we never do know the meaning of it all. Rarely does she convey an inspiration in her dream, and this too is recorded by Sri Aurobindo:

“Only to those whom thy fancy chose, O thou heart-free, is it given to see
thy witchcraft and feel thy caresses.”

Now Sri Aurobindo prefers the Puranic mythology to help him convey the idea of this Mother-image when one has her vision when deep in yoga. With her help the yogin can see the victorious movement forward of Indra, quaff nectarean Somarasa and see the undulating dance of the heavenly virgins:

“High-throned on a cloud, victorious, proud I have espied Maghavan ride
when the armies of wind are behind him;
Food has been given for my tasting from heaven and fruit of immortal
sweetness;

I have drunk wine of the kingdoms divine and have heard the change of
music strange from a lyre which our hands cannot master;
Doors have swung wide in the chambers of pride where the Gods reside and
the Apsaras dance in their circles faster and faster.
For thou art she whom we first can see when we pass the bounds of the mortal,
There at the gates of the heavenly states thou hast planted thy wand enchanted
over the head of the Yogin waving.”

The poem concludes that dreams are not everything. The yogin gains the dream-vision and then leaves behind this dream to “climb out of Space and Time to the peak of divine endeavour.” ‘*The Mother of Dreams*’ is a charming poem indicating yet another facet of Sri Aurobindo’s approach to the Mother-idea. There is then the challenging poem, ‘*The Mother of God*’. When or how did the universal Brahman create this world? Sri Aurobindo could not dismiss creation as maya. Who created all this? Who created this mind-boggling set of universes? The Supreme, of course. Then the question: is the Supreme a man or woman? Mind is an untethered monkey and must go on questioning! Sri Aurobindo is aware of this weakness of the human being and himself frames the question:

“In the strength of a man, in the beauty of woman,
In the laugh of a boy, in the blush of a girl;
The hand that sent Jupiter spinning through heaven,
Spends all its cunning to fashion a curl.

These are His works and His veils and His shadows;
But where is He then? by what name is He known?
Is He Brahma or Vishnu? a man or a woman?
Bodies or bodiless? twin or alone?” (*Who*, SABCL, vol.5, p.40)

As the Mother-idea went deeper and deeper into his creative forge, he recorded the astonishing, ‘*The Mother of God*’. Here we are closer to the Sankhya and Tantra images of the female energy as Prakriti to the Supreme’s Purusha. Sri Aurobindo has written at length on the core idea of pranic energy which is usually dormant but can be aroused to flower creatively, whether within our body or without:

“We can become aware of the existence and presence of the universal Shakti in the various forms of her power. At present we are conscious only of the power as formulated in our physical mind, nervous being and corporeal case sustaining our various activities. But if we can once get beyond this first formation by some liberation of the hidden, recondite, subliminal parts of our existence by Yoga, we become aware of a greater life-force, a pranic Shakti, which supports and fills the body and supplies all the physical and vital activities, — for the physical energy is only a modified form of this force, — and supplies and sustains too from below all our mental action. This force we feel in ourselves also, but we can feel it too around us and above, one with the same energy in us, and can draw it in and down to aggrandise our normal action or call upon and get it to pour into us. It is an illimitable ocean of Shakti and will pour as much of itself as we can hold into our being. This pranic force we can use for any of the activities of life, body or mind with a far greater and effective power than any that we command in our present operations, limited as they are by the physical formula. The use of this pranic power liberates us from that limitation to the extent of our ability to use it in place of the body-bound energy.”ⁱ

Crystallising this idea of an all-pervading Pranic force as a familiar image, Sri Aurobindo writes:

“The Mother of God, his sister and his spouse,
Daughter of his wisdom, of his might the mate,
She has leapt from the Transcendent’s secret breast
To build her rainbow worlds of mind and life.
Between the superconscient absolute Light
And the Inconscient’s vast unthinking toil,
In the rolling and routine of Matter’s sleep
And the somnambulist motion of the stars,
She forces on the cold unwilling Void
Her adventure of life, the passionate dreams of her lust,”

So the energy which is all around comes to us as a Mother image in this poem. Child of the human family! SriAurobindo seems to be telling us: Do not be afraid. When this all-pervading mother is here in so many forms – mother, daughter, sister, consort, what need you fear? The pain of the movement has to be borne for the aim is to reach out to a transformed future with the maternal love guarding us.

“Amid the work of darker Powers she is here
To heal the evils and mistakes of Space
And change the tragedy of the ignorant world
Into a Divine Comedy of joy
And the laughter and the rapture of God’s bliss.”

Sri Aurobindo’s *Ahana* gets docketed among his shorter poems because it gets dwarfed by his epic production, *Savitri*. Actually it is quite a long poem. There are two versions of the poem. The 1915 version, ‘*The Descent of Ahana*’ is a dialogue. Ahana the Mother-Goddess was no doubt inspired by Sri Aurobindo’s Vedic studies when in Pondicherry. He had been translating the hymns on Usha who comes to the earth every morning to give man a wake-up call.

“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.”ⁱⁱ

Ahana is the transcendent Mother-vision who is not interested in the humdrum ways of the earthlings. But the aspiration of humanity will not leave her in peace. Can a mother abandon her child? Can Goddess Ahana turn away from opening a new future for humanity?

“Come, come down to us, Woman divine whom the world unforgetting
Yearns for still; we will draw thee, O star, from thy colourless setting.
Lonely thou sittest above in the fruitless vasts of the Spirit;
Waitest thou, Goddess, then for some younger world to complete or inherit?
Nay, if thou save not this, will another rise from the spaces?
Only the past fulfilled can conjure room to the future that presses.
Goddess, we understand thee not; Woman, we know not thy nature;
This yet we know we have need of thee here in our world of misfeature.”

The poem is a rich gift for lovers of puranic diction and after the anxious prayers of the voices that belong to the Ancients of Knowledge and the Sons of Morning, she agrees to come down to earth and transform it into an area of Ananda, literally the Brindavan of Krishna. The revised version, '*Ahana*' appeared in 1942. The subtitle tells us that this is a poem in quantitative hexameters (as the original version was), and both seem to have been Sri Aurobindo's experiments in bringing the classical metre to modern English. His unfinished epic, *Ilion*, is also written in hexameters. Naturally the classical tread gives the opening a grand entry. It is a speech by the earth's denizens hailing the Mother image of morning, the "the dawn of God":

"Vision delightful alone on the hills whom the silences cover,
Closer yet lean to mortality; human, stoop to thy lover.
Wonderful, gold like a moon in the square of the sun where thou strayest
Glimmers thy face amid crystal purities; mighty thou playest
Sole on the peaks of the world, unafraid of thy loneliness. Glances
Leap from thee down to us, dream-seas and light-falls and magical trances;
Sun-drops flake from thy eyes and the heart's caverns packed are with pleasure

Strange like a song without words or the dance of a measureless measure."
(*Ahana*, Ibid, p.523)

Sri Aurobindo has changed the Puranic references somewhat, and elaborated the poem as an image of the Jnana, Karma and Bhakti yogas. Explaining this inner thrust in a succinct manner, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar says:

"'Ahana' is Dawn – "the Dawn of God" – and her advent is the occasion for universal rejoicings. As she appears on the mountains of the East, the Hunters of Joy greet her first, and behind them are the Seekers after Knowledge and the Climbers in quest of Power also. Even at its most puissant, human power is half-rooted in the earth-crust, human knowledge at its most luminous is yet half-blinding because of this exuberance, and only Joy born of Love has the undimmed vision to recognise and not deny the dawning Light."iii
So we hear the groups of aspirants engaged in the Yoga of Knowledge, Yoga of Works and Yoga of Divine Love pray to Ahana and tell her that they have been aspiring for long and the time has now come for the descent of a divine afflatus.

Mother Ahana must come down to meet Mother Earth! Sri Aurobindo presents an ascent by the aspirants to image the descent of Ahana. All this toil and strife for aeons to ascend the planes of consciousness should not be in vain! The Divine Mother must descend! We will hear these echoes later on in Aswapati's '*Adoration of the Divine Mother*'. Meanwhile the coaxing, adoring, anxious voice of the aspirant child in '*Ahana*':

"Daughter of Heaven, break through to me moonlike, mystic and gleaming;
Tread through the margins of twilight, cross over borders of dreaming.
Vision delightful alone on the peaks whom the silences cover,
Vision of bliss, stoop down to mortality, lean to thy lover." (*Ahana*, Ibid, p.535)

Much like the Divine Mother assuring Aswapati -- "O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry" – Ahana relents and begins to come down:

"Voice of the sensuous mortal, heart of eternal longing,
Thou who hast lived as in walls, thy soul with thy senses wronging!
But I descend at last.....
Come then to Brindavan, soul of the joyous; faster and faster
Follow the dance I shall teach thee with Shyama for slave and for master.
Follow the notes of the flute with a soul aware and exulting;
Trample Delight that submits and crouch to a sweetness insulting.
Then shalt thou know what the dance meant, fathom the song and the singer,
Hear behind thunder its rhymes, touched by lightning thrill to his finger,
Brindavan's rustle shalt understand and Yamuna's laughter,
Take thy place in the Ras and thy share of the ecstasy after."(Ibid, p.536)

In one way these shorter poems that base themselves on the Mother image were no doubt earlier attempts that would conclude in the onrushing floods of the epic *Savitri*. Sri Aurobindo was making a very bold experimentation of positing a female power as an avatar, an incarnation come to save humanity from its tribulations as it tried hesitatingly to go forward towards a transformed consciousness. For, Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* is not just another Puranic character retold like Damayanti, Renuka, Draupadi. *Savitri* is an incarnation that would grapple with the forces of Death, Desire and Incapacity and rid mankind of all these ills to begin a new chapter in his long journey. Meanwhile '*Ahana*' remains a brilliant tour de force, a gift of Sri Aurobindo's Vedic studies, caught with unerring admiration by his friend, the great Tamil poet, Subramania Bharati in

his brief article, ‘Ahana, the Dawn’:

“A few days ago, I asked Sri Aurobindo Ghose how he got his new and marvellous theory of Vedic interpretation. ‘It was shown me’ he said, and I knew he meant it in a very literal sense. All truth is inspired.”

Only a true *sahridaya* appreciates an inspired poet.

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- i. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, vol.21, p.727
ii. *Rig Veda*. Translated by Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, vol.10, p.282
iii. *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History* (1985), p. 601

Mind, Overmind and Supermind – Theme I

Debashish Banerji

Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* begins with the aspiration of one person, Aswapati. Aswapati, the king, is an extraordinary person. In Sri Aurobindo’s interpretive world, he comes to us from the Veda and his name, which means Lord of the Horse, partakes of the symbolism of the Veda. Here it stands for divine Force and Aspiration. From the beginning, he is introduced to us as someone who feels his kinship with a divine principle of consciousness. He is, in Sri Aurobindo’s presentation, an avatar, a human being who carries within himself a divine source of consciousness, close to the surface, which begins manifesting itself from his childhood. Quite early, he begins experiencing a powerful aspiration and greater powers of consciousness that are latent in humans, moving him towards a universal identity. These constitute the early yoga of Aswapati and lead him to the experience of the soul’s release, the freedom of the spirit, and a greater operation of his nature through its power of unity with the cosmos. Having attained to this liberation and experienced a perfect creation at the source of all becoming, Aswapati asks himself the question on the origin of the universal condition of Ignorance and Falsehood, why it is that human beings do not find themselves living this divine perfection, or experience an uninterrupted growth of consciousness into liberation, universality and godhood, and why instead, they find themselves in a condition of suffering, discord, failure and eventual death, with no clue about this divine existence which is their source and essence.

Aswapati feels that the answer to this question lies not so much in any error or ignorance of human individuals but in the cosmic condition. There must be some power of consciousness that is responsible for this universal condition of the cosmos and its creatures, including humans. This question causes him to quest beyond his personal needs, to embark on an odyssey through the universal planes of conscious being. This journey constitutes *The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds* in *Savitri*, a large and important part of the epic. What we experience as the cosmic condition is a state in which

beings are fragmented and lead finite lives, bracketed by the two darknesses of pre-birth and death. Each such finite and temporary form of consciousness is discrete and separate from the others, living in a state of multiplicity, without either unity, harmony or integrality. This is a state of discord, a confusion of contested wills – each creature itself carries a multiplicity of unintegrated wills and these are at war within the individual and with others. All these beings cohabit or inhabit concurrently one universe and, therefore, are constantly in conflict or compromise. We find it very difficult to arrive at any happy cohabitation of our planet and we strive through this discord to arrive at some provisional understanding. As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said “War is the father of all things.”

How and where does this condition arise and what keeps it in place? This is what makes Aswapati voyage through the spatial ranges of consciousness, seeking an answer, since he knows that it is possible for human beings to arrive at a consciousness where this is no longer necessary. Yet humanity takes its condition for granted, it has inhabited this cosmos for millions of years and has been stuck as if forever in this condition of Suffering, without ever mirroring the integrality or harmony of Being that Aswapati knows could be our native condition. It is interesting to consider that it is this universal condition of Suffering that drove the Buddha to seek for an answer and it is this same condition that now drives Aswapati, and later Savitri, in the epic *Savitri*. Yet, whereas, Buddha’s solution was one of a freedom from the cosmic condition which left it vacant, Aswapati’s seeking is for a different solution, one which transforms the human condition to a divine life in a divine cosmos. This is what gives its aim to Aswapati’s travels through the universal planes of consciousness, which are called ‘worlds’ by Sri Aurobindo because each such condition of consciousness is an ontology held in place by a combination of forces with a specific modality of being behind them. Each world is a being and an operation of energy and these two share a characteristic relation which defines this world in experience.

Through Aswapati’s travels, Sri Aurobindo describes for us his own explorations of consciousness, since the problem he puts into Aswapati’s mind is that which gave meaning to his own life. Sri Aurobindo asks this question because he realises that human individuals may find various solutions to the problem of suffering on earth; but we cannot find a solution to the problem of harmony on earth unless we discover some universal principle of consciousness, which is absent in our present condition but can be made available and embodied by us. The planes of consciousness through which Aswapati moves, though distinctive and alien to the law of the earth, are nevertheless, also all present here, and experienced, in however attenuated a form, in our lives. So, what we

find in the descriptions of Aswapati’s journey, is the entire spectrum of consciousness that characterises cosmic Ignorance, marked by a sense of radical separation and a discord of wills jostling for supremacy in a single domain. These worlds are seen to form gradations which move through three ascending modes of consciousness, those of Matter, Life and Mind.

Aswapati moves along the ascending gradations of these worlds and as he does so, Sri Aurobindo describes the properties, forces, characteristics and personae that belong to these worlds. First he travels through a world of subtle Matter, then through the worlds of Life, and finally the worlds of Mind. Human beings are constituted of all these modes of consciousness – we are physical beings with a life-force and a mind. Humans have been commonly characterised as rational animals – it is the animal part in us, only partly under the control of the rational part that constitutes our life-being. Yet, it is our mentality which makes us characteristically human. This is what makes the worlds of Mind particularly important in this journey, since human beings find their peculiar vantage from these worlds, and at the same time, these worlds grant greater power and freedom over the cosmos to human beings, though they are also marked by intrinsic limitations. However, Sri Aurobindo’s interest in describing the properties of the Mind-worlds is not limited to their operation in human beings, but opens to cosmic planes of Mind that go beyond the human consciousness and link the human to the superhuman, the mental to the supramental and Divine. It is through the exploration of these mind-worlds, that Sri Aurobindo gives us a map of all the possibilities of cosmic mentality that lie between the human and the Divine, discovering in the process the parting of the ways, that bifurcation of consciousness which Aswapati seeks, where the One loses itself in the fragmentation of Being that has been known as the sacrifice of the Purusha. This is where the integrality is lost, leaving a chaos of multiplicity.

Sri Aurobindo finds this parting of the ways at the heights of the plane of Mind. The planes of Mind, as Sri Aurobindo presents them in the journey of Aswapati, are seen at first to have properties that we are familiar with as the properties of mind. In Sri Aurobindo’s psychology, the modalities of consciousness expressed by Matter, Life and Mind are different in kind, but each being itself an expression of pure Consciousness, are also related through cross-linkages. In the evolution of the grades of Consciousness, each new form of Consciousness that emerges retains a relationship to existing planes of consciousness through similitude. This establishes a cross-linkage by which communication between levels of Consciousness may occur. Mental consciousness, thus, has operations and properties within it that resemble or are near to the properties of Life and Matter. We now know of this layered morphology of mind also through cognitive

brain science. This is at the individual level, but Sri Aurobindo asserts that these individual properties are instantiations of universal planes of Consciousness. Thus, in Aswapati's journey, we find him moving through the planes of Mind and observing in them properties which resemble the material and vital principles. At first he comes across a plane of Mind which seems to operate in fixed habits, in monotonous repetitions, which are stereotyped. These are the characteristics of what Sri Aurobindo calls the Physical Mind. This mirrors or limits in mentality the movements of Matter and the dumb repetitions of its movements in a formulaic fashion.

The next level of mind-consciousness that Aswapati reaches has properties that are more characteristic of the Life-plane, a changeful rash adventurous spirit that lends itself to desire. It supports and justifies through its rationality the irrational drives of the life-impulse for possession, enjoyment, survival, and the carrying out of a desiring will. Passing through this phase, Aswapati discovers a more native action of the Mind characteristic of its primary property of intelligence and rationality. Here the Mind shows itself to be a pure seeker after truth. Though ignorant in itself, it is a seeking for truth and this seeking proceeds through an abstraction of empirical sense-experience into ideas and a process of classification and relation of these ideas leading to the formation of systems. These systems grant the mind a better handle over the world, the human ability to control nature, life and matter.

This brings us to the summit of what we ordinarily consider to be mental in human beings. But other properties of mind are also experienced by humans. We receive in rarer moments of our mental life visionary imaginations, or are uplifted by ideals. These visions and ideals provide our aims for perfection in personal and collective lives. These idealisms come from planes of Mind beyond that of pure rationality which only seeks for the laws that make up this cosmos. Aswapati in his journey through the Mind climbs to these planes which he discovers to be transcendent of subjective differences and universal. These mind-planes send messages that we receive at the summits of our own mental activity.

Going beyond the rational mind, he comes upon a mind-plane which Sri Aurobindo calls the Higher Mind. The grand intuitions received by great philosophers or theoretical scientists come from this plane. World views, metaphysical schemes, grand systemic theories of science that integrate many laws, come from this cosmic plane of mental consciousness. It carries a density of Logos, a sense of the ordering power of an Idea behind the cosmos. But such a single idea remains elusive, rather it inspires the intuitions of a multiplicity of schemata, all generated from this plane of Higher Mind. We realise that

these are all relative schemes, models of an elusive reality; we sense a relativism affirmed by the 18th c. Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant who said that Reality is transcendent to us, we can never know it as-it-is. What is possible to us are mental models of Reality. This correspondence of perceptions fitting into a world picture with predictable laws is accepted as mind's legitimate function. These schema come to us from the Higher Mind.

Higher Mind, however, is not the last bastion of cosmic Mind. Beyond Higher Mind, are ranges of Mind where a rigid necessity governing things through laws or even a probabilistic logic is overpassed in a visionary beauty whose forms are significant with an archetypal order. Aswapati passes beyond the Higher Mind to such a plane which Sri Aurobindo calls the Illumined Mind. But even these planes of significant form are not the Truth-Consciousness, but a world of living symbols that encompass great Truths of Reality. Succeeding this, Aswapati reaches another plane of Mind which Sri Aurobindo calls Intuition. With the plane of Intuition we come intimately near to the Truth. A body of ancient Indian sacred texts that are given the greatest importance are known as the Upanishads. The name "Upanishads" translated, literally means "to sit near." This has been popularly considered to refer to the way the teachings of these texts were transmitted from teacher to student, through the intimate and loving residential relation of the guru and disciple, the guru-shishya parampara. But there is a deeper meaning to the name which takes its roots in the plane of Intuition. It refers to the fact that the Upanishads voice a kind of utterance, which is intimate to the home of Truth. In other words, the languaging of these texts comes from the Intuition plane of Mind consciousness. Thus this plane of consciousness brings us into contact with a knowledge, which needs little or no external aid, not even a significant vision but something closer to a self-evidence, a knowledge by identity. We start entering the home of a Truth where nothing is "outside" or "alien," all is sensed as the One Being there is, an emergence out of the Ignorance in which we find ourselves struggling for knowledge. Our Knowledge is intuited from an intimacy of an experience of the oneness of all things.

The plane of Intuition rises further into the highest summit of mind, what Sri Aurobindo calls Overmind. Overmind is a global mind-consciousness. It has also been called the cosmic consciousness. At the level of Overmind, there is a sense of Spirit, of the One Being that is cosmic and that contains all Reality. Things are known not merely through vision, or through any kind of external contact, or even through an internal contact, as in intuition, but we begin experiencing a knowledge by pure identity.

However, even this mind-plane is a delegate of true spiritual knowledge

because Overmind is an operation where Knowledge and Ignorance meet. This indeed, is the parting of the ways which Aswapti is in search of. This meeting of the ways and parting of the ways of Knowledge and Ignorance is where the One becomes the Many or the Integral becomes fragmented. But if the One can “become” Many, there must be an even greater source of Mind, where the One and Many may co-exist without diminishing each other. If this were not the case then it would be impossible for us to arrive at a divine life upon earth. If there is to be a divine life on earth, it cannot be through the abolition of difference in some great uniformity. It has to be a Reality in which the One can be experienced as infinite difference because it is the Infinite One. This indeed is the truth of a Consciousness beyond the Mind, because the Mind is bound by the law of finites and their non-contradiction. To the experience of the Mind, there is the One on one side and the Infinite on another, the two form exclusive realities. On our side, the side of Ignorance, we experience the Multiplicity devoid of the Unity, on the side of a world-negating Spirit, there is the experience of the undifferentiated One, the erasure of the Many. Both these realities are exclusive and excluding of each other if experienced through the Mind.

At the level of Overmind there is sensed a vast plane of infinite Forces and possibilities of one Reality, but each of these is a figure of that Reality, a representation. These representations at their very heights are the Ideals which form the high goals of human existence and which attract our aspirations. As Aswapati climbs into the lower rungs of the Overmind, these Ideals reduce themselves to two and reveal themselves as ‘the Deathless Rose’ and ‘the Immortal Fire,’ Perfect Beauty and the Will-to-Power as self-exceeding. The Deathless Rose subsumes a perfect order of multiple laws and forces in an effortless creative and miraculous Beauty. This miraculous harmony of all the innumerable seeming contradictions of world-existence is one of the great Ideals that draw the human aspiration. This is what makes Sri Aurobindo assert in *The Life Divine*, “All problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony.” The other primary Ideal is the indomitable Will of the Flame of Divine Aspiration, a will to self-exceeding, Knowledge and “the adventure of Consciousness and Joy.”

These two primary ideals stand at the summit of a sub-plane of the Overmind. Each represents an infinity in itself, as if the entire One. In the Overmind, there are other such archetypes, each of which is a representation of the Supreme Divinity, yet they all work in harmony, possessing an innate sense of the primordial unity of which they are an expression. But they cannot merge back into that Integral Unity to recreate the cosmos. The original Creative Power is above

Overmind in a plane which has generated this Consciousness, this world of Mind with all its planes, at the summit of the cosmos. Thus in the Overmind, we find a multiple reality of Ideals which are independent figures of the One, but working together in harmony.

However, these figures or representations as emanations or projections of Truth, present a symbolic appearance inhabited by a life which does not originate in Overmind but in the Truth of Spirit. Thus an illusory quality haunts the Mind-consciousness. At the heart of the Overmind, there is this negation, a sense of the cosmos generated from a projection. Sri Aurobindo calls this power of projection the Overmind Maya, contrasting it with the creative power of the Truth-Consciousness, which he calls the Divine Maya. The Divine Maya does not proceed through emanations or projections, but rather through manifestations or embodiments of the Truth-Consciousness.

Aswapati rises further into a plane of Overmind which represents this last shell of representational illusion. Sri Aurobindo calls this the Self of Mind. Here a vast sense of Doubt destroys for him the meaning of the entire creation. Even though he has established all the ideals of the Overmind, he feels their irrelevance. The entire cosmos appears to him an illusion. But this is not the highest peak of Overmind and Aswapati rises to the Truth of Overmind, where it is seen a delegate of the Supermind, the Truth or Knowledge-Consciousness. Here, the shell of projected representations is seen to take its origin in the Truth-Consciousness. Here we see why Overmind is the meeting place of Knowledge and Ignorance, which Sri Aurobindo sometimes calls the Knowledge-Ignorance or Vidya-Avidya. There are planes of the Overmind which are more steeped in the reality of the Ignorance where the powers and properties of cosmic being are separate and have their independence and lose contact with each other; and there are planes of the Overmind where these powers and properties experience themselves as representations of the One and are thus in harmony with each other.

Rising beyond Overmind, when one enters the Supermind one finds there this fullness of the integrality of the infinite One. There the One Consciousness has differentiated itself into innumerable possibilities of itself but none of these loses its sense of being the One or its sense of being one with all the others, that also know themselves as the One. A complete integrality characterises the Supermind. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo describes this difference between Supermind and Overmind:

The integrality of the Supermind keeps always the essential truth of things, the total truth and the truth of its individual self-determinations clearly knit

together; it maintains in them an inseparable unity and between them a close interpenetration and a free and full consciousness of each other: but in Overmind this integrality is not there. And yet the Overmind is aware of the essential Truth of things; it embraces the totality; it uses the individual self-determinations without being limited by them: but although it knows their oneness, can realise it in a spiritual cognition, yet its dynamic movement, even while relying on that for its security, is not directly determined by it. Overmind Energy proceeds through an illimitable capacity of separation and combination of the powers and aspects of the integral and indivisible all-comprehending Unity. It takes each Aspect or Power and gives to it an independent action in which it acquires a full separate importance and is able to work out, we might say, its own world of creation. (SABCL, vol.18, p.279)

In these lines we see the primary property of Overmind, which makes it different from Supermind and gives to it the foundation for the world of separation, also known as the Ignorance. Sri Aurobindo continues:

And still we can recognise at once in the Overmind the original cosmic Maya, not a Maya of Ignorance but a Maya of Knowledge, yet a Power which has made the Ignorance possible, even inevitable. (Ibid.)

We see here that it is the Maya, the creative force, the magician energy at the heights of the Overmind which receives its power of Knowledge, of the oneness of all things, from the Supermind. It knows itself to be the parent of the cosmos.

For if each principle loosed into action must follow its independent line and carry out its complete consequences, the principle of separation must also be allowed its complete course and arrive at its absolute consequence; this is the inevitable descent, *facilis descensus*, which Consciousness, once it admits the separative principle, follows till it enters by obscuring infinitesimal fragmentation, *tucchyena*, (Rig Veda, X.129.3) into the material Inconscience, — the Inconscient Ocean of the Rig Veda, — and if the One is born from that by its own greatness, it is still at first concealed by a fragmentary separative existence and consciousness which is ours and in which we have to piece things together to arrive at a whole. ... it is only by the evolution in us of the concealed superconscient powers of cosmic Truth and the Reality in which they are one that the harmony and unity we strive for can be

dynamically realised in the very fibre of our being and all its self-expression and not merely in imperfect attempts, incomplete constructions, ever-changing approximations. The higher ranges of spiritual Mind have to open upon our being and consciousness and also that which is beyond even spiritual mind must appear in us if we are to fulfil the divine possibility of our birth into cosmic existence. (Ibid, p.285)

It is this power of Consciousness which is beyond spiritual Mind or Overmind, in what Sri Aurobindo calls Supermind, where the possibility of a divine life exists because here the one and the many can coexist as powers and possibilities of integrality. The one infinite being knows its oneness and its infinity in itself and in each of its parts. All its parts are the one, each of its parts is all the others and the one itself is all its parts and has entered fully, integrally into all its parts. This is why Aswapati will find that the only way to change the cosmic condition of Ignorance is to call down this Power, this Consciousness of Supermind into the Ignorance and he does this by coming into contact with Supermind, and invoking its Shakti, the Supramental Shakti or Divine Mother to be incarnated here in a human embodied form, so as to change the conditions of the Ignorance, replacing them by the properties and principles of the Truth-Consciousness, or Supermind.

This establishes the relation between Supermind, Overmind and Mind and the reason for the work of Aswapati in *Savitri*. Both in *The Life Divine* and in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo also gives us wonderful descriptions of the ranges of the mental planes above the human mind creating a stair of the levels of Mind reaching up to Overmind and Supermind. It is an opening to these higher mind-planes that makes it a possibility for the human consciousness to arrive ultimately at the fullness of knowledge. In *The Life Divine* he says

.... we perceive a graduality of ascent, a communication with a more and more deep and immense light and power from above, a scale of intensities which can be regarded as so many stairs in the ascension of Mind or in a descent into Mind from That which is beyond it. We are aware of a sealike downpour of masses of a spontaneous knowledge which assumes the nature of Thought but has a different character from the process of thought to which we are accustomed; for there is nothing here of seeking, no trace of mental construction, no labour of speculation or difficult discovery; it is an automatic and spontaneous knowledge from a Higher Mind that seems to be in possession of Truth and not in search of hidden and withheld realities. One observes that this Thought is much more capable than the mind of

including at once a mass of knowledge in a single view; it has a cosmic character, not the stamp of an individual thinking. Beyond this Truth-Thought we can distinguish a greater illumination instinct with an increased power and intensity and driving force, a luminosity of the nature of Truth-Sight with thought formulation as a minor and dependent activity. If we accept the Vedic image of the Sun of Truth, — an image which in this experience becomes a reality, — we may compare the action of the Higher Mind to a composed and steady sunshine, the energy of the Illumined Mind beyond it to an outpouring of massive lightnings of flaming sun-stuff. Still beyond can be met a yet greater power of the Truth-Force, an intimate and exact Truth-vision, Truth-thought, Truth-sense, Truth-feeling, Truth-action, to which we can give in a special sense the name of Intuition; for though we have applied that word for want of a better to any supra-intellectual direct way of knowing, yet what we actually know as intuition is only one special movement of self-existent knowledge. This new range is its origin; it imparts to our intuitions something of its own distinct character and is very clearly an intermediary of a greater Truth-Light with which our mind cannot directly communicate. At the source of this Intuition we discover a superconscious cosmic Mind in direct contact with the supramental Truth-Consciousness, an original intensity determinant of all movements below it and all mental energies, — not Mind as we know it, but an Overmind that covers as with the wide wings of some creative Oversoul this whole lower hemisphere of Knowledge-Ignorance, links it with that greater Truth-Consciousness while yet at the same time with its brilliant golden Lid it veils the face of the greater Truth from our sight, intervening with its flood of infinite possibilities as at once an obstacle and a passage in our seeking of the spiritual law of our existence, its highest aim, its secret Reality. This then is the occult link we were looking for; this is the Power that at once connects and divides the supreme Knowledge and the cosmic Ignorance. (Ibid, pp.277-78)

(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, *Śraddha* at 98302 58723)

Talk to the students of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE), Pondicherry

Surendra Mohan Ghose

[1]

Friends, children of the Mother and standard-bearers of tomorrow, I have been requested to share with you something of your past — it is not only my past, it is yours as well.

I have known Sri Aurobindo — not from the very beginning, although I came not quite in very close touch but near him as a young boy. Gradually some unfolding began also to go on within me. Then I came to know that it was his hidden hand which really guided my steps, without myself knowing anything about it. That is another aspect of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which I discovered, and today I can say that I see that hidden hand again.

One thing I remember now is that at the age of 9 or 10, I was reading in school and that during the summer vacation I went to my maternal grandfather's home where I had been born and brought up. The next day I went to look for boys of my age-group to play with and I saw a village school and went there. There I saw a friend of mine being mercilessly beaten by the teacher — with a cane. He was rolling on the ground, and the teacher was beating him without mercy. As soon as the teacher had left, I collected the boys and girls together and told them, "From tomorrow don't come to this school. Come to my house, I shall open a school there!" As my own tutor was with me, I asked him to start teaching all those boys and girls. So that was my first act of revolt!

Another thing which has been brought to our notice by Girijashankar Rai Choudhury in his book on Sri Aurobindo is that in 1893 Sri Aurobindo came to India, Vivekananda left India and Gandhiji went to South Africa. These three events happened in the same year — and sometimes I feel proud that I was born in 1893!

Some years later the partition of Bengal suddenly came and the agitation

started. Being young we were drawn into it. With turbans on our heads and sticks in our hands we too became volunteers for the meetings. ‘Samitis’ were formed, and our ‘Samiti’ was called ‘Sadhana Samaj’ led by Hemendra Kishore Acharya Choudhury in Mymensingh. It was an open activity — everybody going there for physical exercises — playing lathi, sword, dagger, etc.... But along with this there was a secret revolutionary party founded by Sri Aurobindo himself. We didn’t know anything about it at that time, and our leader Hemendra Kishore was already a member of this secret party. I first saw Sri Aurobindo in Mymensingh — I forget the year — when Bipin Chandra Pal and, as far as I remember, Subodh Mullik were also with him. Sri Aurobindo never addressed any public meeting, never spoke, but he used to be taken there and made to sit; it was Bipin Pal who used to address meetings in those days. Sometimes people would shout, “We want to hear Aurobindo.” I was quite young, but I still remember — and Bipin Pal would say, “Don’t ask him to speak now, try to assimilate what I am telling you; when he will speak, it will be only fire!”

Then I had an opportunity to know that there were some secret activities going on, and I also became a member of that secret revolutionary party. I have never said all this previously, but now I am saying it, otherwise people will forget Sri Aurobindo the founder of the Indian revolutionary party, Sri Aurobindo the first among the Indian leaders, who proclaimed openly, publicly that complete independence was our goal. Other leaders were saying something else: annulment of Bengal’s partition or, in guarded language, without explaining it, *swaraj*. He was the first leader who said openly, “Complete independence, and nothing short of it will satisfy us!” So our present generation as well as future ones should know what is their past, how they are able to enjoy these fruits of freedom today, from where this freedom has come, who gave the call, who started it. And I am one of those still alive, who joined his party. We had to take an oath and write a pledge with our blood — that we would obey our leader’s command, whatever it might be, and execute it. We had to hold the Gita in one hand and a revolver in the other and take the oath. In my turn, after I had taken the oath, I was suddenly asked, “Now that you’ve pledged your life for this, tell us why you want freedom or independence for India.” I was taken aback. It was so obvious — the young mind’s reaction was: why should these foreign people coming from such a distance rule over us? In what way are they superior to us? They are exploiting us. So there was a feeling of hatred. I was told, “Yes all this is all right, but you have to remember one thing more — after Independence, India will have to work for the whole world, the entire humanity. The misery of humanity will not be removed unless India becomes free, independent, and then works for it. That burden of responsibility is also on your

shoulders; you are to remember it. You are not only responsible for your suffering, you are responsible for the suffering of humanity as a whole; you have to remember it.”

The impression these words had on my mind at that time is still vivid. I knew something of the Vedantic *mukti*; it meant this world is nothing but maya; and there were India’s sadhus, sannyasis who knew the way out of it and become ‘*mukta-purusha*,’ free beings. So I thought, “It must be this secret which India knows and which we shall have ultimately to deliver to the world.” It had nothing to do with politics, or economics, or other affairs in our material life. That was the impression — something beyond.

Now instead of going into detail into this direction, I come to another aspect.

We joined the movement in 1908 and then this Alipore Bomb Case took place — in which Nolini was arrested. And Sudhir, from the same revolutionary group, went to Jamalpur where there was some communal upsurge — Goddess Basanti’s idol had been broken by the Muslims and some atrocities also committed, so Sudhir went there — I don’t know if it’s known to all of you, but he actually opened fire with a revolver on a crowd and then escaped and the police couldn’t trace him. And he came to Mymensingh and stayed in the house of my immediate leader Hemendra Kishore Choudhury. Afterwards other people were arrested but he could not be found. Then the Bomb Case began. Before it was concluded I myself had been arrested and jailed for a year — because they had found in my possession an unlicensed revolver. When I came out of jail Sri Aurobindo had already left for Pondicherry.

As regards the secret party, it was so very secret that only a few people knew each other and acted as connecting links. Both my father and I were members of this party, and yet we did not know about each other!

Suddenly some of the key people disappeared from the field and the entire organisation was dislocated, we couldn’t find the links. Outside Calcutta we knew one of our men — in Rangpur — Nolini’s native place — he was the father of Suresh Chakravarty who used to be a member of this Ashram, Ishan Chakravarty. Another of his sons was Prafulla Chakravarty who went with Nolini to experiment with a bomb — the first one they prepared and unfortunately the bomb exploded and he was killed. So we started by establishing contact with him, and then in 1912 I was sent to Calcutta to find out other links and reorganise the party. From that time onwards I took a leading role in the party, along with some other friends, in order to carry on the work not only in Bengal but in other parts of India also. Immediately after that the First World War broke out. Most of you must have read or heard that we made an attempt at a general rising and it failed; we were again arrested and kept as state prisoners.

One curious thing was about Sri Aurobindo's writings — I found something inspiring in them. In those days *The Ideal of Karmayogin* and *The Indian Renaissance* were the two books we used to read. I liked them very much; from every sentence, every word of them one could draw inspiration. And on the last page of *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, Sister Nivedita's 'A Daily Aspiration for the Nationalist' is given. We felt wonderful reading it in those days. She wrote: "I believe that India is one, indissoluble, indivisible. National unity is built on the common home, the common interest and the common love..." I still remember a little of it here and there — "I believe that the strength which spoke in the Vedas and Upanishads, in the making of religions and empires, in the learning of scholars, and in meditations of saints is born once more amongst us, and its name today is Nationalism..."

After the First World War, inside the jail, we were thinking of what we should do after our release. There I was helped very much by Abinash Bhattacharya who was also imprisoned with me — from 1916 onwards.

Abinash was Sri Aurobindo's most devoted, and loyal worker in the revolutionary movement. I didn't know much, but from whatever I could get from his talks, I gathered that he was also touched by Sri Aurobindo's spirituality and yoga. But he was mainly helping Sri Aurobindo in the revolutionary field. After Noren Goswami's confession to the Government, Abinash was not exactly dismissed but his service was dispensed with by the Government, and later he was arrested. That's how we came to be together. It was a great advantage for me — again I point out to you how the Secret Hand was working — the hidden hand of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Abinash was much older than myself, I couldn't have approached people like him in those days.

In those days our literature was confined to Garibaldi's life, the history of the French Revolution, Bankim's novels, Romesh Dutta's novels, and a few other things; the rest were all Ramayana and Mahabharata stories to draw inspiration from.

Under his guidance I read many books — all the 'darshanas', etc. — and finally he told me about Sri Aurobindo. So before we were released Abinash drew my attention first to Sri Aurobindo's last letter to his countrymen — pointing out that a new movement was coming and that it would be such as shown in the letter — and he told me, "Now Gandhi is coming up and now we shall have to go and work among the masses through this Congress organisation. You had better take a decision on these lines." We came out... It'll be very difficult to reach Pondicherry soon! I came here only in 1938 — I'm still in 1920...

I had the unique privilege to see Sri Aurobindo whenever I was here, and to discuss politics which was my only interest and for which I had to pledge

everything. This was also his command, so he had also some responsibility for me. I could go and tell Gandhiji that if he wanted he could come and see him and discuss politics also with him. Once Gandhi had wanted to see him, but Sri Aurobindo had avoided the meeting — but in 1939 he said, "He can come now; whatever political difference there was is no more. He can see me. You may convey this to him." I conveyed it. But that's another unfortunate thing. When I came here in 1939 I had already given, as President of Bengal Congress in those days, notice to the District Magistrate that on such and such a date I would offer Satyagraha in such and such a place; after giving one month's notice, I came here. And here the command was that I should convey Sri Aurobindo's words to Gandhi. So I went from here to Sevagram and told Gandhi and he jumped at the idea. He also wanted to convince me that there was no difference. For three days I stayed with him. He used to have meals with me. But I told him that it must be kept a secret: "Whether you avail yourself of this opportunity or not, the matter must be kept a secret." He said, "Yes. I want to go, you make some arrangement." I said, "I cannot do that because from here I shall have to go straight to my place of Satyagraha, I can't go to Pondicherry now. But I shall write." I sent a message here but the interview didn't take place. I don't know the reason; I was in jail.

I shall not be able to narrate to you everything in sequence. But I can tell you something — Sri Aurobindo's advice, directions, instructions as they come to my mind, I shall disclose them to you.

The order in which I used to see him was: on the first day Nolini used to take me at 11 o'clock, without anybody knowing it, quietly, to Sri Aurobindo's room. At times I found my friend Nirod moving here and there in the room, and Champaklal was also there. The room was the same — the big chair in a corner where he used to sit, and I would sit at his feet. I would tell him about the international situation in the light of *The Ideal of Human Unity*, what was going on in the world and what we expected of it. And he would ask me questions now and then. If I knew the answer I told it to him, otherwise I said I didn't know. Daily two hours, from 11 to 1, I was with him. And at the end, every day, on every occasion, his reply was: "I shall give you an answer tomorrow, after consulting the Mother." Then I would come away. The next day he would give me the reply of the questions I had raised, and then our all-India or internal politics were discussed. Sometimes he used to ask about one or other of the leaders he had known — what was he doing? What was his activity? etc. Then again he would give me the same reply to my questions — "I shall reply to you after consulting the Mother."

On the third day after getting the reply I would talk of Bengal affairs — I

was President of Bengal Congress — Bengal which was undivided then and afterwards partitioned. And on the fourth day Yoga, sadhana and philosophy were the themes, and I put questions. On the fifth day after receiving his blessing I used to leave Pondicherry. That was the order of my meetings, our programme. And he told me, “Don’t come during Darshan time, avoid it.” Apart from this routine, once I had to suddenly come to the question of Partition. I could not adjust myself when this Partition was decided upon — I was Bengal Congress President — agitations were carried on by others, specially Atulya Ghose, Prafulla Sen and others. People asked: ‘Why is the President silent? Why isn’t he saying anything about the Partition? Why isn’t he calling a meeting of B.P.C.C.?’

I went to North and East Bengal and you’ll be surprised to hear that the advocates and others surrounded me and started shouting, “Why aren’t you accepting this Partition?” They were all against me because I was silent. Even then I could not make up my mind. I came here and asked Sri Aurobindo, “What am I to do?” He said, “You cannot resist it. It has come, but don’t adopt any resolution supporting this Partition of India on a communal basis. If India is partitioned, then in Bengal the people who would like to remain in India have a right to remain here: on that basis you may go and adopt a resolution.” And we adopted a resolution on those lines.

After that I received a telegram — Nolini told me it was the first and the last telegram in Sri Aurobindo’s name — saying, “Come at once — Sri Aurobindo.” I came here immediately and met him. I don’t know if I am divulging a secret — I suddenly realise that this is not a closed secret meeting where one may divulge all these things. Very big personalities not only of India but of other countries also are involved. I can only tell you this much that all of us had to suffer for not having listened to Sri Aurobindo’s direction or advice. He sent me back, saying, “Go and tell Gandhi, Nehru, Maulana, Sardar and Rajendra Prasad, that it is for the good of India, and ultimately for the good of the world, that they should act on these lines; and here is an opportunity I am giving them, let them accept and work on it.” I went to Delhi — there was a meeting of the Working Committee of the Congress, everybody said, “A very good thing, very good” — but it was never implemented, and no step was taken to see that it would be. How it got stuck is a mystery. One thing I should mention here that in the first open session of the Congress at Jaipur the foreign policy resolution which was adopted was practically the same draft as sent by Sri Aurobindo. I can’t say that it was the very draft but it was a nearly word for word version that Nehru adopted. It was Sri Aurobindo’s draft, but it was to be kept a secret in those days. So Nehru adopted, word for word, the whole thing, adding a little more to

it to suit India’s foreign policy.

The draft which Sri Aurobindo had made about the integration of the French possessions with India was on this basis that all the French possessions should immediately merge with India, with a right for Pondicherry to maintain its cultural contact with France. Because we did not implement Sri Aurobindo’s resolution a serious problem arose afterwards. To solve it I was asked to go to Pondicherry again by our leaders after 1950 when Sri Aurobindo had passed away.

I told them nothing could be done, still they said, “No, no, you go and see what can be done.” I came here and stayed here for two or three days. Then when I was returning, Rajagopalacharya who was Chief Minister of Madras sent word to my host, “As soon as he returns, ask him to see me.” I went to him. He asked, “What could you do?” I said, “Nothing could be done.” He too had received a message from Delhi to see what I had done. But when I told nothing could be done, he said, “Then go and tell the Mother.” I said, “The Mother doesn’t take interest in politics.” “No, no, you go — take my car and go.” This time I had to tell the Mother and she replied, “You know I don’t take interest in politics.” I said, “That is true; but now it is not my politics or the Government of India’s politics: it is Sri Aurobindo’s! He wanted this to be done and in our stupidity we didn’t understand then. Now these people want to do something on those lines, for which I can expect your blessings.” The Mother kept quiet for some time and told me, “All right, go back. If you receive a telegram from me, come again.” I went back, told Rajagopalacharya what she had told me. “Yes, yes, yes...,” he said. After about a month I received a telegram. I came, saw her here. Then she asked me, “Between certain dates — when will you be able to come to Pondicherry? Somebody will come from France; he wants to have a talk with you.” Then I told Rajagopalacharya that I wanted for some delicate matter a responsible man for consultation and I asked him to tell me when he’d be available and fix up a date and note it down in his diary too; so that I could come on that day. I informed the Mother of this and went back and soon afterwards came again. And the whole integration of the French possessions with India was finalised here.

One important thing, lest I forget. Sri Aurobindo could see my limitations and my ignorance; to deal with me was also difficult for him — I am not so learned a scholar that by his throwing a few hints I would understand things. One day he spoke to me in connection with the international situation; after consulting the Mother he was giving me the reply; he told me, “Look here; before the Second World War the stability, the sense of security all over the world depended on the British Empire. It was the force around which world security moved. As a result of this Second World War, the Empire is in process

of liquidation and it is fast getting liquidated. The whole world will be free — a vacuum in the international leadership will be created. That makes all the difference in studying the international situation with old ideas — because the latter are no longer there. We are not yet aware that the Empire is gone and nothing else has come up to replace it; everybody is free.” He reminded me of this position in 1950, October — my last darshan. This really helped me a great deal to understand the situation then and even today. I feel that it puts to a great extent the international situation in the proper perspective. In *The Ideal of Human Unity* he said, during the First World War, that the total outcome of events was a movement towards a World Government. “It is not only a probability but a certainty,” he said. Today there is no choice before the nations except to come together and set up something stable; otherwise the entire human civilisation, even this planet earth, is threatened in its existence. Therefore the more the nations realise this situation the more their attention is drawn towards the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and towards Pondicherry and Auroville and towards you all.

Thank you very much!

[2]

Friends, I shall first read a quotation of the Rig Veda, from *The Life Divine*, the opening quotation for the first chapter:

“She follows to the goal of those that are passing on beyond, she is the first in the eternal succession of the dawns that are coming,— Usha widens bringing out that which lives, awakening someone who was dead... What is her scope when she harmonises with the dawns that shone out before and those that now must shine? She desires the ancient mornings and fulfils their light; projecting forwards her illumination she enters into communion with the rest that are to come.”

Why I have read this out from *The Life Divine* has a history behind it. As I told you last time, I came to Pondicherry long after Sri Aurobindo left Bengal. I came in 1938 but I couldn’t discuss anything of importance. Next I came in 1939. I discussed with Nolini a question that was uppermost in my mind. *The Ideal of Human Unity* had come out only in the *Arya* monthly; somebody had published it in book form without the knowledge of Sri Aurobindo or the Ashram. So I requested Nolini that it should be printed here in book form for my use in the political field, as one of Sri Aurobindo’s workers. Next day Nolini told me that Sri Aurobindo had said *The Ideal of Human Unity* was being typed out by

Miss Margaret Wilson, the daughter of President Wilson whose private secretary also she had been during the first World War. After reading that book she was amazed that those who like her had been the main actors in that period could not see things so clearly as Sri Aurobindo did from one corner of India, as if they had been happening right before his eyes. She would type it and give it to Sri Aurobindo for correction. But he said that first *The Life Divine* would be brought out in book form and then *The Ideal of Human Unity*. I felt a little disappointed: what was the use of *The Life Divine*? *The Ideal of Human Unity* was the book which people like myself needed. But, well, there was no other way. Then I realised why *The Life Divine* had to come first, because without it his whole ideal of Human Unity would not be understood in its proper perspective.

I have to express my gratitude to Nolini. It was from an article written by him that I came to realise the importance of *The Life Divine*. It was an article in Bengali based on the story of Urvashie and Pururavas in the *Rig Veda*. He started with the cry of Pururavas, addressing Urvashie, “O my dear one, do not forsake me! It is not for my fault that you have to leave me!”

Most of you know the story, I suppose, but I shall give you the gist. Urvashie, due to some curse, came to live on earth; but she wanted to go back to heaven. She came to Pururavas on certain conditions, one of them being that he would never appear naked before Urvashie. So the ‘devas’ and ‘gandharvas’ conspired to give her the chance. One night thieves stole Pururavas’s two lambs and Urvashie suddenly cried out, “There is no man in this house, otherwise they would not have dared to steal.” And Pururavas jumped out of his bed with a spear in his hand; he couldn’t think of his clothes; suddenly there was lightning, and he was shown naked before Urvashie and she began receding. Then Pururavas realised what had happened and cried out to her, “It is not my fault, do not forsake me!” And Sri Aurobindo raised the question: if Veda is eternal universal Truth, what is there in this story? There is apparently no eternality or universality in it! But everything in the Veda is symbolic. And Nolini has written in that article the meaning Sri Aurobindo had given to this story — Pururavas is the eternal man, and Urvashie is the Divine Grace which comes to every man everywhere throughout the ages, but on a certain condition — that man should not take life as it is, as it appears to be. There is something beyond and, to remind man of it, the Divine Grace comes and tries to help him, to go towards that Beyond. But, instead, if man utilises that Presence with his human knowledge and experience, then the Grace recedes, and then this eternal question: “Why have you forsaken me? Life is barren, everything is meaningless. Why shouldn’t I get back all that I have enjoyed?”

Similarly, in politics — now I come back to my subject — what we see on the surface is one thing; but the eternal man is everyone of us and the Divine Grace that comes down to help is constantly working. That is the basis on which the whole of *The Ideal of Human Unity* is written. It is the secret hand of the Divine working through us, without letting us feel that we are being interfered with in our activities by somebody outside ourselves. In our ignorance that secret hand works on. That is how Sri Aurobindo saw the working of it, trying to shape the destiny of mankind towards a certain inevitable goal — which is the ultimate realisation of our inherent unity. It is to be discovered. Today the urge is there, but in our mind, in the intellect the resistance is also there, so the secret hand works in such a manner that we feel that whatever we wanted is being done. I shall give you an example from *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

After the Versailles Treaty, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “You have concluded this Treaty to curb Prussian militarism. But instead what will happen?” He could see how that secret hand was working from behind — he could see all the trends and he interpreted them in terms of political forces, social forces, economic, psychological forces, and then he drew the irresistible conclusion from all those forces that instead of the Treaty curbing Prussian militarism the whole of Europe would come under the heels of Prussian militarism — and how right he was, you have seen. And he developed this point further. In those perilous days, he said, the British people, who were resisting India’s freedom and Independence, would realise that the granting of autonomy, Independence, to India, instead of weakening their imperial power, would be a pillar of strength to save Democracy in this world.

So you see in the passage on Usha I read out, how, one after another, things that were happening were revealed to the Rishi’s vision. Similarly everything can be seen in the right perspective.

I’ll give you a very recent experience of mine. Maharaj Trailokya Chakravarty, popularly known as Maharaj, was the leader of a rival revolutionary group in Bengal — he was the leader of one group and I of another. I invited him to Delhi, and it was a most successful visit from my point of view. Then suddenly he died at night. I thought his dead body should be sent to Bengal and I made the necessary arrangements. There the whole route was lined by not less than 20 lakhs of people, from Dumdum to Shyam Bazaar, and then from there to Calcutta another 15 lakhs of people. I was reminded of this Usha passage. Nobody anywhere remembers Maharaj now — his name is not very prominent today. But he was really a great man. I spent only 23 years in jail, and he had to spend, including the Andamans, 32 years. He was dynamically active, and today’s

people are very very busy with this ’ism and that ’ism and who would now recognise a man who was in those a very respectable leader? But you see how everybody suddenly felt. I interpreted it to many of my friends as the working of the Dawn.

Another example — Orissa receiving the relics of Sri Aurobindo — a real eye-opener! Nandini Satpathy, after her return to Delhi, told me that she had never seen such a crowd in her life. Dr. Mahtab came afterwards and he too told me the same thing. What is that Force secretly working?

Similarly in 1962, when China attacked India, I was talking to our Prime Minister Nehru after he had returned from Ceylon. I said, “Have you seen the people of India rising up and standing like a rock? And under your leadership they are prepared to go to any length?” “Yes,” he replied. I asked, “Did you have any hand in creating this situation? Did anyone of us work for it?” “No.” “Keep this in mind,” I told him. I need not go into further detail, some political complication might come up.

So this secret hand is working, in me, in you, in everyone, to lead us, to guide us to the destined goal...

In 1938 I came here without informing anybody in the political field. But at Madras station I found quite a big crowd. I told them, “Don’t disclose it to anybody, but I am going to the Ashram. I haven’t come here for any politics.” I came to the Ashram, but the Darshan was cancelled because of the accident to Sri Aurobindo. I stayed on. One night a person I had known in Ramnad District came to me and said, “Subbiah has come to see you, he is waiting outside in the street.” Subbiah and I had known each other only by name, not personally. He had already been implicated in the murder case of that mayor whose statue you see now in the park on the beach road — Selvaraju Park. Now he is one of your ministers; a communist leader. My friend said, “He cannot enter the Ashram fearing that the Ashram might get implicated in that murder case.” I came into the street and Subbiah said, “I have already informed all the people that you will come to my house and have dinner with me; please come, they will be also coming.” I said, “How can I, now I am in the Ashram? I can’t do any political work from here!” He said, “No, but these people will come. What shall I tell them?” Then I hesitated and wondered and told him, “You may go now, I shall see what arrangements can be made.” Next morning I sent word to Sri Aurobindo, through Nolini: “This is my trouble, you see; these people have come to know of my arrival and this is what they suggest. What am I to do?” Sri Aurobindo replied: “Take leave of the Ashram, go away and finish your political activity, then come back.” So the next morning I took my leave of the Ashram, saying, “I am now going away!” And then I went to

Subbiah's house; many workers had come, we had dinner and discussions that finished at 1 a.m. After this, another party came by car and said, "You must come with us now. Sri Aurobindo has said you must finish your work and then go back to the Ashram." I said, "All right" and got into the car. Then continuously for three days and three nights I toured all these districts, without a single minute's rest — taking my bath here, breakfast there, dinner at a third place, passing, from village to village. On the third day in the evening I again entered the Ashram as an Ashramite!

Now the next point in the Russia-China rift. It related to my last interview with Sri Aurobindo, in October 1950. I met him, as usual, and on the last day he said to me, "You didn't ask me anything about China" — and really I hadn't mentioned anything about China. It had been in turmoil, the communists had come to power under Mao Tse-tung, and Chiang Kai-shek had been driven out. I could not make up my mind about the importance of what had happened there. So I told him, "Sir, I cannot make up my mind about it." He said, "Keep a very keen, careful eye on China. There are certain forces which might divide China and Russia. Keep a keen eye. There are forces at work, still very subtle, and if they come to the surface, China will be disintegrated one day." I listened. Then he asked me, "Have you read the articles on Tibet, that have come out in *Mother India*?" "No, Sir." "Read them, they are not written by me but they were written on my instruction and I have corrected them."

The next point is Bhriгу's reading on Sri Aurobindo. I believed in astrology, Sri Aurobindo also believed, but I never felt the urge to go and consult an astrologer. There is a part in me that dislikes it. From what I have seen in my life I am telling you the plain truth without exaggerating anything — nothing is '*adrishta*' — 'unseen' — everything is '*drishta*', 'seen'. I need not go to an astrologer to find out what will be my future. My future is in my hands. If I want to do something, and I know how it can be done, no force on earth or heaven can stand in the way. That is what I used to believe. The only thing is, you must know your mind — what you want. If you want to live an honest life in business, yes, you can shape it. And if you want to be a master black-marketeer, that line is also open to you. So, you see, I had no inclination to go to an astrologer; but I had a friend in Delhi who would go to any astrologer who came and he would try to drag me along, saying, "Oh such a great man has come, let's go to him." I never went; but one day I couldn't resist him any more. It was Bhriгу's reading that had been brought. I suddenly decided to take Sri Aurobindo's horoscope and see what Bhriгу had to say. We went. The astrologer brought out the book of horoscopes and read one. It didn't tally; the second one tallied a little, and the third I found tallying exactly with Sri Aurobindo's

life. He went on and on and on. Everything was there, the Mother's coming, even my connection! Finally he said, "After 78 years, when Sri Aurobindo will complete 78 years, he will develop a '*ghrina*' towards his body and then he may leave his body; otherwise death is in his control, he is such a great Yogi." And this was there in Bhriгу's book. Then I became serious. It was also mentioned there, that the Mother or I could perform a certain '*yajna*', sacrificial ceremony, with certain mantras; an elaborate process was given.

After this I wanted to test the astrologer further. My own horoscope was in my pocket. I said, "You find out this one from your book." He said, "No, not today." I said I wanted it there and then: I feared he might later collect information and then say things. I didn't want to allow him that time. Then he said, "All right", brought out his things and started reading. Amazing! There are certain incidents in my life, which today nobody living knows. My mother died at a very early age, I cannot even remember her face. My maternal grandfather had no other children except my mother, and I was the only grandchild, I was never allowed to go to my ancestral home. I was born in Mymensingh and brought up there. I was the only interest in his life. I would join the revolutionary party at a very early age, I would take a vow not to marry — the country would be free when I would be at a certain age at which I would not have time to marry. All these things were there! And also that I had persuaded my grandmother to adopt somebody — it is a fact. Because we had big estates and I left everything behind, so to manage them all I persuaded her to adopt another boy. They would thus be looked after and I would be free for my work. Then in jail there was a hunger strike of 64 days; I gave up even drinking water; and then my connection with Sri Aurobindo. More and more I was puzzled at the reading. That was the year precisely when we formed a committee to celebrate Sri Aurobindo's coming 80th Birthday in Delhi — I was Secretary, K. M. Munshi was Chairman and S. N. Jauhar was Secretary too. We had already started working on the scheme.

After hearing Bhriгу's prediction I came almost immediately to Pondicherry. What to do? I didn't want to mention it to Sri Aurobindo, I was afraid it might work as a suggestion in his mind. I was really afraid, but at the same time I couldn't keep it to myself. So I went to Nolini and told him everything. He asked me to tell the Mother. I did so and then I met Sri Aurobindo; before I could say anything he said, "What have you told the Mother?" I was taken aback. I didn't know I would have to face such a situation. Then I had to tell him. He asked me, "Why didn't you mention it to me?" I told him that I had been really nervous and afraid that it might act like a suggestion, therefore I had consulted Nolini, and he had asked me to tell the Mother. "No, don't worry," he

said. I told him, “I worry because you too believe in astrology.” “No, don’t worry,” he repeated. Now what happened? Here comes in destiny, although I have said I didn’t believe in destiny. You see, the Mother asked me, “Can you get a copy of the whole thing and send it to me?” I said, “Yes, I can do that.” I went back to that man again, and he saw I was interested in the affair. He used to charge Rs. 10 or 15, but now things had to be copied out and given, so he said he would take Rs. 300. I agreed even though I was in difficulty. Money matters — there I am always in difficulty! He gave me a copy, I put it in an envelope to be sent by registered post. Just then somebody came to me from the Ashram. I asked him how long he’d be in Delhi; he said he would soon go back to the Ashram. So I handed over the thing to him to give it to Nolini. This was all between October and December. On December 5, in the early morning I went out to collect funds for the celebration of Sri Aurobindo’s 80th birthday. Every day I used to go early in the morning. That day as usual I went out and at about 7, when I returned, I heard the news that he had passed away — Munshi telephoned it to me. Afterwards I came to know that the gentleman who had taken that paper from me arrived in Pondicherry only after the Master had left his body. So this ends the story about Bhriugu.

As I told you, Sri Aurobindo had asked me to read the articles on Tibet. When I came here in October or November, 1949, he put me another question, “Why have you not asked me anything about the communal situation in Bengal?” I said, “There is nothing to report, it’s all very quiet.” “No, no, be careful; something may happen.” And exactly that year, when I was in Delhi and held the post of President of West Bengal Congress... Oh, one thing I forgot to tell you, you will find it interesting. Although I worked for Congress, I never took any important office of Congress. It is also a fact that I controlled Bengal Congress, but not as an office-bearer. However, when Subhash Bose revolted against Congress, that was my point of difference with him. The manner in which he was working, I warned him, would ultimately lead him to an organisational revolt. He said, “No.” I said, “I’m dead sure; you won’t be able to check your steps.” He denied the danger. I said, “I can’t go with you any longer. I shall not be a party to the organisational revolt with Congress.” And when he revolted nobody was found in Bengal to take charge of its Congress. All the big leaders refused. Then I was approached. I took a little time; meanwhile I wrote a letter to Sri Aurobindo, saying, “This is the situation. I believe in Congress but nobody is coming forward to take this responsibility because of Subhash’s revolt. What am I to do?” I received the instruction that in that case I would have to take the responsibility. Then I made a condition with the Congress people, who had approached me, that I was prepared to take the responsibility

but I must write a letter to Gandhiji, so that I might not be accused afterwards that I had exploited my position as Congress President for my party. I wanted to make everything clear. So I wrote to Gandhiji: “I am prepared to take charge, but you say that Non-violence is the only means by which our freedom can be achieved; I don’t believe in it. You say Charkha is indispensable for our fight for freedom; I don’t believe in it. You say that in order to be a Congress member one must spin regularly; I don’t believe in it. But I believe in Congress and I have signed the pledge and I shall work to maintain the organisational integrity of Congress. So I have made my position clear.” Gandhiji showed this letter to the Working Committee. He said, “This man doesn’t believe in a single item of my programme and you say he is to be the Congress President?” Maulana took that letter from Gandhiji and said he would tackle me. He came to me in Calcutta and said, “What have you written here? *Aré bhai, yé kya likhdiya* [“O brother, what have you written?”]—“*Méré méra dil ka bat likhdiya* [“I’ve written what’s in my heart”] — “*Aré*, you could have said you believe 25% and don’t believe 75% or 50% and 50%, but you have bluntly said you don’t believe anything.” I said, “*Méra dil ka bat ohi hé*” [“This is what my heart says.”] — “No, you will have to take office.” — “All right, but I’ve made my point clear, so that I don’t have to hear later on that I have taken undue advantage of my position.” This point is very important now. I feel sometimes a little ashamed and embarrassed also, but at the same time there is something in me which prompts me to be very outspoken and frank, always, everywhere, and I am known to be of that temperament.

In 1938 I could not see Sri Aurobindo, as I have said; but I received a message from him saying, “You will be shown the Ashram activities, the Mother will send someone to guide you.” I was taken round all the different activities in the Ashram. I saw them all; and the day I was finally to leave the Ashram, a message came, “Write your impression of what you have seen.” I took a paper and wrote down, “I have never seen in my life, anywhere, such a colossal waste!” I put the note in an envelope and sent it. But there was no reference to it when I met Sri Aurobindo.

After my return I asked the people weaving here from where they got the yarn; they said they had purchased it. At that time everybody was wearing dhotis and sarees — they said they had purchased them. Then going back to Calcutta I asked the Mohini Mills proprietor — a great friend of mine — to send some bales of sarees and dhotis to the Ashram. Immediately he sent them. Then to the proprietor of Basanti Mills I suggested to send some bales of yarn. When I came here Sri Aurobindo asked me, “How did you manage to send all this?” I said, “That’s nothing. It was very easy.” He told me, “Don’t

approach anybody in my name or in the Ashram's name for money or things. If anyone wants to give, let him give; don't go and ask." Another thing he said was: "The people outside think that the Mother selects very spiritually advanced people for the Ashram. Nothing of the kind. She selects different types. The worst scoundrel also may be selected. She wants to observe how the Divine works in different types." I don't know whether I am right in disclosing all these things... All these years I've kept these things a secret.

What Sri Aurobindo next told me was also about the Ashram. "The Mother is trying to develop this Ashram into a university; but not according to the common conception of a university. It will be a place where every branch of knowledge in which a man may be interested will be taught, there will be no profit motive. Everybody will be taught to work, not with any profit motive but with a spirit of service." Thus in this connection I was awakening to the meaning of the 'colossal waste' which I had mentioned! Because I had seen everything from the profit motive, I saw so much waste, nothing but waste. I was gradually waking up. Sri Aurobindo was giving a reply to that statement! He added one thing more: "You know we wanted to teach every sadhak here how to spend money. They must learn the use of money. The Mother used to give them Rs. 2 in cash, apart from all the Prosperity things. And you know what they did? They returned the money to the Mother! It was given to them to learn the use of it."

I shall end with these words. Thank you all very much

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A Trumpet Call: its background and significance

Dasharathi Sengupta

"The first really systematic critique of Moderate Politics", writes Sumit Sarkar, "was made in 1893-94 in a series of articles entitled *New Lamps for Old* by Aurobindo Ghosh ... having returned from England after a highly Anglicised education against which he had begun to react sharply"¹.

This sentence contains three observations which are noteworthy. Firstly, Sri Aurobindo had a highly Anglicised upbringing in England itself. (The author, however, does not mention that Sri Aurobindo had a remarkable academic career in St. Paul and King's College at Cambridge). Secondly, he, Sri Aurobindo, had begun to react sharply against this upbringing immediately on his return to India, his native land. This reaction, we all know, was visible in his earnest adoption of Indian way of living², in his devotion to the study of Sanskrit, in his eagerness to study Hindu scriptures and epics, in his easy assimilation of Indian cultural traditions.

Thirdly, it is from the pen of Sri Aurobindo that the "first really systematic critique of Moderate Politics" came out. What does Sarkar mean by these words? They imply that Sri Aurobindo was not historically the first critic of Moderate politics. There were others who preceded him in their criticism of Moderate political attitude and programmes. They criticised, though often indirectly, the politics of 'prayers and petitions', the mendicancy and submissiveness of the Moderates to their English Masters. Bankim ridiculed them in his '*Hymn to the Englishman*'³. His highly satirical piece '*Politics*', distinguishing its canine form from the leonine, had actually targeted the Moderates⁴. Rabindranath, too, criticised such a politics, which depends on the benevolence of the rulers and hankers for their patronage, in many of his articles written even before the birth of Indian National Congress (December, 1885). His was a consistent call for achieving self-dependence as a precursor of, and even as an alternative to, political independence. In one of his articles, published

in 1883, (*National Fund, Rachanavali*, vol.15A) Tagore writes that we cannot attain self-dependence through begging. It is not mendicancy, but self-dependence, which can produce permanently beneficial results. Tagore also fully endorsed Ashwini Kumar Dutta's (another critic of moderate politics) contention that the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress were 'three-day tamasha'. (Dutta was referring to the Amaravati session of 1897, from where he had just returned) ⁵.

Thus the opposition, though not very articulate and widespread was in the air even before Sri Aurobindo arrived on the scene with his pen using it like a rapier to cut through the web of moderate politics that covered and hid the political reality of the Raj. His real contribution, then does not lie in his being the first critic of collaboration and cooperation which the emerging urban bourgeois class offered to the English rulers in the hope of 'soiled crumbs' which England may cast from her table from time to time. [*New Lamps for Old* (2)]. The real and the most valuable contribution of Sri Aurobindo lay in the fact that his was the first 'systematic' critique of the moderate politics, that on its positive side, anticipated the whole course of India's national movement in its subsequent phases.

Sri Aurobindo was systematic mainly because his perspective was holistic. He did not direct his criticism against any particular policy or programme of the moderate leadership. He put under scanner the total moderate approach to the colonial rule, the moderate perception of goals and preferred strategy, of English benevolence. He challenged the adequacy and rationality of some common political assumptions, who looked at the English, their political history and institutions with dreaming eyes, and who aspired at colonial self-government at some distant future under the aegis of the colonial rulers themselves.

Early political writings of Sri Aurobindo presented an alternative approach that was not only holistic, but also refreshing. He demanded complete independence not because it would pave the way for social and economic development of the nation, but simply because foreign rule was unnatural and unjust. It is against the natural law of Liberty and universal justice that one group of people should be made to suffer subjection to another ⁶. As a 'lover of humanity', Sri Aurobindo believed that only equals can clasp each other in a truly fraternal embrace ⁷. The idea of colonial self-government is a contradiction in terms. There can be no halfway house between subjection and independence. There is no intermediate condition in which the blessings of freedom could be wedded with the blessings of subjection. [*Shall India be free?*, *Bande Mataram*, 27 April, 1907]

All political ideas of Sri Aurobindo, the Nationalist, flow from this basic position. His views about the nature and historical role of nationalism, his attitude towards the British rule, his ideas about the form and methods of struggle against it, his strategy of mass-movement and rejection of political elitism implied in constitutionalism – that is, all core ideas related to his radicalism – have their roots in his concept of national freedom and in his aspiration for a free India.

These ideological constituents of Sri Aurobindo's early political writings also weave a pattern underlying the future course of India's national movement. They not only call for self-help on a national scale but also anticipate the Gandhian strategy of controlled mass-resistance in the form of non-cooperation and non-violent civil disobedience. Sri Aurobindo, however, treated the question of violence and non-violence as matters of policy determined by circumstances and not of principle dictated by rigid ethical norms ⁸. In fact, the armed struggle which scores of activists from the Jugantar group, the Chittagong Revolutionaries and the Hindustan Socialist Republic Army (H.S.R.A) initiated had their earliest sanction in Sri Aurobindo's positive attitude towards the French Revolution (1789), in which the common people through "a purification by blood and fire", "blotted out in five terrible years the accumulated oppression of thirteen centuries"[*New Lamps for Old*, 4, 18 September, 1893]. Sri Aurobindo, as a nationalist ideologue, was, in fact, an inspiration for the likes of Boses – Rashbihari and Subhas Chandra.

This summary of Sri Aurobindo's political ideas pertaining to the nationalist phase of his life should be treated as an introduction to his earliest political article – *India and the British Parliament* – published in that historically well-known fortnightly *Indu Prakash*, a bilingual magazine from Bombay (presently Mumbai). The article which came out on 26 June, 1893 also happens to be his first published prose writing. The reason for proceeding from the foliage to the sapling is simple. The basic political convictions of the author of the *New Lamps for Old*, of the editor of *Bande Mataram* and of *Karmayogin* can be traced in their embryonic form to *India and the British Parliament*. But let us first take a look at the historical background that provided the urge for this article written at the invitation from K.G. Deshpande, the editor of *Indu Prakash* (English Section). The article was unsigned. Beneath the title only the word "communicated" was printed.

The Government of India Act, 1858 summarily ended almost a century-old rule of East India Company. India was brought under the direct rule of British Government. All legislative powers with regard to India came to be vested in the British Parliament, elected by and responsible to an adult male electorate that did not include the urban and rural workers. In short, the Parliament was a

mixture of bourgeois and aristocratic elements.

The Government of India was now headed by a Governor-General, also known as Viceroy, appointed by and responsible to the Cabinet. A separate ministry to look after Indian affairs was created. A minister of cabinet rank, designated as the Secretary of State for India, headed the Ministry. Indians were totally excluded from this system of 'governance'. Even the microscopic native elite — educated, urban and loyal collaborators — were kept out as participants or advisers. But the Queen's Declaration (1st November, 1898) did not forget to dangle carrots. Good governance was assured. Progressive association of Indians in the process of government was promised. The emergent indigenous elite pinned their political hopes and aspirations on this promise. Their hopes were raised when the Indian Councils Act (1861), providing for nomination of Indians to the Governor-General's Council was passed. The metropolitan elite began to submit "prayers and petition" for more reforms — political and administrative. They joined hands to form an Indian association that could substitute for and also pose as a national political party. The result of these efforts was the Indian National Congress, which held its first session in Bombay on 30 December, 1885.

The early leadership of the Congress claimed to be national, that is representative of all geographical and demographic sections of India. But it actually represented the emerging metropolitan bourgeois-feudal sections and their interests. Sri Aurobindo had seen through the political character of their members and the nature of their politics very early. In fact, it would be legitimate to infer that he had begun to doubt, even before he reached Baroda, whether the Indian National Congress would be an effective political instrument to liberate her from the colonial political bondage. It lacked number and mass-base. Its goal was limited — progressive political reforms leading to colonial self-government in some distant future. Its methods were collaboration and cooperation within the bounds of law. Firm in its belief that the British rule was Divine Dispensation, the Congress leadership had immense faith in the British sense of justice and in her sympathy for the underdog. It almost worshipped the British Parliament, her liberal leadership and particularly Gladstone who was regarded as the "venerable Bhisma Pitamaha" of British politics. In a later writing, Sri Aurobindo characterised — and rightly too — the liberal leaders of early Congress as "emotionally nationalist, intellectually loyalist".

The earliest and not so vaguely formed political project of Sri Aurobindo was to demolish the credibility of this loyalist leadership, and expose its political timidity and to radicalise the goals and methods of the Indian National Congress. The "*New Lamps for the Old*" was the first hint of what Sri Aurobindo had in

mind. '*India and the British Parliament*' preceded *New lamps for Old* not only chronologically, but also logically. For it is in this article that Sri Aurobindo trained his guns for the first time on some cherished political beliefs of the national elite, known subsequently as the "Moderates".

Two events, significant in the eyes of the Moderates occurred in 1892. One was the passing of another Indian Councils Act by the British Parliament. The second was the chance adoption by the House of Commons of a resolution proposing simultaneous examination in India and Britain for recruitment to the Indian Civil Service (ICS). The Indian Councils Act increased the number of non-official members of the Imperial Council, an advisory body to the Governor-General from 10 to 16. None of them was, however, to be elected either directly or indirectly. The majority of official members also remained unaltered. The Councillors could 'discuss' the budget proposals and put questions, but they were not empowered to move amendments⁹.

This constitutional reform and the resolution adopted by the House of Commons related to the recruitment of ICS trainees elated the Indian political elite that led the early Indian National Congress. They were glad not only because their prayers appeared to bear fruit, but also because their hopes, perception, expectation and their political strategy proved to be right in their eyes. The hope of moderate leaders was that the British rule would guide them to colonial self-government, their ultimate goal or objective. The Indian people, they believed, could rely on the British sense of justice, on their liberty-loving rational instincts and their willingness to meet reasonable demands of their subjects. So the Moderates felt the strategy of constitutional agitation in the form of peaceful propaganda and submissive presentation of petitions was right.

Sri Aurobindo saw through the hollowness of such claims. His knowledge of British Parliament, of British Government and British politics was first-hand, and not based on month-old newspapers. He had watched and observed the realities of English politics at close quarters and with no preconceived ideas akin to those carried in their heads by the contemporary moderate leaders. He did not use spectacles forged by a colonial system of education and knew that the hopes of liberal leaders were unfounded, their political views naïve.

It was these ideas which Sri Aurobindo sought to share with others in '*India and the British Parliament*'. It was a path-breaking article in more senses than one. It mocked the 'chorus of jubilant paeans' that arose from the Indian press, either owned and controlled by the moderate elites or their camp-followers, following the passage of Indian Councils Act (1892), and more particularly after the resolution on simultaneous examination pertaining to ICS recruitment was adopted. Though Sri Aurobindo began the article with a criticism of the

native press 'eager to accept even the flimsiest excuse for deluding itself', his real aim was to expose the Moderate illusions about the nature of British parliamentary system, the reality of British politics and about 'Gladstonian leadership'. He pointed out that the vote in the House of Commons on the subject of simultaneous examination for the Civil Service in India was not a 'solemn and deliberate pronouncement by the assembled representative of the English nation. It was simply a chance vote snatched by a dexterous minority from meagre and listless House'. It was merely a pious opinion and not a mandate of the British Parliament. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for its supporters to overcome the antagonism of the Indian Government, or the opposition from the vast majority in the House of Commons. Sri Aurobindo reminded those who saw in this Resolution and in the Act of 1892 the British eagerness to do justice to India, that the Parliamentary constituencies send their representatives to support Mr. Gladstone and not to do justice to India. The latter, in his turn, would not jeopardise his political prospects at home to serve Indian as against English interests. To expect otherwise is to build castles in the air.

But expectations were always there and hopes would not die down even if disappointment stared at the face. This is because the Indian mind nurtures grave illusions about the British sense of justice, about the democratic rationality of British Parliament and about the greatness of her leadership. These illusions must be expunged from the Indian mind; the press and the public must be made to see things as they really are. This is what Sri Aurobindo proceeded to do in '*India and the British Parliament*', marking the emergence of a novel and fresh voice in Indian politics¹⁰.

Speaking from his personal experience and direct observation, Sri Aurobindo informed his readers (his real target-audience, however, was the Anglophile section of the Indian leaders) that

The English are not, as they are fond of representing themselves, a people panting to do justice to all whom they have to govern. They are not an incarnation of justice, neither are they an embodiment of morality; ... they like to think themselves, and to be thought by others, a just people and a moral people. ... in the dull comedy which we call English politics, Truth and Justice – written in large letters – even the whole of the poster, but in the actual enactment of the play these characters have very little indeed to do.

Sri Aurobindo, unlike the contemporary Indian elite, was no admirer of the British Parliament or what passes as parliamentary system of government. He never looked at the Parliament as an instrument of unqualified rational rule.

Surendranath Banerji, the leader of the Bengal Moderates, had declared unshaken faith in and reliance on 'the liberty-loving instincts of the greatest representative assembly in the world, the palladium of English Liberty, the sanctuary of the free and brave, the British House of Commons'. Sri Aurobindo just dismissed this grandiloquent speech as 'an oratorical frenzy'¹¹.

Gandhi was a known denigrator of British Parliament. He knew that the claim of the Parliament to supremacy was a false claim¹². The very concept of parliamentary sovereignty was misleading. 'Prime Ministers', Gandhi observed in *Hind Swaraj*, are known to have made Parliament do things merely for party advantage'. However, it was not Gandhi but Sri Aurobindo who pointed out this 'unpalatable' truth in print more than fifteen years before *Hind Swaraj* was published. In fact, it was Sri Aurobindo who before anyone else – Indian or English – noted that what passed as parliamentary system was nothing but a Prime Ministerial system of government. 'It is evident', he told his readers, 'that if we wish to obtain any real justice from the British Parliament we must secure the pledges not of individual Liberals but of the responsible heads of the party, ...'. That is to say, the decision-making power lies with the Prime Minister, and not with the Parliament.

What the author of *India and the British Parliament* said about venerable Gladstone bordered on blasphemy – at least for the liberal Indian leaders, who regarded him as a great – if not the greatest – English statesman on whose large-heartedness and honest sympathy they could rely. The main achievement of the former, in the opinion of the young iconoclast, has been the conversion of English politics 'into a huge market statesmen chaffer for votes'. Gladstone is basically a salesman operating in this political bazaar, where 'justice' is a commodity. Indians did not have current coins to buy that commodity, nor could they hope to get it gratis. For Mr. Gladstone, 'the great salesman', could not overcome his political compulsions.

Sri Aurobindo was at his best as a political satirist in his treatment of the Indian Councils Act of 1892 and its defence by Gladstone. The Act was hailed by the Congress leaders as rightly meeting their hopes for gradual advancement towards parliamentary democracy. Sri Aurobindo, picking holes in this estimation, observed that the bill that became Act was 'nothing short of an insult to the Indian people. They had asked for "wheat bread", but were given a loaf made of plaster of Paris. When this sleight of hand was found out and the genuine article demanded, Gladstone answered the critic, "on his honour as a politician that the Executive authority would do its best to make plaster of Paris exactly like wheat". The Indians, however, complained, after the loaf reached

their hands, 'that the proportion of plaster in its composition is extravagantly large'. Sri Aurobindo notes with regret that despite being tricked in such a manner the Indian leaders continued to rely on and appeal to the 'English sense of justice'.

The essential message of the author was reserved for the last part of the article. It would be futile, he stated, to expect that the British Parliament would go out of its way to deliver justice to Indian subjects. Dependence on British patronage and guidance would be deviation on their part from the real and legitimate goal of national renovation. The country could not be renovated if the Indians 'hold out supplicating hands to the English Parliament, like an infant crying to its nurse for a toy, but must recognise the hard truth that *every nation must bear out its own path of salvation with pain and difficulty and not rely on the tutelage of another*' (italics mine).

It would be worthwhile to note that Sri Aurobindo used the word 'salvation' instead of 'freedom' or 'liberation' to denote either a goal or a vital step towards a goal. 'Salvation' carries a wider meaning, and has a spiritual connotation. The senses in which the word is employed are: Deliverance, Preservation, Redemption, Rescue, Saving. It appears that Sri Aurobindo was already thinking in terms of saving the 'national soul' from the all-pervading clutches of the West, to raise its spirit from the depths of miserable torpor and hopelessness into which long foreign rule had pulled it down.

The appeal implied in the last paragraph of *India and the British Parliament* was subsequently broadened and reiterated – and given a more definite note – in *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* years later:

It is God's will that we should be ourselves and not Europe ... We must return and seek the sources of life and strength within ourselves ... First, therefore, become Indians. Recover the patrimony of your forefathers ... Recover the sources of all strength in yourselves and all else will be added to you....

The historical significance of *India and the British Parliament* can hardly be underestimated. It marked an ideological turning-point leading to the emergence of what has been characterised in India's nationalist historiography as the 'extremist challenge'¹³. The challenge was first of its kind against the colonial rule and also to the nationalist leadership engaged in politics of submissive collaboration. It was the initial voice of a new political generation that questioned the legitimacy of British rule motivated basically by commercial greed and hardly informed by justice. The post-Mutiny spiritual and cultural awakening urged

this generation to draw sustenance from India's past, to cast aside the habitual political servility of the older generation.

In *India and the British Parliament* can be found the first adumbration of this new political outlook that breached the ideological confines of outdated liberalism and sounded the advent of radicalism. Its author, Sri Aurobindo, mocked the veneration of the older generation for British Democracy. He was the first to state in clear terms that the parliamentary system was not what it appeared to be and to cast doubt on whether the development of parliamentary democracy under the aegis of Britain would be genuine political progress for India. He was perceptive enough to realise (though he never referred to it directly) that political enslavement is sustained and strengthened by the fear psychology of subjects and their admiration for the rulers, — the combination being a pro-status quo concoction. Sri Aurobindo's earliest political project vis-à-vis the colonial rule in India was to undermine both.

India and the British Parliament sought to show how naïve and misplaced was the faith of Indian liberals in the political honesty of their rulers. At the same time, Sri Aurobindo's tangential reference to the leadership of Parnell where the new generation should place its faith, and what type of politics he thought was suitable for India. He reminded his readers that unlike the Banerjees and Gokhleys, the Irish people did not appeal to the English sense of justice. They built under the leadership of Parnell a strong Irish party with a purely Irish policy to force Gladstone to meet Irish grievances. What Sri Aurobindo was suggesting through this remark was simply this: The Indians also should build up a party that was both national and nationalistic, neither comprising a microscopic elite nor serving only sectional interests.

K G Deshpande, the editor of *Indu Prakash*, was delighted by the content or theme of *India and the British Parliament*, as also by its contemporary relevance and literary quality. He was also quick enough to perceive the historical significance of the article, and did not want the questions it raised to run into oblivion. Hence in the next issue of *Indu Prakash* the following note by the editor appeared under the heading *India and the British Parliament* :

Under the heading we had a communication from a very able writer in our last issue. Our readers must have been struck with the tone and *conclusions* (italics mine) of the article. We shall be very happy to receive any communication from the readers on the subject. Meanwhile we are trying to get a series of articles on the question and the one implied therein *as to where we are drifting and in what direction our political should lie. This last article will thus be a kind of trumpet note*¹⁴ (italics mine).

The phrase ‘a kind of trumpet note’ carries a double significance. Deshpande suggests, in the first place, that *India and the British Parliament* is a call for battle, for this is what a ‘trumpet note’ is supposed to be. The article calls for a redrawing of battlelines and for a new form of politics. Secondly, the words ‘trumpet note’ also appears to be an illusion to a well-known Biblical story in which the blowing of seven trumpets by seven priests brought down the impregnable walls of Jericho¹⁵. Deshpande seems to be confident that in Sri Aurobindo his journal *Indu Prakash* has found a trumpet-blower heralding an initial assault on ‘the walls of the Anglo-Indian Jericho’¹⁶.

The editor’s confidence and expectations were not misplaced, nor did Sri Aurobindo disappoint him. Just a month after his note was published, the first instalment of *New Lamps for Old* appeared in *Indu Prakash* (7th August, 1893), marking the emergence of radical nationalism on India’s political horizon.

Notes and References

Quotations used in this article but without any note or reference are from *India and the British Parliament* by Sri Aurobindo.

1. *Modern India* (1985), Ch.III, p.97
2. *Sri Aurobindo Proshongey* (in Bengali), by Sri Dinendranath Roy draws a fine portrait of Sri Aurobindo of his early Baroda days.
3. *Lok Rahasya*, Bankim Rachanavali, vol.II
4. *Kamalakanter Daptar*, (Musings of Kamalakanta in translation), Ibid.
5. Quoted in Sumit Sarkar, p.98, Ibid
6. *Shall India be Free, Bande Mataram*, 1.5.1907
7. *Swaraj and the Muslims*, Karmayogin
8. *Morality of Boycott, Bande Mataram*, SABCL, vol.I, p.124. See also Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* (On Non-violence)
9. *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, p.4, DD Basu, Prentice-Hall, 1994.
10. For the full text of *India and the British Parliament*, see CWSA, vol.I, *Early Political Works*
11. *New Lamps for Old* (5), *Bande Mataram* (*Indu Prakash*, October 30, 1893)
12. Gandhi, MK, *Hind Swaraj*, Ch.V
13. *The Extremist challenge*’ is the title of the famous work of Amalesh Tripathi.
14. *Indu Prakash*, 3rd July, 1893
15. *The Old Testament, The Book of Joshua*
16. A phrase used by Sri Aurobindo in the last sentence of the first instalment of *New Lamps for Old* (7th August, 1893)

Sri Aurobindo and the Hooghly Conference

Trija Roy

In the long poem written by Rabindranath in laudatory admiration of Sri Aurobindo, he brought out the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo’s fighting spirit in the freedom struggle of the country.

That is the finest gift of the Almighty –
Complete right for the country you demanded
In unshakable hope, and in a language
Lit up in the glory of truth and unwavering faith

.....
Is that the reason why he placed in your right hand
In fond yet demanding affection, the lamp
Ignited by intense sorrow, the light of which,
Like the polestar, pierced the darkness of the
Country and set it aflame? Let victory be yours!

(An unworthy attempt by the author at translating that masterpiece written in Bengali)

Exactly two years after it came out in a journal, the words of admiration expressed by the poet in his lone voice reverberated in a thousand voices when Sri Aurobindo was felicitated at the Provincial Conference held in September 1909 which he came to attend in the town of Chinsurah in Hooghly.

In 1909 Sri Aurobindo was known as the kingpin of Bengal Nationalist party and a revolutionary leader who propagated the doctrine of complete independence of India. This noble and daunting task to accomplish which he lived and which was partly revealed to the people, during his forty years’ of stay at Pondicherry bears no contradiction or inconsistency with this phase of his life. An in-depth evaluation of his activities enables us to realise that the

political life of Sri Aurobindo was really a definite chapter of a much bigger scheme of things which was a prologue to his great revolution of integral yoga.

As yet we have not been able to elevate ourselves to the realisation of this consistency, but have we been able to appreciate the role of his direct revolutionary works for the country as well? Today we have to agree with pain that there too has remained a void.

In the present article there is little scope of discussing that role of Sri Aurobindo, yet since he attended the Hooghly Conference in one phase of the freedom movement, we can recall his role therein by quoting from the writings of Rameshchandra Majumdar, the eminent historian.

A short while after he accepted a service at Baroda, the few articles that he wrote in *Indu Prakash* published from Bombay under the title *New Lamps for Old* voiced for the first time protests against the views and line of action of the Congress. After that when he came to Bengal permanently and took part in active politics, he wrote a number of essays in the journals *Jugantar* and *Bande Mataram* and gave definite directions to the freedom movement in an entirely novel way. ...

I have expressed my opinion more than once that Sri Aurobindo was the forerunner of both the methods by which our freedom struggle proceeded and as a result of which we gained independence. The two ways I spoke of were Bengal's doctrine of revolution and the non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi. Many do not believe that Sri Aurobindo was the pioneer of revolutionism. But the best proof of it is Sri Aurobindo's own admission. Then again the various stages of the non-cooperation movement that Mahatma Gandhi indicated had been explained in great detail a good thirteen or fourteen years earlier. His essays on this were published in a booklet entitled *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*. Yet Mahatma Gandhi mentioned the names of Thoreau and Tolstoy as its originators but did not take the name of Sri Aurobindo. That is why many people of the country do not know this. The Congress, for the first time, proclaimed the demand for complete freedom in the Lahore Conference in December 1929, but much before that Sri Aurobindo had given his call for this ultimate objective time and again. Many of us, therefore, do not know about the nature and extent of Sri Aurobindo's contribution in the freedom struggle of India.¹

Rameshchandra Majumdar drew our attention to the novelty of the thoughts and deeds of Sri Aurobindo but we have also to bear in mind the ideal which Sri Aurobindo set before us regarding independence. He sought to make us think

why independence is needed, for whom it is needed and where independence will take India to.

The entire life of Sri Aurobindo is an example of boundless development. That is why his political thoughts and sociological concepts assumed newer forms alongside the progress of his sadhana. We, however, wonder why we were unable or did not try to comprehend, not only at that time, but also now, what he spoke of the ideal of independence and indicated ways to achieve it in 1908 while deeply involved in active politics.

According to Sri Aurobindo

Without political freedom the soul of man is crippled. Only a few mighty spirits can rise above their surroundings but the ordinary man is a slave of his surroundings. ...

So too spiritual freedom can never be the lot of many in a land of slaves. A few may follow the path of the yogin and rise above their surroundings, but the mass of men cannot ever take the first step towards spiritual salvation. We do not believe that the path of salvation lies in selfishness. If the mass of men around us is miserable, fallen, degraded how can the seeker after God be indifferent to the condition of his brothers?²

Sri Aurobindo did not eye spiritual salvation within the confines of narrowness. He wanted political freedom because that would open the possibility of spiritual freedom. He took up his assigned role at the very outset of the journey of his trampled brothers towards that goal. While playing that role he did not make his ideal small, insignificant or commonplace even in those days of agitated turmoil.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo

Swaraj is the direct revelation of God to this people, — not mere political freedom, but a freedom vast and entire, freedom of the individual, freedom of the community, freedom of the nation, spiritual freedom, social freedom, political freedom.³

Not only that, political freedom is necessary for India to play the specific role assigned to her in the process of evolution of the world. In the words of Sri Aurobindo

God has set apart India as the eternal fountain-head of holy spirituality, and He will never suffer that fountain to dry. Therefore Swaraj has been revealed to us. By our political freedom we shall once more recover our spiritual freedom.⁴

Setting up the divine life in this ruthless earth which was the aim of his lifelong sadhana needs spiritual freedom and India which would provide the leadership in that spiritual revolution has to discharge the noble responsibility through political freedom movement. Unless we keep this in mind we would not be able to understand Sri Aurobindo's actions; we are apt to assess him wrongly. The harmony that encompassed his entire life will remain beyond our vision and just as we could not avail of the full opportunity of his presence in our political field, in the same way we would commit an error in evaluating his contribution.

Keeping this aspect of Sri Aurobindo's political personality in mind, we may discuss the background of the Hooghly Conference. It can be said that a new chapter in the history of Congress began with the famous Surat Conference in 1907. From the doctrine of appeals to the declaration of self-assertion Surat was a milestone. The Moderates, for the first time, got direct opposition from the Nationalists and there was a rise of Nationalist force. It was merely a span of two years between Surat and Hooghly. But there was a sea-change in the political history of the country in these two years. That change is the history of the waning of moderation and proliferation of the nationalist forces despite all obstacles.

Before the Hooghly conference, the earlier provincial conference was held at Pabna. There also the Moderates tried to subdue the Nationalists in many ways. In this conference, presided over by Rabindranath, the Nationalist mood finally held sway although the recorded resolution went in favour of the Moderates.

The extremists ... eventually agreed to the Moderate resolution being passed on condition that Aurobindo was allowed to speak, and to state that this agreement to the Moderates' resolution was not to be constructed into an abandonment of their own individual ideas of self-government.⁵

Soon after the Pabna conference the nationalist movements suffered a serious setback. Sri Aurobindo was imprisoned in May. He was released after a year's confinement, barely four months before the Hooghly conference. There was a momentous change within the country in this one year. In order to appreciate the backdrop of Hooghly conference a recapitulation of the incidents becomes imperative.

Sri Aurobindo in his Uttarpara Speech said

When I went to jail the whole country was alive with the cry of Bande Mataram, alive with the hope of a nation, the hope of millions of men who

had newly risen out of degradation. When I came out of jail I listened for that cry, but there was instead a silence.⁶

Much later while recollecting the condition prevailing in the country at that time, Sri Aurobindo said

When he came out from jail Sri Aurobindo found the whole political aspect of the country altered; most of the Nationalist leaders were in jail or self-imposed exile and there was a general discouragement and depression, though the feeling in the country had not ceased but was only suppressed and was growing by its suppression.⁷

Sri Aurobindo confronted this helpless situation. He brought out two journals – *Dharma* in Bengali and *Karmayogin* in English. By being personally present at various meetings he tried to get over the situation. Under such circumstances we may have a look at the feeling of the country towards Sri Aurobindo at that time – especially of the younger generation – and the outlook of his opponents in the political field.

The younger generation, the students in particular, accepted Sri Aurobindo with warmth and sincerity. Contemporary documents remind us that he became the leader of their heart. A full page report entitled '*Aurobindo Ghosh*' was published in the journal *Bharati*. We come to know from that that the students of Calcutta went to see Sri Aurobindo the day following his release from jail.⁸ About three months later

A band of young men assembled at no.6 College Square to offer their felicitations to Aurobindo Ghose on his attaining his 39th year. They presented him with cloth, sweets and fruits. The ceremony was often interrupted by cries of *Bande Mataram* and 'long live 'Aurobindo Ghose'. He was also presented with an address which set forth the services he had rendered to the country in developing the national consciousness and setting out clearly the national ideal.⁹

But not everybody had a similar outlook. The Government, that is the British rulers at that time, saw him as a dangerous man. Lord Minto, the Governor-General of India, wrote to Lord Morley, Britain's Secretary of State for India, on 14 April 1910, "he is the most dangerous man we have to deal at present".¹⁰ That was but natural. But the way a particular section of his countrymen thought about him must also be looked into.

The *Daily Hitabadi* of 8 September 1909 wrote

We never lose sight of the fact that we are people subject to the English ... So we are in every way dependent on the English Government, and cannot boycott it as Arabinda babu suggests, and indeed it is never possible for us to do so.¹¹

This is not an isolated example. The *Dainik Chandrika* of 30th August 1909 writes,

Babu Aravinda Ghosh is, through the medium of his paper *Karmayogin*, pointing out to the people of this country the path of Extremism. He preaches to his disciples the doctrine of complete independence of India gained in dreams, and puts up before them the imaginary existence of an independent India having nothing to do with the British. ... Those who wish for self-government under British supremacy must keep themselves aloof from Arabinda and his preachings.¹²

Such indeed was the view of a section of influential people of the country when Hooghly conference was in the offing. According to Sri Aurobindo, 'The conference at that time was a very tame affair. There was nothing to do but pass already framed resolutions. Nobody put in even an amendment'.¹³ On top of that Hooghly was even more backward. Prof. Jyotishchandra Ghosh wrote, 'Hooghly was to Bengal in those days what Surat was to Bombay – an out-and-out sleepy hollow with no political life in the district at all'.¹⁴ Under such a situation, a deep-rooted conspiracy was hatched. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote in *Dharma*,

I came to know from reliable sources that a few ardent well-wishers of the country tried secretly to prevent Sri Aurobindo Ghosh from being elected a delegate in the Hooghly conference by any of the District committees.¹⁵

Not only this, we come to know from the diary of Jyotishchandra¹⁶ that it was so arranged by the Moderates in charge of organising the Hooghly Conference that professors and teachers were left out, students lost right to serve as volunteers and a volunteer force was raised with merchant office employees and shopkeepers.¹⁷ Sri Aurobindo wrote

The current year is the juncture between the past and the future. The future

of Bengal depends to a large extent on the outcome of this conference. ... Under such circumstances those who are ready to sacrifice their life for the sake of the country, those who do not know what fear is, who do not know and recognise none other than Mother Bengal and the Almighty, must come forward, or else the future of Bengal will be engulfed in gloom. If we are able to save the face of the country, preserve the future aspirations of India in the provincial conference then the road will be clear to a large extent.¹⁸

He was not merely giving directions through his writings, the country found an extraordinarily courageous leadership. We learn from the writings of Prof. Jyotishchandra Ghosh who was actively associated with this conference that Sri Aurobindo arrived in full strength to tackle the conspiracy of the Moderates.

Alone and single-handed, Sri Aurobindo was called upon to break the clique of the Moderate caucus who had combined to prevent even Sri Aurobindo being returned as a delegate and was using unfair means to chuck out men of pronounced nationalistic views from the list of delegates and return their own men from all districts. Sri Aurobindo struck out the age limit of 21 for delegates from the delegation certificate issued by the Reception Committee, printed the certificates for his own party ... in direct violation of the Risley circular.¹⁹

We may recall that according to Risley circular of 1907, participation of students in political conferences was prohibited. In the Pabna conference held in the earlier year 'teachers posted at the doors prevented students from entering'.²⁰ In Hooghly conference he arranged for the election of students as delegates in direct contravention of Government directive. Jyotishchandra writes further

(Sri Aurobindo) advised nationalist professors to break the Risley circular and preside at meetings to elect delegates and finally advised his Nationalist followers in Hooghly to organise a students' volunteer corps in open protest against the rules of the Reception Committee which refused to enlist students even as volunteers. ... He also revised the Draft Resolutions of the Reception committee, printed his counter-resolutions against each of them and circulated it to the Nationalists through the columns of the *Karmayogin*. Thus organised, he went to attend the conference.²¹

The result of Sri Aurobindo's endeavour was that the assembly at the Hooghly

conference was 'the largest ever attending a conference'.²² And Sri Aurobindo came to attend the conference even as the representative of students from a few places. 'Arabinda Ghosh attended as the elected delegate for Uttarpara and Diamond Harbour and for the students of Hooghly and Chinsurah and the senior students of Calcutta'.²³ The attempts of the Moderates were foiled. Sri Aurobindo arrived at the Hooghly conference with the respect and dignity of a leader.

There is no information from any source whatsoever as to whether Sri Aurobindo ever came to Chinsurah before this conference. Neither did he come to Chinsurah after the conference. Devotees and those who rely on documents are keen to know the auspicious date and time on which Sri Aurobindo set foot at Chinsurah and how long he stayed there. For quite a long time 6th September was known to be the date of his auspicious visit. There was hardly any scope of doubt on this assumption because Prof. Jyotishchandra Ghosh, who was well known as 'Mastermoshai' in Chinsurah and nearby localities and who was present in person at Chinsurah Railway Station to welcome Sri Aurobindo indicated '6th September 1909'²⁴ as the date in one of his writings. For quite a number of years he attended meetings on this date held in the very room where Sri Aurobindo, on his arrival at Chinsurah, took his seat. This report appeared in daily newspapers where 6th September had been indicated as the date.²⁵ Sri Ganganarayan Chandra wrote, '6th September was a special day in the active life of Mastermoshai. On that day Sri Aurobindo was to arrive at Chinsurah to attend the Provincial conference'.²⁶

Admirers of Sri Aurobindo in the locality accepted the date indicated by Jyotishchandra which was but natural. However, in course of collection of detailed texts and documents on Hooghly conference it came to light that the conference was held on 5th and 6th September and there arose the doubt. In that eventuality, did Sri Aurobindo arrive on the 6th, i.e the final day of the conference? All records and documents received in this connection led one to the conclusion that 6th September was not the date of his arrival. Let us go through all that is recorded as the dates of Hooghly conference in the authentic biographies of Sri Aurobindo.

a) In the '*Chronology of Sri Aurobindo's Life*' published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, we find 'September, Leader of the Nationalists at the Bengal provincial Conference, Hooghly'.²⁷

b) In all the editions of AB Purani's *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* only the month of September is mentioned, no date is given.

c) KR Srinivasa Iyengar, in the first edition of his famous book *Sri Aurobindo, a biography and a history*, wrote: in September 1909. In the

1972 edition, he mentioned 6th and 7th Sept as the dates. In the 4th edition (1985), however, he indicated 5th and 6th September as the dates of the Hooghly Conference (p.383). Is it on account of the report published in *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research* in December 1983?

d) Rishabchand also mentions 6th and 8th September in his book *Sri Aurobindo: His life unique*.

e) Girijashankar Roychoudhury in his book *Sri Aurobindo O Banglar SwadeshiYug* (p.794) mentioned 6th and 7th September.

There is no use lengthening the list, but it can only be said that none established the date firmly, and those who indicated 6th and 7th, also did not provide any proof of the dates in support of their contention and the writings of all of them were written many years after the conference. Even Jyotishchandra in his eminently famous book *Life and Work of Sri Aurobindo* did not mention any date of the Hooghly provincial Conference anywhere. He simply wrote '... in the coming session of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Hooghly, in September 1909'.²⁸ We have to bear in mind that the book was written in 1927; it was first published in 1929 and the second edition came out in 1951. No amendment was made. Furthermore, no date is mentioned in the part of Jyotishchandra's diary which has been published. We find there: 'In that year Bengal Provincial Conference is scheduled to be held at Hooghly in September'.²⁹ According to Harinarayan Chanda 'respected Jyotishda wrote these much earlier'.³⁰ In 1957, i.e. 48 years after the conference was held, Jyotishchandra first mentioned 6th September in one of his writings.

Let us now turn to contemporary journals and periodicals and government documents. What we get here is as follows.

a) *The Bengalee* writes in its 2nd September issue, 'This year's Bengal Provincial Conference is going to be held at Chinsurah on 5th and 6th September'.

b) The Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal apprises the Secretary to the Govt. of India, Home Department, through a telegram dated 10.9.1909 that 'Provincial Conference was held at Hooghly on fifth and sixth September'.³¹

c) The report dated 8.9.09 of an informer code-named 'L' says 'The Bengal provincial Conference that met on 5th and 6th instant ...'.³²

d) The Bengalee informed its readers on the 2 September 1909: 'For the convenience of the delegates and visitors, the East Indian Railway authorities have arranged to stop the 7up Express train at Chinsurah and to run a special train from Bandel to Howrah at 9p.m. on 5th and 6th September next'.

e) In the detailed report of the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, we

- get: i) 'The Conference was opened at Chinsurah on the 5th September ..'
 ii) 'On the 6th the Conference reassembled at 2 o'clock'.³³
 f) In *Dharma* (a Bengali journal edited by Sri Aurobindo) under the title 'News' we find: 'Bengal provincial Conference was held in Hooghly last Sunday and Monday'.³⁴
 g) *The Bengalee* (September 8, 1909) wrote that the conference met on 'Sunday and Monday last'.
 h) The report of *Amrita Bazar Patrika* corroborates Sunday and Monday.³⁵

That 5th and 6th September 1909 were Sunday and Monday respectively can easily be known. From all contemporary reports therefore it can be said with certainty that the Bengal Provincial Conference of 1909 was held on the 5th and 6th September and not on 6th and 7th September.

The question, therefore, is when did Sri Aurobindo arrive to attend the conference? That he was present in the conference on both the days has been established by the documents of the period as also by the reports of some of those who attended the conference.

- i) Arunchandra Dutta of *Prabartak Sangha* wrote, 'I saw Sri Aurobindo here only for two days – during the Bengal provincial Conference at Chinsurah'.
 ii) There are two reports to establish that Sri Aurobindo was present on the first day of the conference.

- i) *The Bengalee* reports on September 7, 1909 about the first day's proceedingsn '...by 12 noon the place was crowded to overflowing Both Babu Surendranath Babu Arabinda received animated welcome'.³⁶
 j) The report dated 20th September 1909 from the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal says: 'The Conference was opened .. on the 5th September ... Arabinda Ghosh attended as the elected delegate...'.³⁷

We can therefore be sure that Sri Aurobindo was indeed present at Chinsurah before 12 noon on the 5th September 1909. Yet the question remains, did Sri Aurobindo leave Chinsurah on September 5 and come back on the 6th? That was not possible because all the reports corroborate the fact that the Subjects Committee had met on the night of the 5th and again on the morning of the 6th and Sri Aurobindo participated in both the meetings.

So the only question which remains is when exactly did Sri Aurobindo come to Chinsurah and on which date?

In this matter, Jyotishchandra's reminiscences help us most because among those who were present at Chinsurah Railway Station to receive Sri Aurobindo

he was the only person whose writings are available to us. Jyotishchandra recalls 'Sri Aurobindo ... will arrive at Chinsurah with 200 nationalist members from Calcutta by a train in the evening'.³⁸ The word 'evening' is crucial. After the lapse of many years, one might err as to the date but the impression of a particular time, like morning or evening, is likely to remain vivid in one's memory. We can therefore proceed giving due importance to the word 'evening' mentioned by Jyotishchandra.

Granted that Sri Aurobindo arrived at Chinsurah in the evening, it can be reasonably presumed that it must be the 4th evening when he came with such a large number of delegates. An irrefutable support is found in an announcement appearing in *The Bengalee* of Thursday the 2nd September 1909, relating to the arrangements that had been made for the reception of the delegates which said, 'Volunteers will be in attendance at Chinsurah EIR station, Hooghlyghat EIR station and Naihati EIR station on the evening of the 4th September and on the mornings of the 5th and 6th September next'. Reception by volunteers had been contemplated for only one evening, that is, the evening of 4th September; for the other two days it was in the morning.

In the light of the above facts, we can be reasonably certain that Sri Aurobindo did not come to Chinsurah on the morning of the 6th September, and since it is equally certain that he arrived before 12 noon of September 5, the most acceptable conclusion is that he arrived at Chinsurah on the evening of the 4th September 1909.

In connection with the arrival of Sri Aurobindo at Chinsurah, Narendranath Bandopadhyaya hailing from Chandernagore wrote his book '*Rakta Biplaber Adhyay*'. It was so arranged with Jyotish Babu that Arabinda Babu would secretly come to Chinsurah and stay in the interior part of the house of Debendranath Mandal. On the day of the conference Narendranath would have gone there in the morning and the course of action would have been decided. But since Aurobindo Babu made his arrival public, the earlier settled arrangements had to be changed due to various reasons.³⁹

Jyotishchandra gave an account of the arrival of Sri Aurobindo in public, 'on behalf of the residents of Chinsurah we have decided that he would be led to the house of Sri Debendranath Mandal in a huge procession. Accordingly about five thousand of us arrived at the station leading the National Volunteer' Corps with utmost discipline'.⁴⁰

After the train arrived at the up platform, the captain of the National Volunteer' Corps saluted Sri Aurobindo and saw him disembark the train. Soon the platoon crossed the overbridge and went out of the platform.⁴¹ The procession reached the Dutch villa at the scheduled time without any trouble whatsoever.⁴²

The house of Debendranath Mandal was known as the Dutch villa. Sri Aurobindo and his companions were first received in the well-furnished library room, known as Umesh Pathagar, which was a part of the drawing room of the house. Jyotishchandra writes, ‘So far as I remember, Sri Sukumar Mitra, Sri Rajat Roy, Bar-at-law and Deshbandhu Chittaranjan’s younger brother Sri Bhupati Das, Bar-at-law were the companions of Sri Aurobindo’.⁴³ We learn from the autobiography of Dr. V V Athaley, who was a direct witness to the happenings of that time that Sri Aurobindo and his followers stayed in the Dutch villa. ‘The leader of the Extremists was Aurobindo Ghosh. He was given an independent room. The others occupied the open spaces in the bungalow.’⁴⁴

Regarding the lodging arrangements for the representatives, the Bengali journal *Dharma* wrote before the conference that ‘The Reception Committee members are trying their best to see that the delegates are comfortably lodged. We hope that with the care taken by them there would be no problem of hospitality to the guests. Babu Bholanath Dhar, the worthy son of Babu Ashutosh Dhar of Calcutta, would leave his new garden villa situated near Chinsurah station for the stay of the delegates. This house has just been built and not used yet. ...The reception halls of the houses of Babu Surendranath Mandal and Babu Anantanarayan Sil, residents of Chinsurah, and the thakurbari (the house for worship of deities) of the late Chandranath Sil of Hooghly would be made available for the use of the delegates’.⁴⁵

According to the journal *Dharma*, Sri Bepin Behari Mitra, a lawyer of Hooghly, was the President of the Reception committee.⁴⁶ Narendranath Bandopadhyaya wrote, ‘Rajendranath Mukhopadhyaya (Michhri babu) of Uttarpara was the nominated President of the Reception committee. His address was printed and the money donated by him was deposited in the appropriate fund. Yet, since he was an extremist, there was an attempt at the last moment to remove him. Consequently there was a commotion, yet at last it was he who read his address’.⁴⁷ Jyotishchandra wrote, “Sri Suren Mukhopadhaya of ‘Rayer Bede’ who was appointed the secretary of the Reception Committee on behalf of the Chinsurah Congress Committee ... was known in politics as a leader of the Moderates’.⁴⁸ Although Jyotishchandra made us know Suren Mukhopadhyaya as ‘well-known and particularly sympathetic to us’⁴⁹ yet we hear a somewhat different tone after the conference was over in respect of the arrangements made – ‘Not much attention was paid by the higher-ups of the Reception Committee towards food and lodging of the representatives. The volunteers under command of the Reception Committee also appeared to be somewhat indifferent’.⁵⁰

The venue of the conference was the compound of ‘Gauranga Natyamandir’

in Madhabitala⁵¹ situated near Dutch villa where Sri Aurobindo stayed. The venue was mentioned as ‘Gauranga Natyasamaj’,⁵² ‘Gauranga Natayamancha’⁵³ by some. A huge pandal was erected on the ground. The long passage leading to the pavilion and the entrance to it were tastefully decorated with flags, festoons and foliage and presented a gay appearance long before the time fixed for the gathering.⁵⁴ The conference was spread over two days. However, according to Narendranath Bandopandhayaya, the Subjects Committee meeting was held elsewhere. ‘The conflicts between the Moderates and the Extremists reached its peak ... as the situation was extremely contentious, the Moderates arranged for the sitting of the committee at the residence of the president of the main conference.’⁵⁵

The clashes between the Moderates and the Nationalists could not come out in the open that much glaringly though ideological conflict between them was the backdrop of this conference. ‘Proceedings were orderly ... There was warm discussion regarding the number of delegates to be elected for Subjects Committee ... Proceedings of this Committee are said to have been stormy’.⁵⁶ according to the telegram dt. 10 Sept 1909 of the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal.

‘There were some 500 delegates – most from Calcutta, fewer from the districts’⁵⁷ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, however, reported in its Sept 7 issue that ‘There were about 700 delegates from all parts of Bengal’⁵⁸. ‘All told, there were about 1500 people present. Most were young, and the large showing from eastern Bengal gave Sri Aurobindo’s party ‘a strong numerical majority’”.⁵⁹

‘The proceedings commenced with the singing of Bande Mataram, after which Babu Bepin Behari Mitra, Chairman of the Reception committee, read his speech which was moderate in tone. ... Babu Baikunthanath Sen, a lawyer of Murshidabad, was the elected President of the conference. He delivered a moderate address ‘... In the afternoon the question of the election of delegates to sit on the Subjects Committee was considered, and provoked a heated discussion. It was at first proposed that of 15 delegates selected to represent Calcutta, 10 should be Moderates. The Nationalist party demanded ... that they should be adequately represented ... Arabinda Ghosh suggested, as a compromise, the appointment of six Nationalists and nine Moderates and this was agreed to.’⁶⁰ Immediately afterwards differences of opinion becoming sharper, a situation was reached towards a breakdown of further deliberations, when Sri Aurobindo proposed to set up a joint committee to resolve the differences.

The meeting of the Subjects Committee continued until late Sunday night,

and was not concluded until Monday morning. As a result the second day's proceedings were delayed until 1.30 pm.⁶¹ The first three draft resolutions were accepted without any significant opposition but on the fourth draft resolution on the issue of 'boycott' the Nationalist youths became agitated and kept yelling at their opposition. The situation went out of control of the President. Even Surendranath Banerjee who tried hard to control the people failed.

The tumult continued. When such was the situation, Sri Aurobindo stood up before the riotous assembly holding up his right hand. He pacified everybody and explained why he was accepting the draft resolution of the Moderates. He then asked his followers to leave the place silently and they did so, obeying him in disciplined silence as if in a single body. Many years later Sri Aurobindo spoke about the incident thus: 'In the conference there was a great row and confusion ... Banerjee tried hard to control the people but failed and became furious. Then I stood up and told them to be silent and to walk out silently. I said that whatever agreement we came to, we would inform them. Everybody became silent at once and walked out.'⁶²

There was a short discussion on a question on National Fund after Sri Aurobindo's speech and then with a vote of thanks to the chair the conference came to a close.

Sri Aurobindo was felicitated with great warmth and grandeur on this 2nd day of the conference. On 5th September 'he entered the pandal garlanded and escorted by his guard'⁶³ and proceeded towards the dais. The Govt. report says further, 'Babu Surendranath Banerjee and Arabinda Ghosh were each presented on arrival with a printed address, ... Arabinda Ghosh receiving the warmer welcome.'⁶⁴ The telegram of the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal also says, 'Surendranath Banerjee and Arabinda Ghosh were both present and the latter received warmest reception on sixth.'⁶⁵ Motilal Roy who was present in the conference wrote, 'with an overwhelmed heart and glorious feeling we witnessed Sri Aurobindo's arrival and taking his seat on the dais and we greeted him with our silent reverence. The country saw in Sri Aurobindo that day as the angel of liberation. A new nation that day greeted the undisputed leader of the freedom movement in Bengal from the core of their grateful heart.'⁶⁶ The *Hindu Patriot* wrote on 9 Sept 1909, 'The ovation given to Arabinda Ghosh was a sufficient indication of the rampant influence which the Nationalists commanded at the meeting and which they intended to use to their advantage.'⁶⁷ Amarendranath Chattopadhyaya recalls, 'It was clear in the Hooghly Provincial Conference that Surendranath was on the way out, it was Arabinda who was the leader, the overriding influence of Arabinda Ghosh was revealed there.'⁶⁸

This influence was the result of his political farsightedness and his effort to

forge a unity. He had the support of the majority of the representatives in the conference, yet he could establish an ideal which would remain a lesson to be learnt at all times by those who seek unity.

Before commencement of the conference while he was sitting in his room in Dutch villa, his compatriots were putting pressure on him to trounce the Moderates by any means, fair or foul. Sri Aurobindo listened to them calmly and then replied, 'Do you have any idea what great work Surendranath Banerjee and his Moderate party have done in Bengal politics... I shall not be a party to bringing down their downfall by foul means. We shall fully respect the Moderate party and place before the conference, in clear terms, our stand of Independence. If our ideal is sacred and lofty and just, the conference cannot but give its verdict in our favour. If you do not accept this policy I shall withdraw from this conference.'⁶⁹ Such sense of value to the opposition and its leader is an object to be learnt at all times. We are amazed as we peruse confidential documents: 'All reports agree that Arabinda Ghosh had a strong numerical majority in the gathering inside the pandal; but he kept his forces in order and refrained from pressing his amendments to the resolutions for the sake of securing a united congress.'⁷⁰ His efforts to forge a unity while steadfastly adhering to his ideology can best be appreciated when he spoke for a brief period on the final day of the conference. The fourth draft resolution was put up by Maulvi Dedar Bux. Sasankajivan Roy seconded the proposal. Sri Aurobindo said '... you are aware of the fact that we have a certain theory of politics, a certain view with regard to political action in this country. We hold that as we have no effective share in the administration of this country, and our position is such that there is no means of having even our prayers and petitions listened to, therefore the only effective course for us to take is, as far as possible, to withhold our cooperation from the Government, until they give us some effective control over the administration and some constitutional means by which we can bring the voice of the people and the weight of public opinion to bear upon the management of the affairs of this country.... Last year at Pabna a resolution was passed which gave room for our views of politics and it was our intention to press this resolution upon the Subjects Committee. But we found that by pressing this point upon the Committee the hope of a united congress and the unity of Bengal and this provincial conference might be seriously imperilled. Now we are extremely anxious for the unity of the Congress. We are anxious we should not throw any obstacle in the way of any hope union, therefore we have decided not to press that amendment in the Subjects Committee, nor to bring forward our full amendment with regard to reforms. At the same time we want it to be clearly understood that in taking this course we are not for a moment receding from the policy and

line we have taken up.’⁷¹ He made the subject clearer in his editorial in the Bengali journal *Dharma* titled *Hooghlyr Parinam* (Outcome of Hooghly) : We lost patience in Surat conference. Even after bearing with the unfair and unjust doings and insultations by the ‘Bombay’ leaders we lost our cool and could not reap the benefit of our self-restraint. In order to atone for that failing, although we were stronger in Hooghly, we accommodated all the capricious demands of the weaker Moderates only to ensure that the feeble hope of unity is not destroyed by our folly and with that sole objective in mind saved the Provincial Committee from a premature death.⁷² It was indeed the role of Sri Aurobindo that saved the national movement of that time from utter peril. In this context it is worth recalling one of his writings written a few months later: ‘Till such time all of us hold the same view, we are agreeable to accept that the objective of the congress is self-governance. But you do not have any right to command us to endorse that objective in our personal capacity, to deviate from the path of truth and propagate an ideal which is untrue. It is Independence that is our objective ...’⁷³

That the outcome of such efforts of Sri Aurobindo in forging a unity was clearly felt in the political field at that time may be appreciated from the comments of the journal *The Nayak*, Calcutta of 8 Sept 1909: ‘An examination of the resolution discloses the wholesale change which has come over the spirit of political agitation in this country in the last two or three years as the result of the teachings of the Extremists. The present-day resolutions have no longer the old form of wailing and appeal. A new spirit of self-reliance is apparent. Thus Moderates as a matter of undisputed fact have come gradually, if unknowingly, to conform to Extremist principles.... This is certainly a matter for joy to Extremists and to their leader Sri Aravinda Ghose...’⁷⁴

By logical reasoning such an outcome of the conference would not have been possible. If we bear in mind the background of the conference and the activities associated with it, we must come to the conclusion that some such influence came into play which was beyond the perception of the common man. In this connection we may recall the words of Jyotishchandra, ‘To those, who had anything to do with the conference, it was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that a great spiritual force was working there and everyone felt assured that all opposition, in the face of that force, was bound to break down, no matter whether it came from the bureaucracy or from the moderate cliques.’⁷⁵ Sri Aurobindo was the receptacle of this spiritual force. Jyotishchandra wrote, ‘The success of the conference was ... marvellous, all being magnetised by his very presence.’⁷⁶ Not everybody could have had the realisation that Jyotishchandra had, but they also expressed their opinion, the strong personality

of Babu Aurobindo Ghosh.⁷⁷ The hypnotising impact of that personality can be gauged from the experience of Motilal Roy, ‘the assembly was still and silent. There was no sound, save the mesmerising voice of the speaker. The breeze seemed to have stopped blowing by the charm of the speech of Sri Aurobindo which attracted everybody.’⁷⁸ That voice did not belong to the mundane world. A heavenly fountain found its spontaneous release through the spoken words of Sri Aurobindo.⁷⁹

Bearing in mind that this was a political conference where every moment was turbulent with din and bustle, where contentious issues were frequently turning towards a confrontation, we wonder how it was possible for such an atmosphere to prevail there! It was possible because to the person who was having the leading role here politics had no room for conceit and vanity. He was assuming this role by a divine decree. ‘I had the command to do politics.’⁸⁰ Nothing would be excluded in the order of the yoga that would be revealed through him; all life would become yoga. The perception that it is possible even to go for politics while remaining firmly absorbed in true consciousness sprouted in this political conference which was restless and turbulent. In his speech Sri Aurobindo said, ‘Mr. President and Members, I desire to say two words before I say anything further – I entreat you to hear me out without expressing or giving any sign either of approval or dissent. I pray you to hear me in perfect silence.’⁸¹

He was able to let silence descend in a political conference. Four decades later Manindranath Nayek, the revolutionary, recalls, ‘When he speaks with his right hand raised, complete silence prevails in the conference site.’⁸²

Hooghly conference witnessed Arabinda Ghosh ‘a dangerous person’ for the British India. This was the last and biggest political conference he attended before ensconcing himself in the seclusion of his tapasya in Pondicherry for the difficult preparation on his way to transforming this earthly life into a life divine. This conference saw Sri Aurobindo the man with a practical sense, knew Sri Aurobindo who endeavoured to forge unity, felt the presence of the yogi Sri Aurobindo in the role of the worker he played. In this political stage where he played the lead role one gets a glimpse of the spiritual strength which was the true foundation of the dream of the Divine life that he dreamt of, and set his goal to make it happen in this harsh world and transfixing his vision to that goal he was to leave his dear motherland Bengal in a few months’ time.

Taking all these aspects into consideration Sri Aurobindo’s brief stay at Chinsurah on the occasion of the Hooghly Conference has been a special chapter in his life’s history.

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(Translated from the original Bengali by Sri Kalyan Mukhopadhyaya)

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as Personnel Managers

Anurag Banerjee

(I)

What do we mean by personnel management? As the very name suggests, it deals with the ‘people’ dimension in management. In the words of Ivancevich and Glueck: ‘Personnel/Human resource management is the function performed in organisations that facilitates the most effective use of people (employees) to achieve organisational and individual goals.’¹ Every enterprise aims to utilise the services of its employees and whenever required, training is rendered to them to develop their skills and motivate them to enhance the levels of performance with the view to ensuring that they remain faithful to the organisation and work to accomplish the goals of the organisation. Human resource management or personnel management consists of four functions: acquiring, developing, motivating and retaining human resources. The function of acquisition begins with the planning for the number of personnel required and ends with staffing. The function of development includes training of employees, management development and career development. The function of motivation includes ascertaining the motivational needs of the employees and ways to motivate them. And the function of retention provides a conducive work environment to the personnel so that they remain attached with the enterprise.

In the bygone eras, there were two approaches to human resource management — the Scientific Management Approach and the Human Relations Approach. Both these approaches had appeared and disappeared in the past century. In recent times the Human Resource Approach has gained prominence as it treats the goals of the enterprise and the needs of the employees as being mutual and compatible. Initially employees were treated only as a factor of production (those who have studied Economics are aware that labour is among the factors of production) but research has enabled us to observe that if the

employees are treated as resources then both the enterprise as well as the employees would mutually benefit. Hence the employees are looked upon as assets, so time and resources are 'invested' in them by the enterprise to reap better results in the near and long term. So the human resource policies that are framed are employee-friendly. Good personnel policies enable the enterprise to keep its employees satisfied and motivated. It is precisely due to the satisfaction they get from their work and work-environment that people don't leave their jobs despite getting sometimes a smaller amount of money as remuneration. Good personnel policies lead to better employee-performance, cost-savings, maintenance of uniformity in administration across different departments and better control and coordination. However, it should be remembered that the policies framed must be free of any sort of discrimination.

But it is a well-known fact that no matter how much one tries, one can never fully satisfy an individual. This is because man happens to be an insatiable being. Even good human resource policies may not be able to satisfy and motivate him. Moreover, just as four utensils, if kept together, would bang against one another, similarly an individual may clash with his colleague or colleagues. The problems of disharmony emerges from the perception of unsolved discord and 'the instinct of an undiscovered agreement or unity' to quote Sri Aurobindo.² So in order to overcome all shortcomings of personnel management, a yogic or spiritual approach should be adopted while dealing with people.

In an organisation, there exists a variety of employees. Some are industrious, some are comparatively lazy, some are highly efficient while some may be slow at work. Every employee comes from different social backgrounds but they work together as per the organisational culture to fulfil the goals of the organisation. It is the duty and responsibility of the leader to see to it that they work for the achievement of the organisational goals. In the Ashram too, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother chose disciples who represented symbolically the difficulties which existed in the outer world for the purpose of conquering them for the work of transformation. The Mother has said that each inmate represented an impossibility to be resolved for the accomplishment of their work. Some of these disciples had difficult characters; some were excessively sensitive, some were hot-tempered, some were extremely impatient and so on. Hence Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had to work, as leaders of the organisation, for their inner transformation. While the disciples could meet the Mother and talk to her directly about their problems, they couldn't do the same with Sri Aurobindo. With Sri Aurobindo the only medium of communication was the correspondence they had with him. As we know, both verbal and written communication plays a very pivotal role in any enterprise. Communication

facilitates the development of plans for the accomplishment of organisational targets, utilises manpower and other resources in the best possible way, enables employee appraisal and performance evaluation, generates motivation among the subordinates and above all, facilitates control over the organisation. So, as the leader of the organisation, Sri Aurobindo had to perform all the aforesaid functions through the medium of correspondence. Endurance is said to be the most important quality a leader should possess and both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were epitomes of endurance. If one reads the letters Sri Aurobindo had to write to his disturbed disciples to calm them down, one can sense the pain he had to undertake to maintain harmony in the Ashram and manage the swinging moods of his followers.

Let's take the example of Dilip Kumar Roy, a creative genius who was exceedingly sensitive so much so that a mere criticism could make him decide to leave the Ashram. Sri Aurobindo who had profound love and affection for him would write innumerable letters to him to persuade him to change his decision. To illustrate the point of how Sri Aurobindo excelled as a personnel-manager, certain passages from the letters he had written to Dilip Kumar are quoted beneath.

•'It is quite impossible for me to dismiss you or to consent to your going away like this from us. If the idea of this kind of separation is possible to you, for us it is inconceivable that our close relation should end like this. I had thought that the love and affection the Mother and I bear to you had been made evident by us. But if you say that you cannot believe in it or cannot accept it with the limitations on its outward manifestation that not our choice but inexorable necessity imposes on us for a time, I do not know how to convince you. I could not believe that you could really find it in your heart to go or take such a step when it came to the point. As it is, I can only appeal to you not to allow yourself to be swept away by this attack, to remain faithful even in suffering to your soul that brought you here and to believe in our love that can never waver.'³

•'Do not believe all you hear or allow yourself to be driven off your balance by falsehoods of the kind that have been retailed to you. You do not belong to yourself and have not the right to do what you propose to do: you belong to the Divine and to myself and the Mother. I have cherished you like a friend and a son and have poured on you my force to develop your powers — until the time should come for you to make an equal development in the Yoga. I claim the right to keep you as our own here with us. Throw away this despair — rise above the provocations of others — turn back to the Mother.'⁴

So we observe that Sri Aurobindo was not a leader who kept himself aloof from the problems and difficulties faced by his disciples, on the contrary, he was an excellent personnel manager.

However, one must always remember that love and sympathy cannot always be the best medicine for labour-trouble. At times it is essential to be strict and take disciplinary actions for the benefit of the organisation. Unlike Sri Aurobindo, the Mother could be very strict if the situation demanded and she successfully managed all the labour problems that had taken place in the Ashram during and after Sri Aurobindo's lifetime. While Sri Aurobindo's approach was more of a persuasive nature, the Mother's approach was like a direct action. Not only did she solve problems but at times dissolved them.

When the Ashram was formally established in 1926, there were around 24 inmates. This number went up to 36 in 1927 and to 80 in 1928. And by the end of 1951, the number of inmates stood at 800. The followers who joined the Ashram came from different social, cultural and economic backgrounds and as a result their views and opinions towards life and other things varied to a great extent. It is a well-known fact that whenever there is any kind of difference, disagreements emerge. In the corporate sector as well as in a household, we can observe that when a member is given less, he feels that he has not got what he actually deserves and when others receive more than him, he feels that these 'undeserving individuals' have, in some way or the other, manipulated and therefore got more than him. So he creates unhappiness in his mind and loses not only the sense of harmony but all the joy life has to offer. So irrespective of the nature of organisation, the leaders or managers have to face troubles from the personnel.

To give an insight of the nature of personnel problems that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had to face, a passage from Sri Aurobindo's correspondence with Nirodbaran, one of his foremost disciples who later became his attendant and scribe, is quoted. On one occasion, Sri Aurobindo wrote to him: 'I am all the time occupied with dramas, hysterics, tragic-comic correspondence (quarrels, chronicles, lamentations)... It is not one or two, but twenty dramas that are going on.'⁵ About the same problem he writes in another letter: 'The human vital everywhere, in the Asram also, is full of unruly and violent forces — anger, pride, jealousy, desire to dominate, selfishness, insistence on one's own will, ideas, preferences, indiscipline — and it is these things that are the cause of the disorder and difficulty in the ... Asram work.'⁶

If we ponder for a while, then we would observe that even we have to face similar troubles in the ordinary course of life and work that Sri Aurobindo and

the Mother had to face in a spiritual organisation. At the end of the day, it is not the nature of the organisation that matters but the nature of the difficulties which count and no one can escape from these universal difficulties. Sri Aurobindo rightly points out the true cause of all difficulties. He writes: '...as each worker wants to do according to his own ideas, on his own lines according to what he thinks to be the right or convenient thing and expects that to be sanctioned. It is one of the principal reasons of difficulty, clash or disorder in the work, creating conflict between the workers themselves, conflict between the workers and the heads of departments, conflict between the ideas of the sadhaks and the will of the Mother.'⁷ As the number of workers in an organisation increase, all sorts of influences, which did not exist at the time when the organisation was smaller in size, emerge. And that's why many people prefer to work in smaller enterprises. After all, according to some, small is beautiful.

When we are working with our colleagues, we have to contend against not only with the difficulties of our personal nature but also with many other problems for we are then representatives of the entire group. An individual member is subject to the influences coming from all others and as a result such influences overpower him in case he is not strong enough to overcome them. We've seen cases where a person who was singularly responsible for the impressive growth of the department he was associated with, was caught taking bribe from external parties; thus he lost his job and all respect. Such a tragedy reminds us of the following lines of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*:

'Heaven's call is rare, rarer the heart that heeds;
The doors of light are sealed to common mind
And earth's needs nail to earth the human mass,
Only in an uplifting hour of stress
Men answer to the touch of greater things:
Or, raised by some strong hand to breathe heaven-air,
They slide back to the mud from which they climbed;
In the mud of which they are made, whose law they know
They joy in safe return to a friendly base,
And, though something in them weeps for glory lost
And greatness murdered, they accept their fall.
To be the common man they think the best,
To live as others live is their delight.'⁸

So what should be the foremost principle of personnel management in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? The answer is: one must not be

judgmental. It is not that we are supposed to turn our eyes away from the harsh truth about the nature of the person concerned. We have to observe in a calm, sympathetic and impartial manner and then come to the conclusion. A strict disciplinarian action may not always work; on the contrary, at times it might cause more harm than good, so an attitude of leniency, tolerance and patience is advisable. That's why Sri Aurobindo has advised us to control the tendency to criticise and condemn individuals unnecessarily and find fault in them since such attitudes create a bad atmosphere not only for the critic but for others as well. Since man is not free from faults there should not exist in him the eagerness to find faults with others and condemn them. Even if he has to be judged the judgment should not be done in a censorious spirit or harsh manner.

Whether we revolt or judge, we do it on the basis of the vibrations we receive not from our inner self, but from the ego. Suppose some particular person who happened to hold a superior position in the hierarchy has bullied X during his early days in the organisation. X could never forget him so when he got the opportunity he took his revenge in such a way that the bully lost his job. Similarly, a manager might fire an employee on receiving a complaint against him without even trying to find out the truth behind the complaint. All such decisions are taken not by the brain but the ego. And that is why the Mother has offered an ideal solution by analysing the human nature and the problems it face. According to her: 'In human life the cause of all difficulties, all discords, all psychological sufferings, is the presence in everyone of the ego with its desires, its likes and dislikes... The ego reacts to everything that displeases it, starts an inner storm that rises to the surface and spoils all the work. This work of overcoming the ego is long, slow and difficult: it demands constant alertness and sustained effort. This effort is easier for some and more difficult for others.'⁹ And who can forget Sri Aurobindo's immortal words: 'Ego was the helper, ego is the bar.'

There is another principle to personnel management in the light of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It is necessary to present a good example of your own self before your subordinates. How can one expect his subordinates to be good if he himself is anything but good? The manager must set a good instance always and practise the virtues he demands from those personnel who he leads or manages. We have read in the biography of Alexander that he never allowed his soldiers to do any work which he himself could not do. Every manager should keep in mind this true story. We ask our subordinates to execute a particular task and when he is unsuccessful, we rebuke him and cause him to lose all the satisfaction related to the job. But before assigning any functions, we must ponder if we ourselves are capable of doing the work we have assigned or

planning to assign to our subordinates. Such thoughts can automatically lead us to the prospective solutions to all sorts of personnel problems.

And finally, here is a gem of an advice from Sri Aurobindo, the master personnel-manager: 'None should regard or treat another member of the Ashram as his subordinate. If he is in charge, he should regard the others as his associates and helpers in the work, and he should not try to dominate or impose on them his own ideas and personal fancies, but only see to the execution of the will of the Mother. None should regard himself as a subordinate, even if he has to carry out instructions given through another or to execute under supervision the work he has to do.'

'All should try to work in harmony, thinking only of how best to make the work a success; personal feelings should not be allowed to interfere, for this is a most frequent cause of disturbance in the work, failure or disorder.'¹⁰

As a personnel manager, the Mother never focused on the negative aspects of an individual but emphasised on his positive aspects only. Here is an anecdote to illustrate the Mother's style of personnel management. In the Ashram there was an old inmate whom everyone found to be absolutely useless, quarrelsome and crazy. One of the inmates asked the Mother: "Why do you keep him?" She replied: "But he makes such nice envelopes! No one makes envelopes as well as he does." She also used to ask people not to look for flaws in others but to concentrate on the flaws they themselves had for its rectification would lead to the emergence of a greater harmony.

When we talk of personnel management, there is another aspect which we need to focus on. It is 'grievance'. There is a distinction between dissatisfaction and grievance; the former occurs when a person is unhappy with his job or when he finds that the enterprise is not recognising his potentials. When he conveys his dissatisfaction to his colleagues, the dissatisfaction becomes a complaint and when this dissatisfaction is brought to the notice of the management, the complaint becomes a grievance.

When an employee takes his grievance to the management, the management must evaluate it to understand its root cause. In case no corrective action is taken by the management, the morale of the employee declines and as a result his performance gets affected. If more and more employees get dissatisfied, it can lead to industrial unrest as well. Therefore, the management must show genuine concern and while dealing with the grievances must adopt a humanitarian approach for such grievance has great importance as far as the career and future of the employee in the enterprise are concerned.

What are the causes of employee grievances? There are different factors which include dissatisfaction with his remuneration, disappointment from denial of a promotion, disharmonious relationship with the superior or colleagues, unhealthy working conditions, assignments which neither match the skill nor the aptitude of the employee and lack of adequate opportunities for future growth to name a few.

The procedure of redressing grievance varies from company to company. Often the employee takes the help of the labour union but such an approach is not always advisable. There should be an open-door policy and free channels of communication by the virtue of which any employee can come and express his grievance to his superior. One must keep in mind that in today's time, the enterprise cannot afford to lose able personnel due to grievance so it must try to keep its employees motivated and satisfied. An informal culture and reduced bureaucracy is suggested in organisations to facilitate a smooth employee grievance redressal procedure.

Grievance leads to conflicts in case there is an incompatibility in the aims and expectations of the management and the employees. There should be goal congruence and expectation-match between the enterprise and its employees which would, in turn, result in the smooth functioning of the enterprise.

However, it should be remembered that a conflict can be both good and bad depending on the circumstances. It is said that a constructive conflict can turn out to be productive and beneficial for the enterprise. For example, if no challenging queries are posed to the management then some of its counterproductive decisions might affect the organisation as well as its overall performance. Hence, the managers or supervisors must accept the inevitability of conflict and recognise those grievances which are capable of aiding organisational renewal.

There are a number of ways by which conflict can be dealt with. Those who detest confrontations leading to anger and unpleasantness adopt the strategy of 'Avoidance' in which they attempt to withdraw from the given situation than to face it. In other words, the less dominant party withdraws from the conflict. Such individuals are generally sensitive to their own feelings and that of others. There are some who suppress their own needs, feelings and views and by sacrificing their own interests, tries to resolve the conflict in an amicable way. Such people adopt the strategy of 'Accommodating' or 'Smoothing'. Again, there are some people who view conflict as a competition where there has to be a winner and a loser. Therefore they impose their interests and ideas onto others by using various methods like bribery or punishment. Such a strategy is called a 'Win/Lose' approach in which inter-personal relationships suffer to a

great extent as one party takes an upper hand. At times, an external party is involved to resolve the conflict in an impartial way and the decision of this external party is taken as final. Such a strategy is called 'Arbitration'. Again, an outside party acts as a mediator and helps the two parties to arrive at conciliation by steering them towards a mutually acceptable settlement. This strategy is called 'Mediation'. In the strategy of 'Compromise', both the parties meet 'half-way' to arrive at an agreement and each party makes certain compromises to reach an agreeable settlement. Finally, there is the 'Problem-Solving' strategy in which the needs of both the parties are defined and attempts are made to meet those needs equitably with due respect and support the values of both the parties. Hence, a win-win solution is arrived through such strategies.

The Mother was a problem-solver par excellence. Here is an anecdote to show how she had solved a conflict which took place between two inmates of the Ashram who worked in the same department. N., a young inmate, was put in charge of a newly acquired garden named Cazanove by the Mother with the instruction of taking up agricultural farming in the garden which was more like a forest with a number of poisonous snakes as its inhabitants. She assigned another inmate to assist him. With the help of labourers, both of them cleared the forest of the entire 23 acres farm and started farming at Cazanove. They grew pulses, vegetables, some fruits and also built a very small dairy. As per the instructions of the Mother, N used to give away the insect-eaten or rotten vegetables and fruits to the workers and the paddy, mangoes and coconuts were sent to the Ashram in bulk. After a year, the Mother sent another inmate, named M, to assist N. After his arrival, M complained that N was giving away good vegetables to the workers. As the complaint persisted, one day the Mother enquired about it from N who told her that as she had asked him to do, he gave away only the insect-eaten and half-spoilt vegetables and fruits to the workers. The Mother was satisfied with his explanation. But when the same complaints were made to her against N by M repeatedly, she instructed N to bring the rejected vegetables and fruits along with the other stuffs produced at the farm to her. After she had seen them and as per her instruction those rejected fruits and vegetables were disposed of.

Apparently, this incident would not influence us in any way. But let's look at it from a different angle. The Mother used to be so busy with her work in the Ashram that her day started at 4 a.m. and ended at 2 a.m. She slept or rested for only 2 hours and this schedule she continued till her 95th year. She was always pressed for time yet she found a solution to this recurring complaint made by M against N. If she had taken no apparent action against N, then M. would have been stricken with grievance. And if N was punished or rebuked

based on the baseless allegations of M, then N would be grief-stricken. So the best way was not to antagonise anyone yet arrive at the most feasible solution. Since the Mother herself had approved of the fruits and vegetables being sent away after her inspection there was nothing to complain of. This was the Mother's style of management.

Two persons should never be tackled in the same manner. There can never be a general approach. When we deal with men, we have to keep in mind that no men are similar, they come from different backgrounds, they have received different kinds of education, they have different personalities and hence their likes and dislikes won't be similar. When there are such differences, how can one adopt a common or general approach? Therefore it is advisable to deal with men after analysing their nature. That is what exactly the Mother did. She has admitted that she never had the habit of imposing her will on others¹¹ and that she acted differently for each individual according to the necessities of the person concerned.¹² And she made it a point to practise what she preached. Once, K, who was in charge of the Building Service Department of the Ashram, went to the Mother with an old screw in his hand. The screw had rusted and was bent as well. He showed the screw to the Mother and said: 'May I discard this screw?' The Mother observed the screw and replied: 'It can still work for some more time. Heat it well and then straighten it with a hammer. It can still give service.' After K left, U, who was the in charge of another department, came to the Mother with a screw whose condition was far better than the previous one. He showed the screw to the Mother and said: 'Mother, I would like to discard this screw. Do I have your permission?' The Mother replied: 'Yes.' After U left, the Mother was asked why she allowed U to discard the screw whose condition was quite satisfactory but instructed K to use the old screw. The Mother replied that K had come to her to seek her permission for the concerned task and was willing to accept her instruction but U had already decided to discard the screw and he wanted her to approve of his decision. On another occasion, a student of the Ashram School who was quite close to the Mother had asked her whether he could go to a cinema hall to watch a film. The Mother immediately gave him her permission. The Mother's instant approval somewhat surprised him. He told her that if she had the slightest reluctance then he would not go to watch the film. It was then that the Mother told him that she did not want any inmate to visit a cinema hall as the atmosphere of the place was not consonant with the lifestyle of the Ashram. Needless to say the boy didn't visit the cinema hall. Thus we see how the Mother, despite being the supreme authority of the Ashram, never imposed her will on any of the inmates.

(II)

Leading is an important function of personnel management due to a number of reasons. Firstly, the act of leading works as a group-motivating process which inspires the supporters to work effectively. Secondly, it develops creativity. The leader, often or sometimes, presents a problem before his followers and invites their suggestion regarding the solution. In such cases, the employees are motivated to ponder over the matter and come up with a variety of solutions among which the best would be chosen by the leader. Thirdly, leading leads to the creation of motivation and confidence (which is done through the fulfilment of the employee's objectives). They are motivated by extrinsic rewards like cash prizes, perks and amenities, promotion, recognition, status symbols and praise and intrinsic rewards like satisfaction from executing a challenging task. Fourthly, with his experience and knowledge, the leader guides and directs the employees effectively; such guidance in turn increases the skills and knowledge of the employees. Fifthly, good leading is associated with communication, precise decision-making, cooperation, coordination, integration and creation of better work environment.

In his book *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo, while discussing about the role of the teacher of the integral yoga, has pointed out the attributes of an ideal leader in the following words:

'The Teacher of the integral Yoga will follow as far as he may the method of the Teacher within us. He will lead the disciple through the nature of the discipline. Teaching, example, influence, — these are the three instruments of the Guru. But the wise Teacher will not seek to impose himself or his opinions on the passive acceptance of the receptive mind; he will throw in only what is productive and sure as a seed which will grow under the divine fostering within. He will seek to awaken much more than to instruct; he will aim at the growth of the faculties and the experiences by a natural process and free expansion. He will give a method as an aid, as a utilisable device, not as an imperative formula or a fixed routine. And he will be on his guard against any turning of the means into a limitation, against the mechanising of process. His whole business is to awaken the divine light and set working the divine force of which he himself is only a means and an aid, a body or a channel.' ¹³

Sri Aurobindo has explained how an ideal leader should work. As mentioned in the preceding quotation, the Guru or the leader should use 'teaching', 'example'

and ‘influence’ as his instruments. Sri Aurobindo has specifically pointed out the importance of each of these three instruments. According to him, example is much more powerful than instruction. Here, we must remember that by ‘example’ he didn’t refer to the instances of external acts or ‘personal character’. It is the ‘central fact of divine realisation within’ that would act as a stimulant to the aspiration in others. The very life of the Teacher in its entirety and all the actions associated with it will serve as an ideal example. This explains the importance of example. However, ‘influence’ is much more important than example. Influence is not the external authority which an ordinary leader imposes upon his subordinates; on the contrary, it is, as defined by Sri Aurobindo, ‘the power of his contact, of his presence, of the nearness of his soul to the soul of another.’ The leader who is in possession of such a power channels it into his subordinates for their development and such an action has been termed by Sri Aurobindo as ‘the supreme sign of the Master’. However, Sri Aurobindo has warned that the leader must not ‘arrogate to himself Guruhood in a humanly vain and self-exalting spirit’. He should be a channel, a representative of the trust from above who should act as a man who would help and guide his brothers. He should be, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, ‘a child leading children, a Light kindling other lights, an awakened Soul awakening souls, at highest a Power or Presence of the Divine calling to him other powers of the Divine.’¹⁴

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother both have pointed out certain conditions which a true leader must satisfy. According to Sri Aurobindo, the leader must have a ‘large view of the One working in all’ which would help to eradicate all ‘rajasic egoism’ and ‘sattwic ego-sense’¹⁵ and that he should be ready to recognise one’s weaknesses and false movements and withdraw from them.¹⁶ According to the Mother, the leader must be vigilant so that he does not lose any opportunity to progress or learn or overcome a weakness and also that of correcting or mastering something.¹⁷ She has also added that a true leader must have absolute control over oneself, no preferences at all and that he should treat everyone equally and be patient and enduring with one and all.¹⁸ However the foremost condition for being a true leader, according to her, is the ability to forget oneself. He must be a master of his ego, obliterate all sorts of self-regard and selfish movements and also have ‘no selfish interests, to want nothing for oneself, to consider only the good of the group, of the whole, the totality that depends on one; to act only with that aim in mind, without wanting any personal profit from one’s action.’¹⁹

The tasks of a leader are to lead his subordinates towards the successful accomplishment of the organisational goals, motivate them to work better by improving their morale, imposing discipline whenever and wherever required in

the organisation and ensuring the establishment of a perfect harmony among them. While imposing discipline, man as a leader should keep in mind that whatever needs to be done should be done in the right spirit. The subordinates should also realise that they are being guided by a leader who may be strict but at the same time is upright, insightful and sympathetic towards them. In one of his letters, Sri Aurobindo has written that efficiency and discipline, though they are indispensable for work, are dependent on the ‘personality of the superior, his influence on the subordinates, his firmness, tact, kindness in dealing with them.’²⁰

The true leader not only leads his followers but also strives to help them to overcome their limitations which act as a bar towards their path of progress. His actions might appear strange to the followers initially but in due course of time they realise the significance. Let me narrate an anecdote to show how the Mother enabled a follower to overcome his shortcomings and advance towards perfection. N was an inmate of Sri Aurobindo Ashram for a decade. He was given the charge of starting agricultural farming at Cazanove, a garden belonging to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He began to stay at Cazanove with two dogs given by the Mother with instructions to keep them chained during the day and unchained at night. He was further instructed by the Mother to feed them personally after cooking goat-liver meat with turmeric powder. It was not exactly cooking but only boiling. N was a Jain and strict vegetarian since his birth and till then he had not even tasted onion or garlic. He told the Mother about his customs but she insisted that he personally boil the meat. Hence, the task of cooking for the dogs became a routine job for him.

In organisations, the top-level management sets the standards of performance and expects the employees to maintain them. In case there is a deviation between the standards and the actual performance of an employee, the management is compelled to take action as it is a part of corporate norms. But such actions can be used as an instrument to transform the person concerned. Disciplinary actions can be a short-term pain but long-term gain if it is implemented with a right attitude. In this age of hire-and-fire one need not always fire the employee if he fails to perform. If such action is necessary one may take it but it must be planned in such a way that the so-called punishment would enable him to realise his true potential. Thus in the garb of punishment an opportunity could be provided to the employee to prove himself.

Let me narrate an incident to explain my point. In the Ashram School there was a very naughty and mischievous boy whom none of the teachers could control. The teachers tried to think of various ways to control him but in vain. So they approached the Mother. When the Mother was informed about the

matter, she solved the problem by making the boy the monitor of the class. Instantly there was a noticeable change in him. He became a most responsible monitor who executed his duties diligently. A disciplinary action was indeed taken but it was planned and implemented in such a way that it transformed an uncontrollable boy into a responsible individual.

While organising the enterprise, we must ensure that balanced discipline should exist. The degree of discipline should not be so high that the employees feel suffocated and again it should not be so relaxed that the employees take everything for granted. Hence a balanced discipline is always advised. The Mother was a strict disciplinarian. In the early years of the Ashram some of Sri Aurobindo's disciples found it difficult to cope up with the discipline she had imposed and left the Ashram for ever. This was because prior to her arrival at Pondicherry, they used to have a sort of a camp-life and to them, Sri Aurobindo was just like an elder brother and friend. It was the Mother who came and installed Sri Aurobindo on the pedestal of the Guru. But after some decades the Mother relaxed several strict rules of the Ashram. However, there were certain rules that she never altered and these rules exist even now. She firmly believed that no big creation or proper work (including sadhana) was possible without discipline and hence she asked the inmates of the Ashram, who worked in various departments, to follow the discipline of the concerned departments. She believed that a community life should have a discipline as it ensured that the weaker individuals were not mistreated by the stronger ones and that every member, who wished to live in the community, should respect the discipline. However, she knew that the rule-makers can become the rule-breakers in future. Hence her advice was: '...for the community to be happy it is necessary that this discipline should be determined by someone or by those who have the greatest broadness of mind and, if possible, by him or by those who are conscious of the Divine Presence and are surrendered to that.'²¹

At times the leader has to face certain circumstances which are beyond his control. What should be done then? What should be the code of conduct if something untoward happens? Sri Aurobindo has advised that in such cases man should have the right inner attitude; he should be open to the spiritual Force and its power or else ego-resistance and ego-centric troubles may emerge and these can destroy a good creation. And with the help of this Force, all the difficulties of the untoward circumstances can be conquered and turned towards the right direction. But no matter how grave the situation becomes, one must have a sense of perfect equanimity or samata. Sri Aurobindo has said that the leader must make himself an instrument of this invisible Force coming from above so that it could be used for the necessary purpose. Through the power of

equanimity, the Force is capable of transforming not only the attitude of man but also the course of events and actions. To a leader who follows a spiritualised approach to management or leadership, his work does not become an avenue of earning money by maximising the returns on his investment. On the contrary, he assumes the role of a servitor and consecrates all that he possesses for the success of his enterprise. He looks upon the business as his medium of sadhana and works for the growth and development of the enterprise as a service to the Divine. He has to be selfless and he relies entirely on the true Self and Spirit from which he receives inner guidance and which is the architect of his destiny. He must not have a superiority complex due to the high position he enjoys in the hierarchy for it may result in the generation of ego. It is essential for him to look at his colleagues and subordinates as *gurubhais* or brother-disciples and treat no work or workers as mediocre or ignorable because in integral management all work is looked upon as work for the Divine. Work is actually worship and the worshippers, that is, the workers, should not be discriminated.

It reminds me of an incident. Once, someone complained to the Mother that people were not working satisfactorily in a particular department. The Mother said: "People work according to their nature and capacity. If you are not getting satisfaction, do it yourself."

The leader has to have empathy and while dealing with the inter-department or inter-personal problems, he must see the other side of the picture as well. No anger or reproach must exist in him for these elements tend to raise the same on the people involved on the other side. And above all, the leader has to be an epitome of humility. No great work can be done if the leader is not a humble individual. The Mother who was an ideal leader has showed to us how effective leadership can be practised despite being extremely humble. For instance, once she asked a sadhak named Bula (who was in charge of the Electric and Plumbing Department of the Ashram): "Bula, will you please give me a piece of wire?" Bula said: "Mother, why don't you order me? All this belongs to you." The Mother replied: "I must be an example of how to ask."

Another feature that must exist in man as a leader is right judgment. He must know what is good and bad for the organisation but at the same time he must not be judgmental towards people on the advice of others. It is advisable to rely on the inner command which informs him about his course of action. However, it is important to keep in mind that a person who can lead himself can lead others. If one cannot control himself, how can he expect to control others? Nothing can be done with others unless and until one is able to do it with himself/herself. And that is why the Mother has said that one cannot control outer matter if one does not control inner matter.

Here is an incident to show the Mother's style of judgment: During a novelty race in the Ashram Playground, each participant had to roll a wooden dumbbell with a stick keeping to one's lane. The rule of the game was that the participants would have to reach the finishing line touching neither the lines of the lanes nor the dumbbells by hand and whoever reached first would be the winner. Some of the participants ran fast cutting the lines while some straightened the dumbbells with hand. Some of the judges declared the first three participants who reached the finishing line as winners while other judges emphasised on their disqualifications. There was a total confusion around the Mother who was present at the Playground and was also one of the judges. She asked the judges to wait till the last participant arrived. The last participant was a young girl whom the Mother declared as the winner saying that though she came last she had followed the rules of the game and also followed a straight line. A witness of this incident remarks: 'That was the Divine Judge delivering Her judgment and squashing the human erroneous judgments.'²²

However, not all leaders possess the Mother's sense of judgment. That's why the need of self-mastery and self-management emerges the first condition of which is to be conscious of one's own self. One has to awake to his inner movements and nature and must also understand his motives and impulses. If an individual is conscious then he would be able to differentiate between right and wrong. In life we often tend to get confused while differentiating between right and wrong for these are subjective concepts: what may appear right to X might appear wrong to Y. So whom should the leader support? Such dilemmas can be conquered once the leader becomes conscious.

What follows are some guidance on self-management compiled from the writings of Sri Aurobindo.

- 'Do not allow yourself to be worried or upset by small things. Look at things from an inner point of view and try to get the benefit of all that happens. If you make a mistake, don't get distressed because you made a mistake — rather profit by it to see the reason so as to get the right movement in future. This you can do only if you look at it quietly from the inner being without sorrow or disturbance.'²³

- 'Why get excited over these small things? or let them disturb you? If you remain quiet, things will go much better and, if there is any difficulty, you are more likely to find out a way in a quiet mind open to the Peace and Power. That is the secret of going on, not to allow things and happenings, not even real mistakes, to upset you, but to remain very quiet, confiding in the Power to lead you and set things more and more right. If one does that, then things

do get actually more and more right for learning and steps towards progress.'²⁴

- '...One ought not to indulge ideas of incapacity, inability to respond, dwelling too much on defects and failures and allowing the mind to be in pain and shame on their account; for these ideas and feelings become in the end weakening things. If there are difficulties, stumblings or failures, one has to look at them quietly and call in tranquilly and persistently the Divine help for their removal, but not to allow oneself to be upset or pained or discouraged.'²⁵

Sri Aurobindo was not a leader who kept himself aloof from the problems and difficulties faced by his disciples. He acted as a motivator, a coach and a mentor who spent sleepless nights answering hundreds of letters addressed to him. It was like a correspondence workshop of motivation. One of his dearest disciples Dilip Kumar Roy has remarked about him: 'He never minded if any of us wanted to experiment with an escalator "going in the wrong direction." For he had never believed in hard and fast taboos...His tolerance and charity would have been incredible had it not been a fact of almost everyday experience. In the Ashram he tolerated quite a battalion of fire-eaters even when they were found out to be disloyal and treacherous. He gave a long rope even to some insolent rebels who, from calling him names and misrepresenting his catholic views, told deliberate lies — just to do him down. Even such calumniators and traitors he not only declined to expel from the Ashram but actually forgave again and again till I had to ask him which he loved more: to encourage the faithless or discourage the faithful?'²⁶

One might ponder: what was the source of this unlimited patience Sri Aurobindo had for man. The answer is simple. It was based on unbounded divine love. Human love may fail at one point of time but divine love neither fails nor falters. So a true leader should have profound love and sympathy for his subordinates. It is only love and sympathy that can mould and transform the nature, character and personality of man. And that is the mantra of man-power management.

However, let's not forget that love and sympathy cannot always be adopted to control the subordinates. In case strict action is required, the leader must not hesitate to adopt such measures. The Mother followed a strict disciplinary approach whenever and wherever necessary. For instance, once the workers of the Ashram Press had demanded three months' bonus and a sum of rupees fifteen as Dearness Allowance; accordingly they had pasted a handwritten notice on the wall of the workers' washroom. When the Mother came to know of this incident, she remarked: "The best is to take no notice of such demands.

These people will never be satisfied: the more we give, the more they ask.” The matter was simply ignored and before long the demands died down. On another occasion, when a worker of the Ashram Press was sacked the Workers’ Union demanded his reinstatement. The workers shouted slogans and caused other workers to stay away from work. Not only did they challenge the manager of the Ashram Press and the Mother but also threatened to continue with their strike for ten days or till the sacked worker was reinstated. The Mother simply said: “Let them do, we shall see who gets tired of it first.” And this strike too died down soon.

So we have two ways of man-power management shown to us by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The first way is through love and patience as practised by Sri Aurobindo and the second way is through strict disciplinary measures as practised by the Mother. The leader should be prepared to adopt both the measures depending on the situation.

No matter how good a leader is, he is also subjected to harsh criticism by his followers. In the corporate sector, we find the Chairman or Managing Director of the company being heckled at the Annual General Meetings for not giving adequate dividends to the shareholders or for some other reasons. They forget what the leader has done or is doing for the organisation. The same thing happens with spiritual leaders as well. Even Jesus Christ was betrayed by his follower, Judas. All such things happen because a time comes when no matter how intelligent or loyal a follower is he becomes a prey to some hostile power which compels him to deviate from his path. It would be an error to assume that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as leaders of the Ashram, never received any opposition from their disciples. But what is remarkable is the way they had handled the situation and brought them under control. Once, a disciple wrote a very strong letter to the Mother criticising her. However, he didn’t sign his name in the letter. The Mother, by using her occult force, came to know who the disciple was and she penned a good reply for him. But before sending the letter to the disciple, she went to Sri Aurobindo and read out both the letters, the one written by the disciple and the one written by the Mother. When the Mother asked Sri Aurobindo whether she should send the letter, he replied in just two words: “Don’t reply.” On another occasion, an attendant of the Mother had become hostile and was spreading slanderous insinuations against her and Sri Aurobindo. When the matter was reported to the Mother, she said: “I’ve spoken to Sri Aurobindo also about this and he said to me: ‘You know well it is not a question of this person or that person. Sending away one person won’t help us in any way. We are fighting with the hostile force, not with the person. If you

send away one person, it will catch hold of another.’”

Thus we observe that neither the Mother nor Sri Aurobindo favoured the expulsion of the rebel-disciples from the Ashram for they knew such an act would not solve the problem. The act of expulsion could bring about a temporary solution only and what was necessary was a permanent solution. Therefore, they have taught us to identify the roots of all difficulties and work for its total elimination. Let’s not forget that man is the only instrument who is capable of doing so with help from the Divine.

We must remember that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were not graduates from any reputed business schools. Yet they went on to lay the foundations of a new school of management which is best described as ‘Integral Management’. It can be claimed without the slightest doubt that Sri Aurobindo’s concept of management was given shape by the Mother. Their joint contribution can be best described in the following words of *Savitri*:

‘There is a truth to know, a work to do;
Her play is real; a Mystery he fulfils:
There is a plan in the Mother’s deep world-whim,
A purpose in her vast and random game.
This ever she meant since the first dawn of life
This constant will she covered with her sport,
To evoke a Person in the impersonal Void,
With the Truth-Light strike earth’s massive roots of trance,
Wake a dumb self in the inconscient depths
And raise a lost Power from its python sleep
That the eyes of the Timeless might look out from Time
And the world manifest the unveiled Divine.’ ²⁷

One cannot even imagine the wonders that could be brought about if organisations adopt integral management for it is beneficial to both the enterprise as well as its employees. Today, unfortunately, it is not given its due importance but a day would come soon when people will be able to realise its significance. Let’s not forget:

‘Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,
The days become a happy pilgrim march...
A few shall see what none yet understands,
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;
For man shall not know the coming till its hour
And belief shall be not till the work is done.’ ²⁸

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Sri Aurobindo's Critique of German Poetry and Philosophy

Wilfried Huchzermeyer

As a student in England Sri Aurobindo was very fond of studying European literature even beyond the prescribed readings. During this period he also learnt some German and became acquainted with the names of the most important German poets and philosophers. His commentaries on poetry are mainly found in *The Future Poetry*, which appeared as a series of 32 articles in the *Arya* in 1917, but was never published as a book during his lifetime. Therefore, contemporary poetry of the 20th century could not be considered in his study, although he did have the intention to include a chapter on it, and some literature of modern authors was ordered for this purpose in 1950 when it was already too late. Sri Aurobindo had discontinued his intensive readings after having moved to Pondicherry in 1910. His little community there was short of finances at the beginning and at a later stage he spent endless hours writing thousands of letters to his disciples. Whatever time he had at the end of his life, he dedicated to completing *Savitri* as far as possible.

Sri Aurobindo mentions Goethe, Schiller and Heine in *The Future Poetry*. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805) are the two great names of German classical literature whereas Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) may be less known in India. He was a great lyricist and also wrote brilliant essays on various literary, political and philosophical topics. Additionally, Sri Aurobindo also mentions Friedrich Nietzsche, who was a poet-philosopher and will be treated below in the section on German philosophy.

We may note that one great name from the period before the 20th century is missing, namely Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) who wrote lyrics of the highest category. However, he became well-known outside Germany only some time

before the First World War and thus has escaped Sri Aurobindo's notice. The same is true of course for some great names of the 20th century such as Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann or Rainer Maria Rilke. The latter created that great term *Weltinnenraum* (the world's inner space, *Welt-innen-raum*) whose force gets diminished in any translation. I once suggested to K.D. Sethna, who was deeply familiar with the contemporary literature of the world, that Rilke had written some Overhead poetry (inspired by higher levels than the mental plane) and he immediately agreed. Hesse's *Siddhartha* is a rare masterpiece written in almost musical language. He had undertaken a journey to India in 1911 and had a good knowledge of the country and its religions. Actually, his mother was born there as the daughter of a missionary.

Sri Aurobindo's Critique of Goethe

Based on the literature which he had been able to study, Sri Aurobindo sees Goethe as a lonely star in the German poetical sky. He speaks of "shortlived outbursts of creative power in the Spain of Calderón and the Germany of Goethe" which had a strong, but not an enduring influence.ⁱ In another passage he notes that the country was "so rich in music, in philosophy, in science", but the great poetic word was rare; there was "one brief and strong morning time illumined by the calm, large and steady blaze of Goethe's genius and the wandering fire of Heine, afterwards a long unlighted stillness."ⁱⁱ

In another passage in *The Future Poetry* Sri Aurobindo points out that in science and (less so) in critical thought the act of thinking may isolate itself from emotion, adhering to reason alone and to the objective observation of things. But in artistic creation this isolation is not possible, here we find the subjective personality of the poet asserting itself to a greater extent than in former ages. "Goethe himself, in spite of his theory, could not escape from this tendency; his work, as he himself recognised, is always an act of reflection of the subjective changes of his personality, a history of the development of his own soul in the guise of objective creation."ⁱⁱⁱ We feel reminded here of Sri Aurobindo's work on his epic *Savitri*, which was constantly being revised by him so as to reflect his inner progress and access to ever higher planes of inspiration.

In the 19th century, the movement of romanticism was very powerful in Germany. With reference to it, Sri Aurobindo writes that a pure and genuine romanticism of the life-spirit "which cares nothing for thought except as it enriches its own being" is no longer possible now. And if there is an attempt to get back to it, "it falls into an affectation, an intellectual pose." This, he says, is the secret of the failure of modern romanticism in Germany and France. "In Germany,

Goethe and Heine alone got away from the falsity and were able to use this strain in its proper way as one enriching cord serving the complex harmonic purpose of the intelligence; the rest of German literary creation of the time is interesting and suggestive in its way, but very little of it is intimately alive and true, and afterwards Germany failed to keep up a sustained poetic impulse; she turned aside to music on the one side and on the other to philosophy and science for her field."^{iv}

So we may note that in the field of German poetry Sri Aurobindo's commentaries focus predominantly on Goethe, with Heine also being mentioned several times. Here is Sri Aurobindo's poem dedicated to the great author of *Faust*:

Goethe

A perfect face amid barbarian faces,
A perfect voice of sweet and serious rhyme,
Traveller with calm, inimitable paces,
Critic with judgment absolute to all time,
A complete strength when men were maimed and weak,
German obscured the spirit of a Greek.^v

German Philosophy

Once when Sri Aurobindo was discussing with his attendants about the French language, he remarked, "French style is always clear. It is very difficult to translate *The Life Divine* into French." Then Purani said, "*The Life Divine* will be difficult to translate into any language." And Sri Aurobindo added, "Except German. German is the language for philosophy... It is hard and abstract."^{vi}

The German language, like Sanskrit, has a great capacity for creating ever new words with the help of a multitude of prefixes and suffixes, and it also has the same capacity for creating long compounds, combining nouns and adjectives in single words. Thus, it has a great flexibility which is required for expressing very subtle shades of meaning or highly abstract content. But Sri Aurobindo had little interest in abstract thinking: "Much of present day philosophy is only a play of words and ideas, it is mental gymnastics without any experience behind. In India there was always a connection between philosophy and knowledge."^{vii}

He had tried to study Western academic philosophy in his early days, but had no access to it as long as he "was in the mind". "I tried to read Kant but couldn't read more than one page. Plato, of course, I read. But it was when I

went above the mind that I could understand philosophy and write philosophy.”^{viii} At this stage, he reports, ideas, thoughts, visions and spiritual experiences began flowing in and there was a sort of revelation as the foundation of his philosophy; he did not write the *Arya* by any process of mental reasoning or argument. Then he adds that he could read Plato because he was not merely metaphysical, and Nietzsche because of his powerful ideas. In Indian philosophy he absorbed the Upanishads and the Gita etc. as writings which are based on spiritual experience. These latter texts had some influence on him, but whatever he wrote himself was essentially based on his own perception.^{ix}

This was his particular approach and he especially appreciated philosophers who shared it to some extent and who had vision and intuition. This he found in Nietzsche, though the latter was a confused seer in his eyes, and also in Greek philosophers like Heraclitus, or Bergson and Schopenhauer. In an article titled *Shama’a* he makes some significant statements about his views regarding the development and basic characteristics of German philosophy in the last two centuries. He points out that the great Graeco-Roman tradition is over now. Whatever has still some value in it, will remain, but basically the Time-Spirit is passing on to other things. In that new evolution, he says, Germany and Russia* among European nations have taken a leading place.

“Germany has failed to go the whole way, because to a strong but coarse and heavy vital force and a strict systematising scientific intellect she could not successfully bring in the saving power of intuition. Her music, indeed was very great and revolutionised the artistic mind of Europe, not because it was instinctive, but because it was intuitive... Her philosophy was at first a very great but too drily intellectual statement of truths that get their living meaning only in the intuitive experience, but afterwards in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as in Wagner it developed the intuitive vision and led to a deep change in European thinking.”^{xi}

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

There is no Western philosopher, except Heraclitus, on whom Sri Aurobindo has written so extensively as on the famous author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In the following section I will summarise Sri Aurobindo’s Nietzsche critique, based on the most relevant quotations from his works.

It is the great merit of Nietzsche that he reintroduced dynamism and practical force into Western philosophy, that he developed intuitive vision as a means of finding the Truth. A similar role was played by H. Bergson in modern France and Heraclitus in ancient Greece. In fact, Nietzsche has much in common with the Greek mystic. Both stress the principles of war and struggle as evolutionary forces. But Nietzsche is one-sided in so far as he denies Being as the

ground of Becoming. Nevertheless, among modern modern thinkers Nietzsche is “the most vivid, concrete and suggestive.” All in all, his philosophy is stimulating, although it “solves nothing”.^{xii}

Nietzsche was a seer by nature, at times he had great extraordinary visions. Often, however, he misinterpreted his own visions or received them wrongly. One of his brilliant ideas was that of the *Übermensch* or superman, he was the first to popularise it in European thought. But though the concept of a future being of a higher species is great as such, one cannot accept its actual content. Nietzsche spoilt and mishandled his own idea because he was confused about the figures of God and Titan, or Deva and Asura in Indian terminology. Rejecting violently the idea of the suffering, crucified Christ, he presents us “the Olympian... with the aspect of the Asura”, a Greek God with some titanic characteristics.^{xiii}

But sometimes the German poet-philosopher overcomes his personal idiosyncracies and pierces straight into the heart of the Truth. At such moments he is the pure seer who has “rare gleaming intuitions” and speaks out the word as it has come “to his inner hearing vibrating out of a distant Infinite like a strain caught from the lyre of far-off Gods.”^{xiv} When Nietzsche stated that we have to develop a superman out of our present unsatisfactory manhood, he was absolutely right. His idea that we have to exceed ourselves, “could not be bettered.”^{xv} But the difficulty was that he had no clear notion of the true “Self” that is to be discovered.

The main defect of Nietzsche’s superman is that he loses the link to moral evolution. Thus he becomes a figure who shuns sorrow and service and strives to dominate his environment. In this sense Nietzsche’s philosophy is vitalistic. Since he has no concept of a supreme Being above, his superman with his one-sided ascent has no sense of surrender, of offering himself up into something Greater. Instead of growing spiritually, he would rather widen his ego and expand it enormously. In that respect there is a vast gap between Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* and Sri Aurobindo’s superman.

So far my portrait of Nietzsche has been in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s numerous statements. I will not go into many details here, but only refer to the most interesting point: those passages in which Nietzsche received the unmixed, pure intuition like “a strain caught from the lyre of far-off Gods.” I believe we find these passages especially in his main work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and will present a few examples. The following passages show how akin Nietzsche is to Sri Aurobindo in his idea that the focus of human aspiration should not be on a transcendental heaven, but on earth.

“Certainly, except you become like little children, you shall not enter into the

kingdom of heaven.” And Zarathustra pointed upwards with his hands. “But actually we do not want to enter into the kingdom of heaven: we have become men, so we want the kingdom of earth.”

And another passage: “... the heart of the earth is of gold.”^{xvi}

Compare this with Sri Aurobindo’s statements: “The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth.” Or: “Heaven’s touch fulfils but cancels not our earth.”^{xvii}

Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* is not conceived very clearly, behind it there are basically three different ideas: 1) that of an extraordinary being with supernormal capacities, what Sri Aurobindo calls *Vibhuti*, someone like Caesar, Napoleon or Goethe. 2) the *Herrenmensch*, an asuric master-man who achieves greatness by trampling down others. 3) a being of a higher species that truly overcomes manhood and belongs to a higher plane. This latter *Übermensch* is the best inspired and him alone we can compare with Sri Aurobindo’s superman. We find him mostly in *Zarathustra*. He will be “the meaning of the earth”, whereas man is only a link and will “go under”. This word (*untergehen*) is often used in the text. It means to sink (like a ship) or to set (like the sun) or to perish, to disappear (like a civilisation). The *Untergang* of man is followed by the emergence of superman, “the lightning from the dark cloud man”. Nietzsche did not want to be associated with Darwinism, but the evolutionary idea is there in his *Zarathustra*:

“You have progressed from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now man is more of an ape than any ape.” Even the wisest among men are only “a discord and hybrid of plant and ghost.”^{xviii} This cannot be their final destiny. They have to become supermen. In the following passage Nietzsche says explicitly that superman is a new type, not merely a great man:

“There has never yet been a Superman. I have seen both of them naked, the greatest and the smallest man. They are still all-too similar to each other, truly. I found even the greatest man – all-too-human!”^{xix}

It becomes obvious from a number of passages that Zarathustra is not on the asuric, but on the divine side. Once he approaches some dancing girls who stop instinctively as Zarathustra appears. Quickly, he tries to appease them:

“Do not cease dancing, sweet girls! No spoil-sport has come here with an evil eye, no enemy of girls... How could I be averse to divine dancing, you nimble creatures? Or to girls’s feet with beautiful ankles?” Zarathustra then makes an important autobiographical remark:

“I may be a forest and a night of dark trees: but those who are not afraid of my darkness will find rose-bowers too under my cypresses. And they will surely

find too the little god...” And in another passage we read: “I should believe only in a God who knew how to dance.”^{xx} Zarathustra does not like the spirit of gravity, he has learnt how to fly, how to be light:

“Now I am nimble, now I fly, now I see myself under myself, now a god dances through me.”^{xxi}

Sri Aurobindo’s God is a dancer. In *Savitri* we meet him as

“the great Dancer of the boundless Dance”

“the rapturous Dancer in the ways”

and we come across

“the rapt smile of the Almighty’s dance.”^{xxii}

So we can see that Nietzsche in his best moments comes close to Sri Aurobindo in spirit and language, and it is indeed these passages which have made him one of the greatest authors in German language. His poetic genius also becomes fully evident in the following scene, one of the most beautiful in *Zarathustra* and full of significant symbolism. Does it not sound like the supramental Sun touching the Earth, which opens to the illumining rays with all its aspiration for a transforming change?

For already it is coming, the glowing Sun – its love for the Earth is coming. Innocence and creative desire is all Sun-Love.

Just look how it is moving impatiently over the Earth! Do you not feel the thirst and the hot breath of its love?

It wants to suck the sea and drink the sea’s depths up to its height: now the sea’s desire rises with a thousand breasts.

It wants to be kissed and sucked by the thirst of the Sun; it wants to become air and height and the Light’s footpath and Light itself!^{xxiii}

Once more we present some lines from *Savitri* with a similar motive. In the following passage we find the image of Earth’s sweet romance with Heaven:

Earth couched alone with her great lover Heaven,

Uncovered to her consort’s azure eye.

In a luxurious ecstasy of joy

She squandered the love-music of her notes,

Wasting the passionate pattern of her blooms

And festival riot of her scents and hues.

It is a romance that one day may lead to a happy marriage:

Ascending from the soil where creep our days,
Earth's consciousness may marry with the Sun...

Finally, its aspiration will be fulfilled and...

Earth shall be made a home of heaven's Light.^{xxiv}

Again we repeat Nietzsche's lines:

[The sea] wants to become air and height and the Light's footpath and Light
itself!

Luft will es werden und Höhe und Fußpfad des Lichts und selber Licht!

- xx. Ibid., chapter 43
- xxi. Ibid., chapter 18.
- xxii. *Savitri*, pp.433, 454, 390
- xxiii. *Zarathustra*, chapter 48
- xxiv. *Savitri*, pp.390; 256; 451

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- i. *The Future Poetry*, p.48. All the references are to the *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA).
- ii. Ibid. p.53
- iii. Ibid., p.118
- iv. Ibid., p.208
- v. *Collected Poems*, p.16
- vi. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 15-3-1940
- vii. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* (2007), p.345
- viii. *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 5-3-1940
- ix. Ibid.
- x. Russia is not the subject here, but we may briefly note what Sri Aurobindo observes on her evolution: „Russia [is] deeply intuitive in her emotional and psychic being... It is clear enough that the labour of the soul and mind of Russia has not arrived at victory and harmony, but her malady is the malady and suffering of a great gestation...”
- xi. *Early Cultural Writings*, pp.628-29
- xii. *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p.224
- xiii. Ibid., p.152
- xiv. Ibid.
- xv. *The Human Cycle*, p.233
- xvi. *Zarathustra*, chapter 90; chapter 51. All the English translations are my own.
- xvii. *The Life Divine*, p.13; *Savitri*, p.719
- xviii. *Zarathustra*, Vorrede (opening speech)
- xix. Ibid., chapter 37

Notes On Authors

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

Surendra Mohan Ghosh (22.4.1893—7.9.1976) was an active member of the *Jugantar*, the noted revolutionary organisation from 1907 to 1938. He joined the Indian National Congress in 1920 and also played a pivotal role in the Swaraj Party founded by Chittaranjan Das. As a political worker he had spent a total number of twenty-three years in prison. From 1939 he was president of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. In 1946 he became a member of the Constituent Assembly which was charged with drafting India's constitution. In 1952 he was elected to the Lok Sabha. In 1956 and 1962 he was elected as the member of the Raj Sabha. From 1962 to 1967 he was the Deputy Leader of the Congress in the Parliament. He was a devoted follower of Sri Aurobindo. During the 1940s, he had a number of private meetings with Sri Aurobindo, during which the two spoke of political and yogic matters.

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