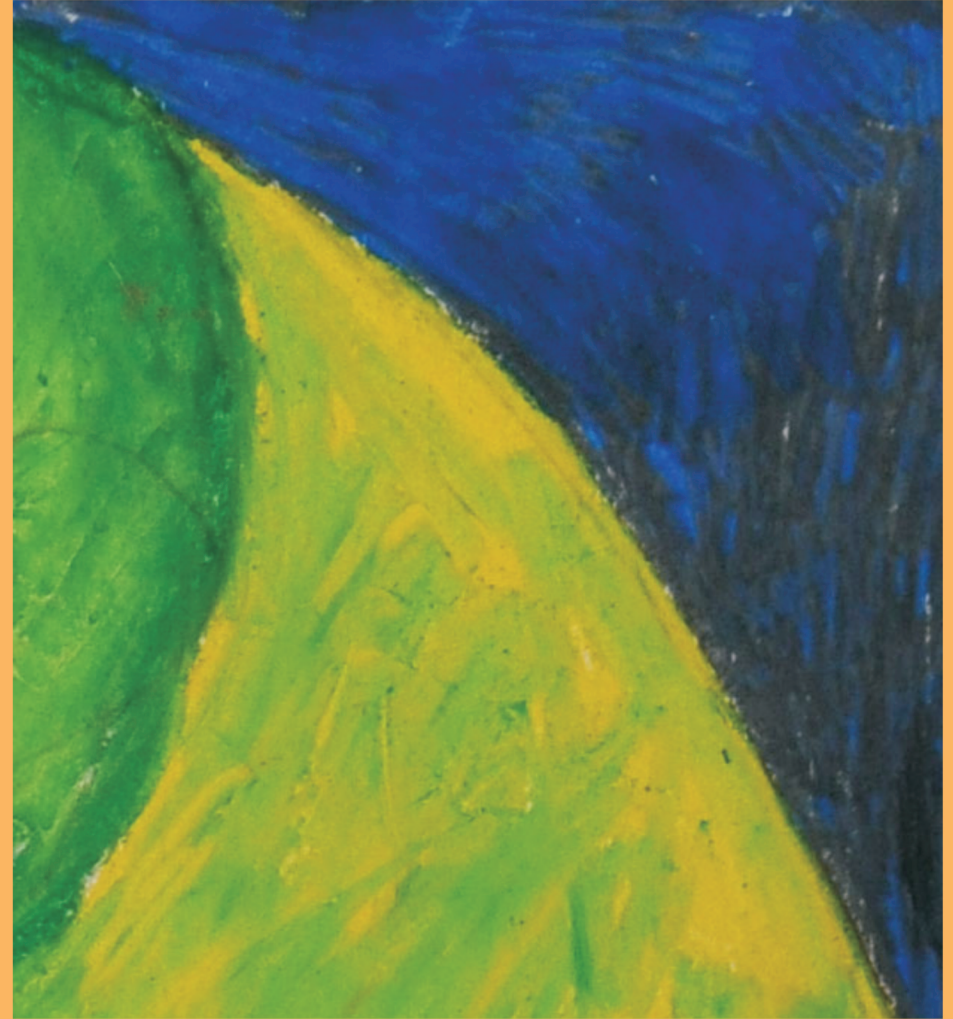


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Śraddhā श्रद्धा



Śraddhā



श्रद्धा



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24 November 2014



The most important thing ... is this change in the CONSCIOUSNESS which has taken place. ... All the rest ... the change in the physical appearance ... is a secondary consequence. ... The physical is CAPABLE of receiving the Superior Light, the Truth, the true consciousness and to ma-ni-fest it the thing is DONE. ... That was the work Sri Aurobindo had given me, that was it.

Mother, *Agenda*

Śraddhā

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

Vol.6 No.2

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Editorial

November is a month of many conflicting moods. There is the joy, the certitude of the coming victory arising out of the descent of the Overmind Consciousness in Sri Aurobindo's own physical sheath, that of the earth-consciousness or the world of Matter – 'one more step towards Eternity' - and the forward-striving hope and the ultimate aim of a march towards the evolution of humanity to a higher level as can be seen from the special task specifically assigned to the Mother by The Master after his voluntary withdrawal from the physical plane viz. to 'FIX the supramental consciousness in the physical consciousness permanently, so that the body may be able to manifest the Supermind' (Kireet Joshi and Jyoti Madhok, *But it is done ...*). On the other hand, there is also the deep anguish, the utter helplessness and acute pain a child feels at the loss of its Mother in the material world, its one and only exclusive support in this world.

But we poor little human beings, always enclosed in our 'deathbound littleness' can rarely free ourselves from this bondage and raise ourselves to 'our forgotten immortal vastnesses' when the situation so demands. We feel as orphans, are bewildered and are overtaken by the canker of doubt that starts sowing its insidious roots in our mind – we begin to ask ourselves what then happens to the divinisation of the body, of the earth's supramentalisation?

We must remember that 'When Sri Aurobindo left his body, the accumulated result of all his physical consciousness was transmitted to the Mother's body' (Ibid). The 'Mind of Light' i.e. 'the permanent reception of the Supramental Light by the physical mind' got immediately established in the Mother, the only *adhar* present capable of receiving the descent of this stupendous Supramental Force, and thus there was no waste. 'But now apart from the Mother's body, there was no other body which was so developed that it could receive, if the Mother left her body, the accumulated result of her physical consciousness. This was a formidable problem ... This task the Mother accomplished after a long and arduous journey, during which she had to find the way by which the Supermind could enter directly into the physical mind so that it could be silenced and go further still to touch the mind of matter, the material mind – corporeal mind – to transform it, to transform the mind of cells, and to supramentalise it,

as a result of which only the Supramental could be irrevocably established in the physical consciousness' (Ibid).

'We know from *Notes on the Way* over several years there was the growing infusion of her cells with the light of the Supramental Body already poised on the subtle-physical plane' (Amal Kiran, *The Mother's Victory, Mother India*, Jan, 1974). In one of her experiences, she says, 'The body consciousness has become individualised and at the same time independent, which means that it can enter into other bodies and feel quite at ease there.' This meant that 'even if she left her body, the work would not be spoilt, there would be no waste. The work would continue' (Kireet Joshi, Jyoti Madhok, Ibid). She continues '... the physical is CAPABLE of receiving the higher Light, the Truth, the true Consciousness, and of manifesting it. ... That was the work Sri Aurobindo had given me. ... The object to be accomplished was the change in the physical consciousness, that the change in the physical appearance was a secondary consequence; that would be the last thing to change' ... She reiterated '... The important thing is this change in the CONSCIOUSNESS – which has now taken place. All the rest is a consequence. The thing is DONE. This (the body) is a secondary consequence' (Ibid).

Therefore for us, children of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, to grieve because the Mother has merely left her physical frame is an insult to her. How often has she told us that if we really want to feel her living Presence, we should withdraw deep within ourselves and concentrate in our inmost self, our true soul. Only then will we find there her Presence, constant, loving and glowing, as active as ever. And if the call is sincere and the aspiration fixed and unfailing, Her help will always be there.

Let us end this discussion on the significance and meaning of the Mother's withdrawal from the physical body in the luminous and succinct words of Nolini-da.

'Mother has prepared for us her new body in the inner world, in the subtle physical which is as living and tangible as her physical body even though not as concrete. ... That body she has built up in her long arduous labours, built up in a complete form and left with us and with humanity. ... It is there living and glorious in its beauty and power and is still at work within us, and around us in the world, incessantly, towards the final consummation of its material embodiment. ... What is expected of us is to see this golden Mother within us and try to become, as she always wanted, her golden children, within and without' (*Complete Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, vol.5, pp.88-9).

No sooner matter for the November issue of *Śraddha* was being readied to be despatched to the printer than the sad news arrived of the passing away of

Sri Kireet Joshi at the Ashram in Pondicherry where he had relocated from Gujarat during the last 5/6 years. Aged 83 and ailing for some time, he passed away peacefully in the early hours of Sunday 14 September. He was an ardent devotee and a true child of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Recruited to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), he gave up his job in 1956 and moved to Pondicherry at the young age of 25 to devote himself to the study and practice of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. During his 20 years' stay in Pondicherry, he taught philosophy and psychology at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE), and took part in various educational experiments under the direct guidance of the Mother. In 1976 he moved to Delhi to resume his political career, successively serving as the Education Adviser in the Ministry of Education, Special Secretary to the Govt. of India, Member-Secretary of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR), Member-Secretary of Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan and the Vice-Chairman of the UNESCO Institute of Education, Hamburg. From 1999-2004, he served as the Chairman of Auroville Foundation, and of the ICPR from 2000-06. He later joined as Editorial Fellow of the Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture (PHISPC). In his final posting he served as Education Adviser to the Chief Minister of Gujarat, the present Prime Minister of India.

A great sadhak and possibly the last in the long list of the greats serving as true and authentic exponents of the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and their vision of the future, Kireet-ji was a prolific writer and a speaker of exemplary quality. He held forth with equal strength, thoroughness, comprehension and depth of insight on any subject related to the thoughts and teachings of his guru, be it integral yoga, national education, the shastras – the exposition of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita – Indian culture and civilisation, art or aesthetics or any of the abstruse metaphysical concepts contained in *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and other major works of The Master. And all these he put across to the audience in a language and style that was at once simple and lucid, shorn of pedantry and verbosity, and which had the ring of authenticity and absolute clarity of thought with an almost surgical precision of arriving straight at the heart of the matter. I still remember the first time I heard him speak nearly 50 years ago in 1966 at the Mahajati Sadan, Kolkata, on the occasion of the silver jubilee celebrations of Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir to which he had been invited to deliver the keynote address. As was his custom, he spoke extempore amid pin drop silence and held the packed auditorium enthralled close to an hour on Sri Aurobindo's yoga on which few would have dared to hold the audience attention unwavering for more than 15 minutes. In 2006, we at Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata, were fortunate to have him preside over a national seminar on Education where he spoke equally forcefully and again held the audience spellbound.

On one of my many visits to the Ashram in Pondicherry, I once asked Arindam-da (the late Arabinda Basu), another great interpreter of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, whom I should refer to if there was any problem in my understanding of Sri Aurobindo's thoughts. He always advised me to go back to the original works and if I still felt uncertain, to seek for the answer in the writings of Nolini-da (Nolini Kanta Gupta). Then pausing for a while, he said there were two other persons who could also offer a very safe guidance, viz. Jugal and Kireet. This comment coming from such a person like Arindam-da, who himself had exceptionally high standards of excellence and was extremely fastidious and chary of giving such certificates, goes to show in what high esteem he held these two sadhaks.

Since taking over as editor of *Śraddha* I had the good fortune of meeting him a number of times at the CARE Nursing Home where he was staying, after he moved to Pondicherry. He was always welcoming and humble and gracious, qualities that one rarely comes across in such learned people because normally they have a very big ego. I was fortunate to hear that he liked our publication very much and there were even times when he rang me up in Kolkata from his bed at CARE to commend me for doing such good work. Personally I shall miss his sage advice immensely. After a long and successful earthly career, he has at last arrived at a secure and permanent abode – at the feet of his Master and Guru, safely ensconced in the lap of the beloved Mother.

We are particularly grateful to the Overman Foundation for granting permission to reproduce the writing by Mukul Dey which appeared on its website. Our grateful thanks to Jyoti Madhok of Shubhra Ketu Foundation for allowing us to reproduce extracts from their book *But It Is Done....*, 2012 by Jyoti Madhok and Kireet Joshi. We are specially indebted to Editors, *Mother India*, and the Clear Ray Trust, the sole copyright holder of all of Amal Kiran's writings for acceding to our request to reprint the excellent article by Amal Kiran *The Mother's Victory ...*, which appeared in *Mother India* in Jan 1974. Our thanks to Shonar Joshi, Editor, *Next Future*, for her permission to reproduce the article by Sri Aurobindo entitled *Doubting the existence of the Divine* taken from his writings. Last but not the least our acknowledgement and thanks to the Sri Aurobindo Managing Trust, Pondicherry, for its permission to reproduce the following:

- extracts from the *Complete Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, vol.5, pp.88-9
- photograph of the Mother taken from the Ashram catalogue of photos
- the passage entitled *Doubting the existence of the Divine* taken from the writings of Sri Aurobindo

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श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṃl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Doubting the Existence of the Divine

Sri Aurobindo

[Most spiritual journeys start with a faith in the existence of God or the Divine, though we may not know what exactly is meant by this. But the human mind is full of doubts, denies the Divine Reality, asks for concrete proofs and questions the authenticity of spiritual experiences.

And this is not confined only to the rationalistic, scientific mind, but even the spiritual seeker faces this major obstacle and difficulty. A disciple once asked this question to Sri Aurobindo:

“Should not the Divine be a concrete certitude which cannot be doubted? Should not the spiritual experiences be beyond questions and doubts? Otherwise how can one be sure?”

Here is Sri Aurobindo’s beautiful answer, full of deep spiritual insight, a lucid clarity and his special sense of humour.]

Doubt Exists for its Own Sake

I have started writing about doubt, but even in doing so I am afflicted by the “doubt” whether any amount of writing or of anything else can ever persuade the eternal doubt in man which is the penalty of his native ignorance. In the first place, to write adequately would mean anything from 60 to 600 pages, but not even 6000 convincing pages would convince doubt.

For doubt exists for its own sake; its very function is to doubt always and, even when convinced, to go on doubting still; it is only to persuade its entertainer to give it board and lodging that it pretends to be an honest truth-seeker. This is a lesson I have learnt from the experience both of my own mind and of the minds of others; the only way to get rid of doubt is to take discrimination as one’s detector of truth and falsehood and under its guard to open the door freely and courageously to experience.

The Divine – a Concrete Certitude

All the same I have started writing, but I will begin not with doubt but with the demand for the Divine as a concrete certitude, quite as concrete as any

physical phenomenon caught by the senses. Now, certainly, the Divine must be such a certitude not only as concrete but more concrete than anything sensed by ear or eye or touch in the world of Matter; but it is a certitude not of mental thought but of essential experience.

When the Peace of God descends on you, when the Divine Presence is there within you, when the Ananda rushes on you like a sea, when you are driven like a leaf before the wind by the breath of the Divine Force, when Love flowers out from you on all creation, when Divine Knowledge floods you with a Light which illumines and transforms in a moment all that was before dark, sorrowful and obscure, when all that is becomes part of the One Reality, when the Reality is all around you, you feel at once by the spiritual contact, by the inner vision, by the illumined and seeing thought, by the vital sensation and even by the very physical sense, everywhere you see, hear, touch only the Divine. Then you can much less doubt it or deny it than you can deny or doubt daylight or air or the sun in heaven — for of these physical things you cannot be sure but they are what your senses represent them to be; but in the concrete experiences of the Divine, doubt is impossible.

Permanence of Spiritual Experiences

As to permanence, you cannot expect permanence of the initial spiritual experiences from the beginning — only a few have that and even for them the high intensity is not always there; for most, the experience comes and then draws back behind the veil waiting for the human part to be prepared and made ready to bear and hold fast its increase and then its permanence. But to doubt it on that account would be irrational in the extreme. One does not doubt the existence of air because a strong wind is not always blowing or of sunlight because night intervenes between dawn and dusk.

The difficulty lies in the normal human consciousness to which spiritual experience comes as something abnormal and is in fact supernormal. This weak limited normality finds it difficult at first even to get any touch of that greater and intenser supernormal experience; or it gets it diluted into its own duller stuff of mental or vital experience, and when the spiritual does come in its own overwhelming power, very often it cannot bear or, if it bears, cannot hold and keep it. Still, once a decisive breach has been made in the walls built by the mind against the Infinite, the breach widens, sometimes slowly, sometimes swiftly, until there is no wall any longer, and there is the permanence.

But the decisive experiences cannot be brought, the permanence of a new state of consciousness in which they will be normal cannot be secured if the mind is always interposing its own reservations, prejudgments, ignorant formulas or if it insists on arriving at the divine certitude as it would at the quite relative

truth of a mental conclusion, by reasoning, doubt, enquiry and all the other paraphernalia of Ignorance feeling and fumbling around after Knowledge; these greater things can only be brought by the progressive opening of a consciousness quieted and turned steadily towards spiritual experience.

Mind and Spiritual Truth

If you ask why the Divine has so disposed it on these highly inconvenient bases, it is a futile question, — for this is nothing else than a psychological necessity imposed by the very nature of things. It is so because these experiences of the Divine are not mental constructions, not vital movements; they are essential things, not things merely thought but realities, not mentally felt but felt in our very underlying substance and essence.

No doubt, the mind is always there and can intervene; it can and does have its own type of mentalising about the Divine, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, mental reflections of spiritual Truth, even a kind of mental realisation which repeats as well as it can some kind of figure of the higher Truth, and all this is not without value but it is not concrete, intimate and indubitable.

Mind by itself is incapable of ultimate certitude; whatever it believes, it can doubt; whatever it can affirm, it can deny; whatever it gets hold of, it can and does let go. That, if you like, is its freedom, noble right, privilege; it may be all you can say in its praise, but by these methods of mind you cannot hope (outside the reach of physical phenomena and hardly even there) to arrive at anything you can call an ultimate certitude.

It is for this compelling reason that mentalising or enquiring about the Divine cannot by its own right bring the Divine. If the consciousness is always busy with small mental movements, — especially accompanied, as they usually are, by a host of vital movements, desires, prepossessions and all else that vitiates human thinking, — even apart from the native insufficiency of reason, what room can there be for a new order of knowledge, for fundamental experiences or for those deep and tremendous upsurgings or descents of the Spirit?

It is indeed possible for the mind in the midst of its activities to be suddenly taken by surprise, overwhelmed, swept aside, while all is flooded with a sudden inrush of spiritual experience. But if afterwards it begins questioning, doubting, theorising, surmising what these might be and whether it is true or not, what else can the spiritual power do but retire and wait for the bubbles of the mind to cease?

Can Mind be the Judge?

I would ask one simple question of those who would make the intellectual mind the standard and judge of spiritual experience. Is the Divine something less than mind or is it something greater? Is mental consciousness with its

groping enquiry, endless argument, unquenchable doubt, stiff and unplastic logic something superior or even equal to the Divine Consciousness or is it something inferior in its action and status?

If it is greater, then there is no reason to seek after the Divine. If it is equal, then spiritual experience is quite superfluous. But if it is inferior, how can it challenge, judge, make the Divine stand as an accused or a witness before its tribunal, summon it to appear as a candidate for admission before a Board of Examiners or pin it like an insect under its examining microscope?

Can the vital animal hold up as infallible the standard of its vital instincts, associations and impulses, and judge, interpret and fathom by it the mind of man? It cannot, because man's mind is a greater power working in a wider, more complex way which the animal vital consciousness cannot follow.

Is it so difficult to see, similarly, that the Divine Consciousness must be something infinitely wider, more complex than the human mind, filled with greater powers and lights, moving in a way which mere mind cannot judge, interpret or fathom by the standard of its fallible reason and limited half-knowledge?

The simple fact is there that Spirit and Mind are not the same thing and that it is the spiritual consciousness into which the yogin has to enter (in all this I am not in the least speaking of the supermind), if he wants to be in permanent contact or union with the Divine. It is not then a freak of the Divine or a tyranny to insist on the mind recognising its limitations, quieting itself, giving up its demands, and opening and surrendering to a greater Light than it can find on its own obscurer level.

The Role of the Mind

This doesn't mean that mind has no place at all in the spiritual life; but it means that it cannot be even the main instrument, much less the authority, to whose judgment all must submit itself, including the Divine. Mind must learn from the greater consciousness it is approaching and not impose its own standards on it; it has to receive illumination, open to a higher Truth, admit a greater power that doesn't work according to mental canons, surrender itself and allow its half-light half-darkness to be flooded from above till where it was blind it can see, where it was deaf it can hear, where it was insensible it can feel, and where it was baffled, uncertain, questioning, disappointed it can have joy, fulfilment, certitude and peace.

Discrimination and Faith in Yoga

This is the position on which yoga stands, a position based upon constant experience since men began to seek after the Divine. If it is not true, then there is no truth in yoga and no necessity for yoga. If it is true, then it is on that basis, from the standpoint of the necessity of this greater consciousness that we can

see whether doubt is of any utility for the spiritual life.

To believe anything and everything is certainly not demanded of the spiritual seeker; such a promiscuous and imbecile credulity would be not only unintellectual, but in the last degree unspiritual. At every moment of the spiritual life until one has got fully into the higher light, one has to be on one's guard and be able to distinguish spiritual truth from pseudo-spiritual imitations of it or substitutes for it set up by the mind and the vital desire.

The power to distinguish between truths of the Divine and the lies of the Asura is a cardinal necessity for yoga. The question is whether that can best be done by the negative and destructive method of doubt, which often kills falsehood but rejects truth too with the same impartial blow, or a more positive, helpful and luminously searching power can be found, which is not compelled by its inherent ignorance to meet truth and falsehood alike with the stiletto of doubt and the bludgeon of denial.

An indiscriminateness of mental belief is not the teaching of spirituality or of yoga; the faith of which it speaks is not a crude mental belief but the fidelity of the soul to the guiding light within it, a fidelity which has to remain till the light leads it into knowledge.

(Reproduced from *Next Future* with thanks and acknowledgement to Shonar Joshi, Editor)

Mundaka Upanishad

Alok Pandey

General Background

The Upanishads belong to a class of spiritual literature that are beautiful in their rhythmic expression of Truth and, at the same time, powerful in packing a great body of Truth in few terse verses. Quite naturally they assume in the reader a developed sense of spiritual things, at least a dynamic seeking for Truth if not a developed intuition about spiritual things. They are not truths of analysis, that imperfect and incomplete image of Reality or Its shadow that we hope to derive by analysis of superficial data of the senses. The way of the Upanishad is a direct experience of Truth and the way that leads to It. It anticipates that we approach it with a seeker's heart, a seeker who is full of faith in spiritual things and in the way and the goal. It expects the seeker not to indulge vainly in sterile intellectual debates that circle around the bushes and hedges of outer existence but to courageously dive deep inside the forest in search of the 'sunbelts of knowledge and moonbelts of delight'. While such is the general mood of all the major Upanishads, this becomes much more pertinent and is thrust upon the reader with much greater force and clarity in the Mundaka Upanishad.

Then again we find that each of the principal Upanishad has chosen for its entry and elaboration a particular doorway to the hidden Reality. Each is a treatise revealing to us one or the other aspect of the One Truth that is also Infinite. Thus the *Isha* speaks about the Lord, the One who inhabits all existence, who has chosen as His abode the minutest of the minute as well as the largest of the large, the microscopic as well as the macroscopic movements of nature to conceal Himself. Not only is He concealed within each and every movement of Nature but He also governs it. He is everywhere, in the near and the far, within and without, above and below, the One all pervading, omniscient Reality that is here as well as there. It plays with the Light as well as the darkness, It uses both birth and death for its endless Becoming. Indeed It has become all

this. He is at once the Knowledge and the Ignorance and yet He remains untouched by all, the formless essence of all things, without sinews, stainless and forever pure, determining with His Breath and the Law of truth the endless cycles of Creation and dissolution. Such is the grand vision of the Lord revealed to us through the *Isha Upanishad*. The *Kena* deals with the subtlest of the subtle, the Force, the Energy, the Consciousness that has gone into creation and moves all things, from the senses and the mind to the gods who stand behind and weave the warp and woof of existence, Above them all supporting all this One Infinite Consciousness is revealed to the seer of Truth as Uma, the Divine Mother, the divine Consort and Spouse of the Supreme Lord. The *Katha* takes us deeper into the very heart of the mystery of created things to discover the secret wells of immortality that lie within. But rare is the soul who seeks it since most are content with the superficial happiness and common pleasures that lead us only towards Death. But the fount of immortality is not found by spreading ourselves outward in the world of the senses but by drawing inward, lighting within us the fire of aspiration and engaging ourselves in an inner dialogue with Death until we are led through the thread of transient things towards the Eternal wherein alone we can find abiding Peace and the supreme Felicity, *shanti* and *sukhamsaswatim* that the sages found within their heart, a portion of the Truth that burns as an imperishable Solar Fire at the apex of the worlds illumining, creating sustaining and destroying all things, including Death itself.

Introduction to the *Mundaka*

In the same line we find in the *Manduka Upanishad* the revelation of *Brahma Vidya*, the highest Reality as it is called. The subject of this great and powerful Upanishad is the Science and Knowledge of Brahman; its object is to lead the seeker towards this Reality through the path of truth, and Light, *Satyenpantha*. For many are the roads through which human beings wander in the endless cycles ever moving in the same grooves, ever repeating the same unconscious acts. But there is one road that leads us straight to the Home of Truth, that this Upanishad expounds. Perhaps that is why it has been named as the *Mundaka* or the razor that removes from us all the unnecessary adornments with its sharp edge of Light and leaves us bare and nude before the Truth that we seek.

But what is that Truth? Is it of his world or of another? Besides, what is the relation between ‘this’ and ‘that’, if any. It is towards this first illumination that the Upanishad leads us at the very outset.

Normally we call as truth only what is perceptible through our gross physical senses and cognisable by our physical mind. In the light of the Upanishads this is not true knowledge but only a very partial aspect of the totality that is Truth.

Our senses and mind cannot tell us fully even about the physical world, leave alone the much more, the larger existence of subtle worlds, their forces and energies, beings and powers that stand behind it, hidden to our senses, not cognisable or analysable by the outer mind of man. No doubt it is a kind of knowledge, but knowledge only of the surfaces of forms and processes, not their totality, not even their essence. Therefore the *Mundaka* prefers to call it a lower knowledge. This is not a disdainful expression as may appear at first sight but an expression of fact that invites us to yet greater domains and vistas of knowledge and self-experience and world- experience. Those who pursue it need to know that there is something yet beyond, something that eludes the grasp of the ordinary mind and senses. It is an invitation and not a condemnation of all forms of knowledge save the inmost. This becomes clear as we proceed further into the heart of this Upanishad. This distinction is important since otherwise there is a tendency in certain quarters to justify Sanyasa and world renunciation on the basis of this Upanishad.

At the very outset it makes it clear to us that we cannot arrive at this higher knowledge just by our normal efforts. It is a special kind of knowledge that needs special processes to which the mind of man is normally not accustomed. Therefore it also needs a Teacher and Guide, an Adept among men, a Master or a Guru who can impart this knowledge to a chosen disciple who seeks it and is ready for it. To emphasise this point, the Upanishad starts by recounting a particular lineage of seers and sages that have been the guardians and upholders of this Knowledge. Its originator of course is the creator Brahma Himself who has imparted this through the sages and seers for the good of mankind.

CHAPTER ONE: SECTION I

What is God-Knowledge: The Foundation for all other knowledge.

1. *Brahma first of the Gods was born, the creator of all, the world's protector; he to Atharvan, his eldest son, declared the God-knowledge in which all sciences have their foundation.*

At the very beginning, the Upanishad boldly declares that God-knowledge, as it is called is the foundational base for all other knowledge! It is only by knowing God that we can understand the final mystery behind all forms and names, including objects, elements, and everything else that we perceive and experience in the world. Atharvan did not keep this knowledge for his own purposes but transmitted it further. It is important to note that some of the names mentioned are of those who have been not only seers but also scientists in the spiritual Age of mankind.

2. *The God-knowledge by Brahma declared to Atharvan, Atharvan of old declared to Angir; he to Satyavaha the Bharadwaja told it, the Bharadwaja to Angiras, both the higher and the lower knowledge.*

3. *Shaunaka, the great house-lord, came to Angiras in the due way of the disciple and asked of him, “Lord, by knowing what does all this that is become known?”*

The two forms of Knowledge

4. *To him thus spoke Angiras: Twofold is the knowledge that must be known of which the knowers of the Brahman tell, the higher and the lower knowledge.*

First we are told that there is a twofold Knowledge worth our efforts, — the higher and the lower. It may appear, at first glance that the seer is drawing a distinction between the subjects that we study under these two forms of knowledge. That is to say, that there is a God-Knowledge or the Science of Brahman which relates to the means and processes through which we arrive at the full knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. Indeed this is so, for the methods we use to arrive at the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality is very different from the way we arrive at the knowledge of worldly objects. Normally we know about the world and its objects by applying our mind and the mental faculties of analysis, cognition, reason, deduction, inference, etc. But since God or the Ultimate is necessarily beyond the Mind the method has to be different, perhaps through faith and surrender, concentration and aspiration, intuition and identification.

However the very next sloka suggests another sense as well. It is this that not only is the knowledge of the ultimate Reality, Brahman, the higher Knowledge but it is also the one true way of knowing the world as well. In other words, the difference between the higher and lower is not just about a classification of the subject of knowledge but more importantly about the way of knowledge. There is a lower way of knowledge and it does not lead us very far and there is a higher way of knowledge that leads us to an integral, complete and truer understanding of all subjects and objects.

5. *Of which the lower, the Rig Veda and the Yajur Veda and the Sama Veda and the Atharva Veda, chanting, ritual, grammar, etymological interpretation, and prosody and astronomy. And then the higher by which is known the Immutable.*

This deeper sense is made clear once again in the above verses. We can approach the Ultimate Reality through lower means and hence arrive at only a limited and finite understanding of ‘That’. These limited means leading to merely a superficial understanding of the Truth are mere reading of the four Vedas, proficiency in chanting them with proper grammar and rhythm. All these things are of importance, no doubt, but they do not lead us to the Higher Truth. Instead of knowers of Brahman we become pedagogues; instead of using the Word as a means of ascension to the sublime state of Consciousness that the Word represents and of which it is the vehicle, we become slaves of the Word itself and fail to arrive through the bright hints it contains in its sound-body.

The Relation between the two forms of Knowledge

6. *That the invisible, that the unseizable, without connections, without hue, without eye or ear, that which is without hands or feet, eternal, pervading, which is in all things and impalpable, that which is Imperishable, that which is the womb of creatures sages behold everywhere.*

7. *As the spider puts out and gathers in, as herbs spring up upon the earth, as hair of head and body grow from a living man, so here all is born from the Immutable.*

But how can our finite means and mortal mind, how can our senses perceive that which is Limitless, All-pervading, Imperishable; transcending all, it is yet the secret womb of all things that come into existence. Such is the nature of that ultimate Reality, Brahman, that is everywhere and in all things.

The next verse hints at the process by which mutable and finite objects are born from the Immutable Infinite. Two examples are given that are significant and meaningful images. The first natural question would be, — wherefrom Brahman gets the substance for creation. The answer is that ‘IT’ brings it out of Itself even as the spider brings out the web and gathers it back into Itself. So also Brahman, the Unchanging eternal Reality puts out the world from within and draws it back to Itself. The sense conveyed here is that the world is a projection from Brahman. It is born out of Him, is sustained and supported in its extensions and expansions by Him and dying, returns back unto Him. The second image is that of a veil that covers the One Reality. Creation is the veil that Brahman has woven around Itself. It is He who has covered Himself with the veil and not some arbitrary or some other Power. Maya is the veil but this Maya is not a second Reality superimposing itself upon the One but the Maya of the Divine Reality Itself. It is He who has spun the veil around His face by His own

power. That Power is Maya. He is the veil and He the Reality within and behind it.

8. *Brahman grows by his energy at work, and then from Him is Matter born, and out of Matter life, and mind and truth and the worlds, and in works immortality.*

The next verse brings home this truth still further. Brahman extends (grows) by Its own energy. It is a strange mathematics that grows by expending. He extends Himself into Space and Time, becomes Matter as the condition for His manifestation and packs it with all His energy of Being. It is because of His Presence in Matter that life and mind begin to emerge out of it and come into the manifold play of creation. And it is because it is 'He', the Brahman that is involved in Matter that will eventually bring out of it the Truth that will harmonise all the different worlds and their action upon matter.

Then comes a cryptic close to this cryptic verse. It is in works that Brahman has established immortality. What is that work in which Brahman is engaged? As we can see the earlier part of the sloka, He becomes matter and then engages Himself with the work of bringing out of matter life and mind and Truth and worlds. We too can discover Brahman by participating in this great original action, this work of progressive evolutionary manifestation of Brahman through creation.

Forms and names change but the energy at work in creation is ever unchanging and eternal. It does not die. It is ever at work in bringing out the deeper possibility of life and mind and truth hidden within matter. As long as we are tied to form and name, we experience death but the moment we step back and discover the One Consciousness-Force that has built the worlds and is ever present, ever at work in creation then we too can discover the principle of immortality within us.

The Great Word of Synthesis

Once again we see the great reconciling note, the synthesis of Brahman and Maya, of the eternal unchanging Reality and the ever changing appearances. They are not two different things but two poises of One Truth, — the truth of the Eternal Presence behind creation as its stable base and the truth of an ever-changing world and appearances. 'Brahman grows by his energy at work' could be compared to a poet or a creative artist growing by his art. Of course, the consciousness of a poet is the same even if he never writes a single poem. We may equally say that no amount of poetry can ever exhaust the consciousness

of a poet. He will always remain greater than his work. Yet, and this is what the cryptic verse seems to imply that the poet and his poetry are one continuum, it enhances him by bringing out of Him something that always existed within. So too the energy of Brahman brings out the countless systems of worlds from within the One and though Brahman remains forever the same, always exceeding His work, yet it is equally true that He extends Himself in His works and the Energy that issues forth from Him is always connected with Him and shares His immortality.

In other words, creation is true since it has emerged out of the True and exists in and by the Consciousness and Power of the True.

9. *He who is the Omniscient, the all-wise, He whose energy is all made of knowledge, from Him is born this that is Brahman here, this Name and Form and Matter.*

This next verse as if further confirms it. Brahman and His energy at work in these countless system of worlds are one. His Omniscience extends into Name and Form and in Matter itself through His Energy that is made up of Knowledge. Obviously this is not mental knowledge. The Shakti of Brahman is not an encyclopaedia with a book of creation and an almanac in its two hands for ready reference. She is not a library of Science and Art but a Wisdom that transcends the normal operations of thought and cognition since it is direct and intuitive. This world is not a planned out thing as we may suppose but the constant unfolding of an all-Comprehensive Wisdom that is at the root of creation. Since it is an All-Comprehending Wisdom its steps and actions are not disjointed from every other elements of creation but acts taking everything into account in simultaneity of Vision and Will. Further, by using the epithet 'Him' for Brahman, this last verse of the Upanishad reminds us that the Truth that we seek is not merely an impersonal Reality but a suprapersonal too, a Being and not just a Consciousness. It is not just Power, a mechanical energy of Nature, but also a Knowledge, a Wisdom that is fully aware of Itself and through His Energy of the various created worlds and the individual beings within it.

Thus we see that the first part of this Upanishad states the nature of the Reality which we are seeking. It is not an Abstraction though It may thus appear to the mind engaged in a world of relativities. It is a Being, a Being of Wisdom, a Being of Power, a Being of Bliss. This sets the tone for what would follow next, the means of arriving at 'That', 'knowing which all else is known'.

(To be Continued)

Freedom and Determinism in Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita*

Ramesh Chandra Pradhan

In this essay I intend to discuss Sri Aurobindo's reflections on freedom and determinism in his celebrated classic *Essays on the Gita*.¹ Sri Aurobindo is very much concerned with the possibility of the freedom of man's will vis-à-vis the deterministic nature of the universe. The picture of the universe or Nature in the Gita is bound up with causal necessity which allows for the prevalence of the laws of Nature. Given this metaphysical picture of the universe, it is necessary that we seek to understand how the human beings can be free in this universe.

The Gita introduces the concept of divine necessity apart from the concept of causal or natural necessity. Sri Aurobindo in his interpretation of the Gita attempts to reconcile freedom not only with natural necessity but also with the divine necessity within the framework of the Gita. His *Essays* is a monumental effort to arrive at this reconciliation comparable with Kant's effort² to arrive at a similar result. However, Sri Aurobindo goes beyond Kant in reconciling freedom with divine necessity.

1. NATURAL NECESSITY VS. DIVINE NECESSITY

The idea of natural necessity is based on the idea that the universe is governed by physical laws which are discovered by the empirical sciences. These laws explain the deterministic nature of the universe in the sense that the latter is determined by these laws and that nothing can deviate from the grand system of the natural laws. This deterministic picture of the universe has been presented by modern science which invariably denies that human beings can have any kind of freedom which the philosophers have been concerned with. The debate between the determinists and the indeterminists which has been a part of modern philosophy owes its origin to the scientific image of man in contrast to the metaphysical image.

Sri Aurobindo acknowledges the fact that the physical universe is deterministic in the sense that the Prakrti or Nature in its gross form is bound by inexorable

laws. Taking the Shankhya Prakrti as his starting point, he explores the structure of the physical universe in terms of its basic material nature. According to Sri Aurobindo, the Gita is committed to the idea that the physical universe has a natural causal order which acts according to pre-ordained laws³. The order of the natural events which take place in the world are all self-determined by Nature. In that sense, the universe is a vast arena of Prakrti at its creative best. The determinism of Nature, as Sri Aurobindo points out, is the fulcrum on which the Gita builds the edifice of the metaphysical freedom, because only against Nature can man's freedom be discussed from a metaphysical point of view⁴.

Sri Aurobindo recognises the existence of the divine laws in the framework of the Gita, because, for the Gita, Nature is lorded over by the Divine, the Purushottama⁵ who oversees the functioning of Nature. Nature is under the direct control of the Divine because it executes the divine laws as it were as instruments of the Divine. Nature is the executrix of the divine plan of the universe. Sri Aurobindo accepts the Gita's idea of the divine plan of the universe, because the universe is nothing but the play of the Divine, according to him. The material universe is a manifestation of the Divine Being, Brahman⁶. This is the reason why we can say that there is a divine necessity in the universe because the latter has no other order than the divine order.

The nature of divine necessity is such that it refers back to the divine laws which operate in the universe. But what are the divine laws? Is there another set of laws other than those having natural necessity? The Gita does not hold that the divine laws constitute a separate category of laws from those of natural laws. In fact, the natural always express the divine laws when we look at Nature from God's point of view. Nature does not have an independent existence from Brahman which controls Nature. The whole Nature is Divine in its essence. There is no Divine-Nature duality in the Gita. Sri Aurobindo accepts the unitary character Reality in the sense that ultimately it is Brahman that is real and the world is a mirror-image of Brahman. Sri Aurobindo writes:

In other words, the supreme Purusha is not an entirely relationless Absolute aloof from our illusions, but he is the Seer, Creator and Ruler of the worlds, *kaviam, anusasitaram, dhataram*, and it is by knowing and loving Him as the One and the All, *vasudevam sarvam iti*, that we ought by a union with him of our whole conscious being in all things, all energies, all actions to seek the supreme consummation, the perfect perfection, the absolute release⁷.

This picture of the oneness of the Absolute Reality does make the world not an illusion but a manifestation of it. That also speaks of the Gita's idea that the divine necessity is manifested in the natural necessity. As Sri Aurobindo observes:

All that is in the *Swabhāva* is loosed out into cosmic Nature for her to do

what she can with it under the inner eye of the Purushottama. Out of the constant *svabhāva*, out of the essential nature and self-principle of being of each becoming, she creates the varied mutations by which she strives to express it⁸. . . .

The *Swabhāva* of Nature is to ceaselessly strive for maintaining the natural order so that the cosmic harmony is not disturbed. This harmony is based on Nature's own dynamics as well as by the divine laws.

Modern science does not accept the divine laws because there is no necessity for these laws other than the natural laws to explain the natural happenings. The Gita has no problem with science because, for the Gita, the divine laws are the natural laws themselves considered from a higher point of view, i.e. seen from God's point of view (*sub specie aeternitatis*)⁹. As Sri Aurobindo points out, the Gita is concerned with the cosmic harmony which is beyond scientific explanations. Science can explain the harmony belonging to the specific domains, but it can hardly explain how the grand cosmic harmony is possible. The universe embodies a universal mind or intelligence which science fails to take note of. Therefore science gives way to metaphysics to explain this. The metaphysics of the Gita introduces the Divine Mind and Divine Law into the functioning of Nature.

2. MAN AND NATURE

In the Gita, according to Sri Aurobindo, there are two standpoints from which we can view man and Nature and determine their metaphysical status. The first standpoint is the standpoint of science and commonsense which is entertained by the ordinary mind which cannot see beyond what is phenomenally present. This, therefore, is the lower standpoint steeped in ignorance of the true nature of reality. Besides this, there is the higher standpoint which gives us the true nature of reality and reveals the ultimate metaphysical character of man and the universe. Sri Aurobindo puts it in the following passage:

Here there is the clear distinction between two levels of consciousness, two standpoints of action, that of the soul caught in the web of its egoistic nature and doing works with the idea, but not the reality of free will, under the impulsion of Nature, and that of the soul delivered from its identification with the ego, observing, sanctioning and governing the works of Nature from above her¹⁰.

From the lower standpoint, man is just a part of Nature and his life is dictated by the laws of Nature. In that sense man is no different from other animals which share with mankind all the natural desires and instincts. This view of man and the universe, which is shared by modern science, reduces man to a natural being which is governed by the natural laws. The Gita calls this man

the *Jiva*, the individual being who is in bondage to Nature and partakes of its essence being part of Nature. Such a being is ignorant of its true Self. That is, the *Jiva* as a natural being is limited in his knowledge of the true nature of his own Self and the nature of the Universe. This limited knowledge is what the Gita calls Ignorance and that is bondage itself¹¹.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the *Jiva* is determined by Nature. All that the *Jiva* does is determined by the natural laws. His thoughts and actions are a matter of how he is disposed to think and act within the vast domain of the natural events. Man's birth and death and his multifarious wills, motives and desires are all propelled by the natural forces. Therefore there is nothing that he can do which is not rooted in his natural being. This is, according to the Gita, the ignorant man's status in the world because of which he is chained in spite of the fact that he thinks he is free in doing his actions. This is not real freedom because it is based on a cosmic illusion¹².

Man's true freedom, according to the Gita, lies in his knowledge of the truth that he is not the *Jiva*, the conditioned being but the Atman, the unconditioned being. The Atman is the true nature of the *Jiva*, as Sri Aurobindo points out, because the former, not the latter, which is identical with Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. As Atman, the *Jiva* transcends his own natural being and becomes one with the Absolute Reality. He realises that he is not the Self chained in space and time but the one who is above all the happenings in Nature. The individual man as the Atman is no more the mere natural man but a transcendent spirit¹³. As the spirit, man is free and is possessed of the knowledge of Reality. Freedom lies in the higher knowledge of the reality of the universe and man¹⁴.

3. IGNORANCE AND BONDAGE

The Gita highlights the role of ignorance of the nature of reality as the cause of bondage in the world. The ignorant man is under the sway of Maya so far as he lives as a part of the Nature in his lower consciousness. Maya is the way man, the *Jiva*, perceives himself as part of Nature and subservient to it. This bondage to Nature and his egoistic self is the product of Maya. The Gita's concept of Maya is more ethical than metaphysical precisely because the loss of freedom on the part of the soul is due to this mayic bondage to Nature. Sri Aurobindo highlights this aspect of the natural state of existence of the soul as the *Jiva* engrossed in the workings of the *gunas* of the Prakṛti¹⁵. The Gita is eloquent about the higher nature of man so much so that it declares the higher Self being the same as *īśvara* who is the inner controller of the universe. It is the higher Self which is the true owner of freedom and not the lower Self that is ignorant because of Maya. For Sri Aurobindo,

The Gita itself makes a distinction between those who have not the knowledge

of the whole, *akrtsnavidadah*, and are misled by the partial truths of existence, and the Yogin who has the synthetic knowledge of the reality, *krtsna-vit*¹⁶.

This distinction reflects the distinction between those who are the *Jivas* or the limited beings in the world and those who are the Yogins who are free from the Maya of limited existence.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the Gita is predominantly a discourse on freedom because it assumes that freedom is the inherent nature of man which is temporarily lost because of the influence of Maya. Freedom is nothing but the release of the *Jiva* from its own limited existence due to ignorance. When knowledge dawns, man becomes free. It is this transition from bondage to freedom which is chalked out by the Gita in its concept of Yoga. This is how Sri Aurobindo expounds the soul's journey to freedom:

We speak of the soul being subject to Nature; but on the other hand the Gita in distinguishing the properties of the soul and Nature affirms that while Nature is the executrix, the soul is always the lord, *īśvara*. It speaks here of the self being bewildered by egoism, but the real Self to the Vedantin is the divine, eternally free and self-aware¹⁷.

This shows the way the Gita maps out the journey of the soul from natural ignorance to freedom through knowledge of the reality. The soul is in itself eternally free because ignorance is due to lack of self-knowledge, that is, the knowledge of the nature of the Self as it is. The Vedantic assurance that freedom is already present but is clouded by Maya goes a long way in making the discourse on freedom metaphysically and ethically illuminating.

If bondage would have been a metaphysically eternal form of existence, then the Gita discourse would have lost its moral value. The entire discourse on freedom would have been incidental to the core of Gita's teachings. But, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, the very essence of the Gita is to lead man from bondage to liberation by his effort and self-mastery. Man's freedom being the eternal nature of the soul, all that man has to do is to become the Yogin, the free soul who knows the true nature of reality. Sri Aurobindo writes:

For that we must to rise high above the three gunas, become *trigunātīta*; for that Self is beyond even the sattwic principle. We have to climb to it through the sattwa, but we must attain to it only when we go beyond sattwa; we reach out to it from the ego, but only reach it by leaving the ego¹⁸.

4. FREEDOM AND DIVINE NECESSITY

For the Gita, as Sri Aurobindo sees it, the real problem is not the conflict between freedom and natural necessity which is solved by appealing to the two levels of man's existence — the natural and deterministic existence on the one

hand and the supernatural existence of freedom, on the other. The reconciliation between freedom and natural necessity is achieved not by the denial of either but by placing them at two different levels. This reconciliation is reminiscent of Kant's solution between the causal realm of the world and the realm of moral freedom¹⁹.

The Gita faces a greater challenge regarding the reconciliation between freedom and divine necessity. In the Gita framework, there is, on the one hand, the human individuals and, on the other, the divine laws between which there cannot be any apparent reconciliation because the individual's freedom of choice is taken to be independent of the divine laws. Therefore if God's will prevails in this world, the individual cannot be free and cannot have an independent will of his own²⁰. The freedom of the individual is at stake in all systems where God's laws are supreme.

The Gita, however, tries to solve this problem by allowing freedom to man even in the God-controlled world, that is, within the world where God's will prevails. The world, as the Gita puts it, is the manifestation of God's Will, that is, it itself is the way Brahman has made itself manifest²¹. There is nothing in the universe that is not Brahman. Such being the case, it follows that the individual man, the *Jiva*, is also a manifestation of the Divine and so the *Jiva* is Brahman in its essence. The individuality of the individual is an illusion which is due to *avidya*²². Thus the individual man is basically a divine reality, that is, the Atman.

Given this metaphysical framework of the oneness of reality and the non-dual character of *Jiva* and Brahman, the picture becomes clear as to where to look for human freedom. The solution is this: freedom is the very nature of the *Jiva*, but is only temporally eclipsed by Maya. The *Jiva* can get back its freedom by realising its true nature. This Vedantic solution which is endorsed by Sri Aurobindo shows that the divine necessity does not deny freedom but rather makes freedom itself part of the divine necessity in the sense that if we realise what the laws of the Divine are we realise that we are not different from the Divine Reality and thereby partake of the same divine necessity. But this realisation of the oneness of the Divine Reality is the freedom or liberation of our Self from ignorance. By realising the unity of all existence including one's own, we get back to our own inmost higher Self, the Atman. That is the state of freedom which annuls all bondage. Thus freedom of man is guaranteed by divine necessity.

Many may think that the Gita's solution is only sidestepping the issue because if man is free then he cannot be a willing instrument of the Divine (*nimittamātram*)²³. If he is an instrument of the Divine then he is not free. Thus there is a conflict between human freedom and God's Will. But the fact of the matter is, in the Gita framework the individual man has no will of his own in reality, except in appearance. The individual will is ultimately a divine will. Therefore the will of man does not conflict with the Will of God. In that sense, the freedom of man's

will is the divine freedom that is the very essence of the Self. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

For when the Gita describes the nature of this self-realisation and the result of the Yoga which comes by Nirvana of the separate ego-mind and its motives of thought and feelings and action into the Brahman-consciousness, it includes the cosmic sense, though lifted into a new kind of vision²⁴.

This shows that self-realisation is, in fact, the realisation of freedom, according to the Gita. Freedom is not the freedom to do something. It is freedom from, that is, freedom from²⁵ the bondage in the world. Thus freedom is the very nature of man, according to the Gita.

5. FREEDOM AND AGENCY

The concept of agency is conceptually associated with the concept of freedom in view of the fact that only an agent can be free in performing actions. Agency and actions are themselves conceptually connected in view of the same fact, namely, that the agents alone engage themselves in actions. The idea of agency is so fundamental to actions and freedom that it is considered as the very basic concept which can be analysed both metaphysically and morally²⁶.

In the context of the Gita, the notion of agency (*kartā*) becomes important because Lord Sri Krishna is addressing Arjuna as an agent who is in the battlefield of actions. In this connection it is important to remember that the agent in the Gita is unable to find out the true meaning of his own agency and the role that he has to play in any action. Lord Sri Krishna's effort is to enlighten Arjuna, the agent about his own agency and its true meaning in the context of the whole cosmic existence. According to the Gita, the human agent is to be seen vis-à-vis the cosmic agent which Lord Sri Krishna himself is. There are two forms of agency in the Gita, the human agency and the Divine Agency. Both the agencies have to be understood in the framework of the cosmic drama which the Gita enacts.

The human agent is a part of the world and so is under the sway of Nature being confined to Nature and its laws. In that sense the human agent performs his actions by being guided by Nature. In this way the human agent is a limited being and can only do those actions which are naturally sanctioned and ordained. The agent, however, is not free in the sense the Gita defines it. The agent is under the illusion that he is free because he is ignorant about the true nature of agency and the ultimate nature of the works. The agent is really free only when he transcends his ego-self and comes to understand his true place in the cosmic drama. Sri Aurobindo makes it clear in the following passage:

Our mental and vital personality is a truth of our natural existence, but a truth of the ignorance, and all that attaches itself to it is also truth of that

order, practically valid for the works of the ignorance, but no longer valid when we get back to the real truth of our being²⁷.

Thus the human agent is not in the complete knowledge of the truth of his being. In fact, his own agency is a product of ignorance and cannot be taken as final. When we are awakened to our true being, we realise that we are not the agents and that the Divine alone is the agent which performs all actions. "We can only know this greater truth by living it, that is to say, by passing beyond the mental into spiritual experience, by Yoga"²⁸. The works which we seem to do are all the Divine Works in the sense that they are all directed by the Divine and are not owing to the human agent as such.

The concept of the Divine Works and the Divine Agent both are central to the Gita. The Gita's concept of agency is dependent on the Divine Agency because there is nothing that happens in the universe that is not according to the will of God. So from the Gita's point of view, God or the Divine is the real agent who does all works in the universe. The human agent is the agent only from the human point of view, but from God's point of view, the human agency is only apparent and not real. Therefore the human agent must offer all his works to God as a sacrifice, as all works belong to the Divine and the human agent is only an instrument. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

Works must be done as a sacrifice to this Lord of our works, and we must by growing into the Self realise our oneness with him in our being and see our personality as a partial manifestation of him in Nature. One with him in being, we grow one with all beings in the universe and do divine works, not as ours, but as his workings through us for the maintenance and leading of the peoples²⁹.

This reveals the cosmic purpose of all actions in the universe which ultimately belong to the Divine. That makes us agents only as dependent on the Divine who is the supreme agent.

6. SURRENDER AS THE STATE OF FREEDOM

The essence of the Yoga defined by the Gita moves around two notions, namely, the surrender of oneself and one's actions to the Divine and the attainment of freedom remaining non-attached to the happenings in the universe. The former is explained through the *karma yoga* and the latter through the concept of *sthita-prajna* (equanimity)³⁰. The idea of *karmayoga* is the heart of the Gita's teachings, while the idea of *sthita-prajna* is the culmination of those teachings. The Gita stands on these two pillars in its ethics and metaphysics..

Freedom or liberation from the sorrows and sufferings caused by one's attachment to the ego and its actions and from the desires which are the propelling force of all human actions is the hallmark of *karmayoga*. The *karmayoga* as the right way of doing actions with the spirit of non-attachment and sacrifice to the Divine makes the way for freedom because in this way of doing actions one is already free from the ego and its attendant illusions. Thus the Gita makes freedom the very nature of our Self which transcends the ego and its attachments. Sri Aurobindo sums up the Gita's notion of freedom as follows:

By works done for sacrifice, eliminating desire, we arrive at knowledge and at the soul's possession of itself; by works done in self-knowledge and God-knowledge we are liberated into the unity, peace and joy of the divine existence³¹.

Here it is unfolded that the free or liberated soul is the one who has surrendered to the Divine in mind and spirit and does everything as a duty towards the Divine and his creation. This makes freedom the very nature of the spiritual existence of man.

What is important to note is that the Gita has taken the radical step of denying the human agency for the sake of freedom. The denial of the agency of the ego is the first step towards liberation. Unless the ego's agency is denied, the ego would seem to be performing its actions in complete oblivion of the Divine and thereby arrogating all his actions to itself. This results in the human beings remaining in the world of suffering because of their own ignorance. The denial of agency is the way to the surrender to the Divine which means acknowledging the fact that one is not the ultimate doer but a mere instrument in the hands of the Divine.

A sceptic may argue that the surrender of agency is the surrender of one's freedom and therefore the Gita has no place for freedom in the real sense of the term. The ordinary sense of freedom is dependent on the assertion of agency and so there could be doubt whether the Gita is interested in the ordinary notion of freedom at all. It is true that the Gita is not in favour of making man the sole reality of the universe and his freedom the only moral virtue. The Gita is interested in the higher notion of freedom that is attained only by negating one's ordinary self and its attachments. It is the higher sense of freedom that is the Gita's concern. It does not deny, however, that man for all practical purposes continues to be in the world doing all his actions. His agency is retained with the caveat that it is not ultimately real.

7. CONCLUSION

Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Gita on the nature of freedom and

determinism remains a very authentic representation of the Gita's doctrines. He has represented the spirit of the Gita in its most magnificent form. One cannot doubt that in Sri Aurobindo the Gita finds its authentic spokesman after Lord Krishna. Like Sri Krishna, Sri Aurobindo has given the message of freedom to man and the clarion call to the life divine.

Notes and References :

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2000). (To be abbreviated as *Essays* henceforward)
2. Cf. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. L.W. Beck (Bobbs-Merill, Indianapolis, 1956).
3. *Essays*, (First series), XXI.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid. See also *Bhagvadgita*, XI, 10.
6. *Essays*, (Second series), III.
7. Ibid, p. 299.
8. Ibid., p. 293.
9. See Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (Dover Publications, Inc, New York, 1955).
10. *Essays*, pp. 214-215.
11. Ibid. Cf. *Bhagvadgita*, VII, 13-14,
12. Ibid, (First Series), XXI-XXII.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., pp. 224-228.
16. Ibid., p. 213.
17. Ibid., p. 215.
18. Ibid., p. 223.
19. See Kant, op.cit. for a discussion on the nature of freedom as distinguished from causal necessity.
20. It is taken for granted that the individual will can have no freedom if God's will prevails in the world. If God wills everything, then the individual will is bound to be without choice and freedom.
21. Cf. *Bhagvadgita*, X and XV.
22. *Essays*, (First Series), XVIII.
23. *Bhagvadgita*, XVIII, 62-66.
24. *Essays*, p. 244.
25. "Freedom to" and "freedom from" are two types of freedom. The Gita propounds the latter because it emphasises the liberation from the ego and its desires.
26. See A. Bilgrami, *Self-Knowledge and Resentment* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2006) for a discussion on agency and freedom.
27. *Essays*, p. 250.
28. Ibid., p. 250.
29. Ibid., p. 257.
30. Cf. *Bhagvadgita*, II.
31. *Essays*, p.123.

The Mother image in Sri Aurobindo

Prema Nandakumar

(Continued from the previous issue)

8. Mother in the Plays

A time comes when reading Sri Aurobindo's literary creations we find the mother image wherever we turn. The plays are no exception. He was a great admirer of Shakespeare and Kalidasa. His translation of Kalidasa's *Vikramorvasiyam* as *The Hero and the Nymph* is a perfect example of literal translation without descending to a prosaic reproduction. He seems to have thought of translating all the works of Kalidasa for after completing this play he had begun to work on Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitra*. This translation remains unfinished. Sri Aurobindo's choice for taking up *Vikramorvasiyam* first may have had something to do with his deep-rooted anguish about his own mother who had to remain separated from her sons when they were studying in England. In this play we get to draw close to a mother's distress as she has to be separated from her child whom she had seen long after she had given birth to him.

Urvashi had been banished to earth by Indra for ruining a dance performance. However this curse would end the moment her human husband saw his son's face, and she would have to return to the heavens. After living with King Pururavas for sometime, she gives birth to Ayus. Worried that she will be forced to go away from her husband if he happens to see the child, she gives the child to Satyavathi. When he grows into a sturdy young man Satyavati brings him to Urvashi and that is when Pururavas learns he is a father. It is too late now for anything to be done, and Urvashi has to go back carrying a double anguish: parting from her dear husband and her firstborn. The joy of a mother looking at her beloved child after a long time and the anguish thereof has been brought to us by Kalidasa's use of a familiar image:

“Pururavas (seeing Urvashi):
O child, look up.

Lo, she who bore thee, with her whole rapt gaze
Grown mother, her veiled bosom heaving towards thee
And wet with sacred milk!”

Of Sri Aurobindo's original dramatic works, we have now five full-length plays and four unfinished plays. He has analysed motherhood from various stances as in the unfinished play, *The Prince of Mathura*. We have no clear idea of how the dramatist would have proceeded with his study of motherhood, but as we open the few pages that are all there, we find motherhood in a fierce anxiety to save a beloved child from an ignominious marriage. Atry, the King of Mathura would like to continue to be king by offering his daughter Urmila to Toraman, the Prince of Cashmere, who is a foreigner, an invading Scythian. His queen, Indrany, fiercely dismisses the idea. Atry thinks otherwise:

“The King's first task is to preserve his realm,
Means honourable or dishonourable
Are only means – to use impartially
The most effective first.” (*The Prince of Mathura*, SABCL, vol.7, p.895)

But his general and minister Mayoora has a better sense of honour and plans to foil the king's scheme to get the princess married to Toraman. Because the play breaks off in the first scene of the first act itself, we have lost a brilliant study of motherhood that guards fiercely the pride of a nation's womanhood, and thereby the pride of the nation itself. Haven't we met Vidula earlier? Queen Mena Devi in *The Prince of Edur* is another memorable creation of motherhood. The plot is not unlike that of *The Prince of Mathura*. Here also the ruling Prince of Edur, Rana Curran wants to give his daughter Comol Coomary in marriage to the Scythian Toraman of Cashmere for political reasons. Obviously Sri Aurobindo had not been happy to read in Indian history the manner in which the Mughal Emperor Akbar had managed to coax certain Rajasthan princes to part with their daughters and married them for gaining the trust of the Hindus. Chief among them was Heer Kunwari Jodha Bai (known as Mariam-uz-Zamani), the eldest daughter of Raja Bharmal of Amer (Jaipur). Sri Aurobindo had wished to dramatise the forces of patriotism against playing into the hands of the British as indeed Hindu princes had done with their immediate foes led by the Mughal kings.

We have a larger fragment on hand with *The Prince of Edur*. Rana Curran's looking upon a daughter as a piece of chattel is alarming:

“What is it but a daughter? One more girl
And in exchange an emperor for my ally,
It must be done.” (*The Prince of Edur*, SABCL, vol.7, p.742)

Once again it is woman as the mother who symbolises Indian honour in this fragment when Mena Devi, with a natural poise rejects the idea:

“You know, my lord, we hold a Rajpoot soldier
Without estate or purse deserves a queen
More than a crowned barbarian.” (Ibid, p.744)

The duel of words is a paean to the Indian mother: patriotic, virtuous, brave, truly in the line of Savitri, Sita, Draupadi. Fortunately his Brahmin Minister Visaldeo is on the mother’s side. He accedes to Rana Curran’s plan but quietly follows Mena Devi to thwart the plan. This play also remains unfinished, probably due to Sri Aurobindo’s Alipur incarceration at that time.

Sri Aurobindo’s varied presentations of the mother image in the five completed plays are very interesting as also thought-provoking. We open with *Perseus the Deliverer*, of course. This is because the play is the only one of the five which was completely revised and published by him. The play has the Chaldean Princess Cassiopea who has married Cepheus, the King of Syria. They have a daughter Andromeda who is the heroine of the play.

Cassiopea, again, is the typical mother who will defend her child from evil at any cost. Unlike the Cassiopea of Greek mythology who is shown as arrogant, Sri Aurobindo has cast her in the Indian mould. He has made suitable changes in the plot and shows Cassiopea as a veritable tigress when it comes to protecting her son Iolaus or daughter Andromeda from Polydaon’s claws. When Andromeda rescues the prisoner bound as Poseidon’s sacrifice by Polydaon, hell breaks loose. Polydaon wants Andromeda as the sacrificial victim! King Cepheus is easily cowed down by Polydaon’s voice, but the mother of Andromeda gives a good fight, thundering at the Priest of Poseidon:

“..... He uses
The name of great Poseidon to conceal
His plottings. He would end the line of Cepheus
And reign in Syria
Look how he pales, O people!
Is’t thus that great Poseidon’s herald looks
When charged with the god’s fearful menaces?

He diets you with forgeries and fictions.” (*Perseus the Deliverer*, SABCL, vol.6, p.111)

It is her call that gets the king and Andromeda safely back in to the palace. However, the intrigues of people in power have always tried to topple the best among people and the populace is easily swayed by a skilful tongue. Therops is one such leader and brings in an argument that the Chaldean Cassiopea is out to destroy Syrian religion. Soon the populace is baying for royal blood. But Cassiopea will not escape and leave Cepheus behind. Again a mother and wife that Indians are familiar with:

“With no half soul I came
To share thy kingdom and thy joys; entirely
I came, to take the evil also with thee.” (Ibid, p.133)

There are other dimensions too to this image of motherhood. Cassiopea accepts the ways of Fate. Destiny is inexorable! It is the wisdom of the ages:

“A screened necessity drives even the gods.
Over human lives it strides to unseen ends;
Our tragic failures are its stepping-stones.” (Ibid)

Till the end, she doesn’t give in to Polydaon’s threats; she is one person whom he cannot cow down. She describes him exactly to his face as “a madman and inhuman monster”. For soon he begins to rant mad, since Perseus has rescued Andromeda. As we race towards the conclusion we find that Cassiopea is as full of humility in her victory as she was defiant when death stared at her. When Perseus gently asks for Andromeda’s hand as his reward, she speaks the words of a typical traditional mother whose joy lies only in promoting the happiness of her children in a dharmic way.

“What can I give thee then who hast the world
To move in, thy courage and thy radiant beauty,
And a tender mother? Yet take my blessing, Perseus,
To help thee: for the mightiest strengths are broken
And divine favour lasts not long, but blessings
Of those thou helpst with thy kindly strength
Upon life’s rugged way, can never fail thee.” (Ibid, p.184)

This is the very basis of our culture which gains a natural obeisance from the younger generations when an elder is present and how ‘*aseervad*’ is consi-

dered the richest of gifts in the Indian context. Earlier, we had seen a sharp, violent reaction from her when faced with rebellion and mob fury. But she is equally quick in forgiving the trespasses of misguided souls as when Therops seeks pardon:

“They are buried deep,
Thy bold rebellion, — even thy cruel slanders,
If only thou wilt serve me as my friend
True to thy people in me” (Ibid, p. 187)

Said like Sita to Hanuman in the *Yuddha Kanda*. Why should he destroy the rakshasis for torturing her? All that is past. The way of the Aryan, the noble person, is forgiveness. Does it matter if the enemy is a sinner or is one who deserves to be killed? The way of the Aryan is compassion, *kaaryam karuna-maryena!*

The one Indian theme among Sri Aurobindo’s finished plays is that of *Vasavadutta*. A myth from the Indian ocean of stories, *Katha Sarit Sagara*, it retells the marriage of Udayana and Vasavadutta, that has been handled by Bhasa in his drama *Pratijna Yaugandharayana*. Queen Ungarica is stationed here as the mother of Princess Vasavadutta. Unlike the royal fathers in *The House of Brut* and *Perseus the Deliverer* who want to purchase peace by the shameful handing over of their daughters to the conquerors belonging to another race, King Mahasegn of Avunthie is arrogant and lusts for power. The rise of Vuthsa Udayan, the king of Cowsambie does not please him. He imprisons Vuthsa by deceit and commands his daughter to guard the prisoner. He thinks it will be a fitting insult for the Cowsambie king to be guarded by a female. His queen, however, does not like Mahasegn’s dubious ways to achieve emperorship. Nor does she favour the ways of Vasavadutta who is as arrogant as her father. Though she loves her daughter deeply, she is not uncritical. She advises Vasavadutta not to be a party to any deceitful move on the king’s part and gently leads her to the natural habitat of a young girl, love. Udayan shall be her Lord, not a prisoner. She should know that it were best to be a typical Indian wife, a sati. It is not pride-driven power but love that brings true happiness to a married life.

“I charge thee, Vasavadutta, when thou rul’st
In far Cowsambie, let this be thy reign
To heap on him delight and seek his good.

Raise his high fortunes, shelter from grief his heart,
Even with thy own tears buy his joy and peace,
Nor let one clamorous thought of self revolt
Against him.” (*Vasavadutta*, SABCL, Vol.6, p.280)

Vasavadutta is not quite pleased with this advice. She desires Udayan but hers should be the upper hand! Ungarica teaches her gently with words and silences. Rejecting the king’s un-Aryan stand to shame or kill the imprisoned Vuthsa, she silently helps Vuthsa go away with Vasavadutta. It is natural that she is steeped in the religious tradition of India which helps her avoid the pitfalls of megalomania exhibited by King Mahasegn. Sri Aurobindo has used religious symbolism to great effect in this Shakespearian romance. Mahasegn reflects the Shiva-Rudra in his speeches and personality; Vuthsa is of course Vishnu-like, handome, sweet of nature, heroic but not aggressive; Vasavadutta is the Luxmie for this Vishnu. The mother’s blessings are not in vain for soon her daughter is welcomed in Vuthsa’s land by the wise minister Yaugandharayana: “Hail, Vasavadutta, great Cowsambie’s queen.”

There is no mother-character in *Eric* which was inspired by Scandinavian sagas. Nor in his other sputtery drama, *The Viziers of Bassora*. Motherhood was holy for Sri Aurobindo and the examples of motherhood in Indian literature made him proud no end. After all, there is the “*Devi Kshamapraadha Sthotram*” which is attributed to Adi Sankara. The second verse seeks the forgiveness of the Mother for placing before her flawed offerings due to his ignorance, poverty or even weak surrender. And why should he not ask her forgiveness, is his question. After all, *kuputro jayeta kvachidapi kumata na bhavati!* A son may become bad or evil but never a mother can be evil!

This is a rule, of course. But, in the final analysis, exceptions do prove the rule. The Himalayan amount of reading that Sri Aurobindo engaged himself in did give him an incident from Greek sources. He could read Greek and was fascinated by Appian (2nd century A.D.) whose Roman History is rich with legends. What we have now of this work is incomplete but there is enough and more for the creative artist. Sri Aurobindo has chosen the heart-searing legend of the Syrian queen Cleopatra, her twin sons and the beautiful Parthian princess, Rodogune.

The story of Cleopatra occurs in sections 66,67,68 of *The Syrian Wars* compiled by Appian. There are a few other sources too including Corneille’s play, *Rodogune*. But Sri Aurobindo’s play makes its own structure. King Antiochus the Great of Syria is dead. His wife Cleopatra eagerly awaits the return of

her banished twin sons by her first marriage to Nicanor. She is very much a womanly woman here, with all the anxieties and stupidities that go with motherhood under stress. Her brief speech gives us the background:

“The man who’s dead was nothing to my heart:
My husband was Nicanor, my beautiful
High-hearted lord with his bright auburn hair
And open face. When he died miserably
A captive in the hated Parthian’s bonds,
My heart was broken. Only for my babes
I knit the pieces strongly to each other,
My little babies whom I must send away
To Egypt far from me! But for Antiochus
That gloomy, sullen and forbidding soul,
Harsh-featured, hard of heart, rough mud of camps
And marches, — he was never lord of me.
He was a reason of State, an act of policy;
And he exiled my children. You have not been
A mother!” (*Rodogune*, SABCL, vol.6, p.340)

That is the problem. Now she has to name one of the twins as the future king of Syria. Whom should she name? Antiochus is heroic and ambitious too and takes it for granted that the throne would come to him. Timocles is effeminate, and at his best, radiates affection and goodwill towards everybody. Naturally the formal, stiff ways of Antiochus do not please her as much as the sweet nothings of Timocles. Her mind is further perverted by the evil counsel of Cleone and she names Timocles as her first-born who also wants Antiochus’ lady-love, Rodogune. Civil strife is the result. Timocles arrests Antiochus and gets him murdered in the prison. Rodogune also dies on getting the news.

Cleopatra’s turning against Antiochus was not merely his indifferent nature. She had no reason to love Rodogune whose father, King Phraates had held Nicanor captive. Nicanor had died in captivity and Cleopatra wants to avenge Nicanor by having Rodogune die a captive in Syria’s prisons. She tells her sons that whoever kills Rodogune would be declared as her first-born. From now onwards Cleopatra conceals her hatred for Antiochus for his refusal to kill Rodogune and even marrying her. However, even though Timocles is declared as the king, the mother’s heart does not reject Antiochus. Unlike the Cleopatras in the earlier sources, Sri Aurobindo’s Cleopatra is a mother in the true sense of the term. She will not shed the blood of her child. Indeed, she had begun well

when the play opened and had hoped for a new time of peace and love:

“I do not wish for hatred any more.
The horrible and perilous hands of war
Appal me. O, let our people sit at ease
In Grecian Antioch and Persepolis,
Mothers and children, clasping those golden heads
Deep, deep within our bosoms, never allow
Their going forth again to bonds and death.
Peace, peace, let us have peace for ever more.” (Ibid, p.354)

The dream of every mother since times immemorial! In her pursuit of peace she is even prepared to give up her hatred for the Parthian princess Rodogune and make her the queen of Syria by marrying her to the elected king. When Cleone tries to make Cleopatra name Timocles as the king instead of Antiochus, she rejects the idea. But soon she veers round to the advice and thereby takes on the “tragical responsibility/of such dire error” because she wants to save her treaty with Parthia to ensure peace. Unfortunately it leads to a fratricidal civil war. Was she then unmotherly in naming Timocles? Hadn’t she worked for real, lasting peace at the cost of personal happiness? Could she ever be at peace with herself for having ignored the claims of the strong and brave Antiochus and promoted the weakling Timocles given to seizures and rank jealousy? Act V, Scene 4 of *Rodogune* is a nightmare when the mother comes face to face with the ultimate tragedy when Timocles confesses to her that he had his brother killed. Cain again! Cleopatra recoils from him:

“Call me not mother!
I have no children. I am punished, gods,
Who dared outlive my great unhappy husband
For this!” (Ibid, p.461)

There is nothing intrinsically evil in Cleopatra but she had had a harsh life, especially as Syria’s queen when she had married again. Nothing is as tragic for a woman as mother when she is forcibly separated from her children, a phenomenon that became very common under the regime of Hitler when he decided to go ahead with genocide. Children were literally torn away from their mothers for the Nazis found a terrible pleasure in maternal grief. This was one of the many terrifying facets of the Second World War. Apparently King

Antiochus was made of such stuff, blisteringly brought to our attention by Sri Aurobindo in his poem, ‘*The Children of Wotan*’:

“Question the volcano when it burns, chide the fire and bitumen!
Suffering is the food of our strength and torture the bliss of our entrails.
We are pitiless, mighty and glad, the gods fear our laughter inhuman.
Our hearts are heroic and hard; we wear the belt of Orion:
Our will has the edge of the thunderbolt, our acts the claws of the lion.
We rejoice in the pain we create as a man in the kiss of a woman.” (SABCL, vol.5, p.112)

In spite of all she had suffered, Cleopatra does try to do the right thing for humanity to live in peace. Her failure is perhaps the failure of humanity itself which prefers to respect and fear the fire-eater and ignores the pacifist. And yet, only this tribe of mothers like Cleopatra gives the world its hope of a peaceful future. For conveying this message, Sri Aurobindo had to deviate from his sources in the matter of characterisation. Sri Aurobindo’s Cleopatra is nearer the Indian reality which has dared to make the final statement: *kuputro jayeta kvachidapi kumata na bhavati!*

(To be continued)

Mind, Overmind and Supermind – Theme II

Debashish Banerji

Savitri, Book II, Canto XII – The Heavens of The Ideal

Rising above the lower ranges of mind and even beyond the cosmic mind ranges Aswapati arrives at *The Heavens of The Ideal*. In his early writings, as for example in his diary notes (*Record of Yoga*) and *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo uses the term Ideal Mind to mean Supermind (1999: pp. 171, 417; 2001: pp. 489, 949, 961, 1135, 1200). This corresponds with the original Idea or what Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine* refers to as Real-Idea (2005: pp. 125, 137, 138, 145) as the manifesting principle of our cosmos. The realisation of this Idea would also be the Ideal forming the attractor of the evolving universe. But later, from 1926, Sri Aurobindo was to distinguish finer gradations of cosmic mind leading to Supermind, most significantly identifying the level of Overmind as the cosmic consciousness proper and the last range of Mind prior to Supermind. He also distinguished finer resolutions within both Overmind and Supermind. Put broadly, the "integral consciousness" of Supermind becomes divided into parts and qualities in Overmind, each of which stands as a cosmic archetype representing the Divine. This is why Sri Aurobindo was to refer to Overmind as the “world of the gods.” The Real-Idea also here divides itself into Ideals. The cosmic mind ranges further differentiate and specify the "global consciousness" of Overmind. They form some of the entry points into the Overmind, where all the ideals that stand behind the creation are represented and make a world each of itself.

Always the Ideal beckoned from afar.
Awakened by the touch of the Unseen,
Deserting the boundaries of things achieved,
Aspired the strong discoverer, tireless Thought,
Revealing at each step a luminous world. (*Savitri*, 4th rev.ed, 1993, p.277)

The Ideal is the ultimate attractor of human aspiration. Its origin is in

Supermind but it exerts its attraction on the human mind from the Overmind. Unfortunately, it is so far above us that we do not see it with any clarity. Yet it translates itself to our minds in terms that make sense to us. Human life is a ceaseless journey along a track of ideals. Often our ideals change in mid-motion, even prior to fulfilment. Or the fulfilment of an ideal leads us to a greater ideal. The fragmentation of the Supramental Ideal into a variety of subsidiary ideals in Mind, combined with the ignorance of human seeking, bestows this changeful nature to our goals. Yet it is a characteristic of human consciousness to be led by ideals.

It left known summits for the unknown peaks:
 Impassioned, it sought the lone unrealised Truth,
 It longed for the Light that knows not death and birth. (Ibid.)

These ideals are idea-forces that cause the various truths and powers of consciousness to emerge in an evolving Ignorance. The higher one rises in Consciousness, the closer one comes to the Supramental ideal. In Overmind, the fragmentation of the Ideal reduces to two powers of attraction that draw the seeker forward. Aswapati becomes conscious of this as he enters these ranges of Overmind that Sri Aurobindo calls "*The Heavens of the Ideal*":

At either end of each effulgent stair
 The heavens of the ideal Mind were seen
 In a blue lucency of dreaming Space (Ibid.)

The cosmic mind planes are seen as a progressive climb to Overmind. The two primary ideals find manifestation at each "rung" of this progression. Thus they stand not only above but behind the entire creation, constantly inspiring the progress of consciousness.

Like strips of brilliant sky clinging to the moon.
 On one side glimmered hue on floating hue,
 A glory of sunrise breaking on the soul,
 In a tremulous rapture of the heart's insight
 And the spontaneous bliss that beauty gives,
 The lovely kingdoms of the deathless Rose. (Ibid)

The "strips of sky" refer to the divided nature of mind experience, so that even in the impersonal ranges of cosmic mind the manifestation of these ideals are fragmented and discrete, appearing with new properties at each rung. Here Sri Aurobindo introduces the first of these two ideals, the kingdoms of the "deathless Rose."

Above the spirit cased in mortal sense
 Are superconscious realms of heavenly peace,
 Below, the Inconscient's sullen dim abyss,
 Between, behind our life, the deathless Rose.
 Across the covert air the spirit breathes,
 A body of the cosmic beauty and joy
 Unseen, unguessed by the blind suffering world,
 Climbing from Nature's deep surrendered heart
 It blooms for ever at the feet of God,
 Fed by life's sacrificial mysteries. (Ibid, pp.277-78)

The fragrance and beauty of divine Love expressing through psychic surrender and sacrifice forms the deep secret meaning of cosmic existence. There is a profound interchange of love relating the manifestation to the Divine. This surrender, this mystery of sacrifice is embodied by the perfection of the "deathless Rose." The truth of love made beauty, the symbol of the rose also represents the truth of complexity made harmony. In Indian and East Asian traditions, the lotus is usually seen as the mystic flower that blooms in the secret heart of things. Sri Aurobindo also refers to the lotus in several places in *Savitri*, including this very passage, where the intense world of symbols evoked by the Rose rises to a crescendo with the supramental vision of:

A million lotuses swaying on one stem,
 World after coloured and ecstatic world
 Climbs towards some far unseen epiphany. (Ibid, 279)

But in describing an archetypal image of the primary ideal of Love in the cosmos, Sri Aurobindo presents us with the Rose. The rose is much more commonly a representation of mystic love in West Asia and Europe and the mysticism related to their two primary religions, Christianity and Sufism. What the rose characterises as a flower (as against the lotus) are the qualities of intensity, passion, sacrifice and harmony. The rich and intense fragrance and crimson colour of the rose carry the message of the offering of life, the willingness to sacrifice one's last drop of blood as a gift of love. The ideal of martyrdom exemplified by Jesus or by a number of Sufi saints translates easily to this symbol of sacrifice, the rose, which has given rise to the use of this symbol in a number of mystic sects of West Asia. In Christianity, perhaps the most prominent of these sects is Rosicrucianism, in whose symbolism the image of Christ is replaced by a rose blossoming at the centre of the cross, literally exemplifying the name of the sect, a rosy cross. The poet W. B. Yeats was a

member of this sect for some time, and wrote a number of poems referring to the symbol of the Rose. Sri Aurobindo was familiar with these poems. He would have been even more familiar with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which there is an ascension of planes, and in the *Paradiso*, the heaven planes. The highest heaven in the *Paradiso*, which is the equivalent of the Apotheosis, is figured in the image of a cosmic Rose (or even perhaps, an extra-cosmic transcendental Real-Idea of the Rose) with all the souls as its infinite infolded petals (Canto XXX: 97-148; Canto XXXI: 1-27). Sri Aurobindo has also himself written a beautiful poem on this divine archetype titled *Rose of God* (2009: 564). In this poem, he invokes the ideal in its different divine qualities such as Bliss, Light, Power, Life and Love. These qualities separated and invoked separately are reminiscent of the "strips of sky" in the descriptive lines from *Savitri*, referring to the different levels of cosmic mind where this archetype exists in its different powers. Yet the rose itself is also an image of complex harmony. We see how a large number of petals of various sizes fold in whorls to produce the effect of its wonderful beauty. Again, this beauty of harmony is not present to the same degree in the lotus. Hence one may think of it as an ideal more suited to the complex differentiation and yearning proper to our collective earthly existence, a realised fulfilment of cosmic multiplicity united in harmonious divine love.

Here too its bud is born in human breasts;
Then by a touch, a presence or a voice
The world is turned into a temple ground
And all discloses the unknown Beloved. (Ibid, p.278)

The human being is the microcosm reproducing in structure and consciousness the forces and relations of the macrocosm. Thus this divine cosmic Rose blooms also in the heart of each human being as his/her secret psychic reality. Due to its presence we discover the Beloved in all things, the Divine is everywhere revealed in the power of Love. This is a special flower from the world of psychic messages that we carry within our souls, a soul-flower that makes all of life, in its dualities of pleasure and pain, a glad offering to the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo describes the psychic action of the "deathless Rose" as one which leads to the opening of the mystic centres (*chakras*) and the beginnings of a divine life:

Our hidden centres of celestial force
Open like flowers to a heavenly atmosphere;
Mind pauses thrilled with the supernal Ray,

And even this transient body then can feel
Ideal love and flawless happiness
And laughter of the heart's sweetness and delight
Freed from the rude and tragic hold of Time,
And beauty and the rhythmic feet of the hours.
This in high realms touches immortal kind;
What here is in the bud has blossomed there. (Ibid, pp.278-79)

This in *The Heavens of the Ideal* is the archetypal Rose, the Rose of God that blooms in miniscule form even in each psychic being. It is that which suddenly opens us to Divine Love pervading and penetrating the entire cosmos and its fragrance and self-offering are the beauty and wonder of the manifestation. Opening within as an intrinsic quality of the psychic being, it can psychise our nature and effect a beginning of transformation towards the divine life. But it also feels the magnetic pull of its origin in the higher cosmic mind planes (which Sri Aurobindo called the Overhead planes) with its summit in Overmind and ultimately in Supermind. In the poem *Rose of God* Sri Aurobindo has a line descriptive of this Supramental status of the Divine Rose. He calls it the "Sun on the head of the Timeless" (2009: 564). This gives us a glimpse of the ultimate origin of this Ideal, where it is no longer recognisable as the rose that we are familiar with but transforms into the fiery solar Gnosis. This is one of the principal ideals that draws us in *The Heavens of the Ideal* as brought out by Sri Aurobindo. Then he introduces the other primary archetype:

On the other side of the eternal stairs
The mighty kingdoms of the deathless Flame (Ibid)

Here we find the ardour, the will to self-exceeding that provides the pressure of evolution. The Divine who has involved itself in Matter through the power of Sacrifice carries the force of its self-compression as a Memory (*smriti*) and a Will (*kratu*) that lifts its tongue of Aspiration ever higher as the inner Fire (*Agni*) lit in the heart of things. This is one of the primary gods invoked in the Vedas, Agni, the priest of the Sacrifice, the strong Forerunner, the remember of Births (*jataveda*) that is the representative of the solar Fire or Supramental Shakti delegated to transform the Ignorance of the cosmos (1998: 58-69; 387-472). Sri Aurobindo discusses this symbol extensively in his studies into the Vedas, devoting an entire book to translations and interpretations of one of the volumes of the Rig Veda dealing specifically with invocations to the Fire. These are the hymns of the *Atris* and Sri Aurobindo's work is titled *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* (2013). We find this symbolism also in other early religions related

to the Vedic, as for example in Zoroastrianism. And it is not fortuitous that it is this cosmic will to self-exceeding that Nietzsche puts into the message of Zarathustra as the way to the superman. This, like the Rose, has its ultimate origin in Supermind as the "Sun on the head of the Timeless." The original home of the Fire is also the solar Supramental Gnosis, but it descends down the cosmic mind planes drawing us upward with its power and enters into the psychic core of the cosmos and each of its souls as the immanent power of Aspiration and Will driving them towards its Origin.

It is interesting that Fire also appears as a symbol in Christianity. The most prominent mention of flames is during the Pentecost, where it symbolises the appearance of the Holy Ghost (Acts: 1-12). In mystical Christianity this is the purifying psychic fire of the spirit and is posited in opposition to the fire of hate and destruction, hell fire. In T. S. Eliot's "*Little Gidding*" from his *Four Quartets*, he invokes both these types of fire, the fire of outward destruction, producing entropy (this was written during World War II) and the fire of subjective intensity (*tapas*) producing negentropy, what the philosopher Gilbert Simondon would refer to as "immanent individuation."

The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
To be redeemed from fire by fire (1988: p. 57).

Sri Aurobindo continues with his description of the "deathless Flame" accompanying Aswapati's climb in this heaven:

Out of the sorrow and darkness of the world,
Out of the depths where life and thought are tombed,
Lonely mounts up to heaven the deathless Flame.
In a veiled Nature's hallowed secrecies
It burns for ever on the altar Mind,
Its priests the souls of dedicated gods,
Humanity its house of sacrifice. (Ibid)

All human beings carry this torch within them. It is tended by the gods, who raise this flame towards the immortal summits so that the Divine may be born in humanity.

On their summits they bear up the sleepless Flame;
Dreaming of a mysterious Beyond,
Transcendent of the paths of Fate and Time,

They point above themselves with index peaks
Through a pale-sapphire ether of god-mind
Towards some gold Infinite's apocalypse.
A thunder rolling mid the hills of God,
Tireless, severe is their tremendous Voice: (Ibid, p.280)

All aspiring will takes its origin from the archetypal Real-Idea of the Flame in Supermind. It motives what, in *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo calls "the divine frenzy for a remote Ideal" (2005: p. 51). The archetypal Flame holds on to a dream without end, a dream passing from the known, through the unknown and into the unknowable. It is the atom of God's machine to manifest infinite possibility. It calls to an adventure full of mystery, hope and danger. Still we follow it because it draws us ever forward by the power of a dim recollection and a sense of divine promise.

Exceeding us, to exceed ourselves they call
And bid us rise incessantly above. (Ibid)

The evolution of Power in the cosmos occurs through the stress towards self-exceeding embodied by the Flame. This also gives meaning to being human, a constant transcendence, a passing beyond our boundaries towards ever greater light and consciousness.

Far from our eager reach those summits live,
Too lofty for our mortal strength and height,
Hardly in a dire ecstasy of toil
Climbed by the spirit's naked athlete will.
Austere, intolerant they claim from us
Efforts too lasting for our mortal nerve
Our hearts cannot cleave to nor our flesh support;
Only the Eternal's strength in us can dare
To attempt the immense adventure of that climb
And the sacrifice of all we cherish here. (Ibid)

Sri Aurobindo refers here to the superhuman intensity that is the demand of the Flame. Elsewhere, he has written that no human effort is sufficient to take us to the Supermind (2003: 24-26). It is only by the Divine Mother's Will being born in us and preparing our subjectivity to sustain and endure superhuman intensities that we may hope to embody that archetypal Flame. The only way to prepare oneself for the ignition of the Mother's Will is through a perfect surrender. Only this can bring that divine Flame into our lives and only that can "attempt

the immense adventure of that climb" (1997: 280), as Sri Aurobindo says.

In fact, each of these two Symbol-Ideals, the Rose and the Fire, could be said to form warp and woof of the soul's constitution, the two helixes of its double helix or perhaps the play of positive and negative charges in electromagnetic fields. It could be seen, from one viewpoint to be the play of Love and Power, Krishna and Kali, the two godheads that formed the guiding spirits of Sri Aurobindo's own yoga, as brought out in his yoga diaries, the *Record of Yoga*.

Love or Sacrifice and Power or Will are the archetypes magnetising our ascent beyond the Ignorance and Falsehood of our cosmic condition. It is Love and Will that have given us the two great ideals by which we rise out of our ignorance into the supreme divine reality. Here is the ardour, the passion of the will of evolution, the urge to climb out of the Ignorance and on the other hand, the ardent will to surrender.

Drawn by the magnetic power of the Rose and the Flame, Aswapati reaches the *Heavens of the Ideal*. Here he sees all the godheads that human beings take for Ideals as master representations of Supreme Being. Yet though they can recognise each other as co-representations of the One and can firm a natural harmony together, in Overmind, they are unable to transcend the representational Idea that binds them. Aswapati realises that this is not what he is in search for. Here is in search for a higher degree of freedom, where any form can be taken and changed at will, since the Whole is wholly active in every part. He thus takes note of the properties of these worlds and moves on.

He through the Ideal's kingdoms moved at will,
Accepted their beauty and their greatness bore,
Partook of the glories of their wonder fields,
But passed nor stayed beneath their splendour's rule.

.....
In each a seraph-winged high-browed Idea
United all knowledge by one master thought,
Persuaded all action to one golden sense,
All powers subjected to a single power
And made a world where it could reign alone,
An absolute ideal's perfect home. (Ibid, p.281)

Each of the Ideas in Overmind is a godhead that images the cosmos through its own terms. But in the lower realms where the density of unconsciousness is greater, each of these develops a separate identity that, being cosmic, can make

its claim on the cosmos. Separate personifications of these ideals claiming overlordship of the cosmos form the different religions. Due to their exclusive nature these religions compete with one another for the singularity of Truth. The inability to overcome the boundaries of the Ideal separates the realities of these beings from each other where within a relative Consciousness attuned to the One there is harmony but in a relative Consciousness attuned to the infinity, there is discord. This is why the Overmind is not effective in the darker planes of relative consciousness.

Aswapati must move on. But Sri Aurobindo draws our attention to the harmony possible at the peaks of Overmind, where each independent personification or real-idea of Truth realises its essential identity with the others. Yet, none of them can mutate into any other, bound as they each are by the Idea they represent.

A glorious shining Angel of the Way
Presented to the seeking of the soul
The sweetness and the might of an idea,
Each deemed Truth's intimate fount and summit force,
The heart of the meaning of the universe,
Perfection's key, passport to Paradise.
Yet were there regions where these absolutes met
And made a circle of bliss with married hands;
Light stood embraced by light, fire wedded fire,
But none in the other would his body lose
To find his soul in the world's single Soul,
A multiplied rapture of infinity. (Ibid, pp.281-82)

So though they can manifest harmony, yet they do not know their unity as an identity. They cannot disappear into the One to reconstitute or reconfigure themselves. Aswapati seeks such an utter oneness at the root of the perpetually differentiating cosmos and he realises this is not to be found here in this province of the Overmind. Aswapati is not satisfied with this state of harmony, since it doesn't solve the problem he has set out to solve. Though such a heaven is a realisation of divinity in the individual and the collective and satisfies the necessity and sufficiency conditions, Aswapati knows that this is not the harmony that arises spontaneously from the creative freedom of identity expressing in infinity. And that its realisation needs the development of a generalised inner subjective condition of a universalised mentality. Even then, it would remain a mental achievement; the animal and physical life in man would obscure the Consciousness of identity replacing it with the ego of separateness. Thus he needs

to continue his climb towards an absolute degree of freedom and unity.

Onward he passed to a diviner sphere: (Ibid, p.282)

Aswapati leaves this province of the Overmind behind, climbing higher. He then rises into a summit height of the Overmind, where the integrality of Supermind is manifest almost as in its origin and Aswapati catches a glimpse of the supramental world.

There, joined in a common greatness, light and bliss,
All high and beautiful and desirable powers
Forgetting their difference and their separate reign
Become a single multitudinous whole.
Above the parting of the roads of Time,
Above the Silence and its thousandfold Word,
In the immutable and inviolate Truth
For ever united and inseparable,
The radiant children of Eternity dwell
On the wide spirit height where all are one. (Ibid)

In this description, we intuit the fusion of the Rose and the Fire in the image of the “multitudinous whole.” This is where the purity of the Overmental manifestation mirrors in the closest way the Supramental unity and identity. This range of the Overmind may also very well be part of the Overmind Intuition. Of all the lines in this canto this image of “multitudinous wholeness” is most strongly reminiscent of Dante’s Divine Rose in the highest heaven of the *Paradiso*. We find this fulfilled perfection of “multitudinous wholeness” in the fusion of the Rose and the Fire also in Eliot’s “*Little Gidding*,” referred to earlier:

And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one (59).

Sri Aurobindo ends the canto with lines that reach from this overmental plane to that which it indicates, its origin in Supermind, home of “the immutable and inviolate Truth.” He captures an image of the heights of supramental existence where the creative play of freedom is enacted by the Truth-Consciousness embodying itself in variant qualities as the playful Children of Bliss (*amritasya putra*) each of whom knows itself to be identical to all others, yet having radical freedom to explore infinite games of Delight with its fellow playmates. These

lines are reminiscent of the games of the child Krishna with his cowherd and cowgirl friends. They also remind of the Biblical lines attributed to Christ, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (*Mark* 10:13-16). It also echoes the Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, on whom Sri Aurobindo had written an essay, and who had famously said “The Kingdom is of the Child” (Fragment 79).

But however close to the truth of transcendental identity, this is still a figure from the Overmind and Aswapati soon finds himself arriving at other aspects of the Overmind, in which it reveals itself as the parent of the Ignorance. This is the *Self of Mind* where the reality of all these ideals and thoughts and all the laws and classification systems of the cosmos resolve themselves into the profound Doubt of representational independence. To every idea its opposite is seen as equally true. Relativism is given full scope. The unity is taken away from the infinity which becomes infinitely fragmented.

II

Savitri, Book II, Canto XIII – In the Self of Mind

At last there came a bare indifferent sky
Where Silence listened to the cosmic Voice,
But answered nothing to a million calls;
The soul's endless question met with no response.

.....
An equal Cause of things, a lonely Seer
And Master of its multitude of forms,
It acted not but bore all thoughts and deeds,
The witness Lord of Nature's myriad acts
Consenting to the movements of her Force.
His mind reflected this vast quietism. (Ibid, p.283)

Aswapati has moved into another realm of the Overmind, the *Self of Mind*. The *Self of Mind* is a pure cosmic Witness. It is not the originator of thoughts. It may be called the Atman of the universal Ignorance. A schism, a division exists here between Being and Force, the Purusha and its Prakriti. It only watches a power of consciousness, deploying all these ideas and making a world out of them.

This witness hush is the Thinker's secret base:
Hidden in silent depths the word is formed,

From hidden silences the act is born
Into the voiceful mind, the labouring world;
In secrecy wraps the seed the Eternal sows
Silence, the mystic birthplace of the soul. (Ibid).

A vast Silence hides the mystery of the origin of Phenomena even from the cosmic Witness' gaze. But nothing within the cosmos is hidden from that gaze:

All now he seemed to understand and know;
Desire came not nor any gust of will,
The great perturbed inquirer lost his task;
Nothing was asked nor wanted any more.
There he could stay, the Self, the Silence won:
His soul had peace, it knew the cosmic Whole. (Ibid, p.284)

Aswapati is one with Cosmic Being here. This is the control tower from where world phenomena are projected as in a cinema. It is as if Aswapati is seated in the projection room. But this is also what makes him realise that what we take for granted as reality is merely a projection, an illusion. This is the basis of the Mayavadin philosophies of India, where the phenomenal cosmos is held to be an illusion since it is a projection of Maya. In Sri Aurobindo's view, the Overmind consciousness is a mixture of the relative consciousness of God's Infinity and the absolute consciousness of God's utter unity. Using Upanishadic terminology, Sri Aurobindo refers to it as the *Vidya-Avidya* plane. At the summit of Mind is the *Self of Mind*. This is where the *Vidya* and *Avidya* meet, the parting of the ways Aswapati has been seeking for. On one side, all seems illusion because it is the realm of relative truths, on the other side there is the singular Truth whose self-presentations are experienced as these relative realities. Thus, Aswapati realises that even at this summit height of the Overmind, he cannot find the solution he is seeking for. He must leave the relative consciousness and enter another realm where absolute Truth alone founds all reality.

Then suddenly a luminous finger fell
On all things seen or touched or heard or felt
And showed his mind that nothing could be known;
That must be reached from which all knowledge comes. (Ibid)

Aswapati is visited by a huge cosmic scepticism. He sees the entire cosmos as an illusory play, the factory of the manufacture of various possibilities all posing as reality. Aswapati finds his sense of reality suddenly removed and replaced with a mirage like illusoriness. He realises that there is no certainty to

anything here. A power of Truth must intervene and reveal the reality of the creation.

The sceptic Ray disrupted all that seems
And smote at the very roots of thought and sense.
In a universe of Nescience they have grown,
Aspiring towards a superconscious Sun,
Playing in shine and rain from heavenlier skies
They never can win however high their reach
Or overpass however keen their probe. (Ibid)

Mind will be constantly dogged by the power of doubt, uncertainty of knowledge. This is why Vedanta refers to the manifest cosmic realms as *Avidya*, Ignorance. However far it goes, however deep it strikes it will always come short of Reality, since all here are only symbols of Something that escapes them, eludes them, a hidden reality which presents itself through these symbol-masks.

A doubt corroded even the means to think,
Distrust was thrown upon Mind's instruments;
All that it takes for reality's shining coin,
Proved fact, fixed inference, deduction clear,
Firm theory, assured significance,
Appeared as frauds upon Time's credit bank
Or assets valueless in Truth's treasury.
An Ignorance on an uneasy throne
Travestied with a fortuitous sovereignty
A figure of knowledge garbed in dubious words
And tinsel thought-forms brightly inadequate. (Ibid, pp.284-85)

Aswapati realises that all his knowledge is only a bright tinsel ignorance, not the gold but false metal that glitters and is taken for gold.

Existence' self was shadowed by a doubt;
Almost it seemed a lotus-leaf afloat
On a nude pool of cosmic Nothingness.
This great spectator and creator Mind
Was only some half-seeing's delegate,
A veil that hung between the soul and Light,
An idol, not the living body of God. (Ibid, p.286)

Here we find Sri Aurobindo drawing on the ancient Sanskrit classical image of the drop of water on the lotus leaf. It is an image given to us by the great

philosopher, Shankara, who, in a poem, likened life to the precarious existence of a dew-drop on a lotus leaf (*Bhaja Govindam*: IV). It moves hither and thither, so perfect, so beautiful but its existence is momentary, it is fated to drop off or dry up and vanish, as if it never existed. Of course Sri Aurobindo chooses this image appropriately because Shankara is a Mayavadin, the great preacher of Advaita Vedanta to whom the phenomenal cosmos is an illusion. For Sri Aurobindo this realisation is a relative one, it is what Aswapati experiences in the *Self of Mind*, which may be a province of Overmind, but not the ultimate truth. There will be another truth which Aswapati will be impelled to seek beyond the *Self of Mind*.

Two firmaments of darkness and of light
 Opposed their limits to the spirit's walk;
 It moved veiled in from Self's infinity
 In a world of beings and momentary events
 Where all must die to live and live to die.
 Immortal by renewed mortality,
 It wandered in the spiral of its acts
 Or ran around the cycles of its thought,
 Yet was no more than its original self
 And knew no more than when it first began.
 To be was a prison, extinction the escape. (Ibid, pp.287-88)

This is the lesson of the *Avidya*, the Ignorance that Aswapati learns at this point in his travels through the Overmental planes. Here Knowledge separates from the Ignorance and the *Self of Mind* reveals to him the illusoriness of all manifest things. Aswapati realises from this that either the creation must accept its illusoriness, or it must realise that something beyond it is the source of its reality.

III

Savitri, Book II, Canto XV – The Kingdoms of the Greater Knowledge

We have seen two aspects of the Overmind that Aswapati has encountered in his climb through the cosmic Mind planes. One is the aspect of *The Heavens of the Ideal*. Here Sri Aurobindo has come across all the Ideals that stand as representations and/or representatives of the One at the heights of creation. These are the ideas that attract human beings to make progress in this evolving Ignorance. The second aspect that he has encountered is *The Self of Mind*. This is the Purusha of “the universal Mind in the Ignorance” (2005: 323), a province of Cosmic Being or Overmind. This mental existence is a delegate of

something higher which has determined the boundaries of its representation. The universal Purusha observes only, is only a witness of the action of Force in the cosmos united with it but is also not the originator of its acts. Therefore all the movements, ideas, forces and symbols that are manifest in the cosmos are seen by it to be without reality, shadows that are projected through this plane. Aswapati experiences the original Ignorance here, that power which is responsible for the fragmentation of the One Being into its innumerable parts. It has also objectified these parts, that become separate ego-bound realities because of their cascading objectification in a series through Mind into Life and finally into Matter. Thus materialised, they become completely objectified, since Matter is an objectified self-perception of Conscious Being. These objectified, separated realities of the Spirit are seen as illusions from this plane of universal mind since they appear as a projection, which the Mind consciousness does not originate.

However, Aswapati, instead of accepting the illusory nature of the cosmos, is driven to look for a plane of consciousness beyond the highest Mind Plane, the Overmind, to find the origin of the cosmos. Rising higher he is given a different experience of meaning, where he sees that all these fragmented realities also contain within themselves, the reality of the One, who has self-multiplied him/her/it-self in the cosmos. This is the experience of the World-Soul. Emerging from that experience, Aswapati arrives at the utter heights of the Overmind, where the knowledge aspect of the Overmind becomes apparent to him. That is presented to us in the Canto, *The Kingdoms of the Greater Knowledge*.

Above the Witness and his universe
 He stood in a realm of boundless silences
 Awaiting the Voice that spoke and built the worlds. (Ibid, p.297)

Aswapati has risen to a summit of the Overmind beyond the realm of the cosmic gods (*The Heavens of the Ideal*) and the twilight zone (*Vidya-Avidya*) dividing the Truth or Knowledge (*Vidya*) from the Ignorance (*Avidya*). He is no longer under the influence of the ignorant aspect of the Overmind, which Sri Aurobindo calls elsewhere “the universal mind in the Ignorance” (2005: 323). This is the origin of the cosmic Witness, who only perceives the world and its forces as presented to it. But now Aswapati has risen to a plane “above the Witness” where he can strive to find an Origin that has manifested itself in the world and its energies.

A light was round him wide and absolute,
 A diamond purity of eternal sight;
 A consciousness lay still, devoid of forms,

Free, wordless, uncoerced by sign or rule,
For ever content with only being and bliss; (Ibid)

What Aswapati encounters initially is a blankness, an intermediate step that seems a Non-Being, like a night. Yet this is hardly the “dark night of the soul” of Christian mysticism. Rather it is a quiescent Light and Peace. Sri Aurobindo has used the term *nivritti* to describe this property of erasure or self-dissolution between instances of self-presentation of Being. This state can be thought of as similar to the beginning of *Savitri* which was “the hour before the Gods awake” (1997: 1). Here in a similar pregnant pause in the Overmind, Aswapati waits for something from beyond to come.

He dwelt in his self's colourless purity.
It was a plane of undetermined spirit
That could be a zero or round sum of things, (Ibid)

This is a pregnant zero, a round sum of things. Once again, one is reminded of the canto “*The Symbol Dawn*” in *Savitri* where “a fathomless zero occupied the world” (1997: 1). In other words it contains the entire cosmos and at the same time it is a hiatus or gap between the cosmos and the Transcendent.

A state in which all ceased and all began.
All it became that figures the absolute,
A high vast peak whence Spirit could see the worlds, (Ibid)

It is a representation figuring the Absolute and a summit from which he can see the entire cosmos.

Calm's wide epiphany, wisdom's mute home,
A lonely station of Omniscience,
A diving-board of the Eternal's power,
A white floor in the house of All-Delight.
Here came the thought that passes beyond Thought,
Here the still Voice which our listening cannot hear,
The Knowledge by which the knower is the known,
The Love in which beloved and lover are one. (Ibid, pp.297-98)

Here Aswapati enters into the Great Unity, the unity at the highest heights of the cosmic consciousness, in which all the represented realities of the cosmos find their Source.

On peaks where Silence listens with still heart
To the rhythmic metres of the rolling worlds,
He served the sessions of the triple Fire. (Ibid, p.299)

Sri Aurobindo is indicating here that even this summit consciousness of Overmind, which is aware of being the creative womb of the cosmos, receives its meanings from something higher, the Supermind. Supermind grants creative power to the Overmind through the agency of the Divine Word, the Logos, and through the great rhythms of creation, the *chhandas*. *Chhandas* are cosmic rhythms organising the appearance and unfolding (evolution) of the cosmos and it is these *chhandas* that become the source of mantric utterance, as for example the verses of the Vedas. *Savitri* itself is an example of the kind of mantric utterance that, Sri Aurobindo tells us, comes from the Overmind. These *chhandas* originate in Supermind but become a formative property in Overmind. They are part of the integral Reality of *Savitri* as an epic poem. Aswapati here is witness to the origin of these cosmic rhythms.

He also serves “the sessions of the triple fire.” Fire, as we have seen earlier, represents the Divine Will to manifest. Its call of aspiration is addressed to the infinite Remainder of unmanifest Being that has not come into Becoming. The triple fire refers to a trinity of aspiration. The Vedas refer to these as material fire (*jada agni*), electric fire (*vaidyuta agni*) and solar fire (*saurya agni*). These correspond to the objective element, the sensational and/or feeling element and the intelligent element. This translates to the qualities of Being, Bliss and Knowledge, manifest here as material, vital and mental-supramental substances respectively. We see how the origin of this Fire is the Sachchidananda — Being, Consciousness/Knowledge, Bliss, the supramental source of Matter, Life and Mind. Each of these qualities can be thought of as a primary fold of the Integral Self-Consciousness, and hence each of these has a radically infinite potential of self-knowledge and self-expression. The mechanism for actualising these potentia is the triple Fire, unceasingly aspiring for more and more of the Unmanifest to express greater degrees of self-consciousness and perfection. As the triple Fire of Matter, Life and Mind, it represents the triple sacrifice of the Cosmic Being on the summits of the Overmind.

On the rim of two continents of slumber and trance (ibid)

This is a reference to the *Mandukya Upanishad*'s divisioning of the conditions of Consciousness or “four *avasthas*” — *jagrat*, *swapna*, *sushupti* and *turiya*. The continent of slumber here is constituted by the planes of inner consciousness, moving from the personal subjective to the cosmic subliminal

planes leading to Overmind. These are the planes of dream, *swapna*. Beyond this is the continent of trance, the superconscient sleep of *sushupti*. This is sometimes called “dreamless sleep” not because one doesn’t see any dreams here, but because this is a condition surpassing the projected reality of the cosmos. It is the trance in which the Divine Being creates the worlds of dream (*swapna*) and waking (*jagrat*) through which it manifests. Sri Aurobindo refers to this world as the supramental. In traditional yogas, the condition of *sushupti* is taken to be a deep trance state, from which one retains little or nothing but a ripple of unfathomable peace and bliss. But in Sri Aurobindo’s teaching, the yogi must endure the superconscient intensity of Supermind and be able to function in the waking state. This requires the development of internal structures of consciousness which are not “given” to the human but necessary if the power (Shakti) of Supermind is to transform our existence individually and collectively. At the border between these two “continents” we find the summits of the Overmind.

He heard the ever unspoken Reality's voice
Awaken revelation's mystic cry,
The birthplace found of the sudden infallible Word
And lived in the rays of an intuitive Sun. (Ibid)

Aswapati is now no longer a Witness only to the play of energies projected into the field of Becoming from Beyond, but has come into the creative Origin, operating with the power of a Consciousness that is intimate to the home of the Gnosis, the Supermind. The “intuition” spoken of here is not the intuition of the cosmic planes of Mind but what Sri Aurobindo has called the Overmind Intuition (2005: 992), an intuition closer to the reality of Supermind. In Vedic psychology, the three primary properties of the supramental knowledge, which find their manifestations in all the planes of existence, modulating their degrees of freedom and truth according to the plane, are *Sruti* (Truth-hearing), *Drishti* (Truth-seeing) and *Smriti* (Memory) (2001: 17, 1462). Sri Aurobindo refers to these three operations of Knowledge in these lines, the “unspoken reality’s voice” and the “infallible Word” referring to *Sruti*, Inspiration, “revelation’s mystic cry” referring to *Drishti*, Revelation and “the rays of an intuitive Sun” referring to *Smriti*, Intuition. Aswapati is experiencing these operations of Knowledge at the summit of the Overmind, close to their origin in the Truth-Consciousness or Supermind.

Absolved from the ligaments of death and sleep
He rode the lightning seas of cosmic Mind
And crossed the ocean of original sound;

On the last step to the supernal birth
He trod along extinction's narrow edge
Near the high verges of eternity,
And mounted the gold ridge of the world-dream
Between the slayer and the saviour fires; (Ibid, pp.299-300)

“The ligaments of death and sleep” refer once more to the *avasthas*, conditions of *jagrat* (waking, objective, material, hence ruled by death) and *swapna* (dream, subjective, vital and mental, ruled by sleep). Aswapati is no longer subject to the manifesting laws of these conditions of consciousness. He has reached the peak of cosmic manifestation, where the world-dream terminates. In this summit of the Overmind, Sri Aurobindo once more invokes the operations of Knowledge – “the lightning seas of cosmic Mind” the Overmind Intuition, the “ocean of original sound” the Overmind Inspiration, the home of the highest mantras. Sri Aurobindo has referred to the Intuition as symbolised by lightning in the Vedas, since it lights up partial territories in sudden flashes. On the other hand, the Knowledge native to Overmind, Sri Aurobindo has referred to as “global knowledge” and characterised as massed cosmic Ideas that are omni-explanatory. “The lightning seas of cosmic Mind” would carry the Overmind’s sense of cosmic wholeness but also the immediacy of luminous comprehension belonging to Intuition. It would be the home of the Intuition, Indra’s abode where he stables all his thunderbolts.

Aswapati also finds himself here “between the slayer and the saviour fires.” These are the two fires which preserve and destroy the world, as we have seen in the discussion of Fire in “*The Heavens of the Ideal*,” most tellingly brought out by T.S. Eliot’s lines from “*Little Gidding*.” The creative Fire, the origin of this manifestation is beyond, in the Supermind. This Fire creates, preserves and destroys. It is present in the rhythms of the cosmos that this passage begins with and it is present in the destruction of material things. Shaivite mythology represents it in the symbol of the Nataraja, Shiva as the Lord of the Dance, who holds the flame in one hand and the drum, *damaru* in the other. With the *damaru* he spells out the rhythms of the creation and with the fire he destroys the past so that new transcendent possibilities may continuously be reborn. He is also the Lord of the invisible Fire that preserves, the Fire of the heart, or the Third Eye, the Fire of *tapas* that enlivens things and inhabits them as aspiration. This Fire causes all things to develop a will to transcendence and grants them sustenance, coming as solar energy and being converted to life-giving forms of matter and energy. This Fire creates food in the universe and causes the assimilation and digestion of manifest things. Thus, between two realms we

find these two operations of Fire, *the slayer and the saviour fires*, one that exists to destroy the old so as to make way for the new and the other creating, preserving and sustaining new and higher forms of manifestation.

The belt he reached of the unchanging Truth,
Met borders of the inexpressible Light
And thrilled with the presence of the Ineffable. (Ibid, p.300)

The “belt... of the unchanging Truth” refers to the Real-Idea, the self-presentation of Truth as Idea, the plane of consistency corresponding to radical Infinity, whose infinite solutions form the unending self-explorations of the Becoming. Such a “belt” belongs properly to Supermind, but Aswapati has now entered the deepest fold of Overmind, where it is translating the realities of Supermind most closely to its own Consciousness-type. The “inexpressible Light” is again, a reference to the Divine Gnosis of Supermind, hymned in the Upanishads as “the Light of lights” and the Light that is borrowed by every other light, hence invisible in any light other than its own. This last frontier of Overmind “borders” the “inexpressible (supramental) Light.” Similarly, the “Ineffable” is the indescribable because it embodies and exceeds any rational Order. Like the “sublime,” its excess humbles us and fills us with bliss and wonder. This can only be a Source higher than the highest ordering capacity of Mind. All the ideals of the Mind end here in the primary godheads originating in Supermind. We see Truth, Light and Beauty here, the shining Trinity embodying in the cosmos the Existence, Consciousness and Bliss, respectively of the Divine Being.

Above him he saw the flaming Hierarchies,
The wings that fold around created Space,
The sun-eyed Guardians and the golden Sphinx
And the tiered planes and the immutable Lords. (Ibid)

But though the “ineffable” exceeds the rational principle, yet is the rational contained within it and used for its self-presentation. Some of these representations are hinted here – phalanxed Hierarchs, tiered planes and their immutable Lords all dazzle the mind with their sense of vast and complex suprarational Order. “The wings that fold around created Space” captures a glimpse of a Mother Power, as of a Bird brooding over its egg. In an image, we are made to sense the sustaining heat (Fire) of *tapas* holding together the cosmos, along with a hint of its teleology, that of the process of the Divine Birth. The meaning of the cosmos reveals itself here as a self-presentation of Truth through the symbol of directed Time – the One who gives birth to Himself through self-

concentration. Yet is this also the primordial gesture in the field of Love – to call infinite Being into a Becoming and Play of its multiple self-presentations, orchestrated through the systemic Logic of Birth. Looked at this way, the cosmos is a project of the Divine Mother, in which She broods on Being with the Idea of representing It under conditions of Time and Space. Aswapati encounters these original Symbol-realities, the ultimate godheads who stand behind the cosmos.

Of these, one of the most enigmatic ones is the golden Sphimx. Sri Aurobindo makes mention of this symbol elsewhere, as for example in *The Life Divine*, where he writes about the “double Sphinx,” a Sphinx in the depths of the Ignorance and the Sphinx of the Supermind or the golden Sphinx of Knowledge (2005: 713). The Sphinx represents a composite or perhaps, an integral being, carrying in itself the principles of materiality, animality, humanity and divinity. In this sense, the equivalent of the Sphinx in Indian culture would be the god Ganesha. But Ganesha does not possess the enigmatic destructive potency of the Sphinx. Of course, Ganesha was also originally a warrior god, the commander of Shiva’s *ganas*. But, unlike the Sphinx, Ganesha’s destructive potency is not unleashed as a part of his ontological mystery. The Sphinx has its roots in western zoomorphism, its origins traceable to ancient Egypt, later repurposed in Greece and Persia. At least in its Greek incarnation, it is figured in terms of a riddle proposed to the human being. The riddle is expressed thus: “Which creature has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?” The correct answer is the human, who walks on all fours as a child, on two feet as an adult and on “three,” using a crutch when old. Looked at in another way, the four-footed is the animal, the two-footed, the human proper, and the three-footed, the human aided by technology, the product of mind. Those unable to answer correctly would be devoured. Its mystic or occult significance lies in the human realisation that the truth of his being is to integrate all the rungs of creation; and his last word has not yet been spoken. The true integrality that correctly answers the riddle of the Sphinx is achieved in Supermind, the Integral Principle.

A wisdom waiting on Omniscience
Sat voiceless in a vast passivity;
It judged not, measured not, nor strove to know,
But listened for the veiled all-seeing Thought
And the burden of a calm transcendent Voice.
He had reached the top of all that can be known: (Ibid)

This ultimate peak of the Overmind, where it shares its border with the

Transcendental Truth-Consciousness or Supermind, is the highest summit of knowable things. Beyond this is the Unknowable. Sri Aurobindo, following Vedanta, refers here to three realms of Knowledge – the Known, the Unknown and the Unknowable. The Unknown is the occult that lies behind the Known that has already been manifested. But this realm of the Unknown can be known, not only in “due time,” when it manifests, but in a space where it resides in its ideal form, its secret home in the Overmind. But Reality is radically infinite, which means that an infinite content of self-knowledge remains forever unexpressed. This is the Unknowable beyond the Unknown, the transcendental realm which is the creator of the cosmic Ignorance. Overmind itself is a figuration or representation of the Supermind, a “subordinate delegate” as Sri Aurobindo refers to it. But its modality of being prevents it from knowing the unfathomable possibilities hidden in Supermind. Therefore the Unknowable has the power to transform cosmic conditions beyond what the Overmind can imagine.

His sight surpassed creation's head and base;
Ablaze the triple heavens revealed their suns, (Ibid)

The sight here, *Drishti*, is the integral seeing of Supermind, or as close as one can get to that from the highest peaks of Overmind. It is a whole-seeing of Reality, “surpassing creation’s head and base” because stationed on the borders of the Unknowable. *Drishti*, Revelation or Truth-Seeing is one of the highest forms of empirical Knowledge according to the Vedas as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo. In the Vedas, the goddess related to this Knowledge of Sight is Ila (Sri Aurobindo 1998: 73). The triple heavens above revealing their “suns” or principles of Being and Becoming, are the domains of Existence, Consciousness and Bless (*Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda* respectively), the three principles of the Transcendental Being.

The obscure Abyss exposed its monstrous rule. (Ibid)

The two limit conditions of the highest Overmind vision (*Drishti*) are described here, in elaboration of the line on surpassing creation’s head and base. Thus, above, Aswapati beholds the *Sachchidananda*, and below the plunge into Ignorance, Falsehood and the complete involution of Consciousness in the Inconscient, “the obscure Abyss.”

All but the ultimate Mystery was his field,
Almost the Unknowable disclosed its rim. (ibid)

Here again, the state of this highest Overmind knowledge is being specified.

The rim of the Unknowable, the Mystery of Supramental reality is seen bordering this plane of the highest Overmind.

His self's infinities began to emerge,
The hidden universes cried to him;
Eternities called to eternities
Sending their speechless message still remote.
Arisen from the marvel of the depths
And burning from the superconscious heights
And sweeping in great horizontal gyres
A million energies joined and were the One. (Ibid)

The radical infinities of Sachchidananda crowd upon Aswapati pulling him into a Mystery beyond the cosmic Idea. Yet this vast unfathomable and seemingly unordered Existence reveals itself to be an infinitely complex Unity. This vision of enormous unity, the sweep and range of the cosmos opening to an unfathomable infinity of Transcendence as its Origin, is what Aswapati experiences here.

In that high realm where no untruth can come,
Where all are different and all is one,
In the Impersonal's ocean without shore
The Person in the World-Spirit anchored rode; (Ibid, p.301)

In this complex unity of Divine Being, Aswapati now experiences the Person or Overmind Purusha. The impersonal reality of the World Spirit is his vehicle or *vahana*. In Puranic mythology, this cosmic Purusha is figured as Vishnu and his vehicle in the upper hemisphere is the golden heaven-bird, Garuda; while in the material realms, his *vahana* is the serpent of unending coils, *Ananta*. The Bird is a creature of the aerial and etheric realms, able to fly anywhere and hence represents the cosmic being of Infinite Space. The Snake is a creature of the waters and earth, and having infinite coils represents the cosmic becoming of perennial Time. Aswapati sees that this Purusha is the embodiment of the World Spirit in which the One and the Many are united. This is the highest Overmental consciousness, which mirrors the Supramental consciousness. It has in it everything of the supramental consciousness except the latter’s power to transform all levels of the cosmos, because it is not the origin of cosmos; it is a representative of that supramental being.

Ashwapti is identified here with the highest realisation of the Cosmic Consciousness and Sri Aurobindo ends the passage with lines which describe

the experience of the highest Overmind in the terms very similar to what he reserves for the Supermind.

The moments there were pregnant with all time.
The superconscient's screen was ripped by thought,
Idea rotated symphonies of sight,
Sight was a flame-throw from identity; (Ibid)

In the last chapter of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo describes the time-experience of Supermind (885-904). These lines are very reminiscent of that chapter. Eternity and Time are one in that consciousness. Out of the identity, the supramental Knowledge-Will sees the inevitable event and becomes immediately what it sees. This casting of the gaze of identity in spontaneities of becoming, is what is likened here to “a flame-throw from identity.”

Life was a marvellous journey of the spirit,
Feeling a wave from the universal Bliss.
In the kingdom of the Spirit's power and light,
As if one who arrived out of infinity's womb
He came new-born, infant and limitless
And grew in the wisdom of the timeless Child; (Ibid)

The trance of *sushupti* takes one outside the double representations of waking and dreaming and plunges one in the Truth-Consciousness. Aswapati is in a height of the Overmind where the world of Universal Subjectivity (*swapna*) passes into the Supermind. Here he knows his Unborn status in which his cosmic existence is wiped clean and he has been new-born. This is what the symbol of baptism represents in Christianity, Aswapati experiences a baptism in a new consciousness, the consciousness of the Transcendent at the borders of the cosmos. We have once again the image of the Timeless Child that was introduced earlier as a supramental symbol.

He was a vast that soon became a Sun.
A great luminous silence whispered to his heart;
His knowledge an inview caught unfathomable,
An outview by no brief horizons cut:
He thought and felt in all, his gaze had power. (Ibid)

Aswapati becomes one with the Cosmic Purusha, and thus feels himself one with all things, not only in being but in power, in will. By identity he can enter into things and alter them, think in them and make them act as he wills.

This Knowledge-Will, a dynamic or volitional aspect of Knowledge is called by Sri Aurobindo *Aajnana*, following the Upanishads. Yet, this is not the supramental *aajnana*. As the overmental *aajnana*, though he can influence and alter the thoughts and acts of men, he cannot transform them, so as to choose divinity in all their parts of being and becoming. In the *Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo documents his own experiences with such Overmind siddhis of thought and power influencing events during World War I.

He communed with the Incommunicable;
Beings of a wider consciousness were his friends, (Ibid)

From here, Aswapati feels connected to all the ranges of the cosmos. Not only can he experience the lives of earthly beings, but the realm of the gods of the archetypal beings and archangels of the heavenly and intermediate planes, are intimate to him. His spirit grown cosmic, is more in tune with them now than the limited consciousness of earth beings and he feels them as his friends.

Forms of a larger subtler make drew near;
The Gods conversed with him behind Life's veil.
Neighbour his being grew to Nature's crests.
The primal Energy took him in its arms;
His brain was wrapped in overwhelming light,
An all-embracing knowledge seized his heart:
Thoughts rose in him no earthly mind can hold,
Mights played that never coursed through mortal nerves:
He scanned the secrets of the Overmind,
He bore the rapture of the Oversoul. (Ibid, pp.301-02)

The vastness and complexity of Ideas in the Overmind are far beyond anything that human beings can think. The global consciousness of the Overmind poses an overwhelming intensity for the human faculties. This would cross the threshold of unprepared beings and if they experienced something like this, they would find themselves passing out of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo hints at this in the powerful images and actions of an “overwhelming light” “wrapping” Aswapati’s brain, an “all-embracing knowledge” “seizing” his heart and thoughts rising in him “no earthly mind can hold.” But Ashwapti has readied his consciousness to endure these intensities and finds them transforming his earthly faculties and instruments. In Sri Aurobindo’s description, we catch here once more a hint of the Divine Mother’s solicitous action: “The primal Energy took him in its arms.”

A borderer of the empire of the Sun,
 Attuned to the supernal harmonies,
 He linked creation to the Eternal's sphere.
 His finite parts approached their absolutes,
 His actions framed the movements of the Gods,
 His will took up the reins of cosmic Force. (ibid, p.302)

He has reached the very edge of the power that has built this cosmos and he is waiting now for his entry into the solar supramental empire. This concludes Aswapati's rise into the absolute summits of the Overmind where Overmental knowledge is manifest, the Knowledge-Ignorance (*Vidya-Avidya*), as he calls it, shows its brighter half, its aspect where it is a delegate and a bright double, a "screen of dissimilar similarity" (Sri Aurobindo 2005: 293), as Sri Aurobindo describes it, of the Supermind. Below it is the Ignorance and the ignorant half of the creation that is generated by the Overmind in its lapse into the lower worlds. Aswapti identifies integrally with the Overmind Purusha here and undergoes an overmental transformation turning him into an incarnation of this Purusha. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo writes of his yoga as a "triple transformation" (2005: 922-952). This canto represents the completion of the second of these three transformations, the completion of the Overmental transformation and the beginnings of the third and last transformation, the supramental transformation. This is also what Sri Aurobindo himself realised on 24 November 1926, the day he named as Siddhi Day.

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The Mother's Victory The Present and Future Results of Her Passing

Amal Kiran (K D Sethna)

The passing of the Mother on November 17, 1973 from the visible scene whose luminous centre she had formed for the last forty-seven years — that is, ever since November 24, 1926, when Sri Aurobindo put his Ashram in her charge and himself withdrew from common contacts in order to concentrate more intensely on the fulfilment of his work — the Mother's physical disappearance has caused a great deal of heart-burning and mind-churning among her disciples and devotees.

One of them has confronted the present writer with the article written when Sri Aurobindo had left his body: *The Passing of Sri Aurobindo — Its Inner Significance and Consequence*. This article is itself considered to have crucial significance and consequence because it carried complete approval by the Mother. Three times she formulated her sanction for it. She declared it to be excellent and as having nothing in it to be changed: she called it the best thing its author had done: she affirmed her entire satisfaction with it and wanted 15,000 copies to be printed in pamphlet form after its first appearance in *Mother India*. Now its author has been sent the following passage from it as a challenge:

"Nothing except a colossal strategic sacrifice...in order that the physical transformation of the Mother may be immeasurably hastened and rendered absolutely secure and, through it, a divine life on earth for humanity may get rooted and be set aflower — nothing less can explain the passing of Sri Aurobindo."

Words could not be more explicit and emphatic in asserting that the Mother would not pass away as she has done. And to ratify further the assertion — if at all there was any necessity to do so after the Mother had set her seal on the

article — we had the authorised report of the talk between her and Sri Aurobindo some months before he left his body on December 5, 1950. They had envisaged the contingency of one of them having to leave the body in the interests of their work. The Mother had said she would do it. Sri Aurobindo had refused to let her undertake the sacrifice. He had said that he would go and that she must stay to fulfil their Yoga of Supramental Descent and Transformation.¹

Most certainly the Supramental Transformation includes as its crown and climax a supramentalised physical body. Sri Aurobindo looked upon his "Integral Yoga" as the swift-moving concentration of the Yoga which Nature has been doing over the aeons, and he clearly laid down in the very first chapter of *The Life Divine* that the Supermind is "involved" in Matter along with the principles of Mind and Life and must inevitably evolve just as these principles did. Sri Aurobindo regarded the supramentalisation of the physical body as the ultimate goal of the Yogic endeavour in which he and the Mother were engaged. It was understood that they had come upon earth to be the pioneers of a total supramentalisation: they would undergo the supramental transformation in its entirety so that mankind might do the same with their help. Not all the race at once would succeed, or even attempt the Yoga, but at least a few who were prepared to follow them in perfect sincerity would in not too distant a future make a small nucleus of divinised humanity and from them the Light would gradually fan out. This was the vision repeatedly announced without any qualification during Sri Aurobindo's life-time and still prominently after he had given the unexpected "strategic sacrifice", though now there was a faint hesitation at times to speak with absolute certitude. It appears that with the Mother's penetration further and further into the unexplored depths of the body-consciousness the work of physical transformation, which meant a radical reversal of the organism's habitual functions, took the shape of a constant play with death — a sort of spiritual "brinkmanship", a coming to the verge of dissolution again and again for the purpose of giving new subtle dynamisms a chance to take over. Merely a stoppage of the old organic operations would not suffice: the cells would have to be illuminated, the matter of the body refined and rendered receptive to the supramental substance and form which had already been brought into action down to what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have called "the subtle-physical plane" immediately behind the gross-material on which we live. The process by which the habitually functioning organism could fuse with that substance and form was the one we could glimpse through the half-enigmatical disclosures of the Mother's "Notes on the Way", her talks with a disciple, in the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* from 1965 onward.

The most baffling of these disclosures — a kind of paradoxical peak to the process— meets us in the issue of February 1973.² It is dated December 30, 1972, and runs:

So it is going to be the new year ...
Do you feel anything for the new year?

(After a silence)

Things have taken an extreme form, so there is as it were an uplift of the atmosphere towards a splendour ... almost inconceivable and at the same time the feeling that at any moment one may ... one may die — not "die" but the body may be dissolved. And so the two at the same time form a consciousness (The Mother shakes her head)... all the old things seem puerile, childish, unconscious — within there ... it is tremendous and wonderful.

So the body, the body has one prayer — and it is always the same;
Make me worthy of knowing You, Make me worthy of serving You, Make me worthy of being You.
I feel in myself a growing force ... but it is of a new quality ... in silence and in contemplation.
Nothing is impossible (The Mother opens her hands upward).

There we have a picture of stark opposites — the sense of the body's dissolution and the sense of a surpassing divine splendour — not only facing each other but also playing into each other, becoming the components of a single state. An extreme point has been reached: it is as if to die physically could be to achieve something "tremendous and wonderful" — as if the feeling of the possibility that the body might dissolve were itself the feeling of "a growing force". It is hardly surprising that this force should be "of a new quality" or that the new quality be experienced in a condition of in-drawnness with everything fallen still — an increasing inner Power that can be all-effective without needing an outer expressive body — a miracle that has become eminently accomplishable when the body has given itself up in a complete surrender to the Will of the Supreme.

The Mother, at the end of 1972, has clearly pre-visioned that such a miracle may happen in 1973. And nothing said later goes really against this foresight. For, she always leaves the future open: "I am repeating always: as You want it, as You want it...let it be as You want it, may I do whatever You want, may I be conscious of whatever You want." This prayer of March 10, 1973,³ puts aside all fixed anticipations and thus even the anticipation of the miracle is not positively

affirmed, other possibilities are afforded their chance, but simultaneously room yet remains for the miracle to take place. And it is significant that the pre-vision at the close of 1972 has been preceded by the revelation on November 8 of the same year: "I have had for a moment — just a few seconds — the supramental consciousness."⁴ Yes, the Supermind that had been pressing for years to exteriorise itself is here said to have briefly done the exteriorisation in a part of the Mother's bodily being. The significance of this act may be seen in two ways. First, the exteriorisation would ensure success in supramentalising the body in the measurable future. Second, it would prelude sufficient development in the near future to allow a change of plan for the body's role in the Yoga of the earth's supramentalisation. The first alternative needs little explaining. The second calls for a commentary.

The role originally set for Sri Aurobindo's body as well as for the Mother's was entire divinisation so that it might not be subject in any mode to the so-called laws of Nature and would mark the beginning of a new, a supramental race. With the passing of Sri Aurobindo we saw a momentous shift in the plan: Sri Aurobindo admitted into his physical frame what we may term the basic power of darkness and, in the act of letting that frame merge with it and be destroyed, he destroyed that power's capacity to stand in the path of the Mother's Yoga and to retard the world's evolution towards the Supermind. The immediate result was the establishment of the "Mind of Light" in the Mother on December 5, 1950 — the permanent reception of the Supramental Light by the physical mind. This result has been described, according to the Mother's estimate, with revelatory accuracy in the opening lines of a poem by a disciple:

The core of a deathless Sun is now the brain
And each grey cell bursts to omniscient gold.

The next consequence of Sri Aurobindo's sacrifice was the Supramental Manifestation which occurred on February 29, 1956: the Supermind made an initial entry into the subtle side of the whole earth-plane and became a permanent part of the earth's future evolution: now inevitably, in the course of time, the Supermind would take organic form in the gross side of the terrestrial plane. We shall better appreciate the hastening of the Supermind's Golden Day, which Sri Aurobindo brought about, if we realise from some correspondence with Sri Aurobindo in July and August of 1938 that the Truth-Consciousness's manifestation on a world-wide scale was originally expected by the Mother as far back as that year.⁵ Owing to several factors — the chief being the push towards World War II by Hitler and the increasing power of Stalinism and the catastrophic division of India — this divine event was delayed for eighteen

years! Without Sri Aurobindo's drastic short-cut which we may call the Dying by the Deathless it would not have materialised for quite a length of time. The progression of the divine event in the terms of earthly life under the spiritual pressure of the Mother has also the touch of Sri Aurobindo: she has said that his action from beyond is greater than what it was when he was in his body and the increase has come precisely by his departure.⁶ A similar increase in her own action grows conceivable in relation to the possibility she always envisaged of leaving her body.

But, merely by a disembodiment, neither she nor he can be thought of as acquiring a greater action: they would first have to make Yogically the most of their embodied state. Fighting for transformation till the last breath, they might somehow make the body's end itself a critical phase of the Yogic process and turn it to the purposes of their earth-transformative ideal. And it is a fact attested by Pranab and the rest of the Mother's attendants that, though she had considered death as possible, she never accepted it as probable and she worked unremittingly for the physical divinisation with which Sri Aurobindo wanted to consummate the Integral Yoga: never did she accept any natural compulsion to leave the body.

It may be argued: "When Sri Aurobindo's body was put in a casket and laid in a vault in the Ashram courtyard, did she not ask for a second chamber to be made and kept empty above the one where he was to be placed? Is not this provision a sure sign of accepting death as the end of her spiritual travail on earth?" The correct answer is: "If one envisages the possibility of dying, it is practical sense to make specific arrangements to meet it — especially when the person concerned is the responsible head of a great institution. But the true attitude of the Mother is clear from her words to Nolini: 'If ever I leave my body, ...'⁷ The possibility is figured, as most faint and remote, as though she said: 'If by some rare chance I die....' And this attitude is borne out also by the actual explanation she gave to Udar who was in charge of building Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi. Knowing the transformative aim of both the Master and the Mother, he was aghast at the proposal to have a second chamber in the vault. Then the Mother softly answered: 'It is good tactics to put the Hostile Forces off the scent.' She did not want these Forces to concentrate their attack on what she really sought to do. Thus the very gesture as of accepting death shows itself to be a secret move in the opposite direction, a provision made in favour of the transformative ideal."

The Mother, like Sri Aurobindo, fulfilled the conditions under which Death the Enemy might be pressed into their service, and her talk on December 30, 1972, spotlights for an instant the capacity held by her consciousness to make

the brief moment of her body's collapse a long-term triumph. This capacity she exercised on November 17, 1973, at 7.25 p.m.

How exactly shall we picture the situation in which she made Death her servitor? On the one hand, as we know from "*Notes on the Way*" over several years, there was the growing infusion of her cells with the light of the Supramental Body already poised on the subtle-physical plane and then the short yet decisive experience of the exteriorised Supermind. On the other, as we learn from her attendants, there was infirm old age but also an ever-resisting youthfulness of attitude, both of which were linked with her stance as an Evolutionary Avatar representing all Nature's upward travail. It was the Evolutionary Avatar who suffered an advancing weakness of limbs, a gradual deterioration of bodily powers — the exhaustion of a corporeal frame that had packed into itself the whole world's problem of aging, the entire race's difficulty of keeping life going for over nine decades. It was the Evolutionary Avatar too who had housed in that frame an indomitable spirit warring against the earth's agelong darkness and doom and able to say like Sri Aurobindo:

I am full of wounds and the fight merciless.

The Mother seems to have found that the body, which she had allowed to go so far in its exalted agony, did not need to go any further: enough had been done to permit a victorious retreat. A retreat was desirable, since what had been done was insufficient except barely to hold on against the battering of Time. But victorious indeed could the retreat become, since sufficient interaction had pulsed between the subtle-physical glory of grace and the gross-physical labour of love, to enable the Mother to carry on earth-work in the future without continuing an outer existence. The gross-physical form could give up the struggle it had so long made to merge with the subtle-physical shape, because the subtle-physical shape had now won by the gross-physical form's arduous *tapasya* a new earthward competence: it had attained the adequate density, the proper power, to operate directly on the earth-plane and ultimately even to condense and precipitate itself there for a still more intense activity to fulfil evolution as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had always dreamed.

The prolonged withdrawal from outer life the Mother underwent from mid-May to mid-November and the protracted trances into which she plunged during those six months must have been oriented towards endowing the supramentalised subtle-physical with the "virtue" gathered by the gross-physical from its fight for transformation. More and more the Mother dwelt in the former and drew into it the enriched essence of the latter while preparing to discard the failing appearance. She had set out to succeed the other way round — to draw the

former's substance into the latter. But occult circumstances called for a change of strategy and she rose to the occasion.

Here a certain point must be thrown into some relief. When we speak of the Mother as preparing to discard the failing gross-physical we must not think she gave up warring against earth's agelong darkness and doom. Sri Aurobindo has said about his work of trying to bring the Supermind into the body that even if he saw the chance that it might come to nothing he would go on unperturbed and strive to the best of his power: he would go on doing what he took to be his mission, for, "what is done always counts in the economy of the universe".⁸ The Mother, aware that her corporeal frame might have to be dropped in the interests of novel tactics for earth's divinisation, kept still the warrior spirit, wanted still her infirm limbs to go on pressing for fitness. Else the essence of physicality would stop getting enriched and cease qualifying unreservedly to be assimilated into the hidden supramental Matter. The Mother, even in planning to abandon her outer sheath because of its being at a spiritual stalemate, went down fighting. Thus alone could the fate of other similar sheaths — the fate of embodied mankind in the future — become more favourable for transformation.

Yes, the Mother fought her way to victory during the retreat from her body. But there is yet another truth to be fathomed by us in visioning what happened to her. We have already seen her fundamental attitude: "let it be as You want it, may I do whatever You want, may I be conscious of whatever You want." The Mother, in doing everything, was still doing nothing — nothing except surrender actively to the Supreme Will. She had given her body to that Will's demand on her for physical transformation. But her body had no preferences. When it was suggested to her in 1969 that she should have "a glorious body", visible to everyone, so that all could come and see the Divine, she agreed but said: "I would be very glad if it were anyone, it does not matter who, I have not the least desire that it should be myself."⁹ And she added: "The body has no ambition or desire whatsoever or even the aspiration to become the glorious body."¹⁰ She repeated that not for a moment did she have the idea that it must be her own body which should become glorious. "Choosing one person or another, one place or another" — nothing of that kind existed for her. "Let there be this incarnation, this manifestation": "the thing by itself was the wonderful solution. That's all."¹¹ Lastly, she observed: "if there is nothing in this body which 'aspires' to be that, it proves that this is not its work."¹² Then she referred to "that wonderful Smile" — what she had earlier spoken of as not only a Smile but also "a shining Light" through which the Lord declared his omnipresence.¹³ Now the Smile said: "It is not your business", and the Mother understood the phrase to mean: "it does not concern you: whether it is this or that or that...." But she at once followed up,

referring to her body: "what has become its business — in such an intense way that it cannot be expressed — is: 'Thou, Thou, Thou ...', no word can translate it; the Divine, to use one word. It is all, it is for all — to eat: the Divine; to sleep: the Divine; to suffer: the Divine ... so on (The Mother points both hands upward). With a kind of stability, immobility."¹⁴

There we have not what one may superficially understand as the Mother saying that another body than her own might, in historical fact, become "glorious". She simply declares the sheer non-egoism of her body, even the absence of any sense of mission in her bodily being, her willingness that if the Lord so wills it anyone's body should be divinised and not necessarily her own which has striven so much for the transformation. Stable and immobile in selfless surrender she yields herself to the Supreme for His activity — and at a different place we get a hint of what must have led her to the crisis of discarding her body. She speaks of having had for three or four hours the Divine Consciousness in the body, but it was a Consciousness that "went about from one "body to another, altogether free and independent, knowing the limitations and possibilities of each body".¹⁵ Then she recounts how the cells of her body spoke to the Presence, telling It of "their effort to be transformed". "The body told of its aspiration and of its will to prepare itself", but "always with the question ...: will it continue or will it get dissolved?... Itself, it is like that (gesture of self-abandon, palms open), it says: 'As Thou wilt, O Lord', but then the body knows that it has been decided, and that it is not to be told to the body. It accepts, it is not impatient...."¹⁶

Here is the key to the moment when the Mother chose the paradox of victorious retreat. She came to know the decision of "the Absolute", as she terms the Presence.¹⁷ And she automatically decided the same. Since the Absolute is her own highest being, we may designate the decision either the Presence's or hers. The decision was that her terribly strained body should get dissolved but that she must go down fighting. As to the results of her heroic fall, what she said in 1969 is that if, with "the work becoming more and more exacting", the body, in spite of her persistence, did not "hold on", she would be constrained to let the transformation "be for another time".¹⁸ But in March 1972, a Supramental Body waiting on the subtle-physical plane and pressing upon the gross-physical became a concrete reality in which she lived for a while,¹⁹ and there were also the experiences we have already sketched. Hence an alternative outcome was open and, according to us, it was this outcome that was opted for and is the significance of her death.

The Mother, by passing away as she did, accomplished the task set to her by Sri Aurobindo in 1950, and repeated in a new mode his own master-stroke of conquering all while appearing to perish utterly.

The Mother stands now on a border-line between Matter subtle and Matter gross — she has broken the barrier that had separated the two — she has brought the former so close to us that the latter is not required any longer for her dynamic influence and impact upon our lives. Nor does she only have the nearness and effectiveness to be the concrete Guru for our Yoga and the direct Guide to our evolutionary consummation: she also waits with all her energy of manifestation ready to materialise herself even to our common sight and touch. If we desire to have an idea of what she is like as she abides on that transitional verge between the outer and the inner, we may recollect the description in Lalita's record of an experience on the Mother's Samadhi Day:²⁰ "Then slowly You appeared as if from behind a veil. You were clad in a pale-gold robe. You looked young and beautiful and radiant with a brilliant white light. This light was strongest round the head, circling it with an indescribable halo. It extended intensely down to the waist. Still lower, it was a little less bright. From Your Body it spread out to the whole world."

But for the materialisation of this body, the new Advent of the Mother, there are conditions to be observed. Our non-observance of them was one of the major causes why the Mother had to bear those countless inner wounds and why her outer form had to suffer so grievously to reach the paradoxical point where, balked of going further, it yet surmounted the necessity of further progress. If we wish to know what the conditions are, we may also hark back to Lalita's record. She heard the Mother saying: "Forget ego, give up self; live and work in harmony and unity for the Divine." The last three words are of the essence. Not only is an ethico-social ideal to be lived and worked for. Valuable as such an ideal is, we have to surpass it and rise with its *élan* vibrant in us to the level of dynamic mysticism and Yoga, a collective spiritual practice lifting our humanity towards a truth-conscious supermanhood.

Understood rightly, the message heard on the Samadhi Day sums up the Mother's demand on us. And the promise to our response is summed up in the final phrase Lalita caught from the Mother: "The Advent will not be far."

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Sri Aurobindo: The Vision and The Boon

Ananda Reddy

I think that the best I can do to give a snap-shot of Sri Aurobindo's outer personality, which was hardly on the surface for men to see and understand, is to quote from K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar — the most authentic biographer of Sri Aurobindo:

"Sri Aurobindo [1872–1950] was a revolutionary like Lenin, a patriot like Tilak, C. R. Das and Chidambaram Pillai, a man of God like Guru Nanak and Namdev, an intrepid apostle like Gobind Singh and Vivekananda,... a poet like Tagore, a particular kind of poet like Dante — and there are many who believe that he was also an avatar like the Buddha ...

"Soon after the turn of the century, Sri Aurobindo was already a well-known figure on the Indian political scene, and took an active part in the agitation following the (first) "Partition of Bengal" of almost seventy years ago. The *Bande Mataram* prosecution of 1907 and the Alipur Trial of 1908-9 made him something of a martyr as well. But when he retired to Pondicherry in April 1910 (he was still under forty), he gradually receded from the public consciousness except for the small section that read the *Arya* as it appeared month after month from 15 August 1914 for over six years. What was the quirk of destiny that sent this magnetic enigmatic figure — this Bengali with his Cambridge and Baroda antecedents, this leader in whom Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya had found "the Bhavananda, Jivananda and Dhirananda of Rishi Bankim all in one" — to a corner of South India, a French colonial possession in Tamil Nad? He met there other political exiles from India like Subramania Bharati, V.V.S. Aiyar and Mandayam Srinivasachariar. He embarked on a deep study of the Veda, and he explored the infinitudes of the Supermind ...

"Again, what was the lila of the Supreme when it brought Madame Mirra Richard (née Alfassa), later to be known as the Mother, to Pondicherry to meet Sri Aurobindo on 29 March 1914, and so help the launching of the *Arya* four months later? It was her presence too that made the establishment of Sri Aurobindo Ashram possible. Like the matrix of the future, the Ashram began taking shape from 1920, and more actively after 24 November 1926 when Sri Aurobindo withdrew into silence and gave her a free hand.

"After Sri Aurobindo's passing on 5 December 1950, his Ashram only grew in strength of numbers and range of activities, and his mystic Presence was felt in the Ashram as powerfully as before."¹

Indeed, as Suniti Kumar Chatterji opined in his speech at the National Seminar held in honour of Sri Aurobindo's birth Centenary, 1972, New Delhi, Sri Aurobindo was:

"...one of the great band of divine choristers in the history of man ... the Priest-Kings of Babylon and of Egypt, the Rishis of India, the Prophets of Israel, the Sages of China, the Philosophers of Greece, the Sufis or Wise Men of Islam: — they form a noble band of singers and choristers of the Unseen. Their words still enable men everywhere to lift up their hearts for a vision of Truth and Beauty. And among the bearers of this great tradition in India, one of the greatest, particularly in the present age, has been Sri Aurobindo."²

"And philosophy!" exclaimed Sri Aurobindo:

"Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher — although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry — I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher. How I managed to do it and why? First, because X proposed to me to co-operate in a philosophical review — and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse ... Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!"³

That was what Sri Aurobindo had written to a disciple on 4-9-1934. Interestingly, after six months, on 1-4-1935, he wrote to another disciple:

"The "latent" philosopher failed to come out at the first shot (when I was in Calcutta) — after some years of incubation (?) it burst out like a volcano as soon as I started writing the *Arya*."⁴

Whatever may be the controversy over Sri Aurobindo being a philosopher or not, what is of importance to us is that Sri Aurobindo has given us "in the terms of the intellect" a cosmic plan, hitherto unknown, and an ideal for both individual as well as collective life, which promises to deliver mankind from its present evolutionary crisis into a future that is beyond the mental line — a future aglow with revealed divinity in matter.

What then is this luminous and at the same time transmuting vision and ideal of Sri Aurobindo?

Every ideal, be it ethical, religious or spiritual, depends for its permanence and for its breadth and depth of influence on its philosophical foundation, that is, on the approach it takes towards the Divine or the Eternal. For instance, the Greeks realised the Eternal in his aspect of Beauty and therefore they developed everything in their culture — art, music, justice, law, and ethics — with a sense of beauty that reflected in balance, proportion and taste, avoiding excessiveness in any direction. So, did the Romans. They took to the Force and Power aspect of the Eternal and accordingly they governed their life with a stern and orderly restraint. Thus discipline became the bedrock of their mental, vital and physical development and enjoyment. But both these civilisations could not uphold their ideals for long because both Beauty and Power are only attributes of the Eternal and there are other aspects of the Divine which the human soul seeks and which these two civilisations failed to provide.

The ancient Aryans of India based the ideals of their life on the vision of the Eternal as both Transcendental Self and the individual self. They raised the veil completely, as it were, and saw the Eternal in all things, and had the experience of Him in themselves and in all around them. It is because of such a broad-based vision of the Eternal that India could give itself a civilisation, which satisfied in every way the human personality and fulfilled the longings of the human soul. This is also the secret of its lasting.

In spite of its lofty vision and its multi-faceted realisation of the Eternal, the Indian ideal has apparently failed to deliver the final goods. The blue vistas of the Eternal consciousness and the oceanic Bliss of the Supreme were meant more for the individual than the collective. It has been always the individual who had access to the lofty idealism and the collective was left to bask in the light of the individual's spiritual glow or to remain caught up in the quagmire of ignorance and suffering. The religious teachers, the saints, the philosophers and even the vibhūtis have all shown way out of this world, but no one has really 'tread the dolorous way' and tried to 'bring the heavens here' or to uplift the human race as such.

As a result, there is no true change in man's consciousness and nature. His physical is still animal in its habits and needs, and is constantly a victim of disease and suffering and death. His vital being is a battlefield of greed and lust of base instincts and all the dark subconscious passions. His mind is like the Supreme Court where falsehood and ignorance masquerade as truth and knowledge. The sorrowful state of the threefold nexus of man's mind, life and body remains unregenerate in spite of all the high, noble and catholic ideals put forth through his evolutionary history. His inferior nature has gone unchanged and unchallenged over the aeons, except for a cosmetic change brought about by

his higher cultural and religious pursuits. A deep-rooted change, a reversal of his nature and his life can be brought about only by a force beyond his present capacities. Like Hercules who turned the river Alphas to cleanse the Augean stables, so too, a new golden river, the Supramental Force, has to be brought down which alone can cleanse and transform man's nature and body.

Thus Sri Aurobindo puts before us the uncompromising ideal of the total transformation of man and a divine perfection of human life. The highest and the most complete life that awaits man's destiny in a divinised earth is the work undertaken by Sri Aurobindo. The unregenerate mind life and body of man are taken up, purified, heightened and uplifted into their true mould on the supramental truth-consciousness level. Man is asked to raise himself to his true manhood by which alone can he become a perfect, integral and complete being: his psychic becoming the vehicle of true and pure love, his mind reflecting infallible knowledge, his vital manifesting inner power and strength and his body expressing a perfect divine beauty and harmony.

What Sri Aurobindo posits is the perfect solution: to immortalise the body, to spiritualise the material, to divinise the human. This solution seems to be the only complete one to the age long dichotomy between Matter and Spirit, between Divinity and Humanity, between Immortality and the Mortal. No one till now has been able to reconcile and bring accordance to these apparently self-contradictory and mutually self-exclusive pairs, neither the Vedantins nor the Mayavadins, neither saints nor gurus, neither pundits nor scholars. The eternal opposites have met for the first time in Sri Aurobindo.

In order to understand how the impossible has been made possible, we must try to grasp the fundamental philosophy of the Eternal and Real in which Sri Aurobindo bases his ideal of a divine life, for as seen earlier, the truth and permanent value of any ideal depends "on the closeness of its fundamental idea to the ultimate truth of the Eternal."⁵

Very characteristic of his approach, which is to go from the near to the far, from the intimate to the unknown, Sri Aurobindo takes up the present constitution of consciousness in man which expresses itself majorly through his mind, life and body, and traces it to its transcendental source, the Absolute, the Sachchidananda. Starting from the multitudinous world, he tracks it back to a single transcendental existence, the One who is also the Many. Other great philosophers, thinkers and spiritual teachers stopped short, as it were, at this stage, viz., tracing the origins of the cosmic creation to the transcendental Reality. And this tendency, obviously, left the doors wide open for the theories of Illusionism which propound that the world is a myth, unreal and that the One, the Brahman alone is real, indivisible, eternal, infinite and unknowable.

Sri Aurobindo is not interested in only trailing the multitudinous world into the One. Starting from the Supreme Reality, the *Sachchidananda*, he shows us its descent, its extension within itself as phenomena, as the manifestation. By describing the process of the Divine Descent, Sri Aurobindo shows that this creation is verily true and real. He puts it simply:

“If then the world is a dream or an illusion or a mistake, it is a dream originated and willed by the Self in its totality and not only originated and willed, but supported and perpetually entertained. Moreover, it is a dream existing in a Reality and the stuff of which it is made is that Reality, for Brahman must be the material of the world as well as its base and continent. If the gold of which the vessel is made is real, how shall we suppose that the vessel itself is a mirage?”⁶

Sri Aurobindo is thus very close to the ancient seers in his experience and vision of the Supreme Reality and its manifestation. The central experience and thought of the principal Upanishads is found to be progressively developed and brought to a perfect culmination and synthesis in his own experience and philosophy. For example, the pregnant ideas of the gospel of eternal Bliss in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, and the teachings of knowledge and self-surrender to the universal Brahman found in the *Kena* find their full sway in his book *The Synthesis of Yoga*. And, of course, the gospel of a Divine life on earth of the *Isha* forms the kernel of *The Life Divine*. What then is this concept of the Supreme Reality, which has found one end of its golden rainbow in the ancient seers and the other end in Sri Aurobindo?

The Absolute or the Transcendent Reality is incomprehensible and unimaginable because it is timeless, spaceless, eternal, infinite, indivisible and stable. It is unconditioned and therefore indescribable by human language, neither by its ultimate negation nor by its absolute affirmation, ‘It is neither this nor that’. It is beyond manifestation, beyond Existence and Non-existence, beyond Being and Non-Being, because, it is unmanifest. It is therefore called as *Tat* or *That*.

As the Absolute leans towards manifestation, the first step It takes is to formulate or render in Itself a luminous Shadow of its inconceivable Being which is variously called by the Ancients as Parabrahman, Brahman the Eternal, God, Creator, the Supreme Spirit, etc. The Upanishads describe Him, subjectively as *Sat Chit Ananda*, and, objectively as *Satyam*, *Jnanam*, *Anantam*. And Sri Aurobindo prefers the first trilogy — *Sachchidananda*: Existence, Consciousness, Bliss.

Sat is Pure Being, Absolute Existence. He is without cause or object of His

Existence. He cannot change because He is unconditioned by Time, Space and Causality. He is alone and alone is He in the One Existence.

Chit is Pure Awareness, Absolute Consciousness of the *Sat*. *Chit* and *Sat* are inseparable because there is nothing beyond the *Sat*. Nor is it that *Chit* is consciousness of one part of *Sat* because *Sat* is without parts, one and simple.

Ananda is Pure Ecstasy, Absolute Bliss. Just as Existence and Consciousness are inseparable, so Bliss is the link between *Sat* and *Chit*.

Looking at the objective expression of this Trinity we see that *Sat* being the Absolute Existence can alone be the only Reality, the Supreme Truth, *Satyam* — all other existences being partially or relatively real. Likewise, *Jnanam* — which is the direct knowledge without the use of any medium — is at its highest degree *Chit*, the Absolute Consciousness. Finally, *Anantam*, Endlessness is *Ananda*, because Bliss consists in the absence of Limitation.

Sri Aurobindo adds to this ancient trilogy, a fourth aspect, that of *Tapas*, Shakti or Force. It is as inseparable from Consciousness or *Chit* as is the power of fire and fire. The ancient seers knew about this aspect of *Sachchidananda*, but they did not stress it. But, in the experience and vision of Sri Aurobindo it gets a unique importance because in his scheme of the manifestation, it is the Force that brings into *Chit* or the Consciousness, which otherwise is a breeding trance of immobility, perfect equilibrium and indivisibility, the first stirrings of division, of creation. So, in Sri Aurobindo, whenever we speak of *Sachchidananda* we mean not just *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda* but *Sat*, *Chit-Tapas* or *Chit-Shakti* and *Ananda*.

So, with the first stirrings, the first urge towards activity in the ineffable and inalienable equality of the bliss of self-identity of *Sachchidananda*, there began the process of Involution, or the Descent of the Divine Consciousness. Somewhere a breach began in that unbroken continuity of absolute Existence, and the divine afflatus of consciousness flung itself into matrices of creativity. This self-pressure to divide sent the consciousness rolling, as it were, right into its very opposite, the very Inconscience. The stable Unity turned itself into infinitesimal particles by its power of self-limitation.

But, in this becoming, or descent, there is a definite process, a law, for otherwise: “Infinite consciousness in its infinite action can produce only infinite results ...”⁷ One possibility out of the infinite possibilities was selected, one truth of manifestation out of the infinite truths of creation was chosen, organised, harmonised at different levels and then marshalled and released into manifestation. And this selective faculty, which commissioned the present manifestation, put forth by *Sachchidananda*, is what Sri Aurobindo names the Supermind or the Gnosis.

In view of the manifestation, Supermind is the first step of devolution. On

this level, the One retains still the essential oneness in and through the Many. That is because the Many here are as seed-truths, as Real-Ideas and there is here no shadow of separateness but only a difference of modes carrying within themselves the essential unity and identity.

The next step of devolution or descent is the Overmind. Here, the multiplicity becomes sharper, as it were, and there is a greater differentiation, isolation, and separation. This stress on individuation, on exclusiveness breaks the unity and oneness of the One and Many that exist on the level of Supermind. The identity of the two recedes to the background and the Many comes to the forefront. Here is the beginning of Ignorance, *Avidya*, the ancients had talked of.

The self-centredness of the Many on the Overmental level becomes 'intolerant egoism and solipsism' in the next step of devolution, the Mind. The unity, the harmony of the higher levels turn into fragmentation, disharmony, conflict and confusion — the very bottom of ignorance. The transparency and subtlety are lost on the level of Mind and there is instead the sense of rigidity and crudity. The global outlook of the Overmind becomes a narrow vision, a piecemeal understanding of things.

Passing through other intermediary levels, such as the Intuitive Mind. Illumined Mind and Higher Mind, the consciousness becomes, according to the hierarchy, more and more dull, dense, uncertain, slow and disintegrated. The intensity, purity, force and the synthetic unity of the higher levels diminish gradually until the consciousness reaches the level of Life.

On the level of Life, the consciousness becomes fiercely selfish, dark and dense. Passion, lust, hunger, desire, blind cravings seize the consciousness making it impervious to the workings of higher forces or light. There is here a sense of throttling, asphyxiation of consciousness.

Still, the descent does not stop here; it goes further into Matter, where there is a total self-oblivion, a complete wiping off of the consciousness, as it were. The first movement of division has now become the last movement of fragmentation; the self-luminous consciousness has become obscure, dense, dark and hard. The original One has sub-divided itself into trillions of atoms where Existence becomes non-existence, where Consciousness turns into Inconscience, where Bliss plunges into Immunity. The Highest descends into the lowest and not until then does the play halt. The Devolution is complete in Matter, the very opposite of the Spirit, the 'plunge of the Light into its own Shadow'.

But this is an illusion only. This opposite of the Spirit is not a zero, devoid of consciousness. The Highest and the Lowest, the positive and the negative are only apparent opposites. They, in fact, complete and explain one another. For,

Matter is but 'Brahman made concrete in atomic division'; it is the form of the Formless. It gives a body and a name to the Bodiless and the indeterminate and unknowable Consciousness. Eternity has been caught in the moment and Infinity in the finite. The white ecstasy of the Absolute Bliss is now reflected in 'a million-bodied beatitude'. If Spirit is Involution on the Summit, out of which everything devolved towards the other pole of Matter, Matter too is Involution at the bottom, containing all the potentials and from where everything evolves upward toward the other pole or Spirit. Spirit and Matter are therefore the obverse and reverse modes of the same Reality. Spirit is consciousness, it is awake; Matter is unconsciousness, it is true, but it is not utter absence or annihilation of consciousness — it is involved-consciousness. By this exclusive and concentrated involvement in atomic forms, by this complete and absolute identification with the scattered units of matter, consciousness forgets itself. The force and intensity of its concentration on the atomic division makes the consciousness of itself, a self-forgotten nescience.

As the bottom of the downward drive is reached, there goes up a "deep spiritual cry"⁸ from the Inconscient and then there is a direct intervention of the Supreme's Grace which swings back the descending movement, and the ascent begins, evolution starts:

"An unshaped consciousness desired light
And a blank prescience yearned towards distant change.

"Arrived from the other side of boundlessness
An eye of deity pierced through the dumb deeps;

"Intervening in a mindless universe,
Its message crept through the reluctant hush
Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy"⁹

Evolution is the inverse action of involution; it is the upward movement of the consciousness through the stages it had taken in the descent. Therefore, what was the last derivation in involution becomes the first one to appear in evolution; what was the first highest and the Original in involution will emerge in evolution as the last apocalypse.

This being the principle of evolution, two basic characters of this movement become obvious and unchallengeable: (a) only that which is involved in Matter can evolve, for otherwise there would not be an evolution but a random and haphazard creation of new things, arbitrarily willed or conceived by an inexplicable Force; (b) all that is involved in Matter is bound to evolve in the ascending order until the final unfolding when the Consciousness which had lost itself finds itself

again “divinely self-conscious, free, infinite, immortal.”¹⁰

Matter is the launching-pad of evolution. This is the inconscient stage of evolution when there is only Matter, when the consciousness is dormant, dense, dark and insentient.

“Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;
A nameless movement, an unthought Idea
Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,
Something that wished but knew not how to be,
Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance.”¹¹

This stirring, this teasing created a kind of tension in the womb of Matter which soon increased and swelled into a mighty churning and an upheaval. Those were the birth pangs, so to say, of something that was already embedded in Matter and was seeking to be delivered. When this secret yearning was intense, then the descent of the Life principle from above took place. Then Life appeared. Consciousness, which was, as though in a stupor and dormant now opened its eyes, and looked around. Bare earth wrapped herself in a green robe and decked herself in innumerable bright colours. Still, everything was too static and rooted to earth. The semi-consciousness of the plant-world strove to come still further up and after aeons of struggle and preparation, there came the animal world. Consciousness was more awake now, able to express itself more freely through movement and feelings and through a rudimentary mentality in the more evolved animals.

It took millions of years for Life to influence and mould Matter in ‘its own mode and law of existence’. Matter that was once just physicochemical entity had undergone a change, had become ready to receive a living organism, in the form of the animal. At the same time, Life prepared itself to receive the higher principle. When, through the millennia, it attained a certain complexity of form, a certain maturity, a kind of readiness and organisation to become the vehicle of the psychic element of consciousness, then the Mind principle seized Life and Man appealed on earth’s evolutionary scene.

If we follow this evolutionary trend, we see that Man is not the final rung of evolution. He is only in a state of transition. Just as Nature worked out Life in Matter and Mind in Life, so too Man is only a living laboratory of Nature “in whom and with whose conscious co-operation”¹² she will work out by the same method and process the next higher principle of Supermind. To an extent, Man’s eternal aspiration for God, Light, Bliss, Freedom and Immortality is “simply the imperative impulse by which Nature is seeking to evolve beyond Mind ...”¹³ says Sri Aurobindo. Beyond this “imperative impulse”, the mental consciousness too has to be widened, deepened, purified, made supple and receptive before

the supramental principle can descend. And this process of Mind’s preparation is taking place at the present through a kind of catharsis of human consciousness. Mind was a helper in the past, but now it is a bar. With the guiding lights of religion, occultism and religious thought it did lead Man on his destiny. But now it has brought Man to the brink of self-destruction. Unless humanity opens itself to the higher principle beyond Mind, there is no hope for it.

The path of evolution is not, however, linear. It follows two main processes — sublimation and integration — which form the single movement of ascension. Sublimation means a purification and refinement of the lower, dense and obscure consciousness. And integration is the process of the higher principle embracing the lower and infusing it with its own light and consciousness. For instance, Matter, which was once a dense obscure unconsciousness, went through a process of refinement in order to become the basis of Life in the form of fauna. The Life principle injected into Matter its own higher principle of a soul-element and made it ready to receive and to express the vital principle in the form of the animal. Vitalised Matter then became more plastic, spontaneous under the pressure of Mind. Life too has been purified of its crudities and it has become more refined, sensitive and responded to the light of the Mind. We thus see that Matter is constantly ascending in its aspiration to express a greater consciousness and light. The present-day computer technology is a significant example of how the once obscure Matter has become luminous, sentient and capable of accepting the demands of the Mind and forces beyond it.

Parallel to this ascending movement, is the movement of descent, the coming down of the higher involutionary principles. No amount of churning or yearning, shuffling and reshuffling, struggle and aspiration from below can establish the higher status. The higher status or the plane awaits for a sufficient preparation of the lower level before it can actualise itself. It is the manifestation of the higher that gives the lower aspiration and preparation a definite form and pattern. At a precise moment, the principle that is seeking to evolve and the principle that is awaiting to descend, they meet and consummate, and then alone is born the new level. After a certain degree of preparation and maturity of its womb, Matter had to await the seed of Life before it could burst forth into millions and millions of living forms and moving shapes. Similarly, no amount of permutation and combination of the Life elements could bring forth Mind. After it got sufficiently organised and ready enough to become the receptacle of the psychic element of consciousness, it had to await the conjunction of the Mind principle embedded in itself and the Mind principle from above, for the new mental consciousness to shape itself into Man.

Likewise, Man the representative of the Mind principle, has been preparing

himself, though mostly unconsciously, for a higher life. Sages and saints, poets and idealists, scientists and reformers have, through the ages, prepared the Mind to open itself to higher levels than itself, have purified life with the godward emotion, and made Matter receptive, plastic and supple, responding readily to the deeper needs of Life and Mind. There has been on the whole a kind of preparation for a higher life.

“Nature’s attempt at the transcendence of Mind opens the door for a more and more direct and integral descent of the Divine Consciousness, and in its highest degrees — the degrees of the Supermind — the Descent means a reversal of the normal values, a swift and total transfiguration of earthly life into the mould of supernal spiritual realities. An absolute degree of the Descent, an irruption of the Divine Consciousness in its supreme purity and fullness becomes inevitable in the end: for that alone can bring about the fulfilment that Nature ultimately has in view. Matter will yield completely, and life-power too, only to the direct touch and embrace of the Divine’s own self.”¹⁴

It is always the higher principle that fulfils the lower: Man must transcend into the superman. Mind must surpass into the Supermind. Nature herself is endeavouring to bring out and establish this New Consciousness, the Supramental consciousness, for this is her evolutionary goal and this is what man must consciously strive for. The only way out of the human morass lies in the direction of the supramentalisation of human consciousness; all other ways will only lead him to his doom.

“In this age we stand at some such critical juncture in Nature’s evolutionary history. Its full implications, the exact degree of the immediate achievement, the form and manner of the Descent are things that remain veiled till the fact is accomplished. Something of it is revealed, however, to the eye of vision and the heart of faith, something of it is seized by those to whom it chooses to disclose itself —”¹⁵

Fortunately, for us, both the evolutionary processes of ascent and descent have been accomplished. Although Nature and Man have been labouring for aeons to prepare themselves for the New Consciousness, it is the advent of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which has hastened this process of Mind’s sublimation. They, the Supramental Harbingers, have not only brought down the Truth to be established as the next evolutionary step, the Supramental Truth, but they have acted here below, struggled and suffered to carry forward the terrestrial movement towards its fulfilment. Their coming has been the only assurance of

the grand finale envisaged and aspired by Matter: to reveal and manifest the Spirit. The ascent of the Mind and the descent of the Supermind, have both been accomplished by them. On 5th December 1950, Sri Aurobindo sacrificed his body in order to bring the supramental into the earth-consciousness. And later, on 29th February 1956, the Mother brought down the golden flood of the Supramental Force on earth and fulfilled the promise they had given to mankind, fulfilling at the same time man’s immemorial aspiration for Truth, Light, Freedom and Immortality.

Presuming that the New Race of the supramental consciousness has come, does it mean that is the end of the march of civilisation? It is not so. According to Sri Aurobindo, it only means that with Supermind creation has leaped from the domain of Ignorance to Knowledge and Light. Mortality, which has been the governing principle of the present life on earth, will be replaced by immortality. Thereafter, after crossing the borderland of Ignorance, a new creation starts and the evolutionary course will continue ad infinitum — from light to greater Light, because Sachchidananda is infinite and his self-revelation and manifestation are also infinite.

This then is the philosophical foundation, which supports our ideal of the total transformation, the divinisation of man and spiritualisation of matter. Sri Aurobindo charts the very creation of the universe and traces in a god-like gesture the spiritual evolution of earth from the very first dawn when evolution began, from “the hour before the Gods awake.”¹⁶ He does so only to show us the inevitability of the coming of the New Race and to convince the human mind about the urgent need of it to submit to the ideal of integral transformation.

Yet, this is only half the story. An ideal never belongs to the past; it looks always to the future. The past only serves as the foundation to a future that is more luminous, more promising, and more stupendous than anything since the beginning of evolution. And Sri Aurobindo once again paints the glorious future in magnificent hues. His “vision and prophetic gleam”¹⁷ have in themselves the necessary Force, Consciousness and Light to sustain mankind in its present gloomy period of transition.

To know “the mystery of the journeying years”¹⁸ of the future, to try to understand what awaits our destiny is itself a help on the way of fulfilling our ideal. However faintly we may understand the Vision, we at least become humble, and the more consciously we surrender ourselves to this Vision and Force, the greater are our chances of collaboration in the ideal.

February 29, 1956, was the day when the New World was born. The New Consciousness is amidst us, recasting, unobtrusively, the old consciousness. It is there, spreading in every walk of life — the political, the economic, the spiritual,

the artistic, urging man to cast off old habits old institutions, old values, old ways of thinking and beliefs — the old consciousness based on falsehood, hypocrisy, ignorance. Quietly, the New World is gliding into the old one, replacing it inch-by-inch, minute-by-minute. New foundations are being laid, ‘not below, but above’, in the inner being, the psychic being of man. The New Man will be therefore not a slave to his outer nature, limited and obscure, but a monarch of himself and all around him — *Swarat* and *Samrat*. Living in his soul-status, he will be in conscious harmony and communion with other individuals. There will thus be neither strife nor competition, neither rivals nor opponents, for all would be one in the cosmic soul and therefore radiating the Divine Will. His mind would be a channel of profound, creative and true knowledge. His heart will overflow not with the base human egoistic emotions, but with a ‘wide and intense rasa that lies in the divine identity of souls’. His body will be beautiful, transparent and supple— “a tabernacle of God.”¹⁹

With the increase of such individuals, the social structure too will change and will become one that is based on cooperation, collaboration and free expression of one’s own *Swadharma*. It will be a kind of living in one self by living in all and vice versa. With an increase of such aggregates, there will be a change in the nations, for each one would increasingly find its own true soul. It would automatically result in a ‘supra-nation’ or a federation of nations. The world would thus move towards one indivisible humanity, which will be the basis of the super humanity.

“Thus shall the earth open to divinity
And common natures feel the wide uplift,
Illumine common acts with the Spirit’s ray
And meet the deity in common things.
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine.”²⁰

Considering the apparent state of human consciousness at present, this lofty ideal, this vision of “A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal’s world”²¹ seems a far-off cry, something impossible and chimerical. Even if it is to take place, it may take place in a ‘far-flung futurity’, hundreds of years from now.

To this sceptical view Sri Aurobindo answers:

“I have already spoken about the bad conditions of the world; the usual idea of the occultists about it is that the worse they are, the more probable is the

coming of an intervention or a new revelation from above. The ordinary mind cannot know — it has either to believe or disbelieve or wait and see.

“As to whether the Divine seriously means something to happen, I believe it is intended. I know with absolute certitude that the supramental is a truth and that its advent is in the very nature of things inevitable. The question is as to the when and how. That also is decided and predestined from somewhere above; but it is here being fought out amid a rather grim clash of conflicting forces. For in the terrestrial world the predetermined result is hidden and what we see is a whirl of possibilities and forces attempting to achieve something with the destiny of it all concealed from the human eyes. This is, however, certain that a number of souls have been sent to see that it shall be now. That is the situation. My faith and will are for the now.”²²

In another letter, he writes:

“But I have not been discouraged by what is happening, because I know and have experienced hundreds of times that beyond the blackest darkness there lies for one who is a divine instrument the light of God’s victory. I have never had a strong and persistent will for anything to happen in the world — I am not speaking of personal things — which did not eventually happen even after delay, defeat or even disaster.”²³

Along with this sanction and will of Sri Aurobindo for the coming of the supramental race, what is required to lay the foundations of a new world are a few pioneers, an avant-garde, a selected group of aspirants. In any case, it is never intended that the entire human race will be taken up into the new consciousness. Just as Matter continues to exist, though changed and influenced to an extent, after the advent of Life and Mind, so too Life and Mind will continue to be and they will not be obliterated from the face of the earth. However, as the small nucleus of forerunners snowballs and becomes a larger collectivity, the effects of the New Consciousness will be felt on humanity in general:

“This change might happen not only in the few, but extend and generalise itself in the race. This possibility, if fulfilled, would mean that the human dream of perfection, perfection of itself, of its purified and enlightened nature, of all its ways of action and living, would be no longer a dream but a truth that could be made real and humanity lifted out of the hold on it of inconscience and ignorance.”²⁴

When asked by a disciple, “What will be the effect of the Supermind on the earth?” the Mother replied:

“... I told you immediately that before the effects of the supramental manifestation become visible and tangible, perceptible to everybody, perhaps thousands of years may go by ...”²⁵

As the complete transformation of the earth-life and the full manifestation of the supramentalised beings is a proposition of thousands of years from now, Sri Aurobindo envisages an intermediary race which could act as the bridge between man and the supramental race. It is the race of superman. The superman, although born in the human way, would transform his consciousness sufficiently – that of the mind, life and body — by connecting it with the higher spiritual principle of Supermind. However, even the level of supermen is not in the immediate reach of man. Before achieving that level, there would be several attempts, successful and unsuccessful, each forming a partial realisation according to one’s capacity and the degree of transformation. And such men who give themselves to the attempt will be the apprentice-supermen, and they will be the candidates for Superman.

“All those who strive to overcome their ordinary nature,” defines the Mother:

“all those who try to realise materially the deeper experience which has brought them into contact with the divine Truth, all those who, instead of turning to the Beyond or the Highest, try to realise physically, externally, the change of consciousness they have realised within themselves — all are apprentice-supermen.”²⁶

The starting-point of this change of consciousness is aspiration — aspiration coupled with a will to realise it:

“But if in addition to the aspiration there is an inner opening, a kind of receptivity, then one can enter into this transformed consciousness at a single stroke and maintain oneself there. This change of consciousness is abrupt, so to say; when it occurs, it occurs all of a sudden, although the preparation for it may have been long and slow ... It is a complete and absolute change, a revolution in the basic poise; the movement is like turning a ball inside out. To the transformed consciousness everything appears not only new and different, but almost the reverse of what it seemed to the ordinary consciousness. In the ordinary consciousness you advance slowly, by successive experiences, from ignorance to a very distant and often doubtful knowledge. In the transformed consciousness your starting-point is knowledge

and you proceed from knowledge to knowledge. However, this is only a beginning; for the outer consciousness, the various planes and parts of the outer active being are transformed only slowly and gradually as a result of the inner transformation.”²⁷

In other words, it is the awakening of the psychic being in the seeker, the sadhak. After a considerable time of incubation, that is, a deepening of the ordinary consciousness, there is a sudden contact with the divine Presence in the heart centre. This contact, when stabilised, guides the sadhak at every moment telling him what’s to be done and how it is to be done, for, the psychic has the absolute knowledge of the truth behind appearances.

Thus, after the first change of consciousness or the awakening of the psychic being, if the sadhak makes his outer nature of body, life and mind move in the light and guidance of his psychic, then, the higher consciousness purifies and regenerates his ordinary human nature.

“Finally, when the psychic being is in full self-possession and power, it can be the vehicle of the direct supramental consciousness — which will then be able to act freely and absolutely for the entire transformation of the external nature, its transfiguration into a perfect body of the Truth-consciousness — in a word, its divinisation.”²⁸

Thus a psychicisation, leading to a spiritualisation and culminating in a supramentalisation can alone fulfil the ideal of total transformation of which “a transformation of the body must be an indispensable part of it; without that no full divine life on earth is possible.”²⁹

In truth, the great emphasis on the physical transformation is because:

“It must be remembered that for the divine life on earth, earth and Matter have not to be and cannot be rejected but have only to be sublimated and to reveal in themselves the possibilities of the spirit, serve the spirit’s highest uses and be transformed into instruments of a greater living.”³⁰

Until the supramental is realised here, in the body, nothing is realised permanently. So, the new consciousness is working itself out in the body and not on the mental or vital levels, because they cannot support it. A new body alone can stand the pressure of the new consciousness. The body alone has the true capacity to understand and for it to understand means the capacity to be able to do, the Mother used to explain. And this capacity and understanding is contagious. That is why the Mother gave her own body for experimenting with

the principles of physical transformation, which in their essence had been realised by Sri Aurobindo in his own body. For, she believed that ... “since it is happening in one body, it can happen in all bodies!”³¹ And if this victory is won in one single glorious body, then it will be a victory for all men and Matter. “... once it is done (Sri Aurobindo has said this), once one body has done it, it has the capacity to pass it on to others,”³² confirmed the Mother.

Once the Supramental Force anchors itself to a single body, then it will open itself around the cells of the body and refashion and remould its new body. And,

“the moment a body, which was of course formed by the old animal method, is capable of living this consciousness [the New Consciousness] naturally and spontaneously, without effort, without going out of itself, it proves that this is not one single exceptional case but simply the forerunner of a realisation which, even if it is not altogether general, can at least be shared by a certain number of individuals who, besides, as soon as they share it, will lose the perception of being separate individuals and become a living collectivity.”³³

The Mother’s own body has been the “forerunner” of such a realisation. She transformed it to the extent it could be done, leaving behind her New Body and her promise:

“One day I shall return, His hands in mine,
And thou shalt see the face of the Absolute.
Then shall the holy marriage be achieved,
Then shall the divine family be born.
There shall be light and peace in all the worlds.”³⁴

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The Role of the Body in the Integral Yoga - Part I

Martha Orton

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's vision of the role of the body in the spiritual progression from ordinary human consciousness to supramentalisation is a major departure from traditional spiritual perspectives on the body. In spiritual practice in the past, the body has been regarded not only as an obstacle on the spiritual path, because of its gross physical nature and its being the seat of unconsciousness and associated with various forms of desire, but it has also been scorned and even subjected to physical deprivation and punishments in order to tame it, in effect, or deny its relevance in the pursuit of a life of the spirit. While Sri Aurobindo and the Mother take a clear stand on the problems of the body, fully recognising its difficulties, they also advocate including it in the spiritual life as part of the integral nature of the yoga and actually propose its ultimate divinisation in the course of the evolution of consciousness. This is so because they regard spirit and matter as one. In his writings, particularly in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo resolves the duality of soul and nature, spirit and matter, and demonstrates their oneness. Furthermore Sri Aurobindo and the Mother regard spiritual progress as incomplete unless it includes the manifestation, for they envision a divine life on earth, fully including earth, not only the souls which inhabit it. In *Savitri*, his epic poem of spiritual ascent and transformation, Sri Aurobindo writes:

Earth must transform herself and equal Heaven
Or Heaven descend into earth's mortal state.
But for such vast spiritual change to be,
Out of the mystic cavern in man's heart
The heavenly Psyche must put off her veil
And step into common nature's crowded rooms
And stand uncovered in that nature's front
And rule its thoughts and fill the body and life. (*Savitri*, pp.486-487)

Sri Aurobindo regards matter and spirit, body and soul, as being one and, not only confronts the traditional dualistic view, but also transcends it, revealing the higher truth behind the apparent reality. The following statement is an indication of the importance Sri Aurobindo attributes to the understanding and realisation of this unity:

The affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognise not only eternal Spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept Matter of which it is made, as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves constantly His garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of His mansions.

Nor is this, even, enough to guard us against a recoil from life in the body unless, with the Upanishads, perceiving behind their appearances the identity in essence of these two extreme terms of existence, we are able to say in the very language of those ancient writings, "Matter also is Brahman", and to give its full value to the vigorous figure by which the physical universe is described as the external body of the Divine Being. (*The Life Divine*, SABCL, vol.18, p.6)

It is relevant to consider how human thinking came to see them as separate realities. This human assessment of separateness is deeply seated in its ignorance — that is, ignorance in its largest sense, the separation from the knowledge of reality. This ignorance has its basis in egoism, which consists of identification with a separate mind, life and body and a sense of oneself as a separate entity existing apart from other individuals. In contrast, true knowledge derives from the realisation of oneness as the reality of the universe. Sri Aurobindo, writing about the attainment of the gnosis in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, discusses the universality of being as a necessary component of achieving higher consciousness and states: "This universality is impossible to achieve in its completeness so long as we continue to feel ourselves, as we now feel, a consciousness lodged in an individual mind, life and body." (CWSA, vol.23, p.490) The division felt among beings is also experienced on the individual level and takes the form of a division among the parts of the being, with the soul and body commonly regarded as separate, the soul being eternal and the body its temporary instrument.

The human perception of the duality of spirit and body has its origins in the larger, universal duality of soul and nature. Sri Aurobindo states: "This division was made most clearly by the old Indian philosophies; but it bases itself upon the eternal fact of practical duality in unity upon which the world-manifestation is founded." (Ibid, p.427) Sri Aurobindo describes this as having its origin in the vast single reality of the Purusha manifesting itself in the universe as Prakriti

and, in this manifestation, a separation appearing to occur as part of the creation of nature in its diversity. This variety, however, is merely the divine play and, however multiple it may seem, even with its various parts appearing vastly different from each other or in opposition to each other, there is one underlying reality of existence, and all are truly one.

Sri Aurobindo resolves the duality of Purusha and Prakriti, soul and nature, by going beyond the perception of them as separate realities and discovering where they meet and are actually one. He describes this as occurring where the two merge, with the Purusha being more than the silent, passive witness behind the creation, and giving its active support, active sanction, to the creation:

In the attitude of the Witness there is also a kind of sanction, but it is passive, inert and has no kind of absoluteness about it; but if he consents entirely to uphold, the sanction has become active, even though the soul may do no more than consent to reflect, support and thereby maintain in action all the energies of Prakriti. It may refuse to determine, to select, believing that it is God or Force itself or some Knowledge-Will that selects and determines, and the soul only a witness and upholder and thereby giver of the sanction, *anumantā*, but not the possessor and the director of the knowledge and the will, *jñātā īśvarah*. Then there is a general sanction in the form of an active upholding of whatever is determined by God or universal Will, but there is not an active determination. But if the soul habitually selects and rejects in what is offered to it, it determines; the relatively passive has become an entirely active sanction and is on the way to be an active control. (Ibid, p.433)

As the Purusha takes an active role it unites in energy and substance with the Prakriti and they are seen to be indeed two aspects of one reality. Additionally, when the soul accepts the active role of directing existence as master of nature, this leads to further fulfilment and understanding of the resolution of the duality of soul and nature. As master of nature, the soul is also, as Sri Aurobindo describes it “the knower, lord and enjoyer of Nature”. (Ibid, p.433) He describes an interplay of knowledge and force:

As the knower the soul possesses the knowledge of the force that acts and determines, it sees the values of being which are realising themselves in cosmos, it is in the secret of Fate. For the force that acts is itself determined by the knowledge which is its origin and the source and standardiser of its valuations and effectuations of values. Therefore in proportion as the soul becomes again the knower, it gets the capacity of becoming also the controller of the action whether by spiritual force alone or by that force figuring itself

in mental and physical activities.” (Ibid, p.433)

Furthermore, in writing of this relation and interplay, Sri Aurobindo declares that the soul necessarily becomes “the active enjoyer, *bhoktā*.” (Ibid, p.434) As the active enjoyer of nature then the soul unites with nature, Purusha with Prakriti, in Sachchidananda. Sri Aurobindo describes this result further: “Purusha and Prakriti in their union and duality arise from the being of Sachchidananda. Self-conscious existence is the essential nature of the Being; that is Sat or Purusha. The Power of self-aware existence, whether drawn into itself or acting in the works of its consciousness and force, its knowledge and its will, Chit and Tapas, Chit and its Shakti, — that is Prakriti.” (Ibid, p.435)

Consequently, with resolving the duality of soul and nature, with the realisation that they are two aspects of one reality, the conflict supposed to exist between them is also resolved. Instead of being in opposition to each other, soul and nature can have a complementary and harmonious existence. This is possible because each aspect has the potential to exist in its proper place and perform its intended role in the overall scheme of existence. When the soul becomes master of nature, both are fulfilled. Soul is able to progress unhindered by the ties and weight of lower nature and nature is able to support the progress of the soul through its force and action and be its expression in the manifestation. As with the resolution of all conflict, all is well when each element finds its proper place.

In identifying the soul’s role as master of nature and, moreover, demonstrating that Purusha and Prakriti, soul and nature are one, Sri Aurobindo lays the foundation for including the manifestation in the spiritual life and, more specifically, matter and the body in the integral yoga and in the transformation which he and the Mother envision.

Sri Aurobindo also expresses a perspective on the relevance of matter in his writings on the nature of reality. In *The Life Divine*, after developing his explanation for the underlying reality of life, Sri Aurobindo considers the nature and significance of matter:

We have now the rational assurance that Life is neither an inexplicable dream nor an impossible evil that has yet become a dolorous fact, but a mighty pulsation of the divine All-Existence. We see something of its foundation and its principle, we look upward to its high potentiality and ultimate divine out-flowering. But there is one principle below all the others which we have not yet sufficiently considered, the principle of Matter upon which Life stands as upon a pedestal or out of which it evolves like the form of a many-branching tree out of its encasing seed. The mind, life and body of

man depend upon this physical principle, and if the out-flowering of Life is the result of Consciousness emerging into Mind, expanding, elevating itself in search of its own truth in the largeness of the supramental existence, yet it seems also to be conditioned by this case of body and by this foundation of Matter. (SABCL, vol.18, p.231)

Therefore Sri Aurobindo emphatically states that matter forms an essential basis of life and acknowledges the importance of the physical principle, including emphasis in regard to the development and expansion of consciousness. In addition, he specifically speaks to the importance of the body, as follows:

The importance of the body is obvious; it is because he has developed or been given a body and brain capable of receiving and serving a progressive mental illumination that man has risen above the animal. Equally, it can only be by developing a body or at least a functioning of the physical instrument capable of receiving and serving a still higher illumination that he will rise above himself and realise, not merely in thought and in his internal being but in life, a perfectly divine manhood. (Ibid.)

While foreseeing an ultimate transformation of the body, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother do acknowledge the body as an obstacle in spiritual progress. For example, Sri Aurobindo states: “It seems indeed that the body is from the beginning the soul’s great difficulty, its continual stumbling-block and rock of offence.” (Ibid, p.232) The essence of the problem posed by the body is its inertia and the influence of the inconscient within it. For the body is matter in a specific form and in matter consciousness has forgotten itself in its creation. Sri Aurobindo identifies three specific problems related to matter in the chapter titled “*The Knot of Matter*” in *The Life Divine*. He writes: “First, then, the fundamental opposition Matter presents to Spirit is this that it is the culmination of the principle of Ignorance. Here Consciousness has lost and forgotten itself in a form of its works, as a man might forget in extreme absorption not only who he is but that he is at all and become momentarily only the work that is being done and the force that is doing it.” (Ibid, p.243) The second problem which matter offers is its inherent bondage to the law of its composition, what Sri Aurobindo calls “mechanic law”: “...it is the culmination of bondage to mechanic Law and opposes to all that seeks to liberate itself a colossal Inertia.” (Ibid, p.244) Sri Aurobindo goes on to explain that, though matter itself is not inert but is “an infinite motion, an inconceivable force, a limitless action,” (Ibid.) he states that its subjugation to mechanic law is so complete that matter resists the influences of mind and life and therefore presents a significant obstacle to integral progress and realisation. At the point at which matter resists change, it,

in effect “persuades Life and Mind that they cannot go farther, cannot pursue to the end their partial victory.” (Ibid.) Both of these oppositions to the spirit constitute highly relevant reasons that matter needs to be addressed in the spiritual life and reasons to give importance to the transformation of matter, for as long as matter opposes the growth of consciousness through its ignorance and as long as it remains stuck in submission to mechanic law, the life of the spirit cannot progress beyond these points of opposition and resistance.

The third and final problem which matter poses is “...that it is the culmination of the principle of division and struggle.” (Ibid, p.245) Sri Aurobindo describes this as follows:

Indivisible indeed in reality, divisibility is its whole basis of action from which it seems forbidden ever to depart; for its only two methods of union are either the aggregation of units or an assimilation which involves the destruction of one unit by another; and both of these methods of union are a confession of eternal division, since even the first associates rather than unifies and by its very principle admits the constant possibility and therefore the ultimate necessity of dissociation, of dissolution. Both methods repose on death, one as a means, the other as a condition of life. And both presuppose as the condition of world-existence a constant struggle of the divided units with each other, each striving to maintain itself, to maintain its associations, to compel or destroy what resists it, to gather in and devour others as its food, but itself moved to revolt against and flee from compulsion, destruction and assimilation by devouring. (Ibid.)

This opposition which matter poses to the spirit stands out as particularly significant to aspects of the integral yoga, for it relates to two key elements: (1) the acceptance of the principle of the unity of the universe, that all is Brahman and Brahman is all; (2) the acceptance of the belief that death is falsehood, life is eternal, and that the mortality of the body is to be conquered. Therefore the implications of the divisiveness of the nature of matter and its relation to death both point to the need for the transformation of matter in order to remove it as an obstacle to the full flowering of the spirit in mankind and in the universe.

It is important to consider how the fundamental oppositions of matter influence our lives as human beings and necessarily influence our spiritual life. Sri Aurobindo gives indications of this in the following statement:

Death, division, mutual resistance and exclusion between embodied masses of the same conscious life-force are the formula of our physical existence; the narrow limitation of the play of the senses, the determination within a small circle of the field, duration and power of the life-workings, the

obscuration, lame movement, broken and bounded functioning of the mind are the yoke which that formula expressed in the animal body has imposed upon the higher principles. (Ibid, p.254)

Given the depth, breadth and pervasiveness of these limitations, the goal of awakening the consciousness in matter, revealing the Divine within matter and transforming it, seems liberation indeed. The need for this transformation and the necessity of its integrality becomes increasingly apparent as one reflects on the role of matter in the life of the being, both on an individual level and on the universal level. Sri Aurobindo informs us that matter with all its limitations has a higher destiny and that the human body, as a being of matter, also does. In referring to the resistance of matter to the spirit, he writes:

There are superior states, there are higher worlds, and if the law of these can by any progress of man and by any liberation of our substance from its present imperfections be imposed on this sensible form and instrument of our being, then there may be even here a physical working of divine mind and sense, a physical working of divine life in the human frame and even the evolution upon earth of something that we may call a divinely human body. The body of man also may some day come by its transfiguration; the Earth-Mother too may reveal in us her godhead. (Ibid.)

Sri Aurobindo explains that in our present lives the soul cannot express itself completely through the mind and vital and is even further limited in its expression by the body. Even when the body obeys the will of the soul, it imposes limitations by its very nature. Sri Aurobindo explains:

But the body, even in obeying, limits and determines the mind's and the life's self-expression by the limited possibilities and acquired character of its own physical instrumentation; it has besides a law of its own action, a movement and will or force or urge of movement of its own subconscious or half-emerged conscious power of being which they can only partially, — and even in that part more by an indirect than by a direct or, if direct, then more by a subconscious than a willed and conscious action, — influence or alter. (Ibid, SABCL, vol.19, p.985)

Therefore he proposes a reversal of the relations of the spirit with mind, life and matter in which the spirit is master of the body, becoming in full control of it. This action parallels Sri Aurobindo's writings on the Purusha becoming master of Prakriti and, in the two thus assuming their right relation. Furthermore, since the body is subject to the subconscious and inconscient, when the spirit takes control, it will bring the light of the superconscience, the supramental, into the

body and enlighten and uplift it, ultimately transforming it.

Sri Aurobindo describes the potential hidden within the inconscient and the role of matter in the following passage:

The body, we have said, is a creation of the Inconscient and itself inconscient or at least subconscious in parts of itself and much of its hidden action; but what we call the Inconscient is an appearance, a dwelling place, an instrument of a secret Consciousness or a Superconscient which has created the miracle we call the universe. Matter is the field and the creation of the Inconscient and the perfection of the operations of inconscient Matter, their perfect adaptation of means to an aim and end, the wonders they perform and the marvels of beauty they create, testify, in spite of all the ignorant denial we can oppose, to the presence and power of consciousness of this Superconscience in every part and movement of the material universe. It is there in the body, has made it and its emergence in our consciousness is the secret aim of evolution and the key to the mystery of our existence. (*The Supramental Manifestation*, SABCL, vol.16, pp.10-11)

The Mother has also commented extensively on the new consciousness and its effect on life and matter. For example, the following statement describes this conception of the spirit taking control of matter and transforming it:

We want an integral transformation, the transformation of the body and all its activities.

Formerly, when one spoke of transformation one meant solely the transformation of the inner consciousness. One tried to discover in oneself this deep consciousness and rejected the body and its activities like an encumbrance and a useless thing, in order to attend only to the inner movement. Sri Aurobindo declared that this was not enough; the Truth demanded that the material world should also participate in this transformation and become an expression of the deeper Truth. But when people heard this, many thought it was possible to transform the body and its activities without bothering in the least about what was happening within — naturally this is not quite true. Before you can undertake this work of physical transformation, which of all things is the most difficult, your inner consciousness must be firmly established, solidly established in the Truth, so that this transformation may be the final expression of the Truth — "final" for the moment at least. (*The Mother's Vision*, p.494)

In this statement we can see the role of the spirit, leading the body, as master of matter, in its growth towards transformation. Once again we are

reminded of the importance of fully engaging life in the world in the spiritual journey, engaging matter in the transformation and not forsaking life and matter through retreating into a realm of pure spirit. The Mother emphasises this:

Because until now evil has been opposed by weakness, by a spiritual force without any power for transformation in the material world, this tremendous effort of goodwill has ended only in deplorable failure and left the world in the same state of misery and corruption and falsehood. It is on the same plane as the one where the adverse forces are ruling that one must have a greater power than theirs, a power which can conquer them totally in that very domain. To put it otherwise, a spiritual force which would be capable of transforming both the consciousness and the material world. This force is the supramental force. What is necessary is to be receptive to its action on the physical plane, and not to run away into a distant Nirvana leaving the enemy with full power over what one abandons.

It is neither sacrifice nor renunciation nor weakness which can bring the victory. It is only Delight, a delight which is strength, endurance, supreme courage. The delight brought by the supramental force. It is much more difficult than giving everything up and running away, it demands an infinitely greater heroism — but that is the only way to conquer. (Ibid, p.557)

Therefore, the Mother not only explains the crucial importance of including life and matter in the spiritual quest, the great necessity of doing so in order to make the victory over evil and falsehood complete and enduring, but she also tells us how it is possible to actually transform matter through the influence of the supramental force. It is also quite striking that the Mother speaks both of heroism and delight. This is quite an unfamiliar combination of concepts for we usually think of heroism as being sombrely arduous and as not conducive to considerations of delight or any other lighter or happier emotions. This juxtaposition of terms gives us pause and points to the fact that heroism and delight combined are possible simply for the very fact that the supramental consciousness is a completely new consciousness in the human sphere. Living and striving within it is a completely new experience with altogether different capacities and qualities of being. Therefore being a courageous and heroic warrior for truth and transformation promises to be a delightful experience and unlike any which has gone before.

The extent of difference of the new spiritual life, and its mission of collaborating in bringing a new world, is beautifully expressed by the Mother:

First, it is not only a “new conception” of spiritual life and the divine Reality. This conception was expressed by Sri Aurobindo, I have expressed it myself

many a time, and it could be formulated somewhat like this: the old spirituality was an escape from life into the divine Reality, leaving the world just where it was, as it was; whereas our new vision, on the contrary, is a divinisation of life, a transformation of the material world into a divine world. This has been said, repeated, more or less understood, indeed it is the basic idea of what we want to do. But this could be a continuation with an improvement, a widening of the old world as it was — and so long as this is a conception up there in the field of thought, in fact it is hardly more than that — but what has happened, the really new thing, is that a new world is *born, born, born*. It is not the old one transforming itself, it is a new world which is born. And we are right in the midst of this period of transition where the two are entangled — where the other still persists all-powerful and entirely dominating the ordinary consciousness, but where the new one is quietly slipping in, still very modest, unnoticed — unnoticed to the extent that outwardly it doesn’t disturb anything very much, for the time being, and that in the consciousness of most people it is even altogether imperceptible. And yet it is working, growing — until it is strong enough to assert itself visibly. (Ibid, pp.578-579)

Therefore we are assured that a change is taking place on occult levels which enable the ultimate transformation of matter. Humanity can participate consciously or unconsciously in this change. The Mother describes quite emphatically the importance of incorporating life and body in the spiritual journey and aspiring for their transformation and explains how this is essential on both the individual level as well as for the world in general:

An inner illumination that does not take any note of the body and the outer life, is of no good use, for it leaves the world as it is. This is what has continually happened till now. Even those who had a very great and powerful realisation withdrew from the world to live undisturbed in inner quiet and peace; the world was left to its ways, and misery and stupidity, Death and Ignorance continued, unaffected, their reign on this material plane of existence. For those who thus withdraw, it may be pleasant to escape from this turmoil, to run away from the difficulty and to find for themselves a happy condition elsewhere; but they leave the world and life uncorrected and untransformed; and their own outer consciousness too they leave unchanged and their bodies as unregenerate as ever. Coming back to the physical world they are likely to be worse there than even ordinary people; for they have lost the mastery over material things, and their dealing with physical life is likely to be slovenly and helpless in its movements and at the mercy of every passing force. (Ibid, p.493)

From this we see further indication of the importance, in fact the absolute spiritual relevance, of including life and the body in the transformation and also of continuing emphasis in the integral yoga of attaining mastery of nature in order to progress along the path. However, one may say that it is all very well in theory to assert that humanity should take on this new challenge, but then question how to go about pursuing the path to physical transformation. The Mother explains this further:

The starting-point of this transformation is receptivity, we have already spoken about it. That is the indispensable condition for obtaining the transformation. Then comes the change of consciousness. This change of consciousness and its preparation have often been compared with the formation of the chicken in the egg: till the very last second the egg remains the same, there is no change, and it is only when the chicken is completely formed, absolutely alive, that it itself makes with its little beak a hole in the shell and comes out. (Ibid, p.494)

From this we can conclude that our primary task is to become receptive to the divine Force, to open ourselves and our natures to its influence, to offer ourselves for the Divine's work in the world as willing instruments. By stating that "one's inner consciousness must be firmly established, solidly established in the Truth" (Ibid.) the Mother encourages the seeker to address the sincerity of one's inner being, the clarity of one's aspiration, that it not be mixed with egoism, which leads to intermixture of falsehood and ignorance and can take one from the path or make the journey very convoluted and even more difficult than it otherwise would be. With a sincerely receptive inner being, the individual seeker can receive more fully the force of the Divine and more effectively experience the transformation of one's nature, one's life in the world, and ultimately one's physical being, therefore one's entire consciousness.

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(To be continued)

Bodhisattva and the Gnostic Being A study in linkages

Pabitra Kumar Roy

1. I propose to suggest a linkage between the Mahayana ideal of *Bodhisattva* and Sri Aurobindo's concept of the Gnostic Being. With this intention in view I shall consider a couple of passages from *The Life Divine* and endeavour to bring out the interconnection relating the ideal on the one hand and the concept on the other. I shall make use of a couple of Mahayana texts such as the *Vimalakirti nirdeśa Sutra* and the *Bodhicaryavatara* and look for a *bodhisattva's* spiritual affinities with a gnostic being. To open the inquiry, I mention and quote a remark made by Swami Vivekananda striking the note of evolutionary perspective of consciousness. He makes the remark in connection with commenting on Patanjali's aphorism *jātyāntara pariṇāmaḥ* : "the amoeba goes higher and higher until it becomes a Buddha ... if a Buddha is the one end and the change, the very amoeba must have been the Buddha also. If the Buddha is the evolved amoeba, the amoeba is the involved Buddha also. (*Selections from Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 2007, Kolkata, p.255) On another occasion, the Swami told someone who had returned from pilgrimage to the holy shrine in the Himalayas that human life itself was a pilgrimage to the Buddha-man. The point of the cited passage is not *satkārya vāda* simpliciter, rather a terrestrial drama disclosing the possibilities of consciousness both vertically and horizontally. The *Jataka* tales could well be taken to be enclosed accounts of the progression of consciousness through cycles of births, a pilgrimage, an adventurous voyage, as it were, to the final ecstasy of Siddharta's Enlightenment. The drama of consciousness unfolds, Tagore has put it memorably, act by act, *anke anke caitanyer prakāsher pala*.

2. We shall now have the passages from *The Life Divine* (Greystone Press, New York, 1949)

a) It was

“possible for the Buddha to attain the state of Nirvana and yet act powerfully in the world, impersonal in his inner consciousness, in his action the most powerful personality that we know of as having lived and produced results upon earth.

... this Nirvana, this self-extinction, while it gives an absolute peace and freedom to the soul within is yet consistent in practice with a desireless but effective action without. This possibility of an entire motionless impersonality and void Calm within doing outwardly the works of the eternal verities, Love, Truth and Righteousness, was perhaps the real gist of the Buddha's teaching ... In any case, as the perfect man would combine in himself the silence and the activity, so also would the completely conscious soul reach back to the absolute freedom of the Non-Being without therefore losing its hold on Existence and the universe”. (pp.29-30)

b)“Is it altogether a legend which says of the Buddha that as he stood on the threshold of Nirvana, of the Non-Being, his soul turned back and took the vow never to make the irrevocable crossing so long as there was a single being upon earth undelivered from the knot of suffering, from the bondage of the ego? (Ibid, p.40)

c)“The spiritually realised, the liberated man is preoccupied ... with the good of all beings; Buddha discovering the way of Nirvana must turn back to open that way to those who are still under the delusion of their constructive instead of their real being – or non-being. Vivekananda, drawn by the Absolute, feels also the call of the disguised Godhead in humanity and most the call of the fallen and the suffering, the call of the self to the self in the obscure body of the universe. (Ibid, pp.930-31)

The passages cited above are of hermeneutical import. Sri Aurobindo has at hand the metaphysical or rather the ontological problem of harmonising Silence and Activity. ‘All problems of existence’, he said, ‘are essentially problems of harmony’. The problem could be solved if the Absolute at once be both consciousness as well as force. If the Absolute be, in Sri Aurobindo's phrase, “conscious force”, since that is why “the Silence permits the Activity” (Ibid, p.29). The Buddhist metaphors for change and impermanence are incorporated in Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical schematism. There runs the admission: “We are the river, the flame of the Buddhist illustration”, and it is added further that

“There is a supreme experience and supreme intuition by which we go back

behind our surface self and find that this becoming, change, succession are only a mode of our being and that there is that in us which is not involved at all in the becoming. Not only can we have the intuition of this that is stable and external in us, not only can we have the glimpse of it in experience behind the veil of continually fleeting becomings, but we can draw back into it and live in it entirely, so affecting an entire change in our external life, and in our attitude, and in our action upon the movement of the world” Ibid, pp.73-4)

A passage in the *Udana* runs as follows:

“There is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, incomposite no escape could be shown here from birth, becoming, making, composition. But because there is this unborn, unbecome, unmade, incomposite, therefore an escape can be shown from birth, making, composition” (*Gotama the Buddha*, presented by Ananda K Coomaraswamy and I B Horner, Cassell, London, 1948, p.218).

This is the Buddha's version of what Sri Aurobindo calls ‘the Silent’.

Now as for the Activity, the other poise of the Absolute, we find the Buddha admonishing his disciples to go forth on their journey, “for the profit of the many, for the bliss of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the profit, the bliss of ... mankind” (Vinaya, 1.21 tr. F L Woodward, *Some sayings of the Buddha*, OUP, London, 1960, p.30. Here we have the dynamic side of the Buddha's spiritual being.

In the discourses of the Buddha, the accent falls on *Brahma-vihara* or *Brahma-faring*. It consists in suffusing all the quarters of the world with unbounded love. By the *Brahma-faring* one becomes Brahman, so says the *Sutta – Nipat* (655). *Brahma-vihara* is unsurpassed freedom from the ego, here and now. The one who does so is unfettered and awake, says the *Udana* (4). The *Brahma-faring* is “lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the ending” (*Digha Nikaya*, 3.76). In another context, we are told that the holy life or the *Brahma-vihara* is nothing else besides “friendship, companionship, intimacy with the lovely” (*Samyutta – Nikaya*, 5.3). The term “lovely” or *kusala* bears multi-level suggestions, moral, aesthetic and ontological, all at one go. Some commentators hold that contextually, *kusala* is to be apperceived as the negation of whatever is ill, and by definition, “what is ill is not the self, what is not self, that is not mine, that I am not, that is not my self” (Ibid, 3.83). Or as we find it in the *Udana* (74): “Not to consider ‘I am this’, that is freedom”. There is no object, it is admonished, that can properly be called “my self”. An utter non-grasping of whatever is conceptually structured or an empirical modality is

the pathway to freedom. The ego is unreal, because it is mutable.

The Buddhist pilgrim's progress consists in two converging sets of training: training of the will and that of the intellect. It is not enough to undergo the one to the neglect of the other. They are to go hand in hand. Misery, mutability and un-self-isness (*dukkha*, *anica*, *anatta*) are the characteristics of all composite things, all that is not-my-self. What is ontologically un-self-isness is un-selfishness. The free man is other than his individuality. Individuality and falsity are one and the same. Hence it is subjected to descriptive analysis. The training of the intellect could be possible only if the training of the will be there as a prolegomenon. There is the concept of *ceto vimutti* or freedom of heart. A free heart alone can abide in such blessed and virtuous states as of radiating well-wishing love towards all living things whatever, in every direction. Two of the states, namely, *maitrī* and *karuṇā* are universally endorsed. But *mudīta* or sympathetic joy in the happiness of others requires a mature moral perception, difficult as it is to attain by eschewing the natural inclination to jealousy. There is reason to believe that *mudīta* is characteristically a Buddhist prescription. It becomes possible explicitly on the non-perception of the modalities of the self and the other, *parātmā samatā*, as Santideva would put it later. The fourth blessed state of *upekkha* or impartiality is suggestive of detachment as of one who looks upon whatever pleasant or unpleasant things befall himself as one might look at a play, present at but not involved in the hero's predicaments.

The point is that training of the will, through *Brahma-vihara*, is never to be profaned in deference to training of the mind. The two are like the two wings of a bird in flight. The very insight was made explicit by Saraha, a later Mahayana mystic in the following stanza of a poem:

He who clings to the Void
And neglects compassion,
Does not reach the highest stage,
But he who only practises compassion
Does not gain release from toils of existence.
He, however, who is strong in practice of both,
Remains neither in Samsara nor in Nirvana.
(*Buddhist Scriptures*, tr. Edward Conze, Penguin, 1977, p.180)

One might recall what the *Īśopanisad* says in a similar vein: "Into deep darkness fall those who follow the Immanent. Into deeper darkness fall those who follow the Transcendent ... He who knows both the Transcendent and the Immanent, with the Immanent overcomes death and with the Transcendent

reaches immortality". (*The Upanishads*, tr. Juan Mascaro, Penguin, 1965, pp.49-50) We have several analogies at hand for understanding the bi-unity of *karuṇā* and *prajñā*. There is the Kantian invocation of matter and form of knowledge, an echo indeed of Aristotle, culminating in the theory of schematism in the first *Critique*. Or to have the point made in a variant manner Santideva, e.g. *prajñā* or transcendental wisdom has to inform the *pāramitās* or virtues in order to be perfected, lest they degenerate into sentimentality. It is in such a light that we have to appreciate the intention of the beguiling metaphor of the mother in the *Sutta-Nipata* (*Metta Sutta*,7): "As a mother at the risk of her life watches over her own child, so also let everyone cultivate a boundless friendly mind towards all beings". (*Sacred Books of the East*, Part II, Vol.X, ed. Max Muller, New Delhi, 1973, p.24) We may compare the metaphor of the mother with what meets us in the *Praśna Upanisad* (2.13), *mateva putram raksasva* : "As a mother her child, protect us, O Life". Op.Cit, p.70). This of course is a prayer, and not an admonition as it is in the *Sutta-Nipata*. But should one care to compare the two usages of the same metaphor, one would notice that the Buddhist usage is more focused and has an intensity that is not to be met with in the Upanisadic. The *Sutta-Nipata* exhorts us to resolve our mind and will on an edge of comparison far beyond a general mode of prayer. And further, in the readiness to risk one's life to protect another (it matters little whether she be one's own child or not) we hear the footfalls of the Mahayana ideal of Bodhisattva.

3. *Bodhisattva* is the Mahayana ideal of human perfection. He incarnates the gospel of universal salvation based on the idea of the fundamental oneness of all beings. This oneness is to be realised in the attainment of Buddhahood on the part of each and all, in the full realisation of the universal communion. Individuals may purify themselves and thereby escape the miseries of sinful existence, yet the salvation of anyone is imperfect so long as and so far as there remain any who have not realised the universal spiritual communion, i.e., who are not saved. To save oneself by saving others is the message of the ideal. A *bodhisattva* is one who, having attained the goal of purification and emancipation, refuses to enter Nirvana, out of devoted love for those who still remain behind and a consuming zeal to help them. He postpones his own entrance into perfect bliss because his sense of spiritual oneness with others leads him to prefer to wait with them and lovingly serve them until all are ready to enter together. His own salvation would be imperfect and even impossible as long as any living being remain unsaved.

In the Mahayana literature, a *bodhisattva* is taken to have transcended the state in which he is concerned for his own salvation. He is committed to the

eternal weal of all living beings, and will not rest until he has led them all to the goal. On attaining enlightenment he does not leave world behind and enter Nirvana by himself. He remains in the world, devoting his compassionate skill to the aid of others. He shares and bears the burden of their suffering, in loving union with them, instead of merely giving others an example of a person who has overcome the causes of suffering for himself. A quote from the *Lankavatara Sutra* has the classic statement:

“a *Bodhisattva* who is full of pity and concerned with the welfare of all beings ...dwells in friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and evenmindedness. ...

A *Bodhisattva* resolves: I take upon myself the burden of all suffering, I am resolved to do so, I will endeavour it. I do not turn or run away, do not tremble, am not terrified, nor afraid, do not turn back or despond.

... I have made the vow to save all beings. All beings I must set free ... I walk so that the kingdom of unsurpassed cognition is built up for all beings ... I am resolved to abide in each single state of woe for numberless aeons; and so I will help all beings to freedom, in all states of that may be found in any world system whatever”. (*The Teaching of the compassionate Buddha*, ed. E A Burt, Mentor Religious Classics, The New American Library, 1955, pp.132-34)

Another poignant example of the Bodhisattva ideal is available in the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśha Sutra*, where with the help of a therapeutic model, the process of spiritual growth is compared to the healing of sickness. Vimalakirti, who is a householder *bodhisattva*, identifies the sickness of all living beings with his own, stating, I am sick because all sentient beings are sick, when the sickness of all sentient beings has been cured, mine will also be cured. For this reason, he postpones his own enlightenment and chooses to be born again until everyone else attains salvation. The spiritual value of this choice lies in its active involvement in society and in the notion that society is an extension of one's own existence. Indeed Vimalakirti instructs *bodhisattvas* assembled around him to convert the experience of sickness into something positive, something that generates wholesome, striving energy. Here we see that experience of suffering becomes transformed into the potentiality of curing others: without the experience of sickness one cannot cure others.

Why does Vimalakirti choose to adopt the suffering of others? How does it enable him to help them and thus lead them, and ultimately himself as well, to enlightenment? It is because only by fully embracing the experience of others,

which naturally entails experiencing their sickness and suffering, can he fully realise himself as identical to them. The experience of absorbing himself into their sickness, and of thus realising his essential identification with them, is the only means by which he may develop wisdom and compassion, qualities that he needs to show others the cause of this sickness. Similarly, he may use these same qualities of wisdom and compassion in order to discover why he himself also suffers.

There is albeit a difference between the *Lankavatara Sutra* version of the career of a *bodhisattva* and that in the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśha Sutra*. The former is anchored on the level of soteriology, while the latter, soteriology notwithstanding, offers the basis of a nascent theory of social justice. And this becomes evident if one could manage to move from the ontological or soteriological level down to the phenomenal or social level; the doctrine of *anātma* or selflessness provides the underpinnings one needs, in that it posits the mutual interdependence of all members of society and the shared nature of all types of suffering: spiritual, physical, emotional and economic. Apropos of the *Bodhisattva* ideal one would be required to view oneself as being potentially anyone in society. The *anātma* doctrine behoves one to view oneself as being in fact everyone in society. The social implications of this viewpoint are indeed powerful: her poverty becomes my poverty, his tragedy my tragedy. No man is an island, as John Donne said famously. And when combined with the model of active engagement offered to the *Bodhisattva* ideal, in which personal health is achieved by helping others, we find ourselves with a solid rationale for social action. Once the Buddha asked his disciples: "Brethren, he who would wait on me, let him wait on the sick". (*Vinaya, Mahavagga*, viii, section 26)

4. We shall now return to Sri Aurobindo. On the evolutionary ascent there appears a state of consciousness embodied as gnostic being. The term 'gnostic being' wonderfully captures the connotation of the idea of *bodhisattva*. In Mahayana there is nothing more momentous than the arising of the awakened mind, technically called *bodhicittopada*. It may as well be termed *bodhi-mind* or *bodhi-citta*. It is aspirational and transformative. The moment this state of mind or consciousness arises the very vision of life and existence gets transformed in a radical manner. It should be unexceptionable to say that a *bodhisattva* is a gnostic being. Just as there are *bhūmis* of a *bodhisattva's* ascent, so are there 'a hierarchy of states of consciousness rising out of mind and physical life to the supreme spiritual level' (op.cit, p.855). We may note that a gnostic being has no ego, his individuality is universal, there is no contradiction between his own good and the good of others. He will encounter all with a perfect sympathy and sense of oneness. For him attachment and bondage fall away, replaced by an intimate extended self-perception. His will will be an

impersonal consciousness, corresponding to what is said as *anāmbana*, without any prop whatever, in Mahayana literature. A *bodhisattva*'s compassion at the highest reaches is *anāmbana karuṇā*. Impersonality, says Sri Aurobindo, is a poise of consciousness, when it is reflexive, not directed towards any object in particular, it is undifferentiated in itself. It appears that, for Sri Aurobindo, impersonality and universality were inter-definable modes of the foundational Being or the Reality beyond the phenomenal.

Harmonised operations of consciousness mark the poise and activities of the gnostic life, and there occurs a dynamic realisation of the spiritual unity of all being. The gnostic being will live in 'a close and complete consciousness of the self and others, a consciousness of their mind, life, physical being which are felt as if they were one's own'. He 'will act, not out of a surface sentiment of love and sympathy or any similar feeling, but out of this close mutual consciousness, this intimate oneness' (Ibid, p.913). Sri Aurobindo reminds us that unity, mutuality and harmony are the defining marks of the gnostic life and consciousness, but it will be a category mistake to take these ideas as constitutive of our unenlightened social building, rooted in individual egos. These relations at this shore (to borrow the Buddhist imagery) are artificially constructed and constantly marred by imperfection, strife, discord and unhappiness. Our nature has to develop beyond itself to a radical transformation of the imperfect social structure of unenlightened life.

Gnostic psychology is a matter of deep subjectivity. It is the inner life that is the thing of first importance: 'the spiritual man lives always within' (ibid, p.868), yet the antinomy of the inner and outer, the self and the world stands cured and exceeded in the gnostic consciousness. The transcendence aspect of the gnostic life is necessary for the freedom of the spirit. The gnostic being's inmost existence is unassailed by the world's contents, yet this calm and peace of equality is dynamic in his relations with others. Sri Aurobindo appears to accommodate the Buddhist negative dialectic on *anātma* to the ontology of Silence, and finds it to bear a methodological import. He comments:

A silence, an entry into a wide or even immense or infinite emptiness is part of the inner spiritual experience; of this silence and void the physical mind has a certain fear, the small superficially active thinking or vital mind a shrinking from it or dislike, — for it confuses the silence with mental and vital incapacity and the void with cessation or non-existence: but this silence is the silence of the spirit which is the condition of a greater knowledge, power and bliss, and this emptiness is the emptying of the cup of our natural being, a liberation of it from its turbid contents ..., it is the passage not into non-existence but to a greater existence. Even when the being thus turns towards cessation, it is a

cessation not in non-existence, but into some vast ineffable of spiritual being or the plunge into the incommunicable superconscience of the Absolute' (ibid, p.912).

This hermeneutics is importantly suggestive and valuable in respect of explicating the deeper resonances of *Śūnyavāda*. What is remarkable is the manner of Sri Aurobindo's appropriating the ancient spiritual insight in the context of a modern integral formulation. In a Mahayana hymn to the apotheosis of *Prajñāpāramitā*, the deity is hailed as *Śūnyatā-garbha*, i.e. free of all conceits. The point is that if a system of metaphysical experience be grounded on a critique of empirically conditioned operations of the mind as constructing structures of concepts, the transcendent, as of necessity, would loom large as Silence or Void. In a song in the context of Tantrik theology, Kali, the Goddess Absolute is addressed as having the form of Void, *Sunya-rūpā* (Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, Ananda, Kolkata, 1983, p.353).

To take the point further, we note a remark made by Sri Aurobindo: 'The Buddha applied his penetrating rational intellect, supported by an intuitive vision to the world as our mind and sense see it and discovered the principle of its construction and the way of release from all constructions' (Ibid, p.415). Compare the *Dhammapada* verse (no.153) : 'At last I have found you, builder, never again shall you build this house that is my body. All the beams are shattered and the ridge of the roof has crumbled. My liberated mind has attained the extinction of all desires'. This verse is said to have been uttered by the Buddha at the moment of his Enlightenment. Cancellation of the constructions of the mind or consciousness is the way to *paramārtha*. The definition of *pratyakṣa* or perception as given in the *Nyabindu* invokes the issue from a logical point of view. Hence the *nirvikalpa* mode of non-dual or *advaya* knowledge is such that he who realises it becomes one with the realisation. The *dharma kāyā* of the Buddha embodies that category of consciousness, it is identical with *paramārtha satya*, the suchness or *tathata*. It is inexpressible through linguistic devices, and beyond logical analysis. The doctrine of *dharma kāyā* is the apex of the development towards Buddhist absolutism. The *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* is devoted to an analysis of the phenomenal world in terms of the noumenal reality. On the one hand there is the indescribable Ultimate Reality, while on the other, empty phenomenality. The reconciling of the two, the *paramārtha* and the *samvṛtti* or phenomenality has been one of the most difficult problems in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. In such a setting as this that the ideal of *Bodhisattva* made its appearance.

The ideal received two distinct formulations. The earlier *Theravada* image of *bodhisattva* is of the one who has eliminated ignorance and developed insight

into the nature of things. Having eradicated *avidya* at the root, and put an end to grasping forever, he lives in a life of selfless service. There is a paradox in the image of the *arhant* as *bodhisattva*. After his death, the *arhant*, having put an end to rebirth, does not continue in the recurring cycle of existences in order to help others. Hence the purpose of following the *bodhisattva* ideal to help others during a number of lives seems to be completely defeated.

The Mahayana formulations of the ideal hopefully promises to escape the paradox. The *bodhisattva* aspires to attain *samyaksambodhi*, which has a richer connotation, and it is distinguished from *nirvāṇa* simpliciter. An *arhant* is held to possess a lesser moral worth. A *bodhisattva*, by comparison, is extolled for voluntarily postponing his attainment of *nirvāṇa* in order to continue in *samsarā* in the hope of helping all beings to cross over the flood of existence. And as the *Saddharma pundarika* states it explicitly, a *bodhisattva* continues to exist in *samsāra* for countless aeons aspiring to attain *samyaksambodhi*, the supreme and perfect enlightenment, since only a being who has attained that blessed state can help others.

We need not take sides and go in for judging the relative merits of the two ideals. But one point is common between them, and that is the eradication of ignorance from its root and cessation of grasping the objects of the senses leading to the craving to be. *Moha*, in Buddhism, is regarded as the intellectual vice, while *rāga* and *dveṣa* are vices of emotions. Buddhism provides a programme of self-culture through meditation therapy to generate antidotes against the so-called poisons inducing existential sickness. Of the three, *moha* is the most malignant, it implies apprehending states of affair as they are really not, and it is through our thoughts that we have become what we are. The very opening verse of the *Dhammapada* strikes the right chord in this direction: 'In all things the primordial element is mind. Mind predominates. Everything proceeds from mind'. To observe one's thoughts, to watch over one's thoughts, to control one's thoughts, and to master one's thoughts are the four movements in the meditational practice of the Buddhist way of life. Vigilance is the watchword of the spiritual life. It is to be ever awake, to be on one's guard against fictions spun by ignorance. 'Just as the arrow-maker straightens his arrows, so also the intelligent man straightens his thoughts'. (*Dhammapada*, 3.33)

5. As for the office of the mind, there is Sri Aurobindo's critique of its operations. We may note, summarily of course, a few of the observations made by him:

Mind ... the chained and hampered sovereign of our human living ... in its essence is a consciousness which measures, limits, cuts out forms of things from the invisible whole and contains them as if each were a separate integer. Even with what exists only as obvious parts and functions, Mind establishes

this fiction of its ordinary commerce that they are things with which it can deal separately and not merely as aspects of a whole. ... It is this essential characteristic of Mind which conditions the workings of all its operative powers, whether conception, perception, sensation or the dealings of creative thought. It conceives, perceives, senses things as if rigidly cut out from a background or a mass and employs them as fixed units of the material given to it for creation or possession ... Mind may divide, multiply, add, subtract, but it cannot get beyond the limits of this mathematics. ... Mind cannot possess the infinite, it can only suffer it or be possessed by it; it can only be blissfully helpless under the luminous shadow of the Real cast down on it from planes of existence beyond its reach' (Op.cit, p.151).

In short, the mind wields fictions out of the real. To put it in the terminology of Vasubandhu, the mind conjures up images that are *parikalpita* or falsely imagined, always falling short of the *pariniṣpanna*. In the *Trimsikā*, Vasubandhu mentions the modes of consciousness, the configurations of *manas*. These are associated with four defilements, namely, perception of the ego (*ātma drṣṭi*), confusion with regard to the ego-pride (*ātma moha*) and ego-love (*ātma sneha*). A *bodhisattva*'s career consists in purging himself of the defilements and attain to purity of consciousness, *vijñaptimātratā* or 'the central secret' as Sri Aurobindo has put it.

6. The *yogācāra* idealism is remarkable for its inward, spiritual and psychic turn, the accent on subjectivity of consciousness. It is to this subjectivity that Nietzsche referred in remarking that 'The kingdom of heaven is a state of the heart' (*The Antichrist, The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. And tr. Walter Kaufman, Penguin, 1964). It is the sign of a soul-state. Likewise, a *bodhisattva*, through aeons, goes perfecting the *pāramitās* and so ascending the respective *bhūmis*, becoming more and more universal, embracing all being in sympathy and oneness, finding himself in others as in himself. This is the positive and master intuition in the ideal of the *bodhisattva*.

The problem for us has been that of relating the stasis and dynamis of the Reality. The contradiction, if at all, obtains for intellectual reason, at the behest of a wedge between the transcendence and phenomenality. Intuitive experience passes beyond the intellect in order to bridge the gulf between divisive concepts and the constructions of the mind. The alleged debate belongs to the domain of the mind and reason. A decisive spiritual illumination may and can undo the whole edifice of reasonings erected by the logical intelligence. The *Śvetasvatara Upanisad* (6.8) refers to the spontaneous activity and power of the root consciousness by the phrase, *svābhavikī jñāna-bala-kriyā*. We may recall the episode of Ramakrishna's admonition to Vivekananda not to stoop so low

as to long for the poise in the Absolute to the exclusion of compassionately working for the amelioration of woes and worries of the lowly and the lost. The *Īśa Upanisad* reminds us that into deep darkness fall those who follow the Immanent, into deeper darkness fall those who follow the Transcendent. He who knows both the Transcendent and the Immanent overcomes death and with the transcendent reaches immortality (no.9). In a similar vein wrote St. John: 'If a man says I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar : for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' (*The First Epistle General of John*, 1.20). Ramakrishna's admonition was in effect an unconscious celebration of the *bodhisattva* ideal, and Vivekananda wrote to his monk fraternity: '... worship the living God, the Man-God – everything that wears a human form – God in his universal as well as individual aspect. The universal aspect of God means this world, and worshipping it means serving it – this indeed is work, not indulging in ceremonials ...'. And again, 'Go from village to village, do good to humanity and to the world at large. Go to hell yourself to buy salvation for others. There is no *mukti* (liberation) on earth to call my own ... It is only by doing good to others that one attains to one's own good, and it is by leading others to *Bhakti* and *Mukti* that one attains them oneself. Take that up, forget your own self for it, be mad over the idea' (*Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 2008, pp.109,111). Such an impassioned exhortation can come from one who is a *bodhisattva* at heart. Rightly did Sri Aurobindo mention Vivekananda along with the Buddha in the context of spelling out his concept of the gnostic being. By the by, the Buddha was Vivekananda's *ishta* (Ibid, p.19).

7. As one surveys the renascent Indian landscape one would find the *Bodhisattva* ideal supervening the ethical views of life. In the history of Buddhism one notices how the ideal of *pratyekabuddha*, a solitary individual aspiring for his own liberation had waned in the wake of the Mahayana moral ideal of *bodhisattva*. A similar paradigm shift had taken place in our own times as well. Tilak devoted a long section on Buddhism in his *Rahasya* commentary on the Gita. It has been felt that there has been enough of law, custom and contract, socialisation of religion, and also that the idea of man and its method implied by the aforesaid ethico-social experimentations did not correspond to all the reality of the human being and the aim of life which that reality imposes. There were suggestions of spiritual anarchy in the air. It was increasingly clear that a spiritual, an inner freedom can alone create a perfect human order. The problem is to illumine the vital, egoistic nature of man and impose harmony on its self-seekings, antagonisms and discords. The real way out, Sri Aurobindo suggests, could be 'A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love'. Now 'this ... love is to be founded upon a deeper truth of being ... an inner realisation of oneness'. And

he goes on to say, 'if this is not the solution, then there is no solution, if this is not the way, then there is no way for the human kind' (*The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1949, pp.273-4). A decisive turn waits for mankind towards the spiritual ideal of *bodhisattva*.

8. Already indications have been there of conscious formulations of life's ideals by Indian leaders of thought. These deserve a necessary mention, and we shall be brief.

Rabindranath Tagore has interpreted the message of the Buddha's teaching of *nirvāṇa* with reference to the *Sutta-nipata* metaphor of the mother and the practice of *brahma-vihāra*. The idea of the path of attainment lies 'through the elimination of all limits to love. It must mean the sublimation of self in a truth which is love itself, which unites in its bosom all those to whom we must offer our sympathy and service' (*The Religion of Man*, INDUS, 1993, p.43). Also of interest is Tagore's hermeneutics of the Upanisadic concept of *visvakarmā*: we have to divest our work of selfishness and become *visvakarmā* ... we must work for all. All work that is good, however small in extent, is universal in character'. In relating the two ideals, the Upanisadic and the Buddhist, Tagore brought to the fore the great spiritual continuum that enlivened Indian culture.

Gandhi's notion of *sarvodaya* is a variation on the kindred ideal. His idea of Truth as the unity of all living beings harks back to an ideal which is at once spiritual and moral. His equation of Truth with *ahimsā* implies an imperative that goes beyond utilitarianism. For Gandhi, the adjective 'moral' is synonymous with 'spiritual'. He does not believe that an individual may gain spirituality and those that surround him suffer. 'I believe in *adwaita*. I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man fails, the whole world fails to that extent (*All Men are Brothers*, UNESCO, Paris, 1959, p.118). Intending to 'seeing God face to face'. Gandhi adds, 'The whole of my activity whether it may be called social, political, humanitarian or ethical is directed to that end. And as I know that God is found more often in the lowliest of his creatures than in the high and mighty. I am struggling to reach the status of these. I cannot do so without their service. Hence my passion for the service of the suppressed classes ... I find myself in them'. (Ibid, p.71). He described himself as a 'humble servant of India and, therethrough, of humanity'.

Radhakrishnan's *An Idealist View of Life* celebrates the ideal of *sarvamukti*, and in that he looks back to Appaya Diksita as much as to Mahayana Buddhism. It is indeed true that the *jivanmukta* in the Gita is *sarvabhūterataḥ*, engaged in doing good to all that lives. But it must also have to be admitted that it is a little different from the Buddhist readiness to stand the sufferings of *samsāra* for all

time in order to bring Enlightenment to *jivas* in bondage. With the recent Indian thinkers comparison is a compulsion of heart, outgoing in nature, intensely altruistic marked by social commitment. Radhakrishnan's is also an orientation inherited from the *bodhisattva* ideal, and which is no less a glorious part of the tradition of man's moral consciousness.

An icon of the ideal, the great *Bodhisattva* Padmapani (at Ajanta, cave no. 1) stands as the very embodiment of compassion and tenderness that his mission of allaying the miseries of the world implies. In its tranquil suavity and virile sweetness the icon is the perfect realisation of the deity of salvation and refuge. What a 'figuring imagination' (*The Foundations of Indian Culture*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1985, p.233), it must have been to give the aesthetic form to the ideal. The fire of the ideal has been burning, the continuity of the aesthetic appeal holds a promise and hope for the future, call it by whatever name you may please, *bodhisattva* or the gnostic being. I would like to end with a poem that breathes the ideal. This is the great short poem by Jibanananda Das, 'Tangerine':

When once I leave this body
 Shall I come back to the world?
 If only I might return
 On a winter's evening
 Taking on the compassionate flesh of a cold tangerine
 At the bedside of some dying acquaintance.
 (Tr. Clinton B. Seely, *A poet apart*).

Notes

A. The prayer from Santideva's *Bodhicaryavatara* runs as follows:

For as long as space endures
 And for as long as living beings remain,
 Until then may I too abide
 To dispel the misery of the world (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva's way of life*, tr. Stephen Batchelor, LTWA, Dharamsala, 1986, Ch.X, verse 56, p.174)

B. The Dalai Lama told Claude D. Levenson in conversation:

'If for the greater good of living beings, I had to be reincarnated as, say a bridge or an insect, as a monk who follows the Mahayana it is my duty to do it. As long as there are beings who suffer, I shall return'. The Dalai Lama, Oxford, 2010.

My Darshan of Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry

Mukul Chandra Dey

It was 1919. I was in Madras at that time. After my book *Twelve Portraits of Bengal* had been published in 1917 I toured Bombay and South India and arrived at Madras. My aim was to see my country well before going to England and to earn for my passage. At that time there weren't any famous men of South India whose portrait I did not draw in pencil and whose special company and affection I did not enjoy.

The head of the publicity department of Theosophical Society at Adyar was Mr. B. P. Wadia. Mrs. Annie Besant and he were very happy and enthusiastic on seeing all my things and said, "Mukul Dey, we too will bring out a similar book from Madras, if only you can do a portrait of Sri Aurobindo and bring it back from Pondicherry. For, without a portrait of Sri Aurobindo, South Indian portraits will be incomplete." I agreed immediately — surely I'll paint and bring it. And in fact I succeeded. I received something greater.

I told them — surely I'll bring it, but on returning home I started worrying, how shall I go? Won't the police get suspicious and cancel my passport for England? About my going to England I had taken a firm decision. Anyway, after much hesitation I dressed in a peculiar mixed-up dress so that no one recognised me for a Bengali. Socks, shoes, trousers, tie, a long coat, and over that my special cap which I had brought from Japan — which resembles a bit the present day Gandhi-cap — it can be folded and kept in the pocket and when necessary can be used to cover the head. On seeing my gait, my dress, etc. some took me for a Goanese, some a Madrasi, or even an Anglo-Indian, but nobody took me for a Bengali. Whatever few words I spoke were all in English with Madrasi intonation. Thus safely I passed in the train and reached Pondicherry station at about 10/11 p.m. On reaching the station I got worried. I have arrived but where shall I put up? If someone makes out from my behaviour that I am a foreigner, a stranger, a new person, a Bengali, — then I would be in

the soup. Again, I may be arrested by the police. I did not have any letter of introduction, of commendation or even of permission. There was no time to think even. Immediately I hit upon a plan, looked smart — as if I have visited the place many times — and in this way proceeded towards the horse-drawn cart. I asked the coachman — “Take me to the Grand Hotel, European French Hotel” — in the hope that there must be at least one “grand hotel.”

After some time, crossing a sandy road covered with thorny plants, the coachman stopped in front of a European hotel. After paying the fare, I approached the manager of the hotel for the cheapest room. I entered the cheapest room with a rent of Rs. 6/- or 7/- per day. It was a room on the ground floor with a low ceiling — the terrace almost knocking the head! It was as dark as it was damp, as if water was seeping from the floor, — the walls were in equally bad shape. Only one opening in the room — the sort of window through which light and breeze could enter — from that some sea breeze came and one could see the sea too. The room was a bit like a store room of our museums here. But at that time, on entering that room, I heaved a sigh of relief. At least a shelter had been found.

But so long as the real object of coming, that is, the painting of Sri Aurobindo was not accomplished, I could not be free from worries. Therefore I did not sleep well that night. The next morning I woke up early, got ready hurriedly and after somehow eating a little went out into the streets. I moved about a little and got familiar with the streets. Most of the time I walked along the seaside — as if I had come to enjoy the breeze. I kept my ears open to hear if there was any talk of Sri Aurobindo, and my eyes open in case he came for a promenade on the sea-shore. But I neither saw nor heard any of this that I wanted. I was afraid to ask anyone — in case thereby everything got spoilt. In this way I moved about along the thoroughfares — got acquainted with the streets. Three days passed by.

On the fourth day, 20th April, with a pencil and a pad under my arm I started moving about near the seaside and got acquainted with a local gentleman. I asked him — “Aurobindo is quite a good man, isn’t he? Of cool temperament. What do you say?” He replied, “Yes, surely, he is a very good person, at least to me he seems to be so. Gentle — but he never comes out of the house, he remains day and night in that old house.” I asked, “The house is somewhere on that side, isn’t it?” He said, “No, not this side, it is that side, the house is on that street.” Without asking him anything more or giving him a chance to ask me anything, I took the road opposite to his. Then, remembering God with full concentration I took the road to Sri Aurobindo’s house. There was fear, anxiety, trepidation. Who knows if I’ll be able to see him — if there won’t be any obstruction on the way?

It was a noon of April, the sun was burning bright, the streets almost deserted. With palpitating heart, enquiring from a person or two, I managed to find the right house. It was an old two-storey dilapidated house. The walls were perhaps once yellow — now there were patches, green with moss — and the lime plaster had fallen off at places, exposing the red bricks. The doors and windows were wide open. Slowly, with a trembling heart and fearful eyes, I entered it. There was a banana tree in the courtyard, its leaves all torn. Grass and weeds made the courtyard look like a knee-deep jungle. At one place there was a heap of charcoal, at another fire-wood — as if the things were left pellmell. Two or three cats were sleeping near the banana tree. In fact on all sides of the ash heap there were cats, as though it was a cats’ hostel.

A Bengali gentleman, thin in appearance — perhaps he was cooking or doing something similar — came out and asked me “What do you want?” I enquired — “Does Sri Aurobindo stay here?” He replied — “Yes, he stays here.” “I would like to meet him once. Will it be possible to see him?” I asked.

“Who are you? You seem to be a Bengali!” he observed. “Yes, I am a Bengali, my name is Mukul Dey.”

He led me upstairs. He made me sit in the verandah on a wooden chair and said, “Please take your seat, I am informing him.” The chair also was ancient; like the house it was also in an old and shaky condition. There was no trace of colour or polish; as if everything had been washed away, eaten away. I sat with a mixed feeling of happiness and anxiety.

I looked on all sides. There were some three or four pictures hanging on the wall, pictures published in monthly magazines, cut out and framed. At this I saw a glimmer of hope and cheer. So, he loves pictures! Suddenly I noticed, among these there was one painted by me; it had come out in a monthly — Sri Radha with a pitcher on her waist going to fetch water — and underneath the picture there was inscribed my name. I was very happy to see it. What a lovely coincidence! I felt some assurance and courage. This would do the work of an introduction letter; I had come, completely unknown, with no letter of introduction from anyone.

In the meantime he was slowly coming out of the room. He was wearing a small size red-bordered rather soiled dhoti which hung up to the knees; there were no pleats; one end was placed around the neck; bare feet; bare body; long hair; bearded, a thin, austere body. Immediately on seeing him I understood that he was Sri Aurobindo — exactly like the rishis of yore or as if I was seeing a living Christ.

He asked, “What do you want?”

“My name is Mukul Dey, I am a Bengali, I have come to draw your picture.

I know you are fond of paintings.” I said this and showed him the pictures on the wall and added — “There, one of them is painted by me.”

He smiled a little and said, “Yes, I like it quite. I know.” Then he said as if pleased, “Well, what have I to do?” I replied, “You won’t have to do anything, it will be sufficient if you would just sit quietly.”

“How long do I have to sit?”

“About half an hour, one hour —”

“Can you draw if I sit now?”

As if the heavens had fallen into my hands, I was so overwhelmed with joy! “Yes, I can,” I said and took out a sheet of paper and a pencil and sat down. He too sat on an old wooden chair.

I have drawn portraits of so many people in my life but I haven’t seen any one giving such a wonderful sitting. I drew for one full hour, during which he did not move even a bit, nor did I see him bat an eyelid even once. He was going on gazing one way, at one side, with fixed eyes. Overwhelmed with surprise and joy I touched his feet and showed him what I had sketched. He was obviously happy. He looked at it from different angles. On my request he autographed it in English and Bengali and wrote the date. Telling him that I would come again the next day, I returned to the hotel. What happiness, what surprise and fullness in my mind that day! It cannot be expressed in words.

Next day, 21st of April, I got up early in the morning, had my bath, ate something, and taking my paper, pencil, etc. went out to see Sri Aurobindo. No more struggles for finding the way. Taking the known path I went easily to his house and straight upstairs. The doors were wide open — as if everything was easy and known — I sat down on that same chair in the verandah. A short while later he came out of his room and sat on his chair — in the same way, like a stone statue, immobile, quiet, with fixed regard. In one hour I completed my second portrait. He saw and autographed it and put the date on it. I took leave of him by saying that I would come once again in the evening. I was filled with happiness. I would make three portraits from three sides and take them with me; surely people will like at least one of these.

I started again in the afternoon, with my portfolio under the arms. Myriad thoughts passed through my mind. He is that Sri Aurobindo. How wonderful, how strange he is! England-returned I.C.S. — Revolutionary leader — How many stories have I heard about him! Are they all true? Who knows!

Again straightaway I entered the house, sat down on the same chair in the upstairs verandah. He too came out just a little later. In the same way, bare feet, a corner of the dhoti around his neck, with a smile on his face. I did my

pranams and started immediately. Drew for over an hour, but how strange, did not see him bat his eyelids even once! After the drawing was over I took it to him. On the third also he signed his name. As soon as he lifted his head and looked at me smilingly, I said, “Can I ask you a few questions? I have heard many stories about you, I am very eager to know. You won’t mind I hope?”

Smilingly he said, “No. Tell me what you want to ask, put your question.”

“When you were in England, and studied there, how did you like the British at that time? What was your attitude towards them?” I asked.

“My outlook at that time was friendly and cordial. I mixed with a good number of them. I had many friends in London.”

“But I have heard that you were the leader of the revolutionary party of Bengal. Extremely anti-British. What is your present stand towards the British?”

“Yes, what you have heard is correct. I was in the revolutionary party. While in England I used to think a lot about my own country. Then on return to the country, I became hostile to the British rule. But now I have no animosity against the British or for that matter against anyone else — no spite or anger, now I am in peace.”

“How did spite and anger disappear and how did this inner change and peace come?”

“When I was working with the revolutionaries in Bengal, at that time I got acquainted with a great yogi. It was from him that I learnt pranayama yoga and practised it. After that I came here and my anger and spite against all have disappeared, now I am in peace here.”

“If you do not have any anger or spite against anybody why don’t you come to Bengal? I have heard that your wife is living. I have seen her photo, she seems very beautiful, why are you here all alone, why don’t you return home? Won’t you return to your native place? When will you return to your homeland?”

He remained silent for a while, then replied slowly, “Yes, I’ll return. When the country becomes free from the British rule.”

After that there was no talk. On being able to hear such luminous words of his and having been able to draw three pictures, when I took my leave after giving my heartfelt thanks and grateful pranams, he said, “I liked very much your work and your conversation. I bless you, I wish you well.” Placing the sacred dust of his feet and his blessings on my head, I felt overwhelmed with a sense of fulfilment. With the joy and pride as if I had conquered an empire, the same day I left Pondicherry for Madras.

When I had gone there and had the meeting, I encountered no noise, no crowd, no rules and regulations, devout priests, or guards, there was nothing of

the kind, — there was then no need for a letter of introduction or a pass. Everything was easy and simple. My questions were very simple, the answers too equally simple, true.

That day I did not have to prostrate myself before any priestly agent in order to have Darshan of the deity. I saw a Yogi living in Truth and Beauty. I saw an image of a great Rishi of our ancient Bharat. His smile and the benign look have never dimmed in my memory.

(Reproduced with thanks and acknowledgement to Overman Foundation which featured the above writing on their website. The article, however, originally appeared in *The Heritage*, Aug, 1988)

Elaboration of Learning-Teaching Material at Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research, Auroville The Aim of Life and the Good Teacher and the Good Pupil

Alain Bernard

I have been invited to present here the work that we have done in Auroville in the field of learning-teaching material for value-oriented education. But while you are listening, and before you get tired of my French pronunciation, I would like to make a few personal remarks. I take this opportunity to ask for your kind indulgence. I still hope that you might be able to comprehend something of what I will be saying. India has taught me many immensely valuable things, but in spite of my living here for the past twenty-eight years, I have not been able to discard my French way of speaking.

As I said, I have been a resident of India for the last twenty-eight years. By now I don't think I could live happily anywhere else. Such is the spell that India has cast upon me. Sometimes I see that some Indians have difficulty to understand this, but I can only say that this is the truth of my being. I will not try to list out any reasons, they would fall short of any essential truth. I may only venture to say that India is pre-eminently the country of the soul, of the spirit, way beyond any external appearance. And some of us who have come to this blessed country are just humble servants of Mother India, whatever the colour of their skin.

I passionately follow the evolution of India, its tortuous but undeniable progress and I do believe that India will achieve greatness despite so many formidable difficulties. But there are different types of greatness for a country and even though I am certain that India in due course will also become a superpower in

her own right, I believe that India's greatness is destined for much higher goals. That is why it was so comforting for me that no less a person than the Prime Minister of India, Shri Vajpayee, explicitly and emphatically made this point by quoting Sri Aurobindo in his reflections for the new year. The quote is an extract of Sri Aurobindo's message for India's Independence on August 15, 1947. It says:

"I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power, and prosperity — though these too she must not neglect, — and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race."

And the Prime Minister further says, "This, I believe, is the quintessence of India's work, now and in the future." I must say that I felt extremely moved by this comment by the Prime Minister. He dares say that which no other world leader would dare say, that which no other leader could even conceive of. Now, this is India. India's magic. The Prime Minister of the country, in the middle of a grim baffle on so many fronts, with untold pressure from all sides and innumerable problems clamouring for his attention, is able to calmly present to a battered nation the highest possible goal. This is education of the highest order.

Given what we know of today's reality, with its long trail of acute problems like poverty, corruption, pollution, we may feel that such lofty goals belong to the realm of dreams, that they have no bearing on real life. But there is a tremendous force of visionary dreams. It has been proved time and again in the history of mankind. There is even a saying that dreamers are the ultimate realists.

So is a dream the idea of establishing Value-Oriented Education at the core of the educational system in India. Realists would and will say that there are more pressing things, there are more urgent tasks to do before that, like building more schools, having more teachers, etc. Yet I believe that vision must come first.

This is something that we know very well in Auroville. When The Mother founded Auroville, she gave us the loftiest ideal of creating a society which would be manifesting a concrete human unity, where people of all races and nations would live together harmoniously. In order to achieve this, The Mother expected each resident of Auroville to become aware of his or her inner self, so that it may become the guide of his or her day-to-day life.

We are, of course, very far from all this, very far from this lofty, yet concrete, ideal. Yes, there are many nice things happening in Auroville, I am not ignoring

them. But we are very far from achieving the ideals given by The Mother. So far indeed, that sometimes visitors, when told about Mother's vision, wonder as to how all this can be realised. And yet, let me tell you that Mother's solution is the only realist solution to the riddle of achieving true human unity. Nothing short of the inner discovery will ever be able to foster true and lasting harmony. It is our hope — I should rather say our faith — that a growing number of Aurovillians will indeed make that momentous discovery and that, in proportion of this fundamental inner change, the outer manifestation of Auroville will come closer to what The Mother wanted.

So similarly I do believe that the dream of value-oriented education being at the core of the educational system in India is the only true and right goal, however remote it may seem today. Only the largest and highest vision will have the power of lifting the heavy legacy of utilitarian and Macaulayan education. It is why in Auroville we are very happy and proud to participate in this great effort.

We are grateful too because it gives us one more opportunity to work closely with Dr Kireet Joshi, who is also a great dreamer and has been a driving force behind the master idea of value-oriented education. I have had the privilege to be associated in work with Kireetbhai for nearly twenty years and therefore I have had many occasions to witness often the miraculous effect of the power of great visions, as well as the power of utter dedication to the highest goals; these two supreme powers that move the world, Kireetbhai is able to manifest them time and again.

I would like now to say a few words about some specific aspects of the research being conducted in Auroville.

1) We have researchers from different backgrounds.

As you may know, people living in Auroville, the city named after Sri Aurobindo and dedicated to human unity, are from many different nationalities. In consequence it is obvious that on many subjects, like history for instance or social sciences, we have to go beyond the angle adopted by a particular country or a particular culture. We have to approach the subject from the wider angle of the overall evolution of mankind, its constant search for God, Light, Freedom and Immortality, and appreciate all contributions to the progress of humanity towards this goal. In this study, we benefit from the tremendous light that Sri Aurobindo has shed on all the endeavours of the human being, whether in the field of art, education, polity, poetry, etc.

2) We have researchers from various educational backgrounds.

Some of them may have academic diplomas, some of them may not. But we don't consider it important because all researchers and teachers are actually

students of evolution. We have to study everything afresh in the light of this quest. As a matter of fact, it is our experience that a number of those who are conducting/leading experiments in Auroville are self-taught, with the passionate freshness that often comes with the discovery of their real interest in life. As Sri Aurobindo said, "When knowledge is fresh in us, it is invincible."

3) We have researchers whose main area of research is outside the academic field. Most of the researchers whose name you can read in the first pages of the books I am going to speak about are engaged in non-academic activities. If I go through the list, I will find somebody who has been milking cows for the last twenty years in an Auroville farm, somebody who is a retired general and now looks after the archives of Auroville, a person who is an expert in the art of massage and is actively engaged in practical research on alternate methods of healing, somebody who has been managing the collective finances of Auroville, etc. and this leads us to the next characteristic.

4) Our research is not separated from life. All life is yoga, said Sri Aurobindo and similarly, in Auroville all life is research. Auroville is meant to be a living laboratory. Whether we are busy trying to invent a new economy, whether we are engaged in discussions to attempt to organise the collective life of the community, whether we teach or we build houses, in fact we make a practical research in the ways by which we could create a new society, a society that will be governed by the soul.

And it is why our work in the field of learning-teaching material is necessarily intertwined with and coloured by our day-to-day endeavour. It is necessarily connected with our deeper quest.

Let me come now more specifically to the premises of this work.

The concepts we are developing are that the most essential question in the study of values, is not to prescribe but explore. It is by exploration that the free choice for the pursuit of values can be effected. This exploration as we have conceived is first to be centred around what is life, what is the aim of life.

The second is the question of values which are involved in the activities of the teacher and in the activities of the pupil. These values are more pervasive and fundamental.

Then we have been concerned with five aspects of education corresponding to the five aspects of human personality, physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual. We have therefore thought of preparing a book on "*Mystery and Excellence of Human Body*". Next are the values involved in what is called vital aspect of human personality and we have identified three values that uplift the vital. The impulses of vital life can be transmuted and fundamentally it is the transmutation that can be called culture of the human personality, and the three

values are illumination, heroism and harmony.

We are presently working on this. We have a further programme of exploring values that are central to the mental aspect of human personality, — clarity, subtlety, synthesis, calm of the mind. Then we want to concentrate on the psychic which will emphasise the value of mutuality and co-operation and brotherhood as also the value of obedience to the Supreme Will. Then a book on spiritual values that will concentrate on the search on universality and oneness.

We have already produced two books '*The Aim of life*' and '*The Good Teacher and the Good Pupil*' and they can already be made a good vehicle of Teachers' Training in value education and they can also be recommended for tertiary education. We have there already a book not yet published, '*Mystery and Excellence of the Human Body*'. It only awaits publication.

If you examine '*The Aim of Life*', we have studied the problem in some depth and we have come to the conclusion that there are historically speaking four aims which humanity has pursued at different epochs more or less exclusively.

Some have pursued what may be called the Cosmic terrestrial aim of life the others the supraterrrestrial aim of life, and some the supracosmic aim of life, and finally there is also a long tradition of pursuit of integral aim of life.

Our aim in the book is to illustrate these four aims and we have selected appropriate texts from some original writings, and we have prepared introduction and explanatory notes and other additional literature which will explain the text.

For example, to illustrate the integral aim of life, we have taken the text of the *Īśa Upanishad* and also the text of a drama written by The Mother called *The Ascent to Truth*.

For the Cosmic-terrestrial we have taken a text from Jawaharlal Nehru, his essay on *Philosophy of Life* in his *Discovery of India*. It is what may be called idealistic terrestrial aim of life. Then, we have Bertrand Russell, his text of *A free Man's Worship* (materialistic terrestrial aim of life). We have a scientific terrestrial aim of life and we have a text from Einstein called *The World as I see it*. As far as the Supra-terrestrial is concerned, we have taken a text from the *Bible*, the text from the '*Sermon on the Mount*' and also from the *Koran*. And then for Supracosmic, we have taken a text from the *Dhammapada* and a text from Shankaracharya, his *Vivekacudamani*. We have written all the introductions so that each one is sympathetically understood and expounded and how each one can ultimately be synthesised in the most integral exploration and pursuit of the highest possible aim of life.

During our research for this book, we had the opportunity to interact with Professor D. P. Chattopadhyaya and other eminent personalities and we had

the great benefit of the general editorship of Dr Kireet Joshi, who is well known as an educationist and a scholar.

The second book we have authored is *The Good Teacher and the Good Pupil* where we have emphasised the qualities of a good teacher and the qualities of a good pupil, i.e. the values that a good teacher pursues and the values that a good pupil pursues. In essence, what we have said for a good pupil is that there should be enthusiasm of the quest which impels the effort so that he leaps up his hand to such an extent that he can be uplifted by the helpful hand of the teacher and for the teacher we have emphasised the values of wisdom and the values of character that can serve like a magnet of example which can further be enhanced by the power of the contact of the soul of the teacher with the soul of the pupil and we have taken examples of good teachers and good pupils both from the East and the West so that ultimately we can have a harmonious and universal philosophy of education. This also implies a philosophy of child-centred education, philosophy of lifelong education and philosophy of constant youth and freshness. We have taken here the texts starting from the Vedas and the Upanishads and brought out the stories of teachers and pupils of the Upanishads. Then we have given the example of Krishna as a teacher and Arjuna as a pupil and the example of the Buddha himself as a student and the Buddha as a teacher. We have also spoken of the system of Zen Buddhism and the Sufi system of teaching and learning and given also a story of a Sufi teacher. Illustrating how he tests his pupils and how a pupil first failed and ultimately succeeds. We have also, among other illustrations, spoken of Wordsworth, his days of studentship, how he sought the company of nature and communion with nature to learn from her. We have then taken a text from Rousseau which speaks of "holding the hand of the pupil", and texts from Helen Keller about the relations between Sullivan her teacher and pupil Helen herself. We have also taken texts from Montessori and from Pestalozzi. We have also spoken of philosophy of education from B. Russell and spoken of the Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire. We took extracts from *Magister Ludi*, the beautiful and thoughtful book by Herman Hesse. We have also presented extracts from Richard Bach's book, *Jonathan Seagull Livingstone*; and text from Molière which gives counter-example as to how teaching ought not to be. And also *The Little Prince*, Saint-Exupéry. We took *Letters from a Father to his Daughter* which show how as a good father he trains his daughter and also the famous example of Ramakrishna as a teacher to Vivekananda, and also a text from The Mother.

We are very happy to note that this book has received a wide acceptance by educationists in the country. There has been an evaluation of *The Good Teacher and the Good Pupil* by NCERT at the request of the PMO and it is a very

positive evaluation. The then director of NCERT, Shri P.L.Malhotra, writes:

"The underlined message of the various selections contained in the book, which are based on the ideas and accounts from different epochs and different cultural backgrounds is that the best educational output is possible only through a natural, creative, free and mutually respecting interaction between the teacher and the pupil. The prime concern of this quality pupil-teacher interaction is to ensure development of a fully blossomed individual who can become a precious human resource.

"The book is based not only on the educational and cultural heritage of India but it includes profuse illustrations of ideas culled out from the work of educational thinkers from all over the world. There are drawings, sketches, paintings, diagrams and photographs, which have been appropriately incorporated to provide support to many philosophical and psychological ideas contained in the book.

"This volume is a very valuable exploration into the various dimensions which characterise good teacher and good pupil and should be an important reading material for teachers, teachers-educators, educational personnel and even parents."

We are also happy to mention that it has been translated into Hindi and will soon be published in Hindi.

I would like to mention also that the book *Mystery and Excellence of the Human Body* has been prepared following the same pattern of introduction, text and notes and we do hope that it may be published soon if funds can be available. The aim of this book is to bring about an increased awareness about the human body, a sense of wonder about its mystery and excellence and help the reader to a deeper understanding of the values of physical education.

I would like now to give a more detailed presentation of the themes which are central to the two books, *The Aim of Life* and *The Good Teacher and the Good Pupil*.

There are states and states of consciousness; there are profundities and widenesses; there are heights over heights. To discover them one has to enlarge and explore ever-widening possibilities of psychological experience. In the depths of the being we may begin to integrate the threads and complexities of what we are and can become. It is there, perhaps, rather than in books or preachings, that we may begin to perceive and live what precisely is our aim of life. Free from dogmas and fixed beliefs, in the purity of experience, we may hope to discover the answer to the all-important questions: What am I to do? What role do I have to play in the vast and mysterious universe? What is the best and

highest goal that I should aim to realise?

But from no human endeavour — particularly when at a collective and general level — is it easy or desirable to eliminate intellectual inquiry. On the contrary, such an inquiry can be an excellent aid in the ultimate search for the aim of life — a direct search that is based on disciplined practice and experience. But the inquiry must be unfettered by narrow or exclusive assumptions, and carried out in the spirit of sincere exploration. Throughout the history of awakened thought, there has been a persistent questioning as to what is the aim of human life. Answers have been sought at various levels of reflection and critical thought. Answers derived from morality, religion or spiritual experience have also often been expressed in ways which are accessible to our rational understanding. The inquiring mind needs to reflect on these answers and arrive at its own conclusions.

We speak today of value-oriented education and of integral education. It is not necessary to define these two terms here, nor is it easy to do so. But it is clear that certain precautions must be taken if value-oriented education is not to degenerate into something narrow, rigid, and dogmatic. Firstly, each individual must be given the freedom to explore the full realm of values as comprehensively as possible. Secondly, this exploration must not be limited to the realm of morality alone, but must cover as well the values inherent in the physical, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual realms. Similarly, an unreflecting insistence on integral education can degenerate into a hodgepodge of disciplines in all their innumerable aspects and details, unless we are able to discover some unifying direction in which the various disciplines of knowledge and experience can find an ever-progressive synthesis and harmonisation. A free pursuit of the theme of the aim of life could prove a salutary beginning, and even, in a sense, provide a fulfilling climax.

All those who have the responsibility of educating children and youth will have to think out the implications of value-oriented and integral education. They will also have to undergo the training required for them progressively to embody, in their lives and personalities, the experiences gained in their pursuit of values and of integrated development of the being. This book is especially addressed to all those who have this responsibility. The material presented here is meant to encourage a free exploration into the theme of the aim of life. The texts have been selected from many important works related to the aim of life, in the spirit of collecting at random some flowers from a beautiful garden.

For the last two hundred years or more there has been a growing realisation that the teacher should be child-centred and should help the child's innate potential to blossom fully. Learner-centred teaching is being advanced in progressive

schools all over the world.

Indeed, if we examine the examples of good teachers of the past or of the present, we shall find that they have always been learner-oriented; and good pupils have blossomed like lovely flowers when tended with care, love and understanding or even when left to themselves with interventions from teachers when necessary.

A good teacher is always a help in the pupil's pursuit of accomplishment and perfection. For the pupil, the important things are his own enthusiasm and personal effort that can sustain patient and persistent work towards growth and progress. The teacher comes in to uplift the pupil's effort, his growing knowledge, his skills, his orientation. When a good teacher and a good pupil come together, astonishing results follow for both of them and under ideal conditions incredible transmutations of the personality and its power take place, as we can witness in some of the selections in this book.

Instruction, example and influence are the three instruments of a good teacher. A good teacher does not instruct merely by words. In fact, he makes a sparing use of them. He utilises his communicative skills to invent illuminating phrases and expressions, to initiate meaningful devices and projects, and to create a stimulating atmosphere and environment.

The art of instruction is extremely subtle and delicate, but a good teacher practises this art effortlessly. He harmoniously blends formal with informal instruction. He varies his methods according to circumstances and organises his teaching to suit the varying demands and needs of his pupils; A good teacher is a keen observer and tries to understand each of his pupils by a kind of identity. He strives untiringly to make his programmes or lessons interesting and to awaken in his pupils a power of concentration and an irresistible will for progress. Finally, he instructs even without instructing, and allows his inner mastery of his own knowledge to shine out through actions rather than through words.

A good teacher knows that example is more important than instruction, and he strives not only to keep his ideals in front of him, but also to progressively embody them. He is scrupulously scientific in detecting his own errors and defects, knowing very well that he cannot demand from his students what he himself cannot practise. The example expected from the teacher is not merely his outward behaviour, but his inner life, his aims and the sincerity with which he pursues those aims.

It is sometimes argued that what should be expected from the teacher is professional competence and a power of communication, and nothing more. But this contention ignores the fact that the example set by the teacher's inner and outer life is automatically communicated to the pupils, whether this is intended

or not. Giving a good example is an inherent part of the teacher's task.

But this is not all. Even more powerful than example is the direct influence the teacher exercises upon his students. Influence is the power of contact and the nearness of the teacher's presence. Knowingly or unknowingly, teachers tend to exercise authority over their students, and sometimes this authority smacks of arrogance. Not infrequently, the act of teaching itself becomes a battery of suggestions of more or less hypnotic intensity. A good teacher must be intent upon cultivating healthy attitudes and traits which have salutary effects on students.

A good teacher accepts his work as a trust given to him by his station and its duties. He recognises his own importance while acknowledging its relativity. He suggests but does not impose, he is a friend and a philosopher and guide; he does not arrogate to himself vain masterhood. Inspired by humility, he looks upon himself as a child leading children.

A good teacher is a constant learner. He not only renews his knowledge in the field of his specialisation, but he also continues to enrich his personality and strives to achieve deeper and higher realisations. Even as he rises higher and higher, he feels a greater and greater need to share his knowledge, skill, experience and illumination with others, particularly with younger generations. In doing so, he may encounter resistance and conflict.

Let us now turn to the pupil. Every child has an inner desire to learn and to grow, but the most important characteristic of the good pupil is his zeal or enthusiasm. This zeal is what determines the persistence of his effort, and such persistence is indispensable to achieve higher and higher levels of excellence. A good pupil is a seeker of knowledge and, motivated by curiosity and a growing sense of wonder, seeks knowledge for its own sake. He travels from the known to the unknown, and in this travel does not limit himself to thought and imagination alone, but sets out to come in direct contact with Nature and Man, in order to gain access to wider, deeper and higher realms of experience.

A good pupil tends to organise his life and to find time for as many activities as possible. In due course, he discovers that concentration holds the key to development, and that he can compress a long programme of work into a much shorter period by applying the art and science of concentration to it. In his natural process of flowering, he comes to combine work and play, and whether in his more formal studies or in the fine arts and crafts, he aims at cultivating and refining his actual and potential faculties.

A good pupil realises that both body and mind should be developed vigorously and rigorously. He discovers that the qualities needed in physical education contribute a great deal to the development of an integrated personality. For

example, the sporting spirit, valued most in physical education, includes good humour and tolerance and consideration for all, a right attitude and friendliness to both teammates and rivals, self-control and a scrupulous observance of the laws of the game, fair play, an equal acceptance of victory or defeat without bad humour, resentment or ill-will towards successful competitors, and the loyal acceptance of the decisions of the appointed judge, umpire or referee. These qualities have their value for life in general and the help that sports can give to an integral development is direct and invaluable.

One of the best lessons of the sporting spirit is that one should strive not to stand first but to do one's best. And a good pupil should put this lesson into practice in every domain of activity.

In the realm of studies, a good pupil tries to develop different aspects of his mind. The search for truth in a scientific and philosophic spirit is his basic motivation, and he seeks to develop a right discrimination between appearance and reality. He loves books but is not a bookworm. He may or may not read voraciously — his main concern is to cultivate subtlety of intelligence and the capacity to develop complex systems of thought. He learns the skills of analysis and strives to master the dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

A harmonious development of the rational mind, the ethical sense and the aesthetic sensibility is the highest aim of normal manhood, and a good pupil strives to integrate the triple powers of reason, will and imagination in harmony with his own unique turn of temperament and the natural law of his inner growth. Indeed, he avoids a hotch-potch of activities but rather seeks to organise them into a kind of unity emerging from the inner core of his soul's integral aspiration.

At an important stage of the pupil's life there comes a choice, and the quality of the pupil will be judged by and will depend upon the choice he makes. This is the choice between the good and the pleasant, *shreyas* and *preyas*, to use the terms of the *Katha Upanisad*. Not that pleasure or enjoyment has no place in an ideal life, but there is a distinction between seeking pleasure for the sake of pleasure and taking pleasure in whatever worthwhile action one does or undertakes to do. A good pupil makes this distinction and finds that, not in seeking pleasure, but in seeking good and finding pleasure in it, lies the secret of self-discipline. Indeed this is also the secret of the integrated personality.

The choice between the good and the pleasant is not merely a matter of ethical life; it is, in a sense, a matter that pervades all aspects of life and in all circumstances the pupil is confronted with this choice. He can sustain this continuous encounter with choice only if he has in him that sublimest of qualities, sincerity. Indeed, it can be said that sincerity is the golden key to continuous and integral learning. And no pupil can continue to remain a good pupil unless he has

an ever-fresh sincerity which grows continuously and so becomes a burning fire of integral sincerity, that is, sincerity in all parts of the being.

It is this burning fire of sincerity that imparts to the pupil the right thrust and direction, as well as that concentrated and tranquil state of consciousness required to experience the reality which is the object of all knowledge. And it is this burning fire that breaks the limitations of the human mind and leads the seeker into higher domains of psychic and spiritual experience. A good pupil does not refuse to transgress the normal limitations of consciousness, but has the requisite courage to take the staff in his hands and set out on a new journey. For a good pupil is not deterred by dogmatism. He is free to test on the anvil of reason and experience all affirmations and all negations. Henceforth, he is no more a seeker of shadows, appearances, names or forms, but a seeker of the real, the boundless, the infinite.

The journey of the good pupil is difficult and there are tests on the way that he must pass in order to enter new gates of progress. In this journey, sooner rather than later, he comes to learn how to learn, and he employs the principles of learning to educate himself. Sooner rather than later, he comes to learn how to control himself and he employs the principles of discipline to achieve self-possession and self-mastery. Sooner rather than later, he comes to know his own nature, his psychological make-up, his inclinations, his own strengths and weaknesses, and he employs the principles of self-enlargement to discover his wider self and ultimately his highest unegoistic psychic and spiritual self and the means by which the light and power of the self can be made manifest in the physical world.

But, like any pupil, the good pupil too needs help and guidance from the teacher. The distinguishing mark of a good pupil is the attitude with which he seeks help and the degree and quality of the help he seeks. Since he puts in a good deal of personal effort, he does not demand much of the teacher's time. Yet, since his eagerness to learn is great, he learns faster, and this demands greater attention and time from the teacher. There are seasons of learning when a pupil can need and demand almost exclusive attention. There are instances when a good pupil needs very little help from the teacher and at a certain stage can dispense with it. Frequently this happens when the pupil has found within himself the teacher's living guidance or when he has learned the art of discovering the inner teacher in every circumstance and in every encounter. It may be said that the need for external help diminishes as the pupil advances in the discovery of the inner teacher, or when the inner relationship between the pupil and the teacher is so intimate and intense that the pupil constantly feels an ever increasing and more joyful inner contact with him.

In a sense, the relationship between a good pupil and a good teacher is indescribable. It tends to be profound and irrevocable, and the pupil feels a natural urge to emulate and obey his teacher. The tradition in which the pupil is enjoined to obey the teacher unquestioningly is rooted in the natural sacredness of the living relationship between the good pupil and the good teacher, and this tradition has its uses. But we find that a good teacher appreciates repeated questioning by the pupil, and he even allows a mutual testing.

To foster an increasing number of good teachers and good pupils is a special responsibility of any educational system and of those in charge of designing that system. It is true that good teachers and good pupils have flourished even in the most deficient circumstances, but it is certain that they would have proved to be better teachers and better pupils had the system of education itself been better; and it is also certain that a good system of education tends to promote the rapid multiplication of good teachers and good pupils.

Today, educational systems almost everywhere are utilitarian in character, promoting an examination-oriented education that imprisons teachers and students alike. Their goals are limited and have no intrinsic relationship with the ideal processes and ends of genuine teaching-learning. This point is very well illustrated in some of the passages included here.

Do we have any idea as to what system of education would encourage the flowering of good teachers and good pupils? This is a difficult question to answer. But if we study various innovative experiments conducted in this context, it seems that an ideal system is yet to be invented and can come about only if three things are assured. First, there must be a great change in the lecture system. Lectures should have a much more modest place than they have today. A greater role should be assigned to self-learning and to work on individual and collective projects. Second, the present syllabus system must undergo a major modification. Programmes of study should be much more flexible. Pupils and teachers should have the possibility of changing the programmes according to the pupils' evolving needs. In fact, syllabi should be evolutionary in character, developing and emerging out of the interests of the pupils and their goals. Finally, the examination system must be thoroughly revised. Tests should be designed to stimulate the pupils to make further progress. They should be impromptu and should vary according to the varying situations of individuals and groups.

An ideal system of education would provide an environment and a framework that facilitates a harmonious blending of freedom and discipline. This harmonious blending presupposes, mainly on the part of teachers and educational administrators, the fulfilment of two conditions: the pursuit of truth and the pursuit of harmony. Neither of these pursuits can be meaningful or fruitful unless

they are voluntary. The spirit of liberty is a necessary condition for the search for truth and for securing cooperation, mutual goodwill and fellow feeling. In brief, it may be said that Truth, Harmony and Liberty will be the underlying principles of an ideal system of education.

(This paper on Education was presented at the Philosophy of Value-oriented Education seminar organised by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR) from 18-20 Jan, 2002, at the time when Kireet Joshi, the former Registrar of the International Centre of Education of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, was the chairman. The venue was the Convention Centre, Jamia Hamdard (Hamdard Univ) in New Delhi. The Seminar was inaugurated by Shri Murli Manohar Joshi, then HRD Minister. Several Aurovilians gave presentations during the same seminar.

In this paper, there are references to publications produced by the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Education Research (SAIIER) as a result of a programme of educational research for value-oriented education conducted by several teams of researchers at SAIIER. The number of publications has increased quite a bit since then, particularly with a series of monographs aimed at Education of the Vital in the context of value-oriented education. The most recent list of publications is appended to this paper.)

Appendix: List of Monographs which are part of the programme of publications for Value-oriented Education by the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research (SAIIER), Auroville.

Parvati's Tapasya
Nala and Damayanti
The Siege of Troy
Alexander the Great
Homer and the Iliad — Sri Aurobindo and Ilion
Catherine the Great
Uniting Men — Jean Monnet
Gods and the World
Joan of Arc
The Crucifixion
Nachiketas
Socrates
Sri Krishna in Brindavan
Sri Rama — The Beloved and Victorious Hero
Arguments for the Existence of God
Taittiriya Upanishad
Raghuvamsam of Kalidasa (Selected Episodes)
Marie Curie

Leonardo da Vinci
Science and Spirituality
Svapnavasavadattam
Danton and the French Revolution
Napoleon — Poet on a Throne
The Power of Love (Les Misérables by Victor Hugo)
Shivaji Maharaj

Other titles published by SAIIER and Shubhra Ketu Foundation

The Aim of Life
The Good Teacher and the Good Pupil
Mystery and Excellence of the Human Body

“Netritva”-Indian basis of Leadership: an overview

Saikat Sen

Abstract

In the HR field, the cultural, geographical and economic diversity of the workforce has brought about radical changes at the workplace that demand a totally new approach in various HR issues. Scholars and practitioners strongly believe that HR function needs a thorough reorientation to meet the challenges of the 21st century. In this knowledge age to build intellectual capital and shape a high performing work system, a creative leadership is necessary. From ancient times, India is famous for leadership in various fields like administration, education, business, culture and arts, religious and spiritual spheres. Still those lessons may be helpful to us where the leader acts as a visionary pathfinder and a transformer of organisational strategies and practices.

Introduction

True leadership is needed not only for the organisation but in practically every sphere of human endeavour to achieve social progress, nation-building and welfare of the human race. If we look back to India's history, we find that in ancient India, Rishis in their unique Gurukul system of education integrated theory and practice of leadership, belonging to several successive generations, transforming their learners toward inner change. They were able to transmit the living experience to the followers to also achieve a similar transformation. Later on this kind of leadership which emerged during the freedom movement had these noble qualities in great abundance. In the new millennium, leadership requires the ability to influence others, to create harmony, to imbibe transformational changes and the ability to act ethically. Without inner transformation it is very difficult to achieve and for this lesson we have to get the knowledge of our glorious past.

“Netritva” : Its meaning

The basis of good leadership is honourable character and selfless service to the organisation. People want to be guided by those they respect and who have a clear sense of direction. To gain respect, they must be ethical. A sense of direction is achieved by conveying a strong vision of the future. Leaders are thus concerned with bringing about change and motivating others to support that vision of change.

Noel Tichy, who has studied many outstanding business leaders, describes leadership in these words:

“Leadership is accomplishing something through other people that would not have happened if you weren't there. And in today's world, that's less and less through changing people's mindsets and hence altering the way they behave. Today, leadership is being able to mobilise ideas and values that energise other people.”¹

But this philosophy of leadership is not new in India, rather it is being practised through the ages. In Sanskrit the word “*Netritva*” means leadership. The word *Netritva* has come from the root sound ‘*ni*’ which means to lead. So, anyone who leads is ‘*netaa*’. The base form of ‘*neta*’ is ‘*netri*’. An analysis of a few other words derived from the root ‘*ni*’ can explain the meaning of ‘*netritva*’ better. The Sanskrit word for eye is ‘*nayana*’ or ‘*netra*’ because it leads. The word for right conduct is ‘*niiti*’, that which truly shows us the path of right living. The word *naya* meaning leading thought and *nyaya* meaning anything right or any legal proceedings also have been derived from the same root *ni*. Chanakya or Kautilya, a strategic thinker from ancient India, wrote in his 4th century book *Arthashastra*: ‘The King (leader) shall consider as good, not what pleases himself but what pleases his subjects (followers)’.

In this context we can quote Chakraborty and Chakraborty:

“World history shows that wisdom leaders have all been characterised by the power to lead their own lower self by their awakened Higher self. This has been their first and primary leadership exercise..... Wisdom leaders who are called *rajarshis* in Bharat's tradition. The *rajarshi* is the quintessential Indian model of leadership. It represents what may be called the principle of sacro-secular symbiosis or S3. The Raja is the secular arm, the *Rishi* the sacred arm of the model.”²

Rajarshi is a king who is ruling the kingdom but has reached a state of ‘*Rishi*’ as one have attained higher spiritual knowledge. Janaka, the king of Mithila and Dasaratha, the king of Ayodhya were both *Rajarshis*. In this case

the highest divine knowledge is the leading power behind every action or decision taken by the king (leader). They still belong to the kshatriya caste but having gained the higher spiritual knowledge they are superior to most kings. In the term ‘*Rajarshi*’ or ‘*raja-rishi*’ here *raja* representing the *rajasik* qualities and *rishi* representing the *sattwik* qualities. *Sattwa*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*, the idea of the three modes of nature, is a creation of the ancient Indian thinkers. These modes are termed as *gunas* (i.e. qualities). *Tamas* is the principle and power of inertia, *rajas* the principle of kinesis, passion, endeavour, and *sattwa* the principle of assimilation, equilibrium, harmony and knowledge. These *gunas* have indeed their strongest relative hold in the three different members of it, mind, life and body.

Subhas Sharma has given a new Indian model of enlightened leadership rooted in Indian ethos combining Indian *guna* theory with theories X,Y,Z is given below:

“WE” West-East Model of Human Personality ³

Personality Types	“Western” Classification	“Eastern” Categorisation	“WE” Combination	Characteristics	Implications
I ¹ Types	X	Tamas	Tamas & X	Violent	Negative Energy
I ² Types	Y	Rajas	Rajas & Y	Vibrant	Positive Energy
I ³ Types	Z	Sattwa	Sattwa & Z	Silent	Synergy

It will be relevant enough if we highlight Swami Vivekananda’s insights into a leader’s qualities because he led like a revolutionary leader in the institution-building process of Sri Ramakrishna Mission all over the world. Because it is well known that managers run institutions but ‘*hero*’es create them. This crown of ‘*the hero*’ was exactly what Romain Rolland had conferred in 1931 upon Vivekananda, while concluding the chapter on the ‘The Ramakrishna Mission’ in a profound biography.

1. “It is selfishness that we must seek to eliminate! I find that whenever I have made a mistake in my life, it has always been because self-centred into the calculation. Where self has not been involved, my judgment has gone straight to the mark.”⁴
2. “It is absolutely necessary to the work that I should have the enthusiastic love of as many as possible, while I myself remain entirely impersonal.

Otherwise jealousy and quarrels will break up everything. A leader must be impersonal.”⁵

3. “...it is a very difficult task to take on the role of a leader. One must be *dasasya dasah* – a servant of servants, and must accommodate a thousand minds. There must not be a shade of jealousy or selfishness, then you are a leader.”⁶
4. “Do not try to lead your brothers, but serve them. The brutal mania for leading has sunk many a great ship in the waters of life.”⁷

According to The Mother,

“The leaders must always set the example, the leaders must always practise the virtues they demand from those who are in their care; they must be understanding, patient, enduring, full of sympathy and warm and friendly goodwill, not out of egoism to win friends for themselves, but out of generosity to be able to understand and help others.

To forget oneself, one’s own likings and preferences, is indispensable in order to be a true leader.”⁸

We can find these qualities in M.K.Gandhi, an example of a leader who is motivated, not by a desire to control others, but by a desire to help them realise their dignity and power. Gandhi preached non-violence and dedicated his career to the achievement of a better life for the downtrodden. In his campaign to reform India and gain its independence from Great Britain, Gandhi never proclaimed himself a leader. Though millions followed him, he demurred, “I claim no followers.” He avoided office, yet was a master strategist. Recognising that the British could not be countered with force, he unleashed the power of ordinary people through non-violent resistance. He served as a catalyst, providing vision and inspiring hope. He empowered the masses to march to the sea to make salt. In so doing, they demonstrated their capacity for self-governance, and impressed upon history an image more powerful than any conventional show of force.

But to cultivate these qualities is not easy at all. Some inner qualities are required to attain this state. Intuition, judgment ability, foresightedness are the rare qualities one leader should have.

Chakraborty & Chakraborty rightly highlighted this area in their study.

“If leaders are charged with the lower ego hungers and cravings for money and power alone, no procedures, systems, rules, constitutional regulations, agreements, charters, political strategies, etc., are going to answer our mounting problems. Knowledge and learning acquired by the lower ego do not ensure exalted behaviour. They predominantly foster manipulative intrigues. This is the reason that in spite of higher IQ levels in our generation the world does not produce wisdom leaders.”⁹

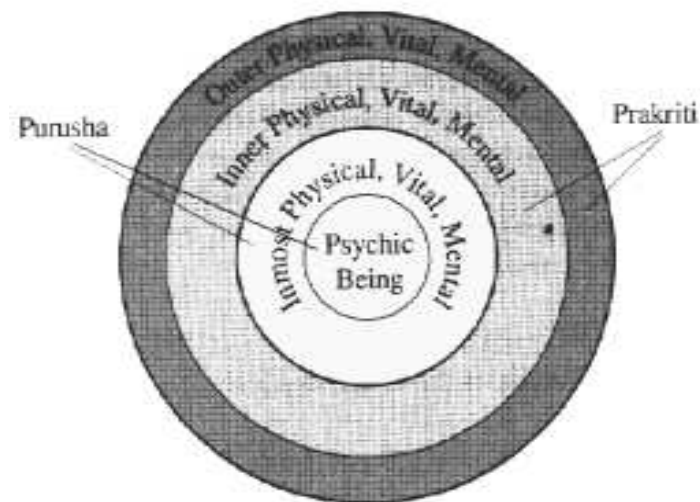
Now the question is how this inner transformation will be done. Let us concentrate on the “Psychic approach” as envisaged by the great thinker of modern India, Sri Aurobindo, highlighting its meaning and role in the development of rarer leadership qualities.

Towards Inner Transformation

We can say in the light of Sri Aurobindo that the *physical, vital, mental*, psychic consciousness all exist and are simultaneously active in each person, though the extent of their relative development and the influence they exercise on the personality differs from person to person. Also, the *physical, vital, and mental* exist and function interdependently among one another. Sri Aurobindo means by the psychic the innermost being. [From Greek *pskhikos*, of the soul, from *pskh*, soul. psychic (skk).

The psychic becomes our personal guide showing us what to do and what not to do, what aspects of ourselves need improvements; it enables descents of direct light and intuitions of knowledge into our minds. This is not the sense in which the word is used commonly. The word ‘psychic’ is used with great vagueness and thus carries a wide extension of meaning, which puts it far beyond that province. All phenomena of an abnormal or supernormal psychological or an occult character are defined as psychic. Again what are merely occult, phenomena of the unseen vital or mental or subtle physical planes, visions, symbols, all shadowy, illusory experiences are summed up as psychic but these things have nothing whatever to do with the ‘*psychic*’ as coined by Sri Aurobindo.

But Sri Aurobindo used the word psychic for the innermost being as distinguished from the *mind* and *vital* and *body*. All movements and experiences of the soul would in that senses are called *psychic*, i.e. those which rise from or directly in touch with the psychic being. On the contrary, where mind and vital predominates; the experience would be called psychological (surface or occult).



The Concentric System (source: A.S.Dalal:Our Many Selves, pp.xx)

Sri Aurobindo has stated the reason why he adopted the term “psychic being” as follows:

“The word soul is very vaguely used in English - as it often refers to the whole non-physical consciousness including even the vital with all its desires and passions. That was why the word psychic being has to be used so as to distinguish this divine portion from the instrumental parts of the nature.”¹⁰

If we make contact with the psychic being, its influence on our day-to-day lives is immense. When we connect with it, it becomes our inner guide in life, helping us to overcome the deficiencies in our outer character and our limiting and negative behaviours, actions, habits, and attitudes. By making this contact we also connect to the universal and transcendent forces and powers in the universe, including vast openings to true, full, integral knowledge which develop the decision making power.

According to SriAurobindo,

“It (The psychic being) supports the mind, vital, body, grows by their experiences, carries the nature from life to life. It is the psychic or *caitya purusa*. At first it is veiled by mind, vital and body, but as it grows, it becomes capable of coming forward and dominating the mind, life and body; in the

ordinary man it depends on them for expression and is not able to take them up and freely use them.”¹¹

“The psychic being may be described in Indian language as the Purusha in the heart or the Chaitya Purusha; (The Chitta and the psychic part are not in the least the same. Chitta is a term in a quite different category in which are co-ordinated and put into their place the main functionings of our external consciousness, and to know it we need not go behind our surface or external nature.) ;...but the inner or secret heart must be understood, *hrdaye guhā-yām*, not the outer vital-emotional centre.”¹²

Conclusion: A True ‘Netaa’

One who becomes aware of his psychic being is able to develop these finer perception powers which help to penetrate into the matter and to get a clear picture of the situation. He becomes conscious of the movement of the different parts of the being and can control the activity of those parts by the help of psychic.

When one leader gets in touch with the innermost psychic being and staying there acts outward, he can act like “witness” (*sakhsipurusha*), not at all identifying with the phenomena or situation. In this calm, poised and detached condition he can only give the right decision. In spite of having external disturbances in the organisational life, the leader’s decision making skill, judgment ability will be reaching towards perfection.

Manoj Das rightly pointed out one legend which will clear the concept behind it.

‘Legend tells us that when there was a severe drought in the ancient Tamil kingdom and king Thondaman distraught, sage Agastya led him to king Kavera of Coorg. The sage who had spent some time on the Sahyadri hills, knew that a new river was to emerge out of the hills. As advised by the sage, the king’s workers stood ready at the foot of the hills and the sage sat in meditation, waiting for his psychic power and the king’s workers applied their physical power to direct the river towards the drought-hit land.’¹³

Chakraborty cited one example regarding this issue,

“I have first-hand knowledge about the deep, inward approach to management adopted by R.K.Talwar, former Chairman of State Bank of India and Industrial Development Bank of India. Whenever faced with an intellectually baffling management problem, he used to retire into a quiet corner within his office-room itself, and by silencing his mind opened to the transcendental intelligence. Even today the reverence for him in SBI is something to realise and feel for oneself. Once retired, no more chasing after Committee

Chairmanships, Board Memberships and the like, nor for him any centres of excellence proclaiming his name at a high pitch. His contribution to society is unobtrusive, through silent, unseen sadhana in Pondicherry.”¹⁴

Awakening of Psychic helps the leader to give right decision at the time of requirement without being fully identified and perplexed with the external happenings. In this state only the leader can give proper direction to the people. Thus, we can conclude quoting Chakraborty

‘The ‘personality’ of an egoistic/leader hungers for power and does not know when and how to relinquish it with grace (à la Modi, Kerkar, Chug et al). But the ‘Soul’ – full leader leads by becoming trustworthy and winning respect as a human being. Driven by the ‘yang of personality’, a power-hungry manager casts aside the ‘yin of the soul’.¹⁵

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An Aurobindonian Critique of the Romantics

Oeendrilā Guha

In the first chapter of *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo praises James Cousins for compiling a poetic criticism of English poetry. According to him, Cousins' poetical analogy fulfils "the essential" (SABCL 9:1) and not the whole. In order to make a detailed study of what poetry is and consists of, he explores all the ages of poetic inspiration, considering the Greek, the German, the Indian and the British, elaborating the strengths and weaknesses of various schools of poetry.

Before going into detail, he clarifies the content and form of poetry in the second chapter, titled "The Essence of Poetry". He says that poetry is mantric as it is intuitive and also "...determines itself its own form..." (SABCL 9:11) In the third chapter, "Rhythm and Movement", he further explains that poetry in general observes rhythm but it need not observe it stringently. He agrees that poetic rhythm often sets the tone of the poem but it is not the end result. What is more important is the content or the poetic inspiration. Depending on the poetic inspiration or the subject matter, a poem can be written in iambic pentameter or blank verse or free verse. For example, sonnet, a fourteen-lined poem, maintains the rhythmic pattern of iambic pentameter as it deals with simple topics, such as, romantic love or friendship and others. *Paradise Lost* and *Savitri* are written in blank as they discuss concepts of epic proportion and therefore, it is difficult for the poets to observe rhyme.

The Future Poetry critiques this balance between the poetic inspiration and poetic rhythm maintained throughout the various ages of poetry and schools of poetic thought but it does not stop at that. It goes on to discuss various schools of poetry and concludes by explaining to the readers the future of poetry, which is spiritual, which is only possible when humanity develops a "...psychic mind and heart, a truer and a deeper insight into his nature and the meaning of the world, a calling of diviner potentialities and more spiritual values into the intention

and structure of his life that is the call upon humanity..." (SABCL 9:288)

This paper focuses on the romantic school of poetry, critiquing the balance between the romantics' poetic rhythm, coupled with poetic inspiration. Sri Aurobindo takes each romantic poet and studies him in detail in accordance to the two poetic criteria: he begins with Wordsworth and ends with Keats in a single strand of thought.

Matthew Arnold, a Victorian critic, set a paradigm of the theory of touchstone in the essay, "*The Study of Poetry*". His theory estimates the value of poetry in terms of its teachings, consolation and sustenance through the personalities of Shakespeare and Milton, who like Homer, Virgil, also possess "...the high and excellent seriousness, which Aristotle assigns as one of the grand virtues of poetry." (*Essays in Criticism*, 19) The rest fit in one group or the other. For example: both Chaucer and Burns possess an excellent style of writing but want this 'high seriousness' in poetic content. Arnold judged the value of poetry from a rational standpoint, as he set much store by the Greek standard of poetic criticism, which maintained that poetic inspiration had to be well contained in the poetic form, abiding by rules. The Greeks were staunch believers in laws. For example, Aristotle wrote in *Poetics* that poetry is born of imitation of nature and rhythmic harmony. He also said that unless a dramatist observed plot, character, diction, thought, music and spectacle, he would not be a perfect dramatist and that while writing a tragedy, he must obey the three unities of time, place and action. Arnold thus judged poetry as criticism of life, the social life that can be guided and governed by the right kind of poetic inspiration.

Sri Aurobindo, to whom there is nothing like the 'right' kind of poetry, likewise came up with his own concept of 'touchstone' which, according to him, denotes the perfect balance of poetic inspiration and poetic rhythm coupled with the spiritual or psychic inspiration as imitating nature is not the end all of poetry as there are many things that have not manifested in the real world but exist in the subtle world. Unlike Arnold, Sri Aurobindo judges poetry not as the store-house of the collective consciousness, working on it and shaping it but of the individual consciousness. Therefore, he considers the individual aspiration of the poet, who on having reached a certain plain of consciousness, which the collective consciousness need not have attained, has penned down his experiences or insights of it. It is in this context that he judges the five romantics: Wordsworth and Byron under the category of the intellectual poets; Blake, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats to be grouped, either collectively or individually.

On analysing the romantic age, Sri Aurobindo says that it is a move forward from the age of reason to an age which is "no longer artificial" (SABCL 9:116) but "facile, fluid helped by a greater force of thought and imagination." (SABCL

9:116) Titling the chapters on the romantics as “The Poets of the Dawn”, Sri Aurobindo makes it clear about the sort of work the romantics took upon themselves in order to overcome the materialistic exuberance of the Elizabethan age, the witticism of the metaphysical age and the rationality of the Augustan age to welcome an age of natural piety, of unbridled imagination and freedom of thought. The romantics were not solely governed by the dictates of the soul albeit they did try to attain the remote heavens in glimpses; repeatedly being obstructed by mere intellectuality as in the case of Wordsworth and Coleridge, lost in sheer abundance of expressions, losing sight of the celestial gates, as in the case of Blake and Shelley and pent up in the hold of sensual beauty as in the case of Keats. Despite these defects, Sri Aurobindo recognised their merit. He states that when their poetry is well:

‘...supported and rhythmized, rises to quite new authenticities of great or perfect utterance, and out of this there comes in some absolute moments a native voice of the spirit, in Wordsworth’s revelations of the spiritual presence in Nature and its scenes and peoples, in Byron’s rare forceful sincerities, in the luminous simplicities of Blake, in the faery melodies of Coleridge, most of all perhaps in the lyrical cry and ethereal light of Shelley...in Keats a turning away to a rich, artistic and sensuous poetical speech’ (Ibid) marvellous in its perfection of opulence, resource and colour ‘which prepares us for the’ more various but ‘lower fullnesses of the intellectual and aesthetic epoch that had to intervene’. (SABCL 9:116)

William Wordsworth, known commonly as the Lake poet as he lived in the Lake District, grew up in Nature tuning himself to listen to her and to write eulogies in her memory. Wordsworth mainly described the quiet, the peaceful, the consoling, the brooding Nature, and not the destructive, elemental, unconditioned force, thus resulting in a measured strain. Even though he was originally excited about the concept of the French Revolution and wrote “*The French Revolution as It Appeared to Enthusiasts at Its Commencement*” to celebrate its theme, later he criticised it as an agent of promoting mass murder in the holy name of equality, liberty and fraternity realising the fatal, unmitigated power of Nature. Instead, he limited his themes to the countryside and the rustics, portraying the calm, the pleasant side of Nature, such as “flower and bird, sky and star, mountain and stream” (SABCL 9:120) mixing with “Some soul of man too...not in revolt...in harmony with this tranquil soul in Nature...of humanity in the simplicity of its direct contact with Nature unspoiled by the artifice and corruption of a too developed society” (SABCL 9:120-121) in poems like “*Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802*”, “*She Dwelt*

among the Untrodden Ways”, “*Lucy Gray*”, “*Strange fits of passion have I Known*”, “*The Two April Mornings*”, “*I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*” or “*Daffodils*”, “*The Solitary Reaper*”, and “*It is a Beauteous Evening*”.

According to Sri Aurobindo, Wordsworth often seemed to have curbed his inspiration to suit his moralising, intellectual nature. Such poems as “*Ode to Duty*”, “*Michael: A Pastoral Poem*”, “*Resolution and Independence*”, “*Lines Composed A Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*” do justice to the moralistic side of his nature by debating and discussing the rights and the wrongs of being and not being dutiful, exploiting Nature and its natives. These poems justify Sri Aurobindo critiquing Wordsworth, saying he who once sang of Nature “with a spiritual closeness and identity which is of the nature of a revelation” (SABCL 9:120) lost touch with this earlier vision as his growing intellect hindered the communion between him and the sensibility (at times bordering on the spirituality) he felt towards Nature. According to Sri Aurobindo, a poet is a seer, a catalyst, a mediator between his highest inspirations and the world and thus, Wordsworth failed to fulfil the inherent nature of a true poet-singer: the moralist almost always won over the poet. This was William Wordsworth’s biggest drawback as a poet but nevertheless Sri Aurobindo applauds him as the first amongst the romantics to initiate a move towards the sensible from the mere rational.

Much like Wordsworth, Byron also faced a spiritual crisis in his poetry due to “a forceful” (SABCL 9:116) nature but of another reason, that of being “a man of action and passion.” (SABCL 9:116) Byron spent much of his talent and time rebelling in the character of the Byronic hero who expressed the poet’s hatred of the moralistic society which bound him and finally made an exile of him. Besides his subject matter, which more than often described his hatred of the moralistic society, also justified him and his works being “intellectually shallow and hurried” (SABCL 9:117) as he always had a propaganda to achieve. Byron’s greatest setback back was his impatient nature, which refused to wait patiently for events to take place: he wanted immediate solutions to his complaints. In the poem “*On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year*” (1824) records Byron’s venture to Greece to fight the Greek war of Independence against the Turks to die at last of a fever.

Despite possessing the power to articulate his feelings and sentiments most cogently, Byron lacked the spirit of the poet “in giving any adequate voice to his highest possibility.” (SABCL 9:117) Unlike Wordsworth, who mainly dwelt inwardly, Byron lived exteriorly, writing on present themes but not of great depth. The poet must have other responsibilities than making his audience become aware of narrow social laws and wars no matter how important. He must devote himself to awaken in man the thirst to realise something higher that will

not merely feed his vital and mental but also his psychic. And Byron, unlike Wordsworth lacked this capacity entirely. Thus, Sri Aurobindo studies Byron as a true critique of democracy and human rights but not as an example of immortal verse.

Blake and Coleridge also suffered as poets, but not from excessive hold of the rational but from their want to be able to express what they envisioned, much like Chaucer. Blake suffered from this setback more often than Coleridge. Both dealt with the supernatural, unlike Wordsworth and Byron who dealt with the mere intellectual and sensible but unfortunately never ventured into its plains to the fullest and deepest. They were the poets of “borderland or middle region.” (SABCL 9:123) Coleridge, a brilliant conversationalist and orator, seemed to have wasted his intellectuality and insight in discussions of metaphysics. Influenced by German philosophers, in his critical work *Biographia Literaria*, he distinguished between fancy, primary and secondary imagination: primary imagination was possessed by all; secondary imagination was possessed by only poets as they alone were capable of synthesising perception, intellect, will and emotion. Despite owning all four capacities, Coleridge did not manage to produce more than a couple or so poetical pieces due to the dominating tendency to intellectualise like a critic and not perceive as a poet. And maybe one reason was his addiction to opium, which some say produced “*Kubla Khan*” (incomplete), is an example of the occult world which dulled his power to perceive. But Sri Aurobindo was all praise for these two poems. He writes “But there are three poems of his which are unique in English poetry, written in moments when the too active intellect was in abeyance, an occult eye of dream and vision opened to supraphysical worlds and by a singular felicity the other senses harmonised, the speech caught strange subtleties” and marvellous lights and hues “and the ear the melodies of other realms.” (SABCL 9:124) Therefore, Coleridge’s poetic defect lay in his inconstancy to envision the occult world between the pull to be a permanent critic and a temporary poet.

Blake, much like Coleridge experimented with the “supraphysical” but to a greater extent. But then he was unable to express all that he perceived. In most of his poems, the subject of discussion and the way it was discussed often seemed too mundane and simple. The language he wrote in to voice his insights did not translate the heights and the depths of his poetic inspiration. For example, in the poem “*Auguries of Innocence*”, Blake begins as “To see a world in a grain of sand,/And a heaven in a wild flower,/ Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,/And Eternity in an hour...” (*Immortal Poems of the English Language*, 227) and ends as “...God appears, and God is light, / To those poor souls who dwell in night;/ But does a human form display/ To those who dwell in realms of

day.” (*Immortal Poems of the English Language*, 230). Shelley, in the poem “*One Word is too often Profaned*”, begins as “One world is too often profaned/ For me to profane it...” and ends as “The desire of the moth for the star,/ Of the night for the morrow,/ The devotion to something afar/ From the sphere of our sorrow.” (*Immortal Poems of the English Language*, 296). Blake’s moderate ending does not quite live up to his spectacular beginning, whereas, Shelley ends brilliantly. Here Blake fell short: to phrase his insights as sublimely as he envisioned them: he was inconsistent. Poems such as: “*A Poison Tree*”, “*The Scoffers*”, “*The Angel*”, “*I Saw a Chapel All of Gold*” and various others do not quite translate his vision in content: be it in subject matter or diction. Byron possessed the latter in abundance but lacked the former.

Unlike Shelley, who drew planes of subtle worlds beyond the apprehension of human mind in the lines “The One remains, the many change and pass;/ Heaven’s light forever shines, Earth’s shadows fly...” (*Immortal Poems of the English Language*, 319). Keats worshipped a smaller godhead, that of the goddess of sensuous beauty. He invoked the muses of music and history to verbalise this beauty as he alone amongst all the romantics was “the first entire artist in word and rhythm in English poetry” (SABCL 9:129-30) but unfortunately, he had not yet found or felt the emotions required to articulate ideal beauty. Sri Aurobindo believes that if he had not died young, he might have found a voice to sing of ideal beauty. But as of then what interested him most was sensuous beauty, not divine beauty of which “*Ode on a Grecian Urn*”, “*To Autumn*”, “*Ode to a Nightingale*”, “*The Eve of St. Agnes*”, “*La Belle Dame sans Merci*” and *Endymion* are perfect examples. In “*Ode on a Grecian Urn*”, Keats writes “Beauty is truth, truth beauty, — that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” (*Immortal Poems of the English Language*, 326). These lines may seem to be the finest examples to prove to the world his adherence to ideal beauty but then again as observed in all his poems he did not praise ideal beauty but sensuous beauty as described in the lines of “*Ode on a Grecian Urn*” and also “*The Eve of St. Agnes*”. “*Ode on a Grecian Urn*” describes the painting of a young woman being chased by a man on the vase as “Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,/ Though winning near the goal-yet, do not grieve;/ She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,/ Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (*Immortal Poems of the English Language*, 325). What Keats pointed out to the readers was the permanence of the physical beauty of the man and woman captured by the artist on a vase. Untouched by time and death, they were immortal as was their physical beauty.

Another poem “*Ode on Melancholy*” portrays this transient beauty. He writes “She dwells with Beauty — Beauty that must die...” (*Immortal Poems*

of the English Language, 332). Through these quotes it can be proved that Keats rendered sensuous beauty. Physical and sensual beauty die, not ideal beauty and this was why in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, he depicted the perpetuity of physical and sensual beauty through the paintings on the Elgin marbles. But in time, Keats did try to shift over from the depiction of sensual beauty to something higher. *Endymion*, published in the year of 1818, records the immortal line “A thing of beauty is a joy forever...” (*Immortal Poems of the English Language*, 331). But it still failed to articulate the ideal beauty as there were ideas that also expressed his fear of death. Most of Keats’s poems, unlike Shelley’s or Byron’s depict his fear of dying. He longed to live, a wish never fulfilled. Death and ideal beauty do not go hand in hand as one represents temporariness and the other symbolises immortality, eternality and as Keats was obsessed with the transience of life, his life, may be why he almost never did succeed in drawing ideal beauty. And this is the very reason why Sri Aurobindo can be said to be justified in saying that Keats drew verbal pictures of ephemeral sensuous beauty. But Sri Aurobindo says that in “Hyperion”, Keats does not only try to define ideal beauty but to some extent is even successful in finding “a clue in thought and imagination, but not quite its realisation in the spiritual idea” (SABCL 9:131) but it was not the end product. He had a promising future, cut short by an untimely death.

Shelley, who was the perfect blend of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Byron and Keats in his ability to grasp “...spiritual realities, much more radiantly...than Wordsworth, has, what Coleridge had not, a poetic grasp of metaphysical truths, can see the forms and hear the voices of higher elemental spirits and natural godheads than those seen and heard by Blake, while he has a knowledge too of some fields of the same middle realm, is the singer of a greater and deeper liberty and a purer and nobler revolt than Byron, has the constant feeling of a high spiritual and intellectual beauty, not sensuous in the manner of Keats...” (SABCL 9:126) and to express, was the most successful of all romantics in his poetic endeavour according to Sri Aurobindo. He was ahead of his time in his insights, which made him unintelligible to his critics and readers. In fact, Arnold called him a dilettante poet. Even Coleridge in “*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*” and Blake in “*Auguries of Innocence*”, “*The Lamb*”, “*The Tyger*”, “*Reeds of Innocence*” dealt with the supernatural. They were intelligible to the masses but not Shelley. Most of his poems: “*One Word Is Too Often Profaned*”, “*To the Skylark*”, “*Adonais*”, “*Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*” deal with themes, express emotions and hail presences beyond the intellectual, to finally culminate in the perfect balance of the vision and the voice in *Prometheus Unbound*, “*Epipsychidion*” and a couple of others.

As the poet of “Light, love, liberty...but a celestial light, a celestial love, a celestial liberty” (SABCL 9:128) Shelley’s contribution to the muse of poetry is unparalleled. Sri Aurobindo extols the lines “The desire of the moth for the star,/ Of the night for the morrow,/ The devotion to something afar/ From the sphere of our sorrow” (*Immortal Poems of the English Language*, 296) as fruition of psychic inspiration. Another such example is these lines in *Adonais*:

“That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not,...
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.” (*Immortal Poems of the English Language*, 319)

With Shelley, is thus completed a circle that began as a mere dot with Wordsworth: Shelley is the culmination of the romantic and psychic genius. If Shelley had lived long enough, he would have built a spiritual haven of ideal poetry. As it was, Shelley in that short of span of life achieved much more than Wordsworth ever did in his eighty years on earth, thus earning for himself the title of the most spiritual amongst all the romantics. According to Sri Aurobindo, Keats, who displayed signs of the making of a true devotee of ideal beauty even at the tender age of twenty-six, had he lived longer, would have been the seasoned singer of ideal beauty. But in general, the romantic poets hardly ever came in touch with the psychic inspiration, much less walked its hallowed halls. Thus, Sri Aurobindo deliberates the age of the romantics as a process of thought evolution leading man, through poetic medium, to recognise higher worlds of truths and existences.

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

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