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Śraddhā



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..... Behold the one
For whom my life has waited long unfilled,
Behold the sudden sovereign of my days.

Savitri, Bk V, Canto II, p.398

Śraddhā

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All correspondence may be addressed to

Śraddhā

Sri Aurobindo Bhavan
8 Shakespeare Sarani
Kolkata 700 071

Editor: Arup Basu

Phone: 98302 58723

E-mail : arupbasu99@yahoo.com , arup.mbe@gmail.com

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Sri Aurobindo Bhavan

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Editorial

To Sri Aurobindo ‘man is a transitional being, he is not final; ... high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees which climb to a divine supermanhood’ (Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Human and Divine*, 1994, p.165). ‘The real work of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo was to open up the consciousness of the cells by fixing the supramental consciousness in the body-consciousness’ (Kireet Joshi and Jyoti Madhok, *But it is done ...*). To him ‘the mind is ignorance seeking for the Truth, the supramental by its very definition is the Truth-Consciousness, Truth in possession of itself and fulfilling itself by its own power’. The ‘Darkness, Inconscience, Inertia, Insensibility, Disharmony and Disintegration ... that we see at the basis of the material world’ (Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*) are ‘bound to disappear’ once the supramental is brought down ‘as a power and established consciousness in the midst of the rest ... This will be enough to change the world and to change Nature by breaking down her present limits’. But to those who in their unnecessary haste try to make a fetish of the supramental yoga, as a religion, Sri Aurobindo holds out this warning ‘What we are doing, if and when we succeed, will be a beginning, not a completion. It is the foundation of a new consciousness on earth — a consciousness with infinite possibilities of manifestation and beyond it there is no progression’ (Ibid). To achieve this aim, it was necessary to build bridges or rungs leading to the Supermind, traversing the various ranges of existence beyond Mind through Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition and Overmind. “When that is done, these planes of consciousness will become more ‘perfect transmitters’ of the energies of the supramental Force” (ref. Rick Lipschutz article). But even the topmost summits of Overmind “cannot divinely ‘dynamise the Transcendence’ nor can it even lead the mind beyond itself. It cannot bring Sachchidananda into the cells of the body; it cannot transform our Inconscient base, our material foundation. It cannot ... lead the mind beyond itself; that is, it cannot be that rung of the ladder that truly joins mind, with no gap between them, to its ‘parent’ Supermind” (Ibid). It is in this context that we have to view the extreme importance of the descent that took place on that momentous day in 1926.

November 24 is usually regarded as the siddhi day or the day of Victory, a

day of accomplishment. Why? Because that day in 1926 represented the complete and full descent of the Overmind consciousness in Sri Aurobindo’s body or, in other words, in the physical or earth-consciousness or matter, not only as a mere influence but as a permanent Presence. This descent ‘would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing ... the descent of Supermind and Ananda’ (Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*). It was therefore an essential descent, a distinct signal from the Divine to move forward, ‘to move beyond all past achievements and work on all fronts to manifest Supermind as a new Shakti, a new power ... available to all’ (Lipschutz).

For this is required ‘a one-centred all-gathering upward aspiration of the soul and mind and life and body; ... a call of the whole being towards the infinite and eternal Divine.... an opening of all the being to the Divine and a total surrender This opening is a throwing wide of all the nature on all its levels and in all its parts to receive into itself without limits the greater divine Consciousness But since no human system has this endless receptivity and unfailing capacity, the supramental Yoga can succeed only if the Divine Force as it descends increases the personal power and equates the strength that receives with the Force that enters from above to work in the nature. This is only possible if there is on our part a progressive surrender of the being into the hands of the Divine Self-surrender to the divine and infinite Mother, however difficult, remains our only effective means and our sole abiding refuge. Self-surrender to her means that our nature must be an instrument in her hands, the soul a child in the arms of the Mother’ (Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Human and Divine*, 1994, pp.178-80). The Mother, ever practical, makes it much simpler and offers this *mantra* when she says that in each moment of our life, every movement of our consciousness and body cell, in all our thought and seeing, our very breathing and moving we must “Remember and Offer”.

Sceptics will point out that ‘when Sri Aurobindo left his body, the accumulated result of all his physical consciousness was transmitted to the Mother’s body, and thus there was no waste’ (Kireet Joshi and Jyoti Madhok, *But it is done ...*, p.98). But with the Mother’s passing away, there was no such body so capable and developed to receive and store the accumulated result of her consciousness. How then can we assume that the work of supramentalisation will continue in the foreseeable future? We all know that after Sri Aurobindo’s passing, Mother embarked upon a most painstaking, arduous and ambitious yoga of the cells, using her body as the field of experiment, seeking to make the physical consciousness, matter itself, the body-cell consciousness an unmediated and direct expression of the supreme Divine Consciousness-Force, as the Supreme manifesting through the Mother’s Force. Exhaustive notes of these experiences

have been recorded in the minutest detail in her conversations with Satprem in *Agenda*. To return to the doubts expressed about the future of supramentalisation, Mother herself has resolved this problem in her conversation with Satprem in *Agenda*, vol.11, where she states firmly ‘that the object to be accomplished was the change in the physical consciousness, the change in the physical appearance was a secondary consequence, that would be the last thing to change. She said emphatically that the thing that had to be accomplished was accomplished’ (Ibid, p.107). She says ‘... this change in the CONSCIOUSNESS – has taken place The physical is CAPABLE of receiving the Superior Light, the Truth, the true consciousness and to manifest it’ (Ibid, p.108).

On this Victory day, therefore, let the 3-word *mantra* of the Mother be our watchword and remind ourselves once again that the best way of participating in this great and heroic evolutionary endeavour is to become an ideal child of the Mother.

We are particularly grateful to Editors, *Mother India*, for permitting us to reproduce the articles by C C Dutt and Udar. Our grateful thanks to Editor, *Collaboration*, for granting us leave to reprint the article by Rick Lipschutz, to Editor, *New Race*, for the paper (though under a slightly different title) by Goutam Ghosal and to Advaita Ashrama for the essay by Srimat Anirvan. Last but not the least we thank the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for allowing us to reproduce the essay ‘The object of our Yoga’ by Sri Aurobindo taken from *Essays Human and Divine* (EHD), extracts taken also from EHD and *Letters on Yoga* used in the Editorial. The painting of Sri Aurobindo is by Barindra K. Ghosh during his stay at the ashram in the early '20s.

Finally we wish to apologise for a slight printing mistake in the Contents page of our August '15 issue, where the writing by the Mother was erroneously printed as *Finding the Psychic Being* instead of *On India*.

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Frontispiece : Painting of Sri Aurobindo by Barindra K Ghosh
Cover : Painting by Giles Herdman

श्रद्धावाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṃl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

The Object of Our Yoga

Sri Aurobindo

The object of our Yoga is self-perfection, not self-annulment. There are two paths set for the feet of the Yogin, withdrawal from the universe and perfection in the Universe; the first comes by asceticism, the second is effected by *tapasya*; the first receives us when we lose God in Existence, the second is attained when we fulfil existence in God. Let ours be the path of perfection, not of abandonment; let our aim be victory in the battle, not the escape from all conflict.

Buddha and Shankara supposed the world to be radically false and miserable; therefore escape from the world was to them the only wisdom. But this world is Brahman, the world is God, the world is Satyam, the world is Ananda; it is our misreading of the world through mental egoism that is a falsehood and our wrong relation with God in the world that is a misery. There is no other falsity and no other cause of sorrow.

God created the world in Himself through Maya; but the Vedic meaning of Maya is not illusion, it is wisdom, knowledge, capacity, wide extension in consciousness. *Prajña prasrita purāṇi*. Omnipotent Wisdom created the world, it is not the organised blunder of some Infinite Dreamer; omniscient Power manifests or conceals it in Itself or Its own delight, it is not a bondage imposed by His own ignorance on the free and absolute Brahman.

If the world were Brahman's self-imposed nightmare, to awake from it would be the natural and only goal of our supreme endeavour; or if life in the world were irrevocably bound to misery, a means of escape from this bondage would be the sole secret worth discovering. But perfect truth in world-existence is possible, for God here sees all things with the eye of truth; and perfect bliss in the world is possible, for God enjoys all things with the sense of unalloyed freedom. We also can enjoy this truth and bliss, called by the Veda *amritam*, Immortality, if by casting away our egoistic existence into perfect unity with His being we consent to receive the divine perception and the divine freedom.

The world is a movement of God in His own being; we are the centres and knots of divine consciousness which sum up and support the processes of His

movement. The world is "His play with His own self-conscious delight, He who alone exists, infinite, free and perfect; we are the self-multiplications of that conscious delight, thrown out into being to be His playmates. The world is a formula, a rhythm, a symbol-system expressing God to Himself in His own consciousness, — it has no material existence but exists only in His consciousness and self-expression; we, like God, are in our inward being That which is expressed, but in our outward being terms of that formula, notes of that rhythm, symbols of that system. Let us lead forward God's movement, play out His play, work out His formula, execute His harmony, express Him through ourselves in His system. This is our joy and our self-fulfilment; to this end we who transcend & exceed the universe, have entered into universe-existence.

Perfection has to be worked out, harmony has to be accomplished. Imperfection, limitation, death, grief, ignorance, matter, are only the first terms of the formula — unintelligible till we have worked out the wider terms and reinterpreted the formulary; they are the initial discords of the musician's tuning. Out of imperfection we have to construct perfection, out of limitation to discover infinity, out of death to find immortality, out of grief to recover divine bliss, out of ignorance to rescue divine self-knowledge, out of matter to reveal Spirit. To work out this end for ourselves and for humanity is the object of our Yogic practice.

(Reproduced with thanks and acknowledgement to Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, from Sri Aurobindo's *Essays Human and Divine*, pp.102-03)

Vedamīmāṃsā : The Background

Srimat Anirvan

Interpretation always presupposes a spiritual communion between the interpreter and the object he seeks to interpret. It requires a mind which is as much free from cherished prejudices as free to enter readily into the depths of the objects of its enquiry with the living sense of a *participation mystique*, which will rather mould the consciousness of the interpreter into the seed-form of the object than allow the form to be moulded by the consciousness. An intense alertness and yet a passive receptivity must combine together before the unknown will yield its secret. This becomes imperative when we seek to interpret a culture, a way of thought, or a thing of the spirit. A process of a saturation must set in before the eyes are ready to see and the ears are ready to hear. The ancients were well aware of this truth and put it into practice as often as circumstances demanded it. To the seeker for Truth, the first command of an Upanishadic teacher always was: *vasa brahmacaryam* — Live and move about in the atmosphere of the Vast. It was the touch of life and the throb of atmosphere that was of prime importance rather than the dissemination of knowledge through set discourses and appeal to the reasoning intellect. A secretly illuminating intuition of the truth must come first before mind can know and reason can understand. It may sound illogical, but the truth of Life or Spirit cannot be grasped by a mere logical procedure of analytical thought. To understand and interpret life, one must first live it. This might appear almost like a truism, but it is sad to see how often human mind, in its arrogance, ignores the primary demand of a truly scientific attitude towards life.

It may be argued that all this is true in the case of a culture that is living, but what about a culture that is past and dead? But the question is: Can we always equate the past with the dead? There is the process of Time in which one Form gives place to another and so a thing of the present becomes a thing of the past; but the Idea behind these changing forms — has this not a tenacity of life that defies time? And what is a culture but the manifestation of a prolific dynamism

of some basic idea as old as human nature itself? Of course there are peculiarities of circumstances which stamp the various cultures with a mark of individuality, and from this there naturally arise the biological phenomena of struggle and assimilation, death and survival. But still these belong to the realm of form; and a culture that is based on some fundamental truth of the evolutionary destiny of human nature has a chance of persistence though all its temporal vicissitudes.

This becomes more apparent when culture finds expression in religion, if by religion we mean, as the ancient Rationalists of India meant it to be so, an integral view of life (*samyak dr̥ṣṭi*) comprehensive enough to include both the known and the unknown in its ambit and thus supplying to the human endeavour an almost inexhaustible source of moral and spiritual dynamism. If there is a width of vision, a plastic adaptability of nature, and a loyalty to the fundamental laws of being, and if these things have a chance of being assimilated and continued in a living tradition, then a spiritual culture embodying these factors may well-nigh promise to endure to the furthest limit of time. And the Vedic culture can claim to be one of those death-defying cultures whose vitality is still strong enough to carry on its task of contributing towards the progressive realisation of a total unfolding of the human spirit. The two fundamental assumptions of the eternality (*nityatva*) and the non-personal origination (*apauruṣeyatva*) of the Word in which its exponents have summed up its right to speak are like a challenge to man to probe the very depths of being to make his life-basis secure. All religions claim to be an expression of an eternal Truth; but few dare to call this Truth of non-personal origination also. And unless this is done, or in other words, unless the human spirit can transcend itself in its striving for the Beyond, the curse of strife and death will stalk all its formulations of Truth-experience.

By calling this culture Vedic, we point to the literary creations in which its spirit has found expression, and naturally our ideas go to the historic movement of a thought-unit. But, as a matter of course, this imposes some conceptual limitations on our assessment of its value. To call it Indian will widen its connotation, but at the same time will impose a geographical limitation on it. Of course the Spirit that seeks to be as wide and as lofty as the skies has still its roots in the earth-nature, as has been so often insisted upon by the Vedic seers; but even then, proper evaluation of life and spirit is always by the fruits and not by the roots alone. It is important to remember that the Vedic seers described themselves neither as Vedic nor as Indian; they would have rather been called 'Ārya' — a term to which no justice can be done in translation, and yet which holds in it whatever there is of cultural value either in the Veda or in India.* Unless we can grasp the underlying spirit of this Ārya culture, which from the hoary past down to the modern age has been the guiding force of Indian spiritual

evolution and which is as much alive today as it was in the days when the Vedic Rishis sang their hymns, we cannot hope to understand and correlate the various expressions it has found throughout the ages in obedience to an inner urge towards an ideological self-fulfilment which has a meaning not for India alone but for the whole humanity.

The most salient characteristics of this Ārya culture briefly stated are as follows: At the very outset we may speak of the deep sense of the ultimate Reality as a self-expansive Consciousness-Force which the Vedic seers expressed by the extremely suggestive word *Brahma*. By *Brahma* they meant not only the psychological perception of this process of self-expansion in the individual but also the spiritual intuition of an eternally realised status of Vastness (*br̥hat*) — which broods over all existence, being both their foundation in Truth (*satyam*) and their dynamic unfolding in rhythmic Time-Order (*ṛtam*). An intuition of this Reality filled the Ārya soul with a hankering for the Beyond: a yearning for liberation of the constrained spirit into the unfoundedness (*anibādha*) of the Infinity, a cleaving asunder of the rocky fastnesses of dark Inconscience to let loose the Waters of Life, Light, and Joy in an uninterrupted flow, an indefatigable urge towards the divinisation (*devatāti*) of human life by a spiritual communion (*sāyujya*) with the Divine — these formed what may be called the second characteristic of the Ārya mind. But this nostalgia of the Spirit has not blinded it to the realities of the earth. If the World of Light is the Ancient Father, this Earth is no less the Mother 'whose golden bosom shines for ever in the highest ether as the materialised spirit of the Infinite Power'. Between them are the Gods, the Worlds, the different levels, of man's spiritual consciousness. The Divine Pair gives birth to what appear as dichotomies to the mental perception; but since the spirit of the Ineffable One (*ekam tat*) pervades and permeates all existence, the qualities are not incompatible apposites but the counterparts of a synthetic whole. The problem of the Spirit is not to achieve a monochromatic exclusiveness but to display its inherent marvel of rainbow iridescence against the background of a colourless Void. This synthetic grasp of the integral Reality from a vantage-ground of Transcendence is the third characteristic of the Ārya way of thought. The claim of the Many, its legitimate demand to the right to live, has created innumerable problems — spiritual, mental, ethical, and social, which the Ārya mind has boldly met and is still painfully trying the work out their solution with a spirit of catholicity, tolerance, and dispassionateness which are often interpreted as cold indifference to realities.

These three characteristic ways of looking at Reality may be said to sum up the Ārya philosophy of Existence. It finds expression in the age-old scheme of a triune conception of Reality: Reality as abiding in Spirit (*adhidaivatam*), as

intuited in the Self (*adhyātmam*), and as manifested in phenomenal existences (*adibhūtam*). The Spirit is the transcendent Vast: it is *satpati* (the Lord of Existence), *deva* (the Luminous One), *br̥hatjyotiḥ* (the ever expansive Vastness of Light), *vena* (the Eternal Lover), *śrī* (the fundamental Harmony), *ānanda* (Joy), *amṛta* (Immortality), and a host of such other lures of the Infinite. It concentrates itself in the Individual, who awakes with a yearning for the Luminous within (*deva-yu*) and an equally insistent yearning for the manifestation of the Truth-Law without (*ṛta-yu*). And the Spirit's outpouring of itself (*visṛṣṭi*) is the manifold Becoming (*vibhūti*) — the dynamisation of Existence (*bhuvana*) as phenomenal appearances. An identity of substance and energy obtains among the three: as the *Devatā* is the *Ātmā* and has become the *Bhūta*, so the *Ātmā* and the *Bhūta* too are basically the same. Expansion of Consciousness which is the Law of Life lays upon the Individual from an intuitive perception of this supreme identity, the double urge of expanding into God-consciousness (*devatāti*) and expanding into All-consciousness (*sarvatāti*).

In practical life, this urge expresses itself in the performance of Sacrifice (*yajña*) which is both the fundamental law of being (*dharma*) and the predestined course of becoming (*ṛta*); and this brings us to the fourth characteristic of the Ārya outlook on life. *Yajña* is surrender as well as creation and so it is the natural law of growth. The scope of *Yajña* is as wide as life itself, as can be seen from the ordination of *Pañca-yajña* which is incumbent upon every Ārya. Life had a beginning in the Fathers, it is moving towards the Gods and is being sustained by the spiritual labours of the Seers; this is the inner and occult course of its development. Its outward manifestation is the whole world of being, of which humanity forms the apex. The individual is a nexus of all these forces: and the law of growth demands that he should be conscious of them and help their working by developing in himself the spirit of service and sacrifice. In the mind of the ancient seers, the true sense of activity lies in its being an act of sacrifice so that in the Veda, *Karma* and *Yajña* are two interchangeable terms. Sacrifice is the Divine Action from which creation springs and it is the model of all human activities.

All these ideas are to be found in the Veda, not in a crude and germinal form, but with a wealth of symbolic imagery and a working up of psychological details which is astounding. The expressions are not intellectual and analytic, but 'fashioned by the heart' and tersely brilliant like diamonds with many facets. To speak in the language of Vedic seers themselves, 'It is the manifold ways of the intuition of the Vast that have found expression in the Word'. And so the interpretation of the Word also must follow an identical course: it should be an attempt at harmonisation (*samanvaya*) of the expressions looked upon as the

deduced forms of an integrally perceived Truth. In the world of senses, the inductive method of discovering truth by proceeding from the known to the unknown is of course a legitimate process. But in interpreting a thing of the Spirit, it is rather the other way about; the unknown is not there quite unknown and does not lie at the mercy of hypothetical constructions or fumbling guesses ; it is only imperfectly known to reason and intuitively known to faith. And so the perfection of knowledge comes by following the path of what the seers called *Śraddhā-tapas* — by a concentrated effort at diving into the depths and being saturated by the spirit. Once we have been born into the Spirit, the harmonisation of its expressed forms does not become difficult and there is less danger of going astray in understanding them.

Herein comes the question of tradition in cultural interpretation. In tradition we find the expression of the soul of a race, whereas by race we mean a human group whose affinity is determined by a definite course of its spiritual aspirations in the widest sense rather than by the accidents of anthropological data. A tradition canalises the forces that go to make up race-unit and it is built up in as much the same way as the amorphous consciousness of the growing individual is crystallised in an ego. As such it is an organic structure and has its own peculiar functions and a definite destiny to fulfil. A race may be said not to have found its soul until it has been able to build up a tradition. Till then, its past is not a source of dynamic energy that can be utilised in shaping its future. The length of the lease of life that is granted to culture depends upon the strength of the tenacity of its tradition. If a race feels that it is a 'chosen people of God' or that its cultural roots are grounded in the Eternal and the Impersonal and if its stubborn spirit will face anything to defend its faith, it is neither arrogance nor supersition. It only suggests that the root-idea of that culture is indispensable for an integral realisation of the ideas of humanity and so Nature will not willingly let it die. It has created a tradition that will live out its full span of life.

If we understand tradition as embodying a collective life-process, we shall find in its development the working of two forces — the basic and sustaining force of a generic idea and the creative force of a diverse manifestation of forms. As the life-force moves down the stream of time, the forms will of course grow divergent; but the loyalty to tradition will always link them with the root-idea. And so the understanding of the present will effectively aid the interpretation of the past, because in the continuity of life-process, past and present are not mutually antagonistic; and in the process of spiritual development we often meet with the most natural phenomenon of an embryonic moment flashing the anticipated glories of a slowly evolving future.

Looked in this light, the meaning of the Vedic thought as a distinctive

expression of the *Ārya* culture is to be sought not only by diving deep into its perennial spiritual source, but also by being fully conversant with all the ramifications of the original spirit which tradition has continued to this day. It is to be remembered in this connection that what is apparently non-Vedic is not necessarily *An-ārya*: it is the one *Ārya* mind dwelling on the polarity of spiritual realisation that has created the seeming divergences. The Vedic thought, being the most catholic, has, in course of time, superseded all protestant forms, of thought. Its Theory of God and Gods (*devavāda*), being the most realistic and comprehensive approach towards integral spiritual realisation, has become the common asset of dissenting schools even; so has been its soteriological outlook. In all these we see the same *Ārya* way of looking at Reality; and unless we can imbibe its spirit and realise its total vision, our attempts at interpreting the earliest of its literary expression are bound to miss the mark.

* It is preferable to use the old term '*Ārya*' instead of the new-coined term '*Aryan*', because the former has a clearly defined and at the same time comprehensive cultural connotation, while the latter is bound to be associated with some historical judgments of arbitrary and controversial nature.

(Reproduced with thanks and acknowledgement to *Prabuddha Bharata*, where it was first published in February, 1950.)

The Mundaka : Chapter Three: Section II

The Goal and the Path

Alok Pandey

Step by step this great and wonderful Upanishad leads us out of our state of Ignorance that keeps us tied to mortality and suffering and limited pleasures that in their passing leave us with a bitter touch of pain, to a state of Unity and Oneness and Light and Freedom and Immortality. It is the true Knowledge, the knowledge of Brahman, the Science of the Eternal that is the object of the reflections contained therein. In a final summary, it leaves us with a goal worth pursuing and a path that would lead us to the supreme Glory.

1.He knows this supreme Brahman as the highest abiding place in which shines out, inset the radiant world. The wise who are without desire and worship the Spirit pass beyond this sperm.

2.He who cherishes desires and his mind dwells with his longings, is by his desires born again wherever they lead him, but the man who has won all his desire and has found his soul, for him even here in this world vanish away all desires.

Brahman is the highest dwelling place, the highest station of consciousness in which our self can abide. But for that it must be freed from desire for it is desire that binds us to this lower creation composed of a mixed tissue of the bright and the dark states. For he who has conquered desire and is full of worship for the highest passes beyond this world whose seed itself is dogged with division and imperfection and incompleteness. Having conquered desire one lives in the world even though he is not of this world. It is a state of Jivanmukti, of an inner freedom that the knower of Brahman arrives at. In contrast those who live by desire do not arrive at freedom even when they have departed from this material world. They return again and again bound and drawn by their unfulfilled desires.

It is interesting to note that the Upanishad brings in worship while speaking of the sublime Science of the Spirit. For this science is not like the other sciences that are busy with techniques and processes. Its end result is not some mechanical, impersonal unconscious power but a conscious Being with whom we can come in contact and relate. Our journey is not our alone but also of the Eternal who leans towards us and lifts us out of our present condition towards His own infinity. This is the purport of the verses that follow soon after.

3.This Self is not won by exegesis, nor by brain-power, nor by much learning of Scripture. Only by him whom It chooses can It be won; to him this Self unveils its own body.

4. This Self cannot be won by any who is without strength, nor with error in the seeking, nor by an askesis without the true mark: but when a man of knowledge strives by these means his self enters into Brahman, his abiding place.

On the one hand the Upanishad boldly declares that one cannot win this state of Brahman by personal effort alone. It would be a folly to believe that one can win the Self through a mere reading of the Scriptures or interpreting it or by intellectual powers. One may or may not do these things but the Self has another vision and another criterion if we may say so of choosing whom to reveal Itself. It is an act of Grace and not the result of any intellectual effort.

This one and the verse that follows are very powerful. The statements or revelations contained in them may seem too sweeping to our ordinary mentality that relies upon reason and the intellect for everything. Here reason halts and flounders, here the intellect feels small and humbled, here our understanding fails and our mind is unable to go beyond itself. Yet there is Grace. A Hand from Above or a Light from Beyond comes down and reveals Itself in its own time when it so chooses. We can aspire and seek but we have also to learn to wait with patience and trust for the Self to bare Its secret body of Light and Bliss before us.

Yet there is a place for personal effort. There is a right practice and a wrong one for arriving at the great Goal. The first thing that we must acquire is strength, — strength physical, strength moral, strength intellectual, strength spiritual. The Self is not for the weak or the cowardly. Instead of scholarly and intellectual interpretation or a mechanical reading of the scriptures we must put the truths revealed in it into right practice. An erroneous seeking full of conceit and ambition cannot lead us to the doors of Brahman. Nor can an askesis done without

aspiration, sincerity and faith in the seeking. Mere outward asceticism is of no meaning and often can only become a means of increasing our self-conceit. These things cannot lead us to the Goal. But having known the right principles and the method and the way, we steadily put it into practice then one day we shall enter through the golden doors that lead us to the Brahman.

5. Attaining to him, seers glad with fullness of knowledge, perfected in the Self, all passions cast from them, tranquillised, — these, the wise, come to the all-pervading from every side, and, uniting themselves with him, enter utterly the All.

This then is the state of an ideal and perfected human condition. While the world today is torn with conflicts born out of desire; while the sign of a perfect man is considered by many as his ability to achieve material things and conquer and acquire physical wealth and win comforts and applause among men, the Upanishad reverses the values that we strive after. It bids us to put our efforts in the direction of the conquest of Desire, to win Peace and tranquillity in this world of agitation and pain, to acquire the wealth of true Knowledge, to strive after Wisdom that comes by casting out passions born out of Ignorance. Thus we can arrive at the desired perfection and wholeness, an integration with the substance of Truth, become one with the divine essence that is present in all.

6. Doers of askesis who have made sure of the aim of the whole-knowledge of Vedanta, the inner being purified by the Yoga of renunciation, all in the hour of their last end passing beyond death are released into the worlds of the Brahman.

Not only in life, this state also leads to the perfection of our departure at the moment of death. Instead of dying ignorantly full of fear and attachment and filled with grief and terror and pain, our departure too must be one that befits the greatness of the soul. When a man has lived a life of inner purity and renunciation, has not been running after the vain pursuit of desires, has stabilised himself in the knowledge of Brahman, then he has nothing to fear, neither life nor death. He dwells in Brahman, the imperishable Truth of life and creation and in his passing departs unto Brahman and the worlds of Light and Peace and Bliss that exist consciously in the Brahman.

7. The fifteen parts return into their foundations, and all the gods pass

into their proper godheads, works and the Self of Knowledge, — all become one in the Supreme and Imperishable.

8. As rivers in their flowing reach their home in the ocean and cast off their names and forms, even so one who knows is delivered from name and form and reaches the Supreme beyond the Most High, even the Divine Person.

Such a one, the knower of Brahman leaves this earth enriched by his breath and when his breath ceases he returns to Nature the instruments and forces and energies that he embodied. His soul merging into the Absolute beyond Name and Form becomes one with the Supreme even as rivers rushing into the ocean lose their separate name and form and become one with the vast expanse. His life a constant striving after and finding of the Eternal departs into the Eternal, freed from all bondages, fear and care.

9. He, verily, who knows that Supreme Brahman becomes himself Brahman; in his lineage none is born who knows not the Brahman. He crosses beyond sorrow, he crosses beyond sin, he is delivered from the knotted cord of the secret heart and becomes immortal.

Not only in his own life and death but by extension, such a One delivers all those in whom his consciousness has been extended. This is the true meaning of the lineage. What is spoken of here is not a hereditary transmission of spiritual achievements or a physical inheritance of spiritual wealth but its extension, the extension of the realisation into those who become part of the spiritual lineage of the such a knower of Brahman. They too share the fruits of his *tapasya* if they acknowledge and become part and parcel of the knower of Brahman even as a child is part and parcel of its parents.

10. This is That declared by the Rig-veda. Doers of works, versed in the Veda, men absorbed in the Brahman, who putting their faith in the sole-seer offer themselves to him sacrifice, — to them one should speak this Brahman knowledge, men by whom the Vow of the Head has been done according to the rite.

11. This is That, the Truth of things, which the seer Angiras spoke of old. This none learns who has not performed the Vow of the Head. Salutation to the seers supreme!

Salutation to the seers Supreme!

What we need is faith in these Masters, in those who have realised the Brahman, it is to them that we must offer our being in a sacrificial rite. It is to such a disciple and seeker that the Master offers in return the Knowledge of Brahman, the highest Truth. Such a person then belongs to the Master and through Him to the Eternal Brahman. He is initiated into the secret Knowledge of the Vedas, into the mystery of the secret truths of the *Rig Veda*. The rite of the Head would mean here a state of submission where the head bows down before the seer of Truth and surrenders one's thoughts and mind to the leading of the Master. The head is also the seat of consciousness in human beings and the rite of head would be to offer this seat to the Divine so as to establish Him firmly as the ruler and the sovereign Master of our being. The outer ceremony is not the real thing. It is the inner act of consecration and surrender that is the central thing. The outer is only a symbolic act that is meant to tell the world that now we belong to the Master, to Brahman alone and no more to the world and its play of ignorance. The shedding of the hair is the shedding of the old consciousness that sticks to us covering us all over. To tonsure the head is not the real thing. To tonsure the pride and ego of the intellect is the real act. This ritual act has no meaning unless it is accompanied by the Vow, the allegiance of one's will and energies to the great Discovery. For only when we are determined and one-pointed, full of sacrifice, surrender and faith that the Master can help us fully and truly. This is the lineage of Angirasa, the first of the seers who gave the inner Fire to man and expounded the truth of the Brahman. By joining the path of this great discovery we also join the lineage of the great seer and receive help from His energies that continue to guide the world of seekers.

Thus comes to a close this magnificent Upanishad that opens the royal doors for man to walk upright towards the great Goal of Brahman, with Truth and Courage in his will, with Faith and Surrender in his heart.

'This Light comes not by struggle or by thought;
In the mind's silence the Transcendent acts
And the hushed heart hears the unuttered Word.
A vast surrender was his only strength.
A Power that lives upon the heights must act,
Bring into life's closed room the Immortal's air
And fill the finite with the Infinite.
All that denies must be torn out and slain
And crushed the many longings for whose sake
We lose the One for whom our lives were made.'

(Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, 4th rev ed, 1993, pp.315-16)

Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of the Gita

(Continued from April '15 previous issue)

C C Dutt

The very first question that the book proceeds to solve is: Is there a Nature higher than the Nature of the three modes? Is there a power of action higher than that of desire and ego? We have seen in the first part repeated exhortations to Arjuna to rise above the three gunas and be desireless and equal to all things. Here, in the seventh chapter, it is pointed out that this can be done by attaining to "essential Knowledge, attended with all the comprehensive Knowledge, by knowing which there shall be no other thing here left to be known." This knowledge is that the Divine Being is all — *Vasudevah sarvam iti*. It is a difficult thing to acquire — "among thousands of men one here and there strives, and of those who strive one here and there knows me truly and integrally." This integral knowledge is founded on the distinction made between the two Natures, phenomenal and spiritual — *Apara Prakriti* and *Para Prakriti*. This distinction drawn between the two Prakritis by the Gita is, Sri Aurobindo says, the practical basis of all its Yoga. The eightfold *Apara Prakriti* is made up of the five elements and mind, reason and ego. This inferior Nature of the Gita is the Prakriti of the Sankhya school. Sankhya stops at this conception of Nature. But the Gita enunciates a higher principle, a spiritual Nature. Krishna says of it, "Know it to be my supreme Prakriti." Here, in their highest forms, Prakriti and Purusha are one. When Krishna speaks of himself, it is as *Purushottama* — "I am the birth of the whole world and so too its dissolution; there is nothing; else supreme beyond me." Sri Aurobindo says of these two higher principles, "Here then the supreme Soul, *Purushottama*, and the supreme Nature, *Para Prakriti*, are identified; they are put as two ways of looking at one and the same reality." The Supreme Nature is described in the text as *Jivabhuta* — i.e. in the universe this Nature formulates itself as the *Jiva*. To put it otherwise, says Sri Aurobindo, the eternal multiple soul of the *Purushottama* appears as individual spiritual existence in all the forms of the cosmos. The supreme Nature is not in its

essence the *Jiva*, it has become the *Jiva*. Later on, we find the Gita saying that the *Jiva* is the Lord, but in his partial manifestation, "Brahman the sole undivided Being dwells in the manifest forms as if divided." The Gita's outlook on creation is clear — unity is a greater truth than multiplicity, but both are true, neither is an illusion! The created world is sustained by the unity of the higher Nature. Therefore it is that the Gita describes this Nature as the principle "by which this world is held up" — *Yayedam dhāryate jagat*. Krishna uses the metaphor of a pearl necklace and says that all this is strung like pearls on a string — *sūtre manigandāh iva*.

"The one supreme power manifests itself not only in all as the one but in each as the individual spiritual presence, *Jiva*; it manifests also as the essence of all quality of Nature." The three gunas are the transient surface manifestations, of the mind, life and body. Thus is all becoming determined by the lower Nature. Her debased powers and values derive from the absolute value of the supreme Shakti, and must, in order to find their individual truth and law of action, go back to that Shakti. So, too, must the individual "turn back to the higher law or its being, if it seeks to free itself from the shackled play of phenomenal nature. Krishna says, "I am taste in the waters, sound in ether, scent in earth, energy of light in fire." For completeness Sri Aurobindo adds, "I am touch or contact in air" and explains, "That is to say, the Divine himself in his *Para Prakriti* is the energy at the basis of the various sensory relations of which, according to the ancient Sankhya system, the ethereal, the radiant, electric and gaseous, the liquid and the other elemental conditions of matter are the physical medium." The point becomes clearer still when we look at the other verses of the series in the text — "I am the light of sun and moon, the manhood in man, the intelligence of the intelligent, the energy of the energetic, the strength of the strong, the ascetic force of those who do *tapasya*, askesis. I am life in all existences." Sri Aurobindo interprets it as meaning that each of these forms depends on the one essential Energy for its formulation. Krishna tells Arjuna, "Know me to be the eternal seed of all existences." Sri Aurobindo points out how the distinction between the original power of the spiritual Nature and the phenomenal derivations of the lower Nature is brought out very clearly in the closing lines of the series: "I am the strength of the strong devoid of desire and liking" — "I am in beings the desire which is not contrary to the *Dharma*". The whole idea is summed up beautifully in the verse, "I am the essential light, strength, desire, power, intelligence, but these derivations from them I am not in my essence, nor am I in them, yet are they all of them from Me, and they are all in my being." Sri Aurobindo shows that there is nothing contradictory or inconsistent in all this, if we remember that the gunas are "not themselves the pure action of the spiritual

Nature, but derivatives from it". Says the Lord, "They are verily from Me, but I am not in them, it is they that are in Me." Why then the bewilderment of false values that we suffer from? It is the illusive *Maya* which hides from us our divine nature. The Gita's own words are, "This is my *Daivi Maya* of the three modes." *Daivi* means divine in the nature of the gods, or even of the one God in his divided and lower cosmic aspects. This veil has to be rent asunder. *Maya* is called by Krishna *durataya*, difficult to overcome, but Arjuna is assured, "To me who turn and come, they all cross over beyond the *Maya*."

The seventh chapter after enunciating this truth proceeds to apply it practically to life and makes the reconciliation of knowledge with devotion the starting point. We have here before us the three aspects of *Jiva*, the Self and the *Purushottama*. It is into the truth of this last aspect, which Krishna has consistently described as "I", that we have to grow. The *Para* or higher *Prakriti* is the nature of the highest Purusha; he says, "I am not manifest to all because I am enveloped in my *Maya*." In the Self the supernal *Prakriti* is in a state of inactivity, *Nivritti*. In the *jiva* she is in a state of activity — *Pravritti*. In order to rise to the higher or divine Nature it is necessary to slay desire and its children the evil propensities arising from the *rajas* guna — "Know them to be enemies, destroyers of Knowledge, slay them, O Arjuna!" One must bring under control one's passions right at the start. According to Sri Aurobindo's teaching, the rajasic has to be transcended in the first instance; we cannot pass beyond the three gunas if we do not first develop within ourselves the rule of the highest guna, *Sattwa*. Krishna says in the Gita, "The evil-doers attain not to Me, souls bewildered, low in the human scale." Such a being sees only his lower nature, the God immanent in him and in the world is hidden from his eyes. But even the sattwic development is not enough, a mere virtuous life is not sufficient. "By virtue alone", says Sri Aurobindo, "man cannot attain to the highest, but by virtue he can develop a first capacity for attaining to it." The crude *rajas* and the inert *tamas* are difficult to shake off, the *sattwa* is less difficult, it can enlighten and transcend itself. By the constant upward aspiration in his ethical aim man ultimately gets rid of the obscurations of rajasic desire and passion and make a start towards the transcendence of the three Gunas. Says Sri Aurobindo, "Man, therefore, has first of all to become ethical, *sukritim*, and then to rise to heights beyond...to the light, largeness and power of the spiritual nature, where he gets beyond the grasp of the dualities and their delusion, *dvandava-moha*."

The unification of the human soul with the Supreme Lord by a Yoga of the whole being is says Sri Aurobindo, the complete teaching of the Gita. But one has to pass to it through a firm realisation of the Immutable, *Akshara Purusha*. This realisation is a prime necessity, and the Gita insists on it as such. Such

insistence has led to a certain amount of misunderstanding. Some commentators have interpreted the teaching of the book to mean an exhortation to seek an inactive poise in the Brahman — a state of Brahma *nirvana*. But a poise in the inactive Purusha can never be the Gita's teaching. Krishna's meaning is clear from the verse, "He who sees me in all becomings and being one with all adores me, that yogi, wherever he may be, abides in Me." The scripture brings in bhakti as the climax of the Yoga "when it says, "Of all Yogis; he, who with his, heart fixed on me adores Me with veneration, is the most completely and united with Me, in my opinion."

When by spiritual development bhakti becomes one with knowledge, and the *Jiva* comes to delight in the one Godhead, he is constantly in communion with Him — *nityayukta*. His entire life becomes an eternal Yoga with the Supreme, than whom nothing greater exists. He is then the *jnani bhakta*, the God-lover who has the Knowledge. Sri Aurobindo describes his relation to God thus, "On him, is concentrated all his bhakti, *ekabhaktih*, not on any partial godhead, rule or cult This single devotion is his whole law of living and he has gone beyond all creeds of religious belief, rules of conduct, personal aims of life. He has no griefs to be healed, for he is in possession of the All-blissful. He has no desires to hunger after, for he possesses the highest and the All and is close to the All-Power that brings all fulfilment. He has no doubts or baffled seekings left, for all knowledge streams upon him from the Light in which he lives. He loves perfectly the Divine and is his beloved for as he takes joy in the Divine, so too the Divine takes joy in him....In him the *Jiva's* cosmic existence is justified because it has exceeded Itself and so found its own whole and highest truth of being."

IN the next three essays — "The Supreme Divine", "The Secret of Secrets" and "The Divine Truth and Way" — Sri Aurobindo continues his presentation of the seventh chapter and goes on to chapters VIII and IX. The starting point of the new and fuller position has been found. We are to change from an earthly imperfection to a divine perfection, but "by a higher, a spiritual fulfilment of all that we now essentially are." Ignorance and egoism are to be discarded and in their stead has to come the rule of the Spirit, made dynamic and active. This is the characteristic teaching of the Gita, there is to be no self-annulment of Nature but a self-fulfilment in divine Nature. Devotion has come in definitely as a path of Sadhana though it is not as yet fully developed. That will come in a later essay, "The Way and the Bhakta." Sri Aurobindo says here, "The passion of love in our self-giving carries us up to him and opens the mystery of his deepest heart of being. Love completes the triple cord of the sacrifice, perfects the true key of the highest secret."

We have to know the Purusha integrally in all his three aspects; the word used in the text is *tattwatah*, "in its true principle." It is the knowledge of the Supreme Purusha which constitutes the true and complete knowledge. Certain metaphysical terms like *adhibhūta*, *adhidaiva*, *adhyātma*, *adhiyajña* and *Visargaḥ* have been introduced and defined in chapter VIII. They sum up briefly the "essential truths of the manifestation of the Supreme Divine in the cosmos." *Adhyātma* is the principle of the self in Nature; *adhibhūta* and *adhidaiva* are the outward and inward phenomena of being; *Visargaḥ* is the creative impulse and energy; *adhiyajña* is the secret of *Karma* and *Yajña* in the world. "By *Adhiyajña*, the Lord of Works and Sacrifice, I mean myself, the Divine, the Godhead, the *Purushottama* here secret in the body of all these embodied creatures", says Krishna in the Gita. Within this formula falls all that is existent. We need not dwell on these terms any more here; *Adhibhūta* the *Kshara Bhava*, *Adhidaiva* the *Akshara Bhava* and *Adhiyajña* the *Purushottama*, the three aspects of the Purusha, are clearly indicated here. Sri Aurobindo has dealt with them more exclusively in a special essay. We shall come to it later on. Now we shall content ourselves with citing one important verse from chapter VIII: "A man can attain to the Supreme Purusha only by one-pointed devotion. All becomings are in him and he is in all of them." Sri Aurobindo's words relating to them are, "But in the form and body of the mutable being inhabits the Supreme Godhead. Possessing at once the calm of the immutable existence and the enjoyment of the mutable action there dwells in man the *Purushottama*." In chapter VIII of the Gita there are certain verses relating to a man's soul passing out of the body under different circumstances. In the limited space at our disposal it is best not to go into them. They refer to certain ideas prevalent at the time. We quote only one passage from the text: "Therefore at all times remember Me and fight; for if thy mind and thy understanding are always fixed on and given up to Me, to Me thou shalt surely come. For it is by thinking always of him with a consciousness united with him in the undeviating Yoga of constant practice that one comes to the Divine and Supreme Purusha." It shows that the more or less technical ideas, referred to above, are after all of secondary or even tertiary importance to the Yogi. The essential condition is the constant memory of God in every action in life, even in battle, thus turning the entire life into an uninterrupted Yoga. For the soul that has reached this state, there is no coming back after death. Exhortations like "Therefore, at all times, be a Yogi" or "Remember me and fight" are of the highest importance. The one essential thing is to make the whole being one with the Divine.

A foundation has now been laid on which Sri Krishna is proceeding to open

Arjuna's mind to the knowledge and sight of the integral Divinity and to prepare him for the World-vision of chapter II. The knowledge of *Purushottama*, who is speaking to Arjuna, will now be unveiled to his eyes in such a manner that he cannot but see it. The vision does what it was expected to do. It removes the last vestige of doubt. Arjuna realises clearly that he has to rise out of the ignorance of the ego into the self-knowledge of a divine being. Thus fortified and enlightened he resumes the action from which he has shrunk. But, before he finally undertakes to do Krishna's bidding, the secret of secrets has been imparted to him. The last six chapters of the Gita constitute a recitation by the Teacher in another form of the enlightenment that he has already imparted to his disciple. The knowledge conveyed is the same, "but details and relations are now made prominent and assigned their entire significance." Clearly and prominently and definitely is the relationship between the Supreme Purusha, the Immutable *Akshara Purusha*, the *Jiva* and *Prakriti* brought out. Some rash speculators have in the past attempted to brush aside the six last chapters (at least the major portion) as an interpolation. Sri Aurobindo's exposition of the Gita leaves no room for such speculations. Each block of chapters exercises a definite function in developing the teaching of the scripture and leading it on to its apex in the last few verses of the closing chapter — the disclosure of the Supreme Truth and the complete surrender of Arjuna.

This revelation of the secret of himself, Nature's profoundest mystery, the teacher has been preparing from the beginning. Throughout the preliminary portion, the note has been sounding of an immanent godhead — a Supreme *Ishwara* seated in the heart of man and Nature. Sri Aurobindo puts this note in words thus, "I who am within thee, I who am here in this human body, I for whom all exists, acts, strives, am at once the secret of the self-existent spirit and of the cosmic action. This I is the greater I of whom the largest human personality is only a partial and fragmentary manifestation, Nature itself only an inferior working. This Godhead is not only the highest truth of self and spirit but also of Nature, the secret at once of the individual and the universe. All the works of the *Jiva* are the works of *Prakriti* and behind all her works there is always the *Purusha* whose power she is. Thus all acts which seem to be of the individual belong really to the *Ishwara* who is seated in the heart of all beings and all things. Therefore it is that the individual has to offer up all his works and sacrifice to the Divine." All this has been gone over already and will be repeated later on; but what is emphasised in this part of the text is "All knowledge then becomes an adoration and aspiration, but all works too become an adoration and aspiration....The final release, a passing away from the lower nature to the source of the higher spiritual becoming, is not an extinction of the soul, — only

its forms of ego become extinct, — but a departure of our whole self of knowledge, will and love to dwell no longer in the universal, but in his supracosmic reality, a fulfilment, not an annulment."

In order to make this knowledge clear to Arjuna's understanding the Teacher starts out to explain how God is at once impersonal and personal, how his impersonality presents itself to our thought as a timeless *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda* — Existence, Consciousness and Bliss — and His personality as a "conscious centre of knowledge and work and the joy of multiple self-manifestation." But all this is the Brahman — *Vasudevah sarvam*, says the Gita. God and Nature and *Jiva*, they are the three aspects of the one being. To understand this, Arjuna has to realise the whole Godhead — *Samagram Mām*, says Krishna in the Gita. This is, as set forth in chapter IX, the Supreme mystery — the wisdom of all wisdoms, the secret of all secrets—*Raja vidya Rajaguhyam Pavitram idam uttamam*. It is a pure and supreme knowledge which one can verify by direct spiritual experience, and which is easy to practise when one grasps it. But, for that, faith is necessary. If faith is absent, man lapses into the defect of the lower nature — *aśubham*. A belief in the Divine, secret within us is, needed to enable us to grow into the divine Nature. The last verse of this chapter is a clear call to the disciple to be *manmanā madbhaktah*, *madyaji*, *mat-parāyanah*, and assures him that he will thereby attain to God and be one with him. In this same chapter there are certain verses with a metaphysical flavour. Sri Aurobindo discusses them, but says that they do not really rest on intellectual speculation, but on spiritual experience. We cannot go into that discussion at any length, for want of space, but shall merely indicate its nature. All this mass of becomings always changing and in motion, all these creatures, existences, things breathing and living forms, cannot contain him either in their sum or in their separate existence....It is they that are in him, it is they that live and move in him, and draw their truth from him, they are his becomings, he is their being. Again, the Divine upholds his becomings, he is not in them. "He pervades it all as its self; there is a luminous uninvolved presence of the self-being of God, *mama ātmā*, which is in constant relation with the becoming and brings all its existences into manifestation by his simple presence." These two extracts are really a free translation of the original quoted in the essay.

Sri Aurobindo gives a vivid picture of those who dwell in the divine consciousness. The great-souled who are open to their immanent Divinity "become aware of the highest status of him in which he is master and lord of all existences and yet see that in each existence he is still the supreme Deity and the indwelling Godhead....They see too that as it is his Nature which has become all that is in the universe, everything here is in its inner fact nothing but the one

Divine, all is Vasudeva, and they worship him not only as the supreme Godhead beyond, but here in this world, in his oneness and in every separate being. They see the truth and in this truth they live and act. Him they adore, and serve."

In the next essay, Sri Aurobindo shows how the Gita brings about a clear synthesis of Works, Devotion and Knowledge. Many verses from chapter IX are interpreted in the spirit of this reconciliation. Works and Knowledge have been already synthesised. Here the stress is laid mainly on bhakti and on a loving self-surrender. Love of the Supreme and a total self-giving constitute the straightest and the quickest way to oneness with the Divine. The voice of the divine Teacher calls out to the disciple in unmistakable terms. "This is my word of promise that he who loves me shall not perish." This love of the Supreme is such a wonderful thing that even if a man of very evil conduct turns to God with a sole and entire love, he must be regarded as a saint, for the settled will of endeavour is a right and complete will. Swiftly he becomes a soul of righteousness and obtains eternal peace. By his devotion all his works are turned into an offering to the Highest. The injunction of Sri Krishna is "Whatever thou doest, whatever thou enjoyest, whatever thou sacrificest, whatever thou givest, whatever energy of *tapasya*, of the soul's will, thou puttest forth, make it an offering unto Me." Love and devotion turn the smallest action, the tiniest fact of life, into an acceptable offering, all distinctions due to ego and desire vanish. Man and woman appear equal in the eyes of the Divine lover. The sage priest, the mighty king, the opulent Vaishya, the faithful Sudra, the Pariah, the Chandala, all find the gate of God opening before them when they approach it with a heart of Love.

We have now a clear conception of the Gita's teaching of divine love and devotion in which Knowledge, Works and the heart's longing merge into one. This teaching, the supreme word of the scripture — a brief reiteration of what has been taught so far — appears at the commencement of the tenth chapter, "I will speak this supreme word to thee from my will for thy soul's good, now that thy heart is taking delight in Me." Arjuna, whose heart is full of ecstatic love for his teacher, promptly accepts the word and asks for a direct way of seeing God in all things in Nature. What is needed is a liberating Knowledge, a knowledge of the Supreme in all his aspects. This is emphasised in the following verses. "Hearken to my highest word again." "Neither the gods nor the great Rishis know any birth of me. I am their source and beginning in every way. He who knows me as the unborn without origin, he, free from delusion, is released from all sin." This knowledge opens the way to a greater Yoga — the Yoga of the Will and Intelligence. "The wise hold me for the birth of each and all, hold each and all as developing from Me its action and movement, and so holding

they love and adore Me and I give them the Yoga of the understanding by which they come to Me and I destroy for them the darkness which is born of the ignorance." These results are bound to come from the very nature of the Knowledge and the divine (*Aishwara*) Yoga that proceeds from it — for the light of knowledge has become one with the ecstasy of god-love. This assurance too Arjuna accepts, but, says Sri Aurobindo, "a desire for a deeper constant spiritual realisation has been awakened in his heart and will." And he cries out, "Thou alone O *Purushottama*, knowest thyself by thyself." He knows that this all-important knowledge cannot be attained by the unaided human faculties. He tells Krishna, "Narada and all the Rishis say this of thee; so do the divine seers Asita, Devala and Vyasa. Not only these sages, but Thou thyself sayest it to me." And what the Teacher himself says, the disciple holds for the truth. But he now asks for that permanent inexpressible spiritual realisation of which the mental is only a preliminary or a shadow and without which there cannot be a complete union with the Eternal. Arjuna sees that the acceptance of Vasudeva as all is helping him to get over the perplexity of his half-opened mind; still he asks the teacher for a complete enumeration of the sovereign powers of his becoming.

"Thou shouldst tell me," he says, "of thy divine self-manifestation in thy sovereign power of becoming, all without exception, nothing omitted, — the *Vibhuti*s by which thou pervadest the worlds and peoples. How shall I know thee, O Yogin, by thinking of thee everywhere at all moments and in what permanent becoming should I think of thee?" Here, says Sri Aurobindo, "we get an indication of something which has been developed later on by Shaktism and Vaishnavism in a greater intensity of vision, man's possible joy of the Divine in the world-existence, the universal Ananda, the play of the Mother, the sweetness and beauty of God's *lilā*."

Krishna agrees to put forth the forms or his manifestation in the world, but warns Arjuna that his reply is bound to be incomplete as these forms are innumerable. Each form symbolises some sovereign power of becoming, *Vibhuti*. "Yes," he says, "I will tell thee of my divine *Vibhuti*s, but only in some of my principal pre-eminences and by way of indication so that thou canst most readily see the power of the Godhead. For there is no end to God's self-extension in the universe — *Nasti anto vistarasya me*. Throughout the tenth chapter of the scripture there is a summary of the principal indications of the divine force in the world. These are set forth in a certain order. The enumeration is prefaced by the statement, "I am the soul immanent in all becomings, I am their beginning, middle and end." If our vision is not blurred by difference in quality and quantity, we are bound to see all things in the manifest world as *Vibhuti*s of the one all-

pervading Soul — the Yogin of the great Yoga. Krishna says that he is Time, the essence of the whole cosmic movement — *Akshayah Kālah*. Not only that. He is the all-snatching Death and he is the birth, too, of all that shall come into being. I am, says that Godhead, Vishnu among the Adityas, Siva among the Rudras, Prahlad among the Titans and so on and on, naming the Airavat elephant, Uchchaisravas the horse, Kamadhanu the cow, Vasuki the snake, the Sun, the Moon, the Ocean, the Himalayas. Sri Aurobindo's summing up is brilliant. "Then among all these living beings, cosmic godheads, superhuman and human and subhuman creatures and amid all these qualities, powers and objects the chief, the head, the greatest in quality of each class is a special power of the becoming of the Godhead." How sweeping the enumeration of Krishna is, would appear from the following verses. "I am mind among the senses...I am the qualities of mind and character and body and action. I am glory and speech and memory and intelligence and steadfastness and forgiveness, the energy of the energetic and the strength of the mighty. I am resolution and perseverance and victory... I am the letter 'A' among letters...the sacred syllable OM among words... I am all the powers of the human being and all the energies of the universe and its creatures." Then there are those in whom the powers of the Divine rise to the utmost heights, His special *Vibhūtis* — "I am Rama among warriors, Krishna among the Vrishnis, Arjuna among the Pandavas ... I am Ushanas among the seer-poets, I am Bhṛigu among the great Rishis ... I am Vyasa among the sages." And the Teacher winds up thus. "But what need is there of a multitude of details for this knowledge? ... Take it thus, that I am here in this world and everywhere, I am in all and I constitute all."

Sri Aurobindo discusses the theory of the *Vibhūti* in a separate essay. That elaborate discussion is somewhat outside the scope of this article. We give here a short extract which contains the pith of this essay. "The vision of the World-Purusha and the divine command to action is the culminating point to which he (Arjuna) was being led. That is already imminent; but without the knowledge now given to him though the *Vibhūti Yoga* it would not bring with it its full meaning." Arjuna himself is a *Vibhūti*, he is a friend and disciple of Krishna, his chosen instrument in the great struggle for the establishment of the kingdom of righteousness. The all-important self-knowledge has been given to him, he is getting ready for the vision of the *Vishva Purusha*, which will fully equip him for receiving the Supreme Secret. Krishna appears unto his disciple as the universal Purusha, Time the destroyer, in response to the latter's request. Arjuna now knows that the divine Conscious Soul is the hidden Truth of all cosmic appearances. But he is not satisfied yet, "he would see too the very form and body of this Godhead, if that be possible. ...He asks of the Master of the Yoga

to discover his very imperishable Self to the eye of Yoga."

But this form is not visible to the human eye. The Teacher gives to his disciple the divine vision saying, "By your own eye you cannot see that form of mine. I give you the divine eye. See my *Aishwara Yoga*". It is the sight of the One in the Many, the Many in the One, — and all are the One. The Supreme Form is then made visible. The language of the Gita is superbly poetic. Sri Aurobindo's rendering makes it still more so. "It is that of the infinite Godhead whose faces are everywhere and in whom are all the wonders of existence, who multiplies unendingly all the many marvellous revelations of his being, a world-wide Divinity seeing with innumerable eyes, speaking from innumerable mouths, armed for battle with numberless divine uplifted weapons, glorious with divine ornaments of beauty, robed in heavenly raiment of deity, lovely with garlands of divine flowers, fragrant with divine perfumes. Such is the light of this body of God as if a thousand suns had risen at once in heaven. The whole world multitudinously divided and yet unified is visible in the body of the God of Gods." Amazed and thrilled, Arjuna gazed at the vision and, with bent head and joined hands, spoke thus. "I see all the gods in thy body, O God, and different companies of beings, Brahma the creating lord seated in the Lotus, and the Rishis and the race of the divine Serpents. I see numberless arms and bellies and eyes and faces, I see thy infinite forms on every side, but I see not thy end nor thy middle nor thy beginning. O Lord of the universe, O Form universal, I see thee crowned and with thy mace and thy discus, hard to discern because thou art a luminous mass of energy on all sides of me, an encompassing blaze, a sun-bright fire-bright Immeasurable. Thou art the supreme Immutable whom we have to know, thou art the high foundation and abode of the universe, thou art the imperishable guardian of the eternal laws, thou art the sempiternal soul of existence." But the vision is not only gorgeous and resplendent, it is terrifying, an image of the grim Destroyer. Arjuna, awestruck, describes it at some length. We shall give some idea of that description in a few lines. "This Godhead who embraces the world with his numberless arms and destroys them with his million hands, whose eyes are suns and moons, has a face of blazing fire and is ever burning up the whole universe with the flame of his energy....The kings and the captains and the heroes on both sides of the world-battle are hastening into its tusked and terrible jaws and some are seen with crushed and bleeding heads caught between its teeth of power." Arjuna cries out in fear and anguish, "Salutation to thee, O thou great Godhead, declare to me who thou art." Why does Arjuna, the hero of the heroes, quail before this dread vision? It is human nature. The mind of man, naturally, turns away from the Terrible and he hides his head in the sand as does an ostrich hoping that, not seeing, it may not be

seen. The frailty of the human heart shirks an encounter with the whole truth, the awful truth, the dreadful truth. The pacifist, the sentimental idealist, the raw religionist, is ever seeking to twist away from the stern facts of life. But Krishna is not going to countenance any feeble shrinkings in his friend. He must know "God the bountiful and prodigal creator, God the helpful, strong and benignant preserver as also God the devourer and destroyer." Therefore the Teacher says in reply to the question of his disciple: — "I am Time, the waster of the peoples, arisen and increased here with a will to destroy the nations. Even without thee, all these warriors shall cease to be, who are standing arrayed in the two armies. Therefore arise and get the glory; conquer thy foes and enjoy an opulent domain. By Me, and by none other, already are they slain, do thou become the occasion only. Fight on, thou shalt conquer thy foes." Sri Aurobindo's application of the truth unfolded by Krishna is brilliant: "The nation or community or race which shrinks too long from destroying and replacing its past forms of life, is itself destroyed, rots and perishes and out of its debris other nations, communities and races are formed. By destruction of the old giant occupants man made himself a place upon earth. By destruction of the Titans the gods maintain the continuity of the divine law in the cosmos." Krishna assures his warrior of ultimate victory, but also warns him that he would gain nothing by abstaining from the fight, for in spite of his abstention God's work of destruction would still be accomplished. Sri Aurobindo wants us to read this admonition with Krishna's words to Arjuna in the last chapter, "That which in thy egoism thou dreamest, saying, I will not fight, vain is this thy resolve. Nature shall yoke thee to thy work."

The dread destructive aspect of the Divine, when explained thus by the Teacher, reassures the disciple and with a new understanding he cries out, "Salutation to thee a thousand times over and again, and yet again salutation in front and behind and from every side, for thou art each and all that is. Infinite in might and immeasurable in strength and action, thou pervadest all and art everyone." Suddenly he remembers that he has known this supernal Being familiarly as a man, as a friend and as a comrade and as a relation and himself asks for pardon, "For whatsoever I have spoken to thee in rash vehemence, thinking of thee only as my human friend and companion, O Krishna ... not knowing thy greatness, in negligent error or in love and for whatsoever disrespect was shown by me to thee in jest, on the couch and the seat and in the banquet, alone or in thy presence, I pray forgiveness from thee, the immeasurable." Arjuna is thankful that he has had a glimpse of God as the dire destroyer, but still he is eager to see that other form, "I would see thee even as before, crowned and with thy mace and thy discus. Assume thy four-armed shape, O thousand-

armed, O Form universal." Krishna's beloved friend knows that the Benign is the truth hidden behind the Terrific. In answer to his prayer the Godhead resumes his form of grace and love and sweetness and beauty. But at the same time, he stresses the true meaning of the other mighty Image which he is about to veil, saying, "This that thou hast seen is my supreme shape, my form of luminous energy, the universal, the original which none but thou amongst men has yet seen. I have shown it by my self-Yoga." It is only for the rare highest souls to see. For realising this form at once cosmic and supracosmic, Krishna says, "Be a doer of my works, accept Me as the supreme being and object, become my bhakta, be free from attachment and without enmity to all existences; for such a man comes to Me." The World-Vision thus brings out the supreme importance of bhakti in the Yoga of the Gita.

The twelfth chapter, which is very short, deals with the path of devotion. Arjuna has just been face to face with the widest universal Godhead, and he is called upon to be one with Him by Knowledge and Works and Devotion. Wishing to have his doubts cleared, he asks, "Those devotees who thus by a constant union seek after thee, and those who seek after the unmanifest Immutable, which of these have the greater knowledge of Yoga?" Krishna's reply is clear and emphatic, "Those who found their mind in Me and by constant union, possessed of a supreme faith seek after Me, I hold to be the mostly perfectly in union of Yoga." The orthodox Yoga of Knowledge envisages as its goal *Sāyujya*, immersion in the One Infinite. The Yoga of love and devotion aims at *Sālokya* and *Sāṃipya*, eternally dwelling in God or near him. The Yoga of Works leads to *Sādrishya*, oneness in power of being and nature with God. The Gita embraces all three in a catholic integrality and fuses them into one divine freedom and perfection. Into this oneness with *Purushottam*, Krishna invites his disciple.

(To be continued)

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The Mother Image in Sri Aurobindo

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prema Nandakumar

12. Savitri

We began this pursuit of the mother image in Sri Aurobindo with two words: Mother India.

It has been a very exciting, if exhausting exploration of Sri Aurobindo and his works for this image. With the section on the Divine Mother we had come to the conclusion of our quest.

Or so we thought.

When we study Sri Aurobindo in the background of Indian tradition and the attempts of the rest of the world to come to terms with man, nature and God, there can never be any conclusion. We are committed to the evolutionary movement and there can only be an endless progression. The work of Sri Aurobindo that marks this progression is *Savitri*.

If we think it was difficult for Sri Aurobindo to make real for us the Form-and-Formless Divine Mother, we are mistaken. The real test for him was to give us a reliable, recognisable icon to understand the mother-image. For, faith in the Mother is very important for one who takes up integral yoga. The human being is not easily convinced by visions. Documentation of experienced affirmations thus has a crucial part in any *Darśana*.

Fortunately, though derided for its lack of historical recordation, India has always scored in registering the experiences of man when he encounters nature and God. These take the form of racial records as *itihāsa* (thus it happened) and *purānas* (what happened in ancient times). The Indian was not interested in dates. He was engaged in writing down great thoughts (stone, copper plate, palm leaves, or mere memory) and deeds that enrich the social fabric. As soon as Sri Aurobindo came to India in 1893 after fourteen years as a student in England, he set down to educating himself about Indian heritage. He learnt Indian languages and studied with care the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He translated chosen passages from the epics and also embarked upon retelling

some of the stories into English verse. He must have been astonished that instead of what he had heard about Indian women being second-hand citizens, illiterate, unaccomplished and forever in the shadow of male guardianship, here were women who were accomplished and distinguished themselves in all walks of life. If romantic heroines, they too claimed the reader's respect.

His early retellings of Indian legends were the result of his new found treasure. His excitement is palpable when he wrote to his brother Manomohan about the Indian epic heroines, dedicating to him his poem '*Love and Death*' based on the *Mahabharata* heroine, Pramadvura.¹ Manomohan had written to Sri Aurobindo not to waste his time over Indian themes, and his letter, according to Sri Aurobindo, "contained an unreserved condemnation of Hindu legend as trivial and insipid, a mass of crude and monstrous conceptions, a [lumber-room] of Hindu banalities." He can understand that this impression is inevitable "to a taste nourished on the pure dew and honey of Hellenic tradition." But he had himself come away from that Hellenic haze ever since he took up ancient Indian literature. He had found new powers in these legends. And as early as 1898 Sri Aurobindo had found his role model for a new incarnation:

"Yet are these great figures, are Rama, Sita, Savitrie, merely patterns of moral excellence? I who have read their tale in the swift and mighty language of Valmekie and Vyasa and thrilled with their joys and their sorrows, cannot persuade myself that it is so. Surely Savitrie that strong silent heart, with her powerful and subtly-indicated personality, has both life and charm; surely Rama puts too much divine fire into all he does to be a dead thing, — Sita is too gracious and sweet, too full of human lovingness and loveliness of womanly weakness and womanly strength!"

He had admired Sita and has translated one of the few passages where we actually hear Valmiki's Sita speak boldly and to the point and win her way as well. Yes, she had "womanly strength" but then also "womanly weakness". There were other heroines too from the *Mahabharata* who touched him deeply. He tried quite a few of them as subjects for his narrative poetry, as he wanted to bring out the innate power in these heroines like Chitrangada and Uloupie. He comes to Savitri again: "Or it is again, as in the tale of Savitrie, the passion of a single woman in its dreadful silence and strength pitted against Death, the divorcer of souls". As he wrote to Manmohan in that letter of dedication:

"To take with a reverent hand the old myths and cleanse them of soiling accretions, till they shine with some of the antique strength, simplicity and

solemn depth of beautiful meaning, is an ambition which Hindu poets of today may and do worthily cherish. To accomplish a similar duty in a foreign tongue is a more perilous endeavour.”

But he would do it. However, his involvement in the independence movement drew him away from such exercises. Though he seems to have written a two-part narrative poem on the legend. But this is not available though a draft of 1916 has been discovered. The first part is complete and concludes with Rishi Narad’s prophecy of Sathyavan’s passing. The second draft remains incomplete. Some lines are still recognisable in the complete epic we have on hand but otherwise, it is more of a line drawing for a picture. It follows the *Mahabharata upakhyana* closely. This is how we find Aswapati asking Savitri to change her mind and choose another boy as Sathyavan will die in one year. This is the scene which must have struck a deep chord in Sri Aurobindo’s heart searching for an inspirational icon to put forward the mother-image as an incarnation of the Divine Mother. Savitri says:

“Once I have chosen, once the garland fell.
Whether for death or life, for joy or tears,
Two hearts have joined and shall not be divorced
By human wills or by the gods’ strong hands.”

Sri Aurobindo was searching for this firmness and readiness to face the perils of death, and no other epic heroine rose to this stature in his eyes. For instance, he did not concur with Romesh Chunder Dutt’s portrayal of the Savitri legend in his retelling for here Savitri is seen weeping and so Dutt “took away the very strength of which Savitri is built.”ⁱⁱ Savitri does not speak a single unnecessary word in the Mahabharata tale nor does she shed tears at any time. She is portrayed as a lady with a stern purpose, poised, and at the same time one who wins the heart of her husband, her in-laws and fellow residents in the forest by her affectionate ways. Never a pathetic suppliant, even Yama cannot unnerve her. She does not ask for any boon from Yama: it is he, the heavenly Yama-Dharma who gives her the boons. As they walk together in the beyond behind the ‘*prana*’ of Satyavan in Yama’s noose, Yama is pleased at the way this ideal housewife also transcends her duties and becomes the protectress and benefactress of her natal family as well as the family of Satyavan. He is pleased with her and so when he releases Satyavan’s life, he blesses the young couple a long life of marital togetherness and happiness. Sri Aurobindo was also no doubt aware, since returning to India, that Savitri was a living presence

for our households. Her struggle and victory continue to be evoked millennia after it was recorded in the *Mahabharata*.

So here was a heroic girl who has never been forgotten and was already an icon to inspire people with an unshakeable faith both in personal endeavour as also the grace of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo wanted to trace a path for earth-bound mortals so that they could reach the Life Divine. So he chose the path taken by Savitri. When he had almost completed his epic poem the girl-wife of the *Mahabharata* had also become the universal Mother who brings the assurance of immortality to the children of the earth.

Vyasa has given a clear clue when he shows Savitri as being born by the grace of the Divine Mother Savitri. Goddess Savitri assures Aswapati: “*kanyaa tejaswini saumya kshiprameva bhavishyati*”. In fact, the heroine Savitri is older even than the Mahabharata for the *Upakhyana* is an ancient story recalled and retold for the Pandavas by Rishi Markandeya. Indeed, she is associated with the Vedas and that is why Sri Aurobindo refers to the story being one of the symbolic myths found in the Vedic cycle. Accordingly she is seen as the Divine Word, the *Divya Vak*. Studying the hymns to the Sun (*Surya*), Sri Aurobindo finds that the rays of the sun indicate the multi-pronged activities of Truth-Consciousness, *Vijnāna*. Since our human mind is not self-luminous, the sun’s rays create a triple world of ascension for us to improve and transform ourselves and reach out to the Supra-mental state of being. The three worlds are:

the sensational, aesthetic and emotional mind
the pure intellect
divine intelligence

The light of these worlds (*trini rocanani*) comes down to our physical being and re-formats the physical consciousness as the Vedic *parthivani rajansi*, the three earthly realms of light. These three earths are created by Surya Savitri. Here Sri Aurobindo tells us that what is created by Savitri is actually what is brought forth from ourselves by energising ourselves through *tapasya*.

“Savitri by the Truth is the Creator, but not in the sense of a fabrication or mechanical forming of things. The root of the word means an impulsion, a loosing forth or sending out, — the sense also of the ordinary word for creation, *sr̥ṣṭi*, — and so a production. The action of the causal Idea does not fabricate, but brings out by *Tapas*, by the pressure of consciousness on its own being, that which is concealed in it, latent in potentiality and in truth

already existent in the Beyond.”¹

The Truth-Consciousness helps us reach out to Ananda. According to Sri Aurobindo, the enjoyment of our existence when placed in the Truth-Consciousness is the solar power, *Bhaga Savitri*. This Ananda, in its turn helps us arrive at the truth of things. Thus, the concept of Savitri as the transformative Divine Power who strengthens us to face the vicissitudes of the world is already in the Vedas.

The power of the Sun, the *Sauragni*, as an impeller that brings out the powers in the human being and transforms what is human in him to the divine must have been interwoven with the actual experiences of our ancients and at some moment of time, the legend of Savitri seems to have been concretised. The process must have taken several centuries. However, in Vyasa’s telling, the legend has already acquired a finished perfection, the inspired utterance of a Rishi.

When a girl child is born, Aswapati names her Savitri. She grows up to be a divine damsel (*deva kanya*) and since she is very brilliant, no suitor dares to ask for her hand. Aswapati asks her to go and choose her husband. She chooses Satyavan, and refuses to change her mind when Rishi Narad reveals the unhappy truth that he has only one year to live. Throughout the legend, Vyasa uses choice words in describing Savitri. She performs a *tri-rattra vrata* before the year comes to an end, and is seen as *Dhyaana-yoga-paraaayanaa*, one who had entered the Yoga of Meditation. And at the conclusion she is referred to as *niyama vrata samsiddha mahaabhaaga pativrata*, one who has performed her *vrata* properly.

The gist of the five *dharma vachanas* spoken by her to Yama make a compendium for faultless living. One must have self-discipline to become an achiever. Those who do not have self-possession cannot follow *dharma*. Following one’s *dharma* is the only excellent way of life. *Sat-sangha* is most important to achieve a blameless life. The finest components of *dharma* are not to have malice towards anyone, not hurt anyone in thought or deed and always give charity. One should be kind even to the enemy. Men put their trust in sages more than in themselves for sages never fail to help. The sages do not have ill will or selfishness and never regret the good they have done. Hence sages are the protectors of the world.

At the end of the legend, the way in which Savitri gently guides Satyavan back to the hermitage is described beautifully by Vyasa. When the *Matri-hridaya* which is nature’s gift to woman is strengthened by a woman’s self-

discipline and service-oriented life, she becomes truly the Goddess Supreme.

Was there a need to give this story which lends itself to questionings (can a dead person return alive?) when the transformative yoga can be explained and taught? Sister Subbulakshmi, introducing her remarkable commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* has given the answer:

“Our *Puranas* have a twyfold significance: the internal and the external. The reason for this double-approach is that it should be of use to all people who are in different states of consciousness. If the high truths of Hindu religion are written openly, many people would miss the deep ideas imbedded there. But when the idea is presented as a story, first it is read and enjoyed and even as one’s mind becomes mature slowly, one begins to seek the truth of the tale.”

Sri Aurobindo had arrived at the great truths of Hindu religion not merely by studies but also by taking to yoga. He has presented the argument regarding the next evolutionary step in his *The Life Divine*. *The Synthesis of Yoga* records the yogic methodology by which the argument can become an experienced reality. But how to convey the incandescent truths to the common man? Sri Aurobindo took a cue from the ancients and has presented the argument and the methodology through the story of Savitri. He had chosen the legend because it has Vedic inspirations. And the heroine was a burning brazier of yoga as indicated by the words used by Vyasa to describe Savitri (like *taponvita*, *dhyanyogaparaayana*) who strengthened herself through yoga and was absolutely calm at the moment of crisis, never giving way to tears. He felt that this is the woman-power which represented the Divine and could save mankind today.

Hence Sri Aurobindo’s heroine is a descendent of Vyasa’s *upakhyana* as well as those innumerable oral narratives which have guarded her as a unique Shakti. The avatar has to be on the earth among living beings, yet remain divine as representing the Supreme. It is interesting that when he chose to give his final message, it was through the mother-image of Savitri. Here is his gift of her living persona:

Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
Voyaging through worlds of splendour and of calm
Overflow the ways of Thought to unborn things.
Ardent was her self-poised unstumbling will;
Her mind, a sea of white sincerity,

¹On the Veda (1956), p.328

Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave. ..
A body like a parable of dawn
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple-door to things beyond.” iii

Can a housewife and her travails be a launching pad for conveying the high reaches of integral yoga? By his choice of the Savitri legend, Sri Aurobindo has proved that nothing can be more perfect and meaningful for tuning the inner and outer spaces to perfection. When the spirit gets reflected in Matter, it is integral yoga. The epic poem *Savitri* helps us in such tuning to the divine. We see her in action in the forest hermitage:

A worshipped empress all once vied to serve,
She made herself the diligent serf of all,
Nor spared the labour of broom and jar and well,
Or close gentle tending or to heap the fire
Of altar and kitchen, no slight task allowed
To others that her woman’s strength might do.
In all her acts a strange divinity shone.
Into a simplest movement she could bring
A oneness with earth’s glowing robe of light,
A lifting up of common acts by love.” (*Savitri*, 4th rev ed, 1993, p.470)

The altar needs fire; the kitchen too. The Seer within, and the physical frame. What is impossible if we have the Seer-Will, Agni showing us the way? He can give us all the riches we want for our material existence as well as for our soul’s sustenance, for Agni is *ratna dhaata*.

So what is the altar and what is the kitchen? Is this where our tracing of the mother-image in Sri Aurobindo led us to? So it is. While the kitchen is our material life, the altar we set up at home may be likened to all that mankind has garnered in terms of religion and spirituality, the symbols, the icons, the myths. The age-old symbol of worshipping in an altar is very much present throughout in *Savitri*. Indeed, one may safely say that the diction of ritualistic worship in an altar is used all over the epic to give a local habitation and a name to the meandering moments of yogic practice and yogic realisation. We have this at the very beginning, in ‘The Symbol Dawn’:

“All grew a consecration and a rite.
.....

The wide-winged hymn of a great priestly wind
Arose and failed upon the altar hills;
The high boughs prayed in a revealing sky.”

Thus do we move from the plane of religion to the plane of spirituality. We need the symbols, we need the altar. Even Savitri needed it at the most challenging moment in her life. Sri Aurobindo describes Savitri as she wakes up on the Fated Day:

“Then silently she rose and service done,
Bowed down to the great goddess simply carved
By Satyavan upon a forest stone.
What prayer she breathed her soul and Durga knew.
Perhaps she felt in the dim forest huge
The infinite Mother watching over her child,
Perhaps the shrouded Voice spoke some still word.” (Ibid, p.561)

The carved Durga is a physical representation of the Divine Mother’s constant guardianship of which Savitri is sure. The Divine Mother as the Indwelling Universal is watching her and is guarding her all the time! For the realised soul, all of creation is the altar!

The poem gives us such altar-spaces throughout the telling, drawing us to a meditative mood by a mere association of ideas. As for instance when Aswapati is at the end of his travels we are given the image of Aswapati’s “living, sacrificed and offered heart / Absorbed in adoration mystical”:

“In the passion of its solitary dream
It lay like a closed soundless oratory
Where sleeps a consecrated argent floor
Lit by a single and untrembling ray
And an invisible Presence kneels in prayer” (Ibid)

One must have a double, integral vision of the body and the Divine’s presence in the body and then there would be no hurdle to our progression in the path of yoga.

Since all of us are sustained by the kitchen in the course of our lives on earth, and at the same time, we guard our altar with loving devotion, Savitri becomes our ideal leader, the avatar who can draw us to the royal path for she never forgot her yoga in the kitchen and in the altar: The “close gentle tending

or to heap the fire / Of altar and kitchen” went on at the appropriate times. It was an integral life all right where she lifted up even the most ordinary gestures by love. One may even say that the “kitchen” and the “altar” have become core-icons in the epic poem. Moving between the two a time comes when the two merge into one meditative whole.

Our Mother referred to the Savitri tale as told by Sri Aurobindo as “the effort of the Divine to divinise the material creation... The creation is plunged in misery, suffering and death. But it can and will be saved through Her (Savitri’s) intervention.” And I believe the Mother.

Such has been the guidance of the Golden Purusha: from Mother India to the Divine Mother.

(Concluded)

Attainment of Immortality – Pt. II Interpretation

(Continued from the previous issue)

Debashish Banerji

In the previous instalment, we considered “the triple transformation” in terms of Savitri’s yoga. The “triple transformation” is a phrase used by Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine* to describe the dynamic structure of his psychological praxis; it gives its name to a chapter in that text. The first transformation is what he calls “the psychic transformation.” It consists in contacting the “soul” or psychic being and bringing it to the front of our existence so as to transform our physical, vital and mental nature by its influence and power. The second transformation is the spiritual or overmental transformation. It consists in the realisation of the cosmic consciousness and its descent into our nature, universalising the mental, vital and physical beings. The third transformation is the transcendental or supramental transformation. This can only be attempted after the first two transformations are complete. This transformation is premised on the crossing of the dividing line between the cosmic Ignorance and the transcendental Truth and the realisation of the supramental consciousness. The supramental consciousness is one in which the experience of indivisible Being is present in all differentiations and thus souls have sovereign power over their media of manifestation, manifesting their eternity in the form of immortality. Clearly this defies the law of the Cosmos, where all life is subject to the “iron law” of Death, since it depends on a material host which cannot sustain beyond a point the complexity needed for the continuance of life, a breakdown which results in death. Savitri, who cannot reconcile herself to Satyavan’s death, is in search of a principle of immortality. Thus, whether she is mentally aware of it or not, it is this supramental consciousness which she seeks. The realisation of the supramental consciousness and its descent into her mind, life and body would constitute the supramental transformation, giving her the power to challenge the laws of the cosmos and replace their falsification of the eternity and the

ⁱSri Aurobindo changed the name to Priyumnada for ease when using the name in an English poem.

ⁱⁱ*Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* First Series, p. 294

ⁱⁱⁱ*Savitri*, Book I, canto ii

oneness with Truth. But for Savitri, this transformation is not achieved in the same way as for others. We remember that Savitri is a Shakti Avatar of the Divine Mother, and carries the supramental consciousness within herself. She needs to manifest it under appropriate conditions and the preparations she has undergone with the first two transformations, has brought her close to this manifestation. In our previous consideration we saw how Savitri is visited by the spectre of Death and goes through the first two transformations in consequence. Here we will see how the supramental transformation is achieved by Savitri through a final confrontation with Death.

The occasion for this third transformation is Satyavan's death. Satyavan's death brings Savitri in contact with the Being who represents Non-Being, the only phenomena of whose Power she has encountered so far. As he appears to claim Satyavan's soul, she readies herself to follow him and retrieve the soul of Satyavan from his grip. To do this she must find a power within herself which exceeds the Cosmic Being, within whose domain Death is authorised to claim all beings. She must find the inner resources to manifest the transcendental and supramental Shakti to whom Being and Non-Being, appearance and disappearance, Life and Death are subsidiary powers, which She deploys creatively and transcends. Book VIII, *The Book of Death*, ends with Satyavan's death and Savitri's anticipation of Death's next move. This canto is followed by Book IX, *The Book of Eternal Night*. This is where the conditions are prepared for Savitri's final transformation.

Towards the Black Void, Book IX, Canto I

The first canto of Book IX begins where Book VIII leaves off. Savitri is waiting immobile by her dead husband, for the next step to reveal itself.

Then suddenly there came on her the change
Which in tremendous moments of our lives
Can overtake sometimes the human soul
And hold it up towards its luminous source.
The veil is torn, the thinker is no more:
Only the spirit sees and all is known.
Then a calm Power seated above our brows
Is seen, unshaken by our thoughts and deeds,
Its stillness bears the voices of the world: (*Savitri*, 4th ed, 1993, p.571)

She is brought into contact with this calm Power "seated above [her] brows",

which we have encountered earlier during the stage of her second or spiritual transformation, when she experienced a shift in her centre of identity, and a power from above her head began to stabilise in her. The crown lotus is the door to the realms of cosmic Mind and to the Knowledge Consciousness beyond the Overmind. Earlier, it was the overmental being that presided over her nature from this lotus. Now, it is the Supramental Power that begins to operate from the crown lotus, bringing Savitri into contact with it.

Immobile, it moves Nature, looks on life.
It shapes immutably its far-seen ends;
Untouched and tranquil amid error and tears
And measureless above our striving wills,
Its gaze controls the turbulent whirl of things.
To mate with the Glory it sees, the spirit grows: (*Ibid*)

The supramental Consciousness-Force, *chit-tapas*, where the One and the Many co-exist as One, the *jivatmans* know themselves to be the multiple self-concentrations of the *paramatman*, is the origin of the individual soul. This is hidden behind a cosmic golden lid in all humans, but Savitri is an embodiment of this Being's *Tapas* and her emergency activates its presence and power from above her crown lotus. Its presence immediately begins to transform her.

The voice of life is tuned to infinite sounds,
The moments on great wings of lightning come
And godlike thoughts surprise the mind of earth. (*Ibid*, pp.571-72)

Though the supramental *jivatman* is the origin of the soul, due to the principle of Division characterising Cosmic Mind, human soul-experience becomes divided into an unmanifest *jivatman* which contains the blueprint of possibilities relating to the qualitative concentration of each soul (a spatial eternity) and a psychic being evolving in relation to cosmic prakriti's evolution through the use of an immanent creative intuition (a temporal eternity). These two seem unconnected, though the dynamic presence of *jivatman* stands behind the psychic being. Occasionally, the *tapas* of the supramental Purusha behind the *jivatman* concentrates the matrix of possibilities in it and sends a fiat of will into the soul-space of the psychic being. Due to the nature of the separation between the Ignorance and the Knowledge (or the Mind and Supermind principles), the appearance of an intimation of the supramental will is experienced as a mystic

romance by the soul. Sri Aurobindo describes this through the image of a crescent tossed into Savitri's soul-space. The crescent moon is especially valued in Islamic cultures, where it comes to stand for the nascent relation of the soul with the Divine – a relation which carries the promise of inevitable fulfilment. It is “tossed” from the transcendental and thus comes from beyond the domain of the known and the unknown, seeming to “float in a bright void.” It is the mysterious signature of the unpredictable Person, whose action nonetheless carries the ring of inevitability, the integral *mantra*. Its integrality has a direct action on all the consciousness-media of the cosmos, down to the physical. The language Sri Aurobindo uses to describe such an event is concrete and sensuous. It refers to the *ananda* of “ravished” thought and a number of forms of physical bliss which he enumerates in his *Record of Yoga* — the *vishayananda* and a hinted *maithunananda*. In the intensity of the “fiery flood” one senses also *raudrananda*. A direct transforming action reshapes the inner being, rapidly preparing a more advanced prakritic vessel, that will be able to sustain the promised/missioned evolutionary leap.

Into the soul's splendour and intensity
A crescent of miraculous birth is tossed,
Whose horn of mystery floats in a bright void.
As into a heaven of strength and silence thought
Is ravished, all this living mortal clay
Is seized and in a swift and fiery flood
Of touches shaped by a Harmonist unseen. (Ibid, p.572)

The source of the inevitability of the unpredictable action is highlighted here. It is the Harmonist unseen, who is conscious of His identity with all things at the same time and hence the perfect harmony of its actions arise from its wholeness that inhabits all things. All in oneself is harmonised and tuned to all in the cosmos, there is an integrality expressed through it. We feel ourselves made one in nature and one with all things that are.

A new sight comes, new voices in us form
A body of the music of the Gods.
Immortal yearnings without name leap down,
Large quiverings of godhead seeking run
And weave upon a puissant field of calm
A high and lonely ecstasy of will.
This in a moment's depths was born in her. (ibid)

The transformative action continues to prepare the new vessel by motivating new capacities and new aspirations. The harmony metaphor is further concretised as a physically transformative agent preparing a body that will bear divine harmonies, the music of the Gods. At the same time, the Divine Will translates itself into psychic aspirations and unites with them individualising the Action. Savitri experiences this change of being and change of nature. She also now experiences the supramental Purusha and Shakti replacing the overmental as the presiding deities in her crown *chakra*. However, it doesn't enter her at this point, nor does it reveal itself as her true identity. The supramental consciousness starts influencing her nature from her crown *chakra*.

A Presence was there that filled the listening world;
A central All assumed her boundless life.
A sovereignty, a silence and a swiftness,
One brooded over abysses who was she.
As in a choric robe of unheard sounds
A Force descended trailing endless lights;
Linking Time's seconds to infinity, (Ibid, pp.572-73)

The supramental consciousness links the relative and absolute worlds; and it links time and eternity.

Illimitably it girt the earth and her:
It sank into her soul and she was changed (Ibid, p.573)

This completes the basis of Savitri's third transformation. It occurs in stages, at first through her coming into contact with this consciousness, then in its shaping influence on her inner and outer nature, and finally its mergence and realised identity with her psychic being. Its transcendental and cosmic presence becomes active in her crown lotus, shapes her nature to be able to receive it and then descends into her soul becoming her individualised dynamic essence, ready to interact with her life circumstances. Linking her personal consciousness with itself, it then reveals itself in a symbolic supramental form, which is her true identity established above her head in the crown *chakra*. This essence of the third transformation sets Savitri's personal stage for her debate with Death, her struggle with the embodied form of the Inconscient on earth.

Then like a thought fulfilled by some great word
That mightiness assumed a symbol form:

Her being's spaces quivered with its touch,
It covered her as with immortal wings;
On its lips the curve of the unuttered Truth,
A halo of Wisdom's lightnings for its crown,
It entered the mystic lotus in her head,
A thousand-petalled home of power and light.
Immortal leader of her mortality,
Doer of her works and fountain of her words,
Invulnerable by Time, omnipotent,
It stood above her calm, immobile, mute.

All in her mated with that mighty hour,
As if the last remnant had been slain by Death
Of the humanity that once was hers. (Ibid)

This being and power become identified with her psychic being and assume the centre of her identity in her crown *chakra*. This foundation initiates a further supramental transformation of her nature. This transformation occurs in Savitri through its possession of the different centres of her mystic *chakras*, just as the psychic transformation had earlier occurred in her. But in this case, the transformation does not effect itself immediately or instantaneously. She receives at first the action of this power from her crown *chakra* as an *adesh*, an influence and a controlling action on the instruments of her nature. But when her struggle with Death reaches an aporetic stage where all theoretical arguments are at an impasse, Death intimates to Savitri that all, in the final analysis, is a question of power. The truth of an argument lies in its demonstration. Savitri then calls upon the power in her crown *chakra* with which she is identified, and it enters into all the mystic centres of her being for effecting the completion of her third transformation.

And Savitri looked on Death and answered not.
Almost it seemed as if in his symbol shape
The world's darkness had consented to Heaven-light (ibid, p.664)

This is the culmination of her debate with Death, Book X, Canto IV

And God needed no more the Inconscient's screen.
A mighty transformation came on her.
A halo of the indwelling Deity,

The Immortal's lustre that had lit her face
And tented its radiance in her body's house,
Overflowing made the air a luminous sea. (Ibid)

There is a flooding of light in her very physicality. The cells of her body express the intrinsic luminosity of Truth, an aspect of the supramental transformation of the physical.

In a flaming moment of apocalypse
The Incarnation thrust aside its veil. (Ibid)

The truth of Savitri as the Supramental Shakti incarnated now reveals itself in her physical appearance. Sri Aurobindo then goes through a description of the entry of this power into each of her mystic centres. He begins with the three mind centres. As we saw, it had already taken its station in the crown *chakra*, now it descends into the *chakra* between the eyebrows, the centre of the mental will and the *chakra* in the throat which is the centre of creative expression. Entering into the *chakra* of mental will, it transforms it into a centre of invincible willing, the operator of the divine will. Entering her throat, it transforms her speech into the divine Word, which is the source of all creation.

The Power that from her being's summit reigned,
The Presence chambered in lotus secrecy,
Came down and held the centre in her brow
Where the mind's Lord in his control-room sits;
There throned on concentration's native seat
He opens that third mysterious eye in man,
The Unseen's eye that looks at the unseen,
When Light with a golden ecstasy fills his brain
And the Eternal's wisdom drives his choice
And eternal Will seizes the mortal's will. (Ibid, p.665)

Sri Aurobindo has a sonnet called *The Golden Light* in which he describes how the supramental Shakti enters the various *chakras* bringing a golden power of supreme divinity into the human instruments.

It stirred in the lotus of her throat of song,
And in her speech throbbed the immortal Word,
Her life sounded with the steps of the world-soul

Moving in harmony with the cosmic Thought.
As glides God's sun into the mystic cave
Where hides his light from the pursuing gods,
It glided into the lotus of her heart
And woke in it the Force that alters Fate. (Ibid)

Here we see it descending further into the heart. There has already been a mergence with the psychic being, but here it is the emotional centre that is transformed and becomes the possessor of a "Force that alters Fate," the power to change cosmic law. In Sri Aurobindo's *Record of Yoga*, he refers to the direct action of the supramental will as *aishwarya*, power of the *Ishwara* or Godhead. Operating through the transformed centre of mental will, it is known as *ishita*; and operating through the transformed vital centres it is known as *vashita*. The transformation of the heart centre makes it the possessor of the invincible *vashita*, the invincible Will-to-Love. He continues, further describing the transformative action on the remaining *chakras*.

After this complete transformation, Savitri becomes conscious of Death as her own instrument; and she is empowered to declare this to Death. At first she hails him because he is a god. He is also a representative of the Supreme Being but due to the veiling power of the Ignorance, makes the mistake of taking himself as absolute. But he is not absolute, only an emanation and power of the Transcendental Being. As such, his actions, appearances and disappearances are under the control of the transcendental Shakti, which is embodied in Savitri. Since all emanations of the transcendental Being are granted a relative independence within the Ignorance, they can take themselves to be Absolute. This is particularly so in the case of Death, who subjects all things in the Ignorance to his Law. But Savitri represents the intervention of the Knowledge (*Vidya*) principle, which is at the origin of the Ignorance, and can challenge and dominate the autonomy of Death. She says

"I hail thee, almighty and victorious Death,
Thou grandiose Darkness of the Infinite.
O Void that makest room for all to be,
Hunger that gnawest at the universe
Consuming the cold remnants of the suns
And eatst the whole world with thy jaws of fire, (Ibid, p.666)

Thus she acknowledges him as the Great Destroyer who can erase all manifested being. Then she refers to him as —

Inconscience, carrier of the seeds of thought, (Ibid)

and shows him his truth in the Ignorance, as the door through which new powers of Being emerge in the evolving universe, an instrument of the Divine Shakti.

Nescience in which All-Knowledge sleeps entombed
And slowly emerges in its hollow breast
Wearing the mind's mask of bright Ignorance.
Thou art my shadow and my instrument. (Ibid)

Savitri now speaks with the voice of the supramental avatar and addresses Death as one of her own powers, given this form for a purpose.

I have given thee thy awful shape of dread
And thy sharp sword of terror and grief and pain
To force the soul of man to struggle for light
On the brevity of his half-conscious days.
Thou art his spur to greatness in his works,
The whip to his yearning for eternal bliss,
His poignant need of immortality. (Ibid)

Death's purpose is shown to be one which challenges the soul to evolve. Life struggles to persist against the torpor of material Inconscience; the human being sinks into inertia, or becomes too comfortable were it not for the constant goad of suffering and death. This meaning of Death can also be seen in Sri Aurobindo's treatment of fate and pain in the *Book of Fate* in *Savitri*. Here Death is shown as a power of Spirit and an agency by which the evolution of consciousness is fuelled in an inconscient world.

Live, Death, awhile, be still my instrument.
One day man too shall know thy fathomless heart
Of silence and the brooding peace of Night
And grave obedience to eternal Law
And the calm inflexible pity in thy gaze. (Ibid)

The divinity of Death will also be realised by human beings after they experience their identity with the Transcendent. But in the meantime Death's

status as a relative agency and not an absolute power, must be realised. Savitri presents this truth to Death as through a mirror and commands him to step aside.

But now, O timeless Mightiness, stand aside
And leave the path of my incarnate Force.
Relieve the radiant God from thy black mask:
Release the soul of the world called Satyavan
Freed from thy clutch of pain and ignorance
That he may stand master of life and fate,
Man's representative in the house of God,
The mate of Wisdom and the spouse of Light,
The eternal bridegroom of the eternal bride." (Ibid)

The affirmation of this great hymn of Being, of delight and of consciousness, of the divinity of manifestation, and the immortality of things, is what Savitri demands from Death. But Death does not step aside; habituated to supremacy, he makes his last stand. Savitri towers around him and covers him with her light. After Savitri speaks thus to Death, she lights the fire of her Consciousness within him, revealing herself to be the power of Being within the Non-Being. Sri Aurobindo stages this last stand:

The Two opposed each other face to face.
His being like a huge fort of darkness towered;
Around it her light grew, an ocean's siege.
Awhile the Shade survived defying heaven:
Assailing in front, oppressing from above,
A concrete mass of conscious power, he bore
The tyranny of her divine desire. (Ibid, p.667)

In other words, he is assimilated by Savitri and dissolved into her. His cosmic existence, which he takes to be absolute, is shown to be a charge given to him; his sense of self-importance is defied and he is transformed by the transcendent supramental power through Savitri. She reveals to him her superiority, her originating power over him.

A pressure of intolerable force
Weighed on his unbowed head and stubborn breast;
Light like a burning tongue licked up his thoughts,

Light was a luminous torture in his heart,
Light coursed, a splendid agony, through his nerves;
His darkness muttered perishing in her blaze. (Ibid)

The power of Light, the power of Being, the power of Substance and of Ecstasy – all these are what Savitri incarnates and by her Divine Shakti she transfigures this shape of the destroying Night.

Her mastering Word commanded every limb
And left no room for his enormous will
That seemed pushed out into some helpless space
And could no more re-enter but left him void. (Ibid)

This defeat of Death by Savitri leaves her victorious over one of the foundational principles of the Ignorance (*Avidya*), the right of Matter to remain Inconscient and to deny life any permanent habitation. Savitri achieves this through her supramental transformation, demonstrating her mastery over the laws of the Ignorance and Falsehood and making possible the transformation of Ignorance. Symbolically achieving this transformation in her life she opens the gates for a Divine Life on earth.

(Concluded)

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

Talk on the Mother's Mahasamadhi

Udar Pinto

I have come at the invitation of Seyril and others to give a talk but I have come not to talk to you but with you and to find out things together.

First let us see what happened to the Mother on the 17th November and the events leading up to it. Pranab has given a talk at the Playground on this and as you were not allowed to attend I asked him to give me a typescript of his talk and he said he would but evidently forgot to do so. Pranab spoke largely of things that happened on the surface. He made it quite clear himself that he would speak only of what he saw and give his own impressions of it. So he talked of the Mother's physical condition, of how She first retired on the 2nd April, 1973, and then started seeing some people again and finally stopped seeing anyone from the 21st May. Then the Mother became very withdrawn and was only concerned, if at all, with elementary things like food, walking, etc. All these matters are not so important to talk of now and, as Pranab's talk will appear in print, all can read it some time. But it is important to look at his conclusions.

To begin with, I feel he made an omission which is very significant for me. He did not do this deliberately but it is nonetheless meaningful. He explained how the Mother, being quite withdrawn and fighting constantly from within for the physical transformation, was quite unaware of anything else happening around Her. Yet, on the morning of 15th August, I understand, She suddenly asked what date it was and when informed of it and asked if She would give Darshan that day. She agreed. So one can see how alive was Her consciousness to things that really are important. She was not occupied with elementary bodily needs.

Another point — and this is of the utmost importance — is Pranab's conclusion that although the Mother fought to the very end for the transformation of Her present physical body, it was the natural process of death that finally prevailed.

On this point I would like to dwell. The Mother had always foreseen the

possibility that She might have to leave Her body. This is clear in some of the things She has said as they appeared in the *Bulletin*. And also Sri Aurobindo has written of this clearly in *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, in the chapter of "The Divine Body" and the next one. He has shown two possibilities. One is of transforming the present human body into a Superhuman body — a body still human but a super one. The other relates to a Supramental body. The Superhuman body would be a big step towards the Supramental body. But the Supramental body would be realised by a new process — not by that of birth and growth as now but by some sort of materialisation into the physical from a subtle stuff, a kind of projection. The process has yet to be established and so is not yet known.

Now my own feeling is that the Mother first tried for Her body to become super-human almost up to the very end but at last She decided to give up the attempt and made the second choice. I base this feeling on what Pranab said of the Mother's last moments: how She who had evidently and visibly been fighting for transformation suddenly became quiet and peaceful for sometime before the end. This, I feel, is the moment She took Her momentous decision. I myself cannot accept that what happened to the Mother was not the result of Her decision. It is quite contrary to all I knew of Her from personal intimate knowledge. You know that for many years together with Pranab we used to have our lunch with the Mother and, with Pavitra added, we had dinner with Her. At these times She told us many things — sometimes at dinner She spoke for an hour or two. Thus there are many things I know personally of what the Mother said. So I can affirm from this knowledge that She left Her body by Her own decision and not by the usual process of nature.

Now the question arises: "Why didn't the Mother choose the second alternative in the first place but, instead, and for so long, the painful part of transforming Her present body?" I feel it was because the way of transformation, if once achieved by Her, would open the path to others to follow — those who were prepared to do so, whereas the other way of projecting a Supramental body is still unknown and that means it would be very delaying and so She deliberately chose a path easier for those of us who want to follow Her. This entailed a terrible and unbelievable physical suffering for Her body and this was Her Great Sacrifice for us for which we must be eternally grateful. The path of transformation is itself quite long. First, the physical cells have to stop decaying. Each cell, of which the body is built up, has an inbuilt principle of growth and then of decay — senility. The first step is to stop this decay and the second to establish again a regrowth. The whole process would take two to three hundred years, the Mother once explained to me, but even such a period

would be quite short for so tremendous a change. The first step is itself very difficult and that is what She set out to do. But the task was formidable as the Mother had not only to contend with the established laws of nature but also with all the weaknesses and follies of all of us. We did not help Her at all but rather hindered Her with our troubles and problems and, worst of all, our quarrels. Our filth and dirt we threw upon Her and, as our Mother, She took everything upon Herself from Her children, blind and stupid though we were.

A very striking passage from *Savitri* makes very clear the Mother's work for the transformation. There Narad speaks about Savitri to the Queen whose daughter she is. I shall recite the passage to you:

A day may come when she must stand unhelped
On a dangerous brink of the world's doom and hers,
Carrying the world's future on her lonely breast,
Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole
To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge.
Alone with death and close to extinction's edge,
Her single greatness in that last dire scene
Must cross alone a perilous bridge in Time
And reach an apex of world-destiny
Where all is won or all is lost for man.
In that tremendous silence lone and lost
Of a deciding hour in the world's fate,
In her soul's climbing beyond mortal time
When she stands sole with Death or sole with God
Apart upon a silent desperate brink,
Alone with her self and death and destiny
As on some verge between Time and Timelessness
When being must end or life rebuild its base,
Alone she must conquer or alone must fall.
No human aid can reach her in that hour,
No armoured God stand shining at her side.
Cry not to heaven, for she alone can save.
For this the silent Force came missioned down;
In her the conscious Will took human shape:
She only can save herself and save the world.
O queen, stand back from that stupendous scene,
Come not between her and her hour of Fate.
Her hour must come and none can intervene:

Think not to turn her from her heaven-sent task,
Strive not to save her from her own high will.
Thou hast no place in that tremendous strife;
Thy love and longing are not arbiters there,
Leave the world's fate and her to God's sole guard.
Even if he seems to leave her to her lone strength,
Even though all falters and falls and sees an end
And the heart fails and only are death and night,
God-given her strength can battle against doom
Even on a brink where Death alone seems close
And no human strength can hinder or can help.
Think not to intercede with the hidden Will,
Intrude not twixt her spirit and its force
But leave her to her mighty self and Fate.

Here I should like you to mark the words: "Even though... the heart fails." As you know, the cause of the Mother's passing is officially declared to have been heart failure.

Now rather than dwell too long on what has happened let us see what we have to do. This, you will all agree with me, is much more important. So I shall stop at this stage and invite questions on the first part before going on to the next. All right? Questions, please.

Question:

Can it be said that, by the Mother's not transforming Her present body, there is a setback for man?

Answer:

I do not feel it so. Because we did not collaborate, the Mother had to take the other alternative. So there is no setback. It is only that we have to wait for the new process to be developed.

Question:

Should we now stop trying for physical transformation ourselves?

Answer:

I do not see it that way. The Mother has constantly stressed the limitless possibilities that exist. She has said that it is a habit of the human mind to pose two alternatives — this or that — but the spiritual view is global and sees endless possibilities. In this view there is no reason why someone should not now succeed in transforming a human body to a Superhuman one. The Mother

has opened a pathway for us to follow, by Her great work. The Divine may take someone to His end.

Question:

Why did not Mother announce Her decision?

Answer:

It is not the way of Sri Aurobindo or the Mother to make announcements. The Mother has given messages to this effect: “No words — Acts”, “Don’t announce. Realise”, etc. Sri Aurobindo also did not announce to us His decision to leave His body though He had told the Mother about it. He said that He had to pass through the experience of death to be able to work on this side. That is why all the medical treatment given to him was quite ineffective against His decision.

Now let us come to what we have to do. But first let us see what we should not do though this way seems a negative approach.

The Mother has given several warnings on what we should avoid and I remember many things She said. But I will, for this meeting, reduce it to three serious warnings.

First, the Mother warned us against trying to see and judge things and happenings by the mind. This is what we continue to do — even here at this meeting. We should rather go deep within ourselves, right to the Soul or Spirit, and try to understand, or rather experience, from there. Let this be our constant aspiration.

The second warning is that we should avoid strictly the dangerous tendency of turning all of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s work into a religion. This tendency is pretty strong now. Also, talking of the formation of priest sects, the Mother often pointed out to me how priest sects were already in formation here for arranging flowers on the Samadhi, for sweeping around the Samadhi, etc.

The third and most serious warning, in my view, is that some of us will try to become Gurus. I remember once Pranab and I, while taking food with the Mother, were making, by way of a joke, a list of “Guru types” in the Ashram. The Mother saw us laughing and asked us to tell Her what we were doing. We were caught and had to tell Her. She laughed. Later She said to me, “And what about you, Udar?” I said, “Mother, please save me from this pit. It is not in my nature to become a guru but please see that I do not ever fall into such a pit.” The Mother answered, “Yes, Udar, it is not in your nature but I warn you that if ever you do fall into such a temptation then wherever you are I will come and break your head.” “Mother,” I prayed, “please do so. I will deserve to have my head broken.” This warning also may go unheeded by some.

Now, as to what we should do, I feel that first we should try to establish a harmony in our working together, all of us, in the Ashram, in Auroville and between the Ashram and Auroville and all else. But the harmony should not be attempted on the level of ideas however noble. See the example of the United Nations Organisation. It will never succeed at that level. Nor will it succeed for long at the level of the heart which, Sri Aurobindo says, is the seat of conflicting passions — love but also hate and jealousy. It is only on the basis of the Spirit that it will succeed, for the very characteristic of the Spirit is its universality. The Spirit is like an ocean where no one can say that this is my drop and that is yours.

So we must try from that basis, but we must try with all sincerity. This is most important, as the Mother has so often stressed the paramount need of a pure sincerity as a first step towards spiritual growth. But how to get this sincerity which must be very pure — how to get it in ourselves and in others? It can only be if each one of us takes it up as a great work in our Yoga Sadhana. I am reminded of an occasion when I took to the Mother a very high officer of the Ministry of Finance who asked Her, “How are we to remove corruption from the country?” The Mother replied, “There is only one way, by example.” The man was rather disappointed by what he considered perhaps a platitude. Maybe he expected a *Mantra* or something like that. But then, several months later, he came back and I took him to the Mother again, and once more he asked the same question and still the Mother gave an identical reply. But She added, “When there is something false I want to change in the Ashram, I work on it in myself first.” This gave me a great shock — to know that our Divine Mother should work on something false within Herself! The shock made me go deep within myself and then an understanding came. It came in a form suitable to my own scientific background though to another it might have come differently.

If, say, I wanted to remove corruption, then I would have to find some stain that is surely there of this corruption within myself and to work hard to remove it. This would set up a certain vibration. Now, at this point, there may be some eyebrows raised when I say vibrations, yet it is very scientific. All power is transmitted and becomes effective through waves which are vibrations. Sound, light, electricity are transmitted by waves. We have also cosmic waves, etc. There are an infinite number of such waves which are vibrations with a wave length and frequency and amplitude. So if I created a wave with a particular length and frequency attuned to the phenomenon called corruption, this wave would naturally go round the world. Wherever it met a similar phenomenon it would work on it also. If such a wave with a sufficiently large amplitude could be made broadcast it would attack corruption wherever it existed even without

the people concerned wanting to be uncorrupt. It may even kill a person if his resistance was too strong.

When I put this view before the Mother, She said, “Ah, Udar! at last you have understood.”

So it is how we have to strive for a strong and pure sincerity.

There again, we can open ourselves to the new force that is now acting in the world and with that strength take up some work or project which is based on the Truth, and we shall have unimaginable support and force behind us. But it must be based on the Truth as it is a Truth-Conscious force and not an unconscious one like, say, nuclear energy — a very powerful material force which can be properly used or misused by man.

This new force came into effective action from 1970. I remember that at about 4 o’clock in the morning I felt a tremendous force in me. I wanted to sing and shout with exuberance. I felt I could shake the house to its foundations. When I told this to the Mother later in the day, She said, “Ah, so you felt it too! It came down at midnight. You received a slightly delayed action of it.” Then it was that the Mother said that the time might now come to tell India and the world of this new force so that those who received the message could open to it and do marvellous things to change the world. The Mother said we should go out at once and She proposed the organisation of “Sri Aurobindo’s Action” because, the Mother said, it was Sri Aurobindo Himself in Action that is this great force.

Question:

Was not the fact of the Mother leaving Her body a form of insincerity?

Answer:

Insincerity to what? The Mother always obeyed the Divine Will. “Not my will but Thy Will be done” was Her constant prayer and aspiration. So when She obeyed the Divine Will and left Her body, is that an act of insincerity? We should ourselves now follow the Mother’s supreme example and surrender ourselves to the Divine Will always.

Question:

Was the Mother’s retirement a preparation for this event?

Answer:

Yes, I think so. She prepared us well. If She had left Her body while in full activity — say, when playing tennis or something like that — it would have been a great shock. But our sweet compassionate Mother thought of Her children always and prepared us in a gradual way for Her leaving.

Question:

Is not Pranab’s refusal to allow Aurovillians to attend his talk an act of insincerity?

Answer:

How am I to judge? I have told Pranab I want to discuss this with him one day. So let us see what happens. We must know all sides.

Question:

How did you feel when Sri Aurobindo left His body?

Answer:

I was by His side when it happened and I knew that He was leaving His body. So I kept very calm and objective as I kept reminding myself that I was standing at a great moment of history. Because I was so calm — the only one then perhaps besides Dyuman — Dr. Sanyal said that I should look after all arrangements and the Mother gave me charge of them all. I remember it all so clearly — how it was decided to put His body next day in the Samadhi. We had worked night and day to get everything ready. Then it was found that there was no sign at all of decomposition, and the Mother said we should wait till we had a sign from Him. So it continued from the 5th to the 9th. Then the doctors who had examined His body twice a day said they had found signs and so the body should be put in the Samadhi. I objected strongly, since, though a layman, I knew that the most definite sign would be the smell and of that there was no evidence at all. But the Mother showed me how the Golden Light had faded from His face and that was the sign from Him that guided Her. So I had to accept. Even when, on the evening of the 9th, I lifted His body with my own hands to place it in the box, I was covered with the liquid that had come out and normally it would be a very foul-smelling liquid but in His case it was a liquid with a wonderful perfume which I carried on me for two days. Even His mattress, which was soaked with it, had this wonderful perfume in it for months. You can ask Mona [Udar’s wife and the Manager of Golconde] if she is here. The mattress was kept at Golconde.

I may here bring in St. Francis Xavier in connection with Sri Aurobindo. I have seen and touched the body of Francis Xavier that has been kept in Goa for several centuries. It was of flesh and bone and not a wax image. But it was of a bluish colour and the body seemed shrunken though all the features were clearly delineated. In Sri Aurobindo’s body I saw a similar bluish colour coming. That is why the Mother said the Golden Light had left His body. Also the giving out of so much liquid would naturally make the body shrink. From all this I conclude — and it is only my own private view, with which I have no concurrence from others — that His body is also intact in spite of all the doctors have said

and is still today in the condition in which St. Francis Xavier's is after about 400 years.

Question:

Is it not a fact that Sri Aurobindo's leaving His body was expected? You say He did not announce it.

Answer:

Expected by whom? How then was everyone in such a state of shock? This I saw myself. It is not hearsay.

Question:

How did you feel about the Mother's leaving Her body?

Answer:

For me it was a shock. I will admit that I had not expected it. Also, I was not at Her side as at Sri Aurobindo's and so I did not see it coming. Thus it was a shock. But fortunately I had immediate work to do, to send telegrams to the President of India, the Prime Minister and others, and so I recovered quite quickly. I, with many, was told of Her leaving only at 3 a.m. on the morning of the 18th. Later the shock was gone and I even began to feel joy. Especially after the Mother's body was laid in the Samadhi I felt a very great joy. I felt She was now free to do Her great work for the whole world, no longer tied to Her body.

Question:

Did you feel relief or release?

Answer:

Both. Relief to know that the Mother was no longer suffering but release because of the great joy of which I have spoken. That joy continues, not only with me but with so many others.

So now we have to take this force and this joy and make a real progress. We have a marvellous opportunity. That reminds me of Dr. Bisht. He was another doctor who had looked after the Mother but he was in Delhi. He came down flying to see the Mother, and attended to Her physically. Then the Mother said something about his pronouncing on the way Her inner being was working towards the transformation of Her outer body. Dr. Bisht said, "Mother, to be able to do that I must make a great progress." "Then make a great progress," the Mother said, "what is stopping you?"

So what is stopping us in the great opportunity that the Mother has placed before all of us? Let us take up the challenge and go forward — ever forward — in Her Light and Love and Strength.

Now, to end, I will recite, if you like, Sri Aurobindo's poem "A God's Labour". I remember the Mother saying that when She first read this poem She went to Sri Aurobindo and said, "What have you done? You have exposed all my secrets to the whole world!" He smiled. Yes, this is Her poem, written by Sri Aurobindo about Her and for Her — so let us end on that — all right?

[On 7 December 1973, Udar Pinto, the Mother's Secretary, gave a talk at "Peace" (Matrimandir Camp) in Auroville on the Mother's Mahasamadhi. The text of the talk was published in the January 1974 issue of *Mother India*, the monthly review of culture published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. We are grateful to Editors, *Mother India*, for permitting us to reproduce the text in our publication.

The said talk has also been published in the online forum of *Overman Foundation* along with a statement issued by Pradyut Kumar Bhattacharya, the then Trustee of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, on Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the Mother's passing away.]

A Manifestation sheathed in Light

Rick Lipschutz

[**Author's note:** This chapter deals specifically with some aspects of the difference between Overmind and Supermind, its crucial significance, and attempts to outline some steps in Sri Aurobindo's ongoing fourth great realisation: "The higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind." (Note well: once the Supermind is reached, as he reached it and exercised it even while still in his body, the further stages of this realisation and its embodiment continue, even now.)]

Foreword

But don't we always bolt backwards, like Arjuna? The Supramental Form of Krishna is too bold for human brainpans, much too bright for these eyes, beautiful beyond our pale aesthesis: it includes far too much and transcends it all too well. No! we shout with Arjuna; oh please, Krishna, present yourself to us the way we like you, in that wonderful unitarian universal form, massage our prejudices, make yourself acceptable to us. We, mental beings that we are, choose the national congress of the Overmind; we have too little soul in us, nothing all that much like Supermind which might, had we but just that little, enable us to respond to those flute-calls of our more dynamic identity. Other-than-wise, we unfriend you. Give us back the old regime. Not ready! Not ready!

Sri Aurobindo's revolution

Who is Sri Aurobindo? What does he stand for? So many have tried to put him in a box, this package or that one, or press him tightly between the covers of a book. But he never could fit inside any of them. His body the British could jail but him they could not hold; his consciousness could not be incarcerated. Even when laid on a cot, having stopped breathing, he refused to play the role of a dead man. He stepped out of every thought this less than whole world thinks about death. Over a hundred hours, his skin got pinker, suffused more than ever with that gold red supramental flush, and the palpable force-field of

energy that emanated from him grew stronger than any around him ever had felt.

What was he all about? What has branded him, core to crust, is what has called him to undergo an inner revolution so complete it would change the world. What is the nature of this revolution, how did he go through it? In what ways are we related to this revolution so that our own constitution can be completely rewritten in entirely different script? "When Sri Aurobindo was 11 years old, he had a sort of premonition that great revolutions were going to take place in the future and that he had a part to play in some of them. Not a mental idea, but a kind of inner feeling was growing within that he had some great work to do, a mission to fulfil."

We may know that Sri Aurobindo pursued a revolutionary programme to free India from British rule. We may not know that he was first among his countrymen to articulate, both through the pages of *Bande Mataram* and at the Nationalist party congress at Surat, the call for India's complete independence. It is also not well known or widely recognised that Sri Aurobindo never has stopped being a revolutionary. Through his own form of yoga he conducted a revolution to overthrow an existing government (that of our cosmos) by forceful means and replace it by a new form of government. He needed for this the instincts of a master politician, prepared every instant to confound his own categories. He would subtly subvert even the most sacred convention forward to unfold its hidden purpose, rolling back the boundaries of what could be with revolutionary grace. "You must know that this is not a simple affair at all. It is not a revolt against the British Government which anyone can easily do. It is, in fact, a revolt against the whole universal Nature and so one must think deeply before enrolling oneself with me."

On March 28, 1908 Sri Aurobindo wrote in *Bande Mataram* journal: "The movement of which the first outbreak was political, will end in a spiritual consummation." The revolution turns into one in which the overmental heights of this universe, all the overmental regions, would no longer overtop the abyss, but — each gap a passage, every break down a breakthrough — joins the golden bridge that connects the worlds. How can the opposition be so overruled that it is no longer the opposition? And these regions of Overmind, so lustrous, intense and universal — so seemingly divine, and one would think, and many have thought, divinely transformative — why did and do they require such interminable effort, to transform them? Sri Aurobindo has been charged with both the task, and the offence, plotting to make heaven a better place to live, and of including Earth in its extended boundaries, so to make "in the formula of the Veda, 'Heaven and Earth equal and one.'"

He was jailed for sedition against the British Raj; now alas, he has grown even more seditious, having hatched a plot against the very spirit that has made us separate, that has subjected us to times and circumstance, and that left us like this, narrow of breath and brain. Now, the effects of the dynamic spiritual mind planes though profound are, in the old creation, only an influence. The supermind consciousness-force works powerfully for “unity, mutuality and harmony” (as Sri Aurobindo expressed, discussing what the divine life means near the end of *The Life Divine*).

His own “ascent towards Supermind” — ascent to and integration making dynamic the Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, and Overmind took place in Pondicherry (though he visited them in vision in Alipore Jail in 1908 or 1909) before 1915. He knew whereof he spoke quite early on in this journey. He was not at all content with this early ascent and preliminary integration, necessary for him to begin the *Arya* which contains the earliest versions of the bulk of his major writings barring *Savitri*: after all, what he was after was Supermind’s advent, its full function on earth and in ourselves as a natural faculty (natural the same way we flex our brains to think). With Supermind’s advent, Overmind, intuition, and illumined and higher mind would become more than influences: they’d become dynamos whose pure transmission of Supermind’s force helps stabilise its dynamic unity and light-bringing harmony, establishing it in our physical consciousness, bodies, and this physical world. These planes, formerly top-heavy with light that dwarfs their own inherent power, and liberated for their true action by being linked to the splendour of their supramental source, then begin to act according to Sri Aurobindo’s description of them as dynamic: live force of dynamic spiritual overhead consciousness.

The steps of the World-Stair (discussed in the first canto of Book II, “The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds” in *Savitri*) become well connected, and the energy of the entire manifestation begins to move freely and without abysmal gaps. These dynamic spiritual mind-planes are not a goal in themselves where we are “finished,” but an adjunct of the Supramental, and its advent now acts to join them to its source: luminous links, burning grades of its joint, generative, dynamic activity. They become, in the words he used to describe his fourth principal realisation, “*the higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind*” (italics mine). They had always been there; part of his job was back then and still is now to connect them, as bridges, or rungs, leading to the Supermind. That being done, they can then receive energies, formerly unmanifest, through the Supermind, and be more-perfect transmitters of those energies into the material world, and also harmonise more happily with each other. Necessary to his fourth realisation was his early ascent towards Supermind before 1915;

what would make this realisation sufficient, enable and “functionalise” the Supermind to transform ourselves and earth nature, would consume the rest of his life in Pondicherry, and still consumes him now that he is based and operating for the most part in a supramentalised golden portion of the subtle-physical layer of the Earth.

All the spiritual-mind planes, though they make valiant forays, utterly fail to achieve the essential integration needed for us to become whole beings living divine earth-lives. It is not till one realises and as it were climbs into the Supermind, then proceeds to live in its full sun-blaze and not in those remoter lustres, and function there as that only and fully, that one can possess that one power which completely integrates and fully controls the other powers. To return to our narrative: The highest energies, which have not yet come to any full extent into this world, emanate from the Unmanifest, and the first step from the Unmanifest towards any manifestation, is That: the Supreme Reality, *Parabrahman*. *Parabrahman* is not the Absolute, but the first step from the Absolute towards manifestation. *Parabrahman* in its full, extended sense is like a drawn bow and Supermind the arrow that sends any intention focused from the Supreme Reality straight to the mark. To quote M. Alan Kazlev from his “Kheper” website, Supermind “contains within itself the entire sequence from Unmanifest to Manifestation, or in other words the archetypal pattern of Reality as a whole.”

The pathway proceeds through the Overmind, and as the arrow passes through (in this old creation where Overmind effectively is at the top) its power diminishes, the intention deviates and diverts. It loses focus, disperses and dissipates. So goes the story of the old creation.

So how can the straight path be restored, the arrow remain golden-true through all the worlds of its passage? To ascertain this we need to retrace in brief some steps of the path taken by Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo trained his focus onto the realisation of “the higher plane of consciousness leading to the Supermind” after the *Parabrahman* realisation of 1912. But this is no sequenced listing of novae, no linear, mind-forged progression. In the incalculable way of the Shakti — and with his tireless experimental spirit — he was “on the way” to Supermind even in Alipore Jail in 1908. Vivekananda’s spirit, he tells us, came to him in his cell and spent “a fortnight” teaching him about the Intuitive Plane, everything Vivekananda wanted him to know, exhaustively, before he would consent to leave him be. Vivekananda also pointed out to him the other planes above the Intuitive; this includes the Supermind.

And the Mother has stated that Sri Aurobindo’s realisation of the Cosmic Consciousness in Alipore Jail was “Supramental.”

Furthermore, even in his Silent Brahman realisation (his first great realisation, in Baroda in January 1908, four months before his yearlong imprisonment), Sri Aurobindo describes, in recorded conversation in 1940, that there had been an “indispensable positive element,” a sense of “mere being” — but yet, being — even in the Silent Brahman realisation, that led him to the Supermind. Silent Brahman for him was more comprehensive, he said in this conversation, than the experience of the Self; for it was a “*Laya*” experience.

Now, “*Laya*,” which is sometimes interpreted as dissolution into Non-being can, in a deeper sense, signify fusion (into greater Being inclusive of, but not limited to, Being and Non-being). In other words, this pioneer, following along his unique line of Brahman-Nirvana experience through Cosmic Consciousness (*Vasudeva*), abiding in that supreme harmony unifying all dualities like steps in a dance, was led, inevitably, to full positive expression of Being in the bodily life, which in its integral plenary wholeness manifests as Supermind. So it seems, from the get-go, Sri Aurobindo was heading somewhere different from the aim of previous silent cosmic realisers in the realm of Supreme Reality.

Sri Aurobindo describes much of his early yoga, primarily from 1912 to 1920 (with some entries before and after), in his *Record of Yoga*, his personal yoga journal. This was published by the Ashram Press as two volumes in 2001. There we see that though he set up specific goals (or rather the Guru of the World, whom he experienced as Krishna, set for him specific goals and gave him concrete guidance which it was up to him to apply), he was, as it were, all over the map experimenting, guided by Krishna and the Divine Shakti, and through his own modification of the scientific method, along the “10 limbs of the yoga” and the *Sapta Chatushtaya* (seven major elements each with four aspects) that was the preliminary stage of his own yoga of self-perfection. These higher spiritual-mind planes — the spiritual thought-knowledge he called Higher Mind; the bright visionary light of Illumined Mind; the direct touch of Truth itself he called Intuition; and the globally comprehensive, lustrous Overmind — were very exalted planes, all in the realm of *Mauna*, Silence, deepening, intensifying, even as there passed through his “applied silence” infused with Shakti all the experiences that poured down on him constantly in torrents, in the teen years of the twentieth century while he was in his forties. By “all over the map” I mean (speaking only from a limited, one-thought-at-a-time, linear human perspective, as there is nothing chaotic about the Divine Mother’s cosmic working order as she moves Sri Aurobindo through the paces), for instance, that the “Ananda Brahman,” an advanced aspect of one of the later major elements, he possessed fairly early, around 1915 or 1916, far in advance of his mastery of earlier elements in the *Sapta Chatushtaya*. Thus, the progression

had its own coherence of divine spirit, not the hubs and links of the human mind. Still he moved through it all pretty quickly, perhaps not on the express train of his earlier realisations, but nothing like the mud of the Inconscient through which he was to experience some near full-stops in the 1930s and early 1940s. Little of his progression through the 1920s, none through the 1930s and 1940s is detailed in the *Record of Yoga*.

The Mother has stated that his full supramental yoga is contained in *Savitri*. And we will trudge with him, through the mud of the Inconscient, later in this chapter.

The Mother’s collaboration

The Mother is his equal, by his own statement, and since from the beginning she has followed the same path as Sri Aurobindo, her words illuminate certain subtle or spiritual matters as no others can. The Mother herself says that, apparently around 1915 and perhaps until the time of the complete Overmental Descent in 1926, Sri Aurobindo and herself were working primarily to bring the Supermind into the Mind to transform it. (Yes, they were working on this together even though thousands of miles apart, during that period after she left Pondicherry in 1915 and did not return there until 1920.) They obviously had to have direct contact with the Supermind in order to attempt and succeed in this (she has also stated, as mentioned earlier, that his contact with Supermind began even back in the Alipore Jail, connected with his second great realisation, that of the Cosmic Consciousness, the Divine experienced as Krishna in all things and as all humans and living beings). In a letter to his younger brother Barin, Sri Aurobindo confirms that it was not until 1920 that he had climbed into the lowest status of Supermind (“climbed into” connotes a further stage from having “contact” and from other precedent, intermediate stages). Again, he had had direct contact before, and this is evident from his *Record of Yoga*, but he needed to stabilise this contact to possess this state, which could bring to bear the supramental radiances, though not yet in their most powerful or fully integrative forms (this would occur by “climbing into” the second and third levels of the Supermind in the 1930s and 1940s). Shortly after the Mother returned to Pondicherry in 1920, to stay there the rest of her life, she states in recorded conversation that she told Sri Aurobindo that in order to make further progress — they had not yet fully transformed the mind — and because of the interlocked nature of the planes and parts of being, they needed to descend into the vital, the region of our energy and life passions, and bring the Supermind into the vital to attempt its transformation. They met with some considerable success in this part of the individual journey, because it seems around this time that she began to look radiant, with the look of an 18-

year-old; and as for him, two of his major disciples, T.V. Kapali Shastri and A.B. Purani, noted the change in the colour of his skin to a more golden-red hue. Sri Aurobindo told Purani, in answer to his wonderment, that they were bringing the Supermind into the vital (confirming what the Mother has said) and this was one of the effects. And Shastri, a Tantric, for his part was very impressed with these outward signs of a physical transformation.

However, never sitting on their realisations, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo then attempted to bring the Supermind into the physical to try to transform it. It may be that they mostly brought it into the physical consciousness (necessary but not sufficient to bring it fully into the physical proper) at that time, up to about 1926. This period, between 1910 or 1908, and 1926, could be referred to as the individual stage of their Supramental transformation. Both Sri Aurobindo and Mother became very universalised, and came into direct contact with the transcendent (as the Supermind is what manifests and even dynamises the transcendent); but, for the most part, they did it as individuals, bringing the beginnings of new possibility into the cosmic formula. (It was only later on, in the 1930s and 1940s that their yoga advanced to the stage where they began to consciously change this cosmic formula, as part of their spiritual revolutionary programme.) For they had accepted, starting from 1926 if not before, to surround themselves with an ashram of varied capacities, each a representative type, each an “impossibility to be solved.”

They had accepted to go through this transformation not merely as an individual achievement moving rapidly to full bodily transformation, but as an ordinary human, moving in evolutionary stages toward and through the three layers of the Supermind, painstakingly applying, integrating each gain as they went, as pioneers opening the way for those of different capacities. Theirs was a “sadhana for the Earth-consciousness.” In 1926, perhaps especially since the summer, a great intensification of energy, vital and otherwise, was felt in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, as if some great descent was imminent. Sri Aurobindo had spoken in recorded conversations of the necessity of becoming aware of the world of the gods — that it was about to make entry in some dramatic fashion. Often during these times in the Ashram (technically, it became the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, with Sri Aurobindo retiring to his rooms, having handed over all administration of affairs to Mirra Alfassa, whom he then named the Mother, after the events near the end of 1926) a powerful electric energy could be felt over one’s head. Finally on November 24th the inevitable happened. The Mother summoned all of the twenty-four ashramites of that time, and a meditation occurred where everyone could feel a palpable presence and a power descending in torrents. Some at the time believed the Supermind had actually descended or

manifested, though this belief proved to be premature.

Supramentalising the Overmind

November 24, 1926 began the more universal stage of the fourth realisation: “the higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind” (the key words here, once again, are, “leading to”). The Overmind Realisation, descending into his whole body on that Day of Siddhi, literally brought home into Sri Aurobindo the full universality of the situation. It was an essential descent, another literally crowning descent, that was followed by his full-fledged movement into the universal aspect of his yoga. He was always most concerned with the “big picture,” and this day of “Silence, absolute living silence — not merely living but overflowing with divinity” (Purani) all the twenty-four present felt this experience overwhelmingly heralded Sri Aurobindo’s ongoing global mission would bear fruit and be met with success. It was therefore called the Day of Siddhi, the day of Victory: the full power of all past achievement, not as a finale but as a signal that the Divine willed him to move beyond these past achievements and work on all fronts to manifest Supermind as a new Shakti, a new power available to all. For the power that produced this realisation was not merely an Overmental Power, but the full divine power of the force of Ananda, Bliss, Eternal Delight that is evolving the earth beyond mind and Overmind into a Supramental world that would begin to live a great and blissful life, somehow justifying all the millennia of oppression, darkness, and death, making meaningful our many struggles. This was the full meaning of Krishna to Sri Aurobindo’s yoga: not merely the Overmental being, Overmental avatar, but behind and above this the Being or Lord of Ananda, with the ultimate mission to bring the full unbridled power of bliss to bear this world in its embrace, and to grace all beings and things with a great and blissful life, golden, sleepless, delightful, deathless, indestructible. This would certainly include supramentalisation, sought for all by Sri Aurobindo, as a necessary stage and passage to the state and full action of Delight. But the immediate action, on November 24, 1926, was the descent of the Overmind intimately into the entire consciousness and body of Sri Aurobindo.

Yet, he realised, even his body realised, there are light-years of difference between Overmind and Supermind. As he moved beyond the mental consciousness, and dredging and digging in the physical consciousness, he came to realise that Supermind is like a distant star far beyond the firmament of Overmind.

A passage in *Savitri* shows us:

The radiant world of the everlasting Truth

Glimmered like a faint star bordering the night
Above the golden Overmind's shimmering ridge.
(*Savitri*, Bk.1, Canto III, 1993, p.41)

For Overmind, though divine in terms of static consciousness (realising but not manifesting), is merely the most universal plane of the mind. In static awareness it may be divine but it cannot divinely “dynamise the Transcendence” nor can it even lead the mind beyond itself. It cannot bring *Sachchidananda* into the cells of the body; it cannot transform our Inconscient base, our material foundation. It cannot, as mentioned, lead the mind beyond itself; that is, it cannot be that rung of the ladder that truly joins mind, with no gap between them, to its “parent” Supermind. One might say there's a big break in the ladder, a gap light-years wide, between Overmind and Supermind. This is the difference that makes all the difference between the worlds.

We may begin, with this in mind, to get some sense or feeling of what Sri Aurobindo meant when he said, year after year after year, in the 1930s and 1940s, time after time, that what he was busy doing was “supramentalising the Overmind” or “supramentalising the descended Overmind” (we recall that it had fully descended in him in 1926).

Sometimes he would add that he was trying to lighten the resistance of the Inconscient. The Overmind was, and for the most part still is, the summit of the universal nature. Changing its formula was monumental work that no one had tried before. The universal powers needed to be respected if only so their resistance might be overcome. There were sensitive issues. There may have been more than a few little talks with Shiva, Kali and all the rest of them, perhaps, who knows, to keep them from walking off the job. And Supermind and its lower end, the Inconscient — they are twins! Counterparts who, though they complete each other, hadn't been talking for millennia. The Overmind with its business-as-usual religion has been blocking the way, diminishing everything the Supermind radiated, veiling it, and on lower levels, mastering evil spells of deformation, turning things into their own opposite; Self and soul into ego-ji, free divine graceful action into heaps of *karma*. The Supreme Shakti through Sri Aurobindo was attempting something impossible. He made it his business to transform the universe and since then, even the angels of utter failure fuel the ultimate fulfilment of his whole daredevil enterprise. When Sri Aurobindo said that anyone could carry on a revolution against the British, but that what was called for was a revolt against the entire Universal nature, which is not so easy to do, he spoke like the cosmic politician that in a way he was. Although this is only a metaphor, it may bear some living resonance to what Sri Aurobindo did.

It seems to me that his revolutionary principles (*Swadeshi* or producing our own goods; boycott against foreign goods and jurisdiction; national education; and *Swaraj*, Self-rule) were translated into his spirituality: producing our own goods became owning and courageously exercising our deepest aspirations to divinity; boycott translated into rejection of all that blocks the realisation of our aspirations; national education into developing the qualities of calm, strong peace and surrender so that knowledge can come to us fresh into a silent mind; and *Swaraj* to move beyond our egos into souls and higher Selves that can rule our natures with grace. But in a deeper sense, he was pursuing a revolution against the politics of the Ignorance. The inspiring goal of his revolution is to bring full-formed into the earth plane a world no longer edged or tinged in shadow, darkness, and obscurity. Even the highest Overmind creation, he says, is like a realm of sunlight, but surrounded, sheathed in a vast darkness, eventually to be swallowed up by the surrounding obscurity that seems to be the foundation of this ancient creation we still live in. His object is to found and form on earth a manifestation no longer sheathed in a protective coating of darkness, veiled by ego and karma and limitations, but rather a new creation: a manifestation sheathed in light.

Tamil Nadu, the state which surrounds the enclave of Pondicherry where the Sri Aurobindo Ashram was founded in 1926, has been for more than a thousand years the cradle of Supermind. Within it was developed a yogic tradition whose most advanced practitioners have transformed even the bodily life, while many dozens of Mahans and Tamil Siddhas have realised their true individual selves and have described the subtle and spiritual planes, even the Overmind and Supermind (these are Sri Aurobindo's terms but he was not the first to discover the realms to which the terms refer).

We find in this special branch of the Tantra, called *Saiva Siddhanta* beginning in the Middle Ages (but predating them), and which before that was practised by Nayanmars (Vaishnavite Tantric devotee poets were called *Alvars*), mapped out in some detail the worlds of the Overmind as well as the Supermind. They also describe what we may call the physical-plant specifications, the cook book, or using another metaphor, the spiritual DNA of the world of Ignorance (for only in the Supermind do true worlds of Knowledge begin). They describe in graphic detail what it was that Sri Aurobindo was conducting his revolution against; they differentiate Overmind from Supermind in great detail. Sri Aurobindo has referred to Overmind as a “protective double” of the Supermind, “a screen of dissimilar similarity” — suggesting, perhaps, that it is a vast region of worlds, in a way seemingly almost as vast as Supermind, but stepping divinity down to produce a secondary creation, far inferior to what Supermind could manifest — should it ever become overt and unveiled from this protective screen. The

lower hemisphere of Overmind is a “selective” Overmind where various universal powers pursue their own powerful creations that often in their lower developing levels clash and come up against one another. Higher up in the lower hemisphere is the global Overmind, a vast universal synthesising consciousness still not yet integral in its actions. We could relate it perhaps to the realm of the All-Gods described in the *Rig-Veda*. The higher hemisphere of Overmind or Summit Overmind is composed of four or five planes or “ancient skies,” more in harmony with Supermind and even potentially a channel for its play and manifestation (Gnostic Overmind, *Ananda* Overmind, *Chit-Tapo* Overmind, *Sat* Overmind); but not equipped to bring It, not able to bring as only Supermind does, the Supreme Power with no impairment or impoverishment in its original intensity. At the top of Summit Overmind, seemingly one more step, and one would be in the worlds of wholeness, the structures of integrality; but few if any seemed to take that step. The extensive “space” between Summit Overmind and the Supermind is a divine darkness across which certain powers of the Supreme Shakti are needed to navigate a prepared and purified soul — and only a soul fully harmonised with its Higher Self or *Jivatman*. Such a soul has merged all the divine elements extracted from life experiences in many bodies, up from its long swoon and mud-caked involvement in Inconscience, and its passage through matter, life, and mind, and then the planes where mind is mixed and mingles with Overmind, and Overmind proper — merged these divine elements freed from ego and extracted from its living soul-experience, with the full realisation that the Higher Self perpetually enjoys of the One, of the Spirit beyond manifestation. In other words, to pass through the “divine darkness” (*Avyakta Paratpara*) into the Supermind and Beyond, one must have become a fully integrated, intact soul-and-higher-Self complex. This, impossible solely by human effort, becomes inevitable with the Grace of the Supreme Shakti.

This was the politics of Ignorance that Sri Aurobindo, the supreme revolutionary, came to overthrow and supplant: The very highest levels of our existing universal nature have been rigged (originally by design of the Supermind or Vast Grace Light itself !) to force us to inhabit a separatist, ego-driven, guna-ridden creation based in Inconscience, to become completely involved in order to evolve, slowly, almost step by step: from mire to mind and beyond, from egos into souls and selves, from slaves of *karma* and the *gunas* into adepts of a higher action possessing the fivefold universal powers, from a veiled obscure creation into a paradise of supreme Grace Light. Grace in its thickest disguise! At a very high plane in the Overmind flows the fountain force of *Tirodhana*, “Veiling,” whose function seems to be to dim, distort, limit, step down the great effulgence of grace at the lower levels into these grey and painful worlds, to

allow very gradual spiritual evolution. This force of veiling casts its shadow even over regions of the Summit Overmind or Overmind Gnosis! High also in Overmind is the home of *Kutilai*, the force of *Kundalini* which, though full of power and force, presides over restricted worlds of relative compulsion far from our divine freedom. It can take us very high but to a place that is still really very limited in its spirit’s vision and unable to fulfil the spirit’s sacred thirst. Lower still, but high above Mind, in Spiritual Mind and Overmind realms, are the foundations of ego and *karma*, which, at still lower levels, through many coiling modes and creative modifications, develop into these worlds we are much too familiar with. Four high ruling overmental powers (*Tirodhana*, *Kutilai* or *Kundalini*, *Karma*, Ego) are thus tied, inextricably, as if by some strange inevitability, all the way down to that dragon tail of our trailing depths that lashes us severely whenever we strive to transform or even tame our foul inhuman parts of nature. But if we look back, above, near the peak of the Overmind, we see, according to Tirumoolar (an ancient supramental adept of Tamil Nadu) and to Swami Ramalingam, a great fissure or a “collapsible door”: the *Para Apra Veli*. It was described by Swami Ramalingam in 1872 in stanza 283 (sometimes listed as stanza 284) of his inspired poem, “*Joti Agaval*,” where he remarks, prophetically, of that door, “it can be shattered into pieces.” Swami Ramalingam in particular completed the fine details of this map of the *Saiva Siddhanta* tradition, even as he transcended that tradition and practised a true supramental yoga. In his vast poetry there are over a thousand pages where he puts in vision, rhythm, and song his direct supramental experiences.

Here we find finely etched the politics of Ignorance, the entire universal natural scheme it is Sri Aurobindo’s global mission to supplant. To free the universal movement from bondage, Sri Aurobindo had to change the government of the universe to be the integral and divine Supermind from the divisive and separatist movements initiated, begun and allowed to develop, by supramental intent and for an evolutionary purpose, by the Overmind. This was the revolution he came to lead.

The supramental action on earth

We hardly know all the details, as he was reticent and secretive about exactly what he was doing. But it’s reasonable to surmise that Sri Aurobindo, who did not read Swami Ramalingam’s voluminous Tamil writings, came upon these same powers and principles and sought to transform them. No, they cannot be destroyed; it’s not that simple. The *Kundalini* allows for a great intensity of knowledge, or of experience in general, that is a necessary part of a blissful divine life. We will always need in some form the *Kundalini*. But it must

somehow be modified, or unmodified, as only a tactful politician can do, to allow it to continue to function as a source of great energetic intensity, in a new creation. The force of Veiling, *Tirodhana*, cannot be thrown away entirely, but again must be fine-tuned, to be used but in a different fashion, with a changed function, in supramental creations. The new creation will continue to include human beings, animals, plants, mountains as before, and must be introduced slowly — because, oh, that slowness is kind — to include as much and as many as possible. Some may be transformed, others purified to allow for a much happier life. Individual differences must always be respected! Again, the ego and *karma* cannot be thrown away, but refined, allowed a more harmonious action and more unified selfhood, much transformed so as to be suitable for beings on many levels of attainment to grow naturally into their higher correlates. Ego and *karma*, but turned back into the utter truth of themselves, become the lever of Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary programme of spiritual and material action; even as he himself was said to be, “a decisive action direct from the Supreme.”

Although Sri Aurobindo came here and still remains fully connected to Earth's atmosphere to bring forth a supramental earth, in a new creation there will still be many humans — more humane we hope! There will still be animals, happier ones, plants and flowers, more green mountains, more blossoms. There will be those whose bliss will be to live primarily in the Higher Mind; this is a great advance from where we are now! Or the Illumined or Intuitive consciousness, or somewhere in those vast regions of the Overmind, in the process of being supramentalised, but still having an Overmental function, however changed. Haridas Chaudhuri once spoke of a “cosmic reconstruction,” and this is what Sri Aurobindo's ongoing global mission is about. We might venture that one aspect of “supramentalising the Overmind” may involve transforming its traditional, age-old status — of holding the Oneness as a sleeping or silent partner, and not the active agent — into a more intimate overt presence of Oneness. It may foster a greater forbearance, more advanced patience, a deeper kindness and a stronger more powerful benevolence, even in the very universal powers themselves who will no longer be what some humans up to now have called “the gods.” In Sri Aurobindo's conceptualisation of the triple status of Supermind in *The Life Divine*, the three enduring layers of the world-founding consciousness of the Supermind are imaged like this, keeping in our minds and hearts that all three poises of Supermind are variations on Oneness that is infinite and versatile beyond imagination. The primary poise, the highest or Comprehending Supermind, is an equal extension of Oneness where individual and universe are held latent in this all-powerful, blissful, all-pervading, all-containing, all-constituting One-in-the-One. All soul-individuality is rooted in this

realm that is completely beyond the individual. The second status, or Apprehending Supermind, is an unequal extension, or Two-in-the-One in that it allows for a centration, a *Jivatman* or true individual Self within the Supreme Divine, one with it but also an expression of it. All flows out of the Divine and back into the Divine simultaneously in this poise; because of that safety action where all flows back into the Divine, the energetic outflow never sinks into ignorance where effective realisation of the One is lost. In the third theatre, a further development of Apprehending Supermind, a fundamental blissful Duality still held firm and fluid in the Oneness of relations takes place, where individual relations that are Supramental begin. More simply, we can characterise the three sessions as Unity, Harmony, Mutuality; or Oneness, Fusion/Intimacy, and Embrace. The essential transcendence is the fundamental experience of Supermind, then the cosmic possibilities, then the individual expression of relations — just the opposite order of the way our mind proceeds, but obviously superior in every way and closer to the innate, intimate truth of things. We find a corresponding terminology in Ramalingam's writings. “I saw the Divine face to face.” This is the way Swami Ramalingam expresses his direct experience of the Divine in the third status of Supermind. It is what some of the greatest realisers have sought in terms of direct relations, the mutual embrace of the human and divine. Here we find what Sri Aurobindo calls “the body of the King.” “I saw the Divine with my own eyes.” Then in the second, or golden station of the Supermind, “I moved towards the Divine. I became fused, matured and ripened in Him.” This is the harmony and intimate fusion of the true individual self (i.e. the soul or psychic being become one with the *Jivatman*, making for an abler, a more powerful and complete Central Being) with the Supreme Divine. In the primary poise, or the first and highest status of Supermind, “I became blissfully united with the Divine.” One in the One. Or to use a closer translation of Swami Ramalingam's words: “I saw Him face to face. I became fused and ripened in Him. I became blissfully united in identity with Him.” Eventually these three are to become simultaneous, in experience, in function. This is simply and surely the direct relationship we may enjoy when we move beyond a politics of Ignorance and fulfil our birthright to the natural unity of souls that are one with their bodies (the bodies having become equal in conscious awareness and in Shakti with the soul). Oneness unveiled, unrestricted, true living unity in consciousness as force, complete transformation of ego and *karma*.

The imagery of Supermind is again depicted in the Temple at Chidambaram. Swami Ramalingam (Vallalar) always signed his name, “Chidambaram Ramalingam.” Chidambaram means the One Sky (as Overmind includes many ancient skies that are not integrally united) over three sessions of Supermind.

Supermind is inherently collective consciousness: so we say it has three sessions, halls, assemblies, meeting places. Three integrally united sessions under One Sky, depicted in Chidaambaram Temple as “the space of Grace.” Nataraja, the form of Shiva dancing in the Temple of Chidambaram, is not the god Shiva of the Overmind realms but the Supramental Sivam, dancer whose dance is the world-founding consciousness of Supermind. This is most closely associated with the second session, *Pon Ambalam*, the golden Supermind. The rhythm of the dance, the biune Golden Feet of Play of the Divine, determines the gradations of the higher, inmost, and inner planes, the outer and the outermost, it is present in the coursing of our blood and movement of our hearts and lungs, and it expresses itself in the expansion and contraction of the cells of the body becoming divinised, as expressed by Tirumoolar possibly as much as 2500 years ago and by Swami Ramalingam more than a century and a half in the past.

Suppose we bypass the Supermind, go direct to *Sachchidananda* and do not realise and possess and form in our nature the Supermind: then, we do not participate in this universal rhythm of the dance through all the worlds, our heart and into our trillions of cells, and we lose the blissful opportunity to live the embodied Life Divine in this good red physical world. Chidambaram Temple also includes around it the *Por Tillai*, the golden field of the deodar trees which is the extension of the Supermind into Summit Overmind (which like the Supermind has white and golden colours and other levels, so one can be confused with the other). Summit Overmind, being more than the mere barrier I spoke of earlier, is also the extension of Supermind into the cosmos and the Earth symbolised by the field of deodar trees outside the Temple of Chidambaram. Tamil Nadu is the cradle of Supermind and Chidambaram is the ancient direct symbol of Supermind on the earth in all its sessions under one golden sky of divinity. Summit Overmind, or the golden field, is also the means by which we, having united or I should say harmonised, though not merged, our souls and psychic beings with our spiritual selves, becoming an eternal portion of the Supreme Divine as the Gita calls it, can through a modification of the power of the Supreme Shakti climb through the golden field into the supramental vastness and if we have the grace of the Shakti, begin to enter into and evolve through the supramental sessions. We may in Overmind feel the swaying of the shoulders of the dancing, supramental Shiva.

The work of physical transformation

Now let us return to Sri Aurobindo going yet further in the universal and transcendent stage of his Supramental realisation (his fourth great realisation is still in process, even now in 2011, of being fully realised, which to him means

completely embodied, one might say transcending the transcendence itself). In the late 1930s and especially the 1940s Sri Aurobindo entered more into the transcendent phase of his supramental work, or his universal global mission extended more deeply into the transcendent. The golden light, as he wrote in a poem, entered not only his brain, but descended into the heart, his limbs and feet and “the earth is now thy playfield and thy seat.”

In other words, the Supermind descended into his physical consciousness and his body and this exerts terrestrial effects. The universal work continued and extended itself, and he held at times the supramental force even in his body cells, though he could not permanently fix it there fully at that time.

He wrote some of the most sublime moving mystical passages of *Savitri* during this period: writing and revising this epic, in inspiration largely Overmental, formed another step in supramentalising the Overmind. He appeared destined for a full, even outward transformation but he chose, or it was chosen that he could achieve more in his global mission if he left his body and extended his action more fully from the subtle-physical plane so close to the Earth. He left the further work in the body, and the body-cells, to the Mother as this was one of her specialties. Remember: his revolutionary goal was not to achieve for himself, but to be considerate at all times and in all ways of the world situation and human needs, so supramentalisation could be as benign and benevolent and widespread as possible, for such a complete revolutionary change. I would agree with R.Y. Deshpande that during the 1940s his aspiration before the Supreme Shakti called down the New Creation, the “manifestation sheathed in light” that is the title of this book. But it needed to be manifested on the Earth, and this again was the specialty of the Mother, Mirra Alfassa, in whom the Supreme Shakti incarnated here in individual bodily form. Furthermore, the universal descent or Supramental Manifestation he had worked his life for, had not occurred, though he felt it come awfully close in 1938 (it would take place on February 29, “leap day” of 1956, again, by the direct hand of the Mother). The golden door still stood between Overmind and Supermind and it had not yet been shattered to pieces, as real and living symbol verified by Tamil saints and siddhars. The supramental light was still veiled by higher powers of the Overmind. There were also urgent necessities in world politics at the time. These necessities were tied to a constant fundamental of his work, which he once wrote, in a letter during the 1930s, was occupied not so much in higher planes than with the nether edge of things. “No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy: I wish it were. It is rather with the opposite end of things; it is in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two.”

This is precisely where his Integral Yoga beginning around 1910 or before

has always run into a rock, the Inconscient. This bedrock of dark trance is intertwined with the Overmind, connected through the full workings of Veiling, of *Maya* and *Karma* and Ego, the principles of this old creation, through many beings, gods/angels, Shaktis, Asuras, through a many-stranded network to the utterly self-involved Inconscient, ruled by Death, over which the highest powers of Overmind lack practical control. Here, the divine potentialities of the Earth-Spirit are locked up — and by a force far worse than the British who in 1908 had given Sri Aurobindo, like a present, the lockup he needed to withdraw from politics and meet Krishna face to face. It was this Infinite Inconscient Rock that always stopped his express train of realisations, that slowed it way, way down; calling forth all the perseverance and every last drop of patience that verily even his very even Brahman-consciousness could muster.

The Inconscient is “the last” obstacle — “I have told you many times that it is the last” — he said in conversations recorded by Nirodbaran, after he sustained a severe life-threatening right thigh bone fracture in November 1938. Starting then he required more physical help, and resumed holding the conversations that had stopped after his Overmind Descent of 1926 (that descent came down the same day that he broke his thigh bone, exactly 12 years later). The Inconscient is still our base, the basis of our instincts, yet at the same time our main goad to transformation. And it was into the immensity of the Inconscient that Sri Aurobindo plunged and penetrated, dug and dredged through the 1930s and ‘40s, instinct and intimate with his supramentalising of the Overmind. “The Inconscience is an inverse reproduction of the supreme superconscience: it has the same absoluteness of being and automatic action, but in a vast involved trance; it is being lost in itself, plunged into its own abyss of infinity.” He dug into the dragon base on which our material foundation seems to rest. The Overmind, even at its highest pitch (for it is still only mind though apotheosised) is incapable to transform this heavy hardpan that hits us from below and sends us reeling backwards if it doesn’t kill us. If this cannot be changed, life cannot be transformed.

Sri Aurobindo knew, and by identity, that it is the Transcendent — or more truly what descends from it — that gives concreteness to all that is in the world. Nothing, not even the Supreme Transcendent, is abstract to Sri Aurobindo. Only something that matters more than matter, so that Matter can begin to be the Spirit it truly is — only the highest supramentality, then, could bring the direct power of Spirit into matter. Only something, and even more to the point, someone, objectifying those “pulsations” of “Supreme Love,” the force of Ananda, emanating directly from the Supreme and imposing itself imperatively, working patiently, vastly and precisely, could cleanse the Augean stables. As

Agni — not only the universal power of the Veda but the supramental force of Divine Will — Sri Aurobindo could descend into the Inconscience, with the full force of the essence of supreme all-powerful love, that radiance within all that burns; wisdom with the power to change the world. And that power and that joy came from the most essential surrender to the Supreme Shakti. That of which the gods were only instruments, that which the Asuras actively fought or badly imitated. That he became by identity; and bored and drilled and dredged and burned — into the pit, the darkness within darkness where the gods, all but Agni, refused to plunge. For beneath all that darkness pitted in darkness was the one the Vedic Rishis call Martanda — the eighth of the Aditis — which means the Supramental that the Inconscient, so effectively, has masked. “The truth above shall wake a nether truth” — that is, the Supramental from its native home must wake the Supermind buried beneath our dark brute base. Then all the worlds in the world-stair could be connected, rung leading to rung. The Overmind “above” could not be conquered and superseded except by transformation of the Inconscient “below.” The serpent must bite its tail. The deepest secret of the Integral Yoga is locked within this struggle to change the Inconscient at its deep dark heart. Only the power of the Ananda Brahman, scarcely conceivable to us, the blissful force emanating from the centre of knowledge by identity — the full free play of the most active identity between psychic being and the *Purushottama* — can force this outcome. In that 1941 conversation, where Dr. Manilal asks: “Will it take a long time, Sir, to finish the Inconscient?” Nirodbaran adds: “Sri Aurobindo with such a smile and tone said: “Yes!” that we all roared with laughter.”

And we might permit ourselves to imagine, it was with a smile and such a tone that he went to meet Death, in full superconscious equilibrium, to face that face, to revolutionise Change himself, having written, just a few weeks before his passing, in *Savitri*, “His knowledge immortal triumphs by his death.”

(To be continued)

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Auroville: towards a spiritualised society based on Integral Yoga

Bindu Mohanty

Abstract

[The paper seeks to present preliminary findings from a qualitative research project – an interpretive inquiry -- that explores how spiritual ideals held by individuals inform the social psychology of Auroville. Based on the spiritual vision of the sage-philosopher, Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), Auroville, located in Tamil Nadu, is a growing international town of 1,800 people from over forty countries. Founded in 1968 by Sri Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator, the Mother (1878-1973), Auroville seeks to aid the spiritual evolution of the earth by manifesting a spiritualised society. Described both as a place for Karma yoga and Integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo, Auroville stands as a remarkable urban experiment that aims to bring about human unity. Its relevance accrues from the fact that Auroville offers a new definition of self, society and spirituality in a globalised, market-driven world that increasingly faces religious turmoil and alienation of the individual self from the society.

This work is a pioneering research project because, as of yet, there is scant qualitative research into the social psychology of spiritual communities. The paper also examines the inadequacy of Western paradigms of social psychology in understanding Auroville. Data collection comprised participant observation of the daily life of the community especially focusing on community meetings, informal conversations, formal recorded interviews, a community survey, and the collection and analysis of written documents such as the community journals. Data analysis was carried out through an open-coding process with the help of the software programme, Hyperresarch 2.8. The study examines the dialectic between the individual and society, particularly in the context of self-identity and social solidarity; lists the inspirations and challenges that individuals face and points at prevalent shadow issues. The findings from the study are placed in the context of Sri Aurobindo's vision of a gnostic or spiritualised society and his and the Mother's description of the collective dimension of Integral Yoga. Integral Yoga, synthesising modern evolutionary perspectives with the ancient wisdom of Indian psychology and philosophy, delineates the farther reaches of human nature and society. Auroville is viewed as a practical application and experiment of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's vision.]

Western social scientists are beginning to discern the emergence of a spiritual society as a result of an ongoing social evolutionary process (e. g., see Griffin, 1998; King, 2004; Wuthnow, 1992; Wilber, 1995; Wexler, 2000;). This emerging new society, beyond the postmodern society with its preoccupations of culture, language and identity, is characterised by a spiritual resurgence rooted in the lived experience of the individual (Forman, 2004). As Ferrer and Sherman (in press) remark, there seems to be a genuine need for “deeply lived religion rather than a simply confessed or routinely performed religiosity” (p.16). Social evolutionary theorists concur that evolution proceeds from pre-secular to secular and further onto post-secular societies (King 2004).

These evolutionary theories however are mainly formulated by Euro-American writers on the basis of their study of the development of the Western civilisation, and are strongly based on the assumption that economic motives are the cause of social development. The validity of these theories needs to be verified by conducting empirical studies of other societies and cultures, for even a cursory study of history reveals that the inter-relationship of society and religion in the West differs from that of India. Briefly speaking, while Western societies are largely homogenous and were organised first under an authoritative religious institution and then around techno-economic means of production, Indian society is far more heterogeneous, complex and religiously diverse. Socio-cultural or psycho-spiritual worldviews in India do not show that neat progression from pre-modern to modern and post-modern development. Nor has the development of rationality and critical thinking in India resulted in a complete social erosion of religious faith as it has in the West. The Indian mind seems to easily embrace the seemingly opposing tendencies of faith and reason. Rationality and faith are seen as qualities that arise from different parts of one being and one or the other can be fruitfully applied to different situations in life as deemed fit.

Sri Aurobindo's vision of society

Sri Aurobindo's spiritual vision presents a unique evolutionary view of society that is radically different from Western theorists. Sri Aurobindo (1972b) holds that that evolution of nature, the human species and society is pre-ordained and aided by a Divine force called the Supramental Force. (1) Rather than analysing economic factors, Sri Aurobindo (1972a) describes evolution of society in psycho-spiritual terms, and his framework is more in keeping with the general development of the Indian civilisation than the Western paradigm mentioned earlier. Sri Aurobindo sees society as proceeding through symbolic, typical, conventional, individualist and subjective stage.

Sri Aurobindo chiefly differs from other evolutionary thinkers on the issue that the earliest forms of society were necessarily primitive and archaic in their religious formulation. In sharp contrast, Sri Aurobindo points out that the first stage of Indian civilisation, the ancient Vedic society, was largely symbolic where life was symbolically organised in accordance with the highest spiritual truths. (2) In the symbolic age of society, life is predominantly religious or spiritual and all the facets of life — the psychological, economic, ethical, and physical — are regarded as being sacrosanct.

In the second typical stage, one sees the spiritual impulse being dominated by the psychological type, as for instance in the psychological characterisation of the Indian caste system. The third conventional stage comes about when the outer expression of the ideal is formalised and becomes more important than the ideal itself. In the conventional stage of the Indian society, the caste system came to be formulated as a rigid, social order rather than a psychological characterisation of the individual's abilities. The increasing intolerance of conventionalism is eventually overthrown by an individualistic stage where rationality predominates. Noting the difference between India and Europe at this stage, Sri Aurobindo (1972a) points out that the former society merely produced religious reformers and new spiritual impulses with appropriate cultural and social practices, while the European society was marked by the rise of atheism and secularism. In the evolution from an individualistic age to a subjective age, Sri Aurobindo speculates on how India and Europe can influence each other: While upholding the democratic rights and the freedom of the individual secured by the West as a necessary condition for social evolution, Sri Aurobindo hopes that India, which has never divorced spirituality from its social and cultural practices, will influence the West in discovering practical and subjective spiritual ideals.

Of the futuristic, subjective age, Sri Aurobindo (1972a) says that ideally it would be a stage where the individual is governed by the deepest law of his/her own being — that of the soul. Further, Sri Aurobindo points out that the subjective stage of the social cycle can culminate in a spiritualised society only by the radical change of human consciousness into a divine or supramental consciousness. Thus, for Sri Aurobindo, a spiritual society is based not on a theoretical or mental understanding but on the actual spiritual realisation of each individual of the oneness of the whole universe. According to Sri Aurobindo, two conditions need to be met to effect a spiritual change in society: Firstly there must be a group of individuals who can “recreate themselves in the image of the spirit and communicate both their idea and its power to the mass,” and secondly, there must be a group or society “which is capable of receiving and

effectively assimilating the power” (p. 232). Sri Aurobindo points out that in the past these two conditions have never been fully met in the past, which has resulted in the observable phenomenon that while individuals have attained enlightenment or high spiritual heights, society itself has never been truly spiritualised. But he believes that, even though the process may take hundreds of years, the spiritualisation of society is the unavoidable goal towards which humanity is moving.

While Sri Aurobindo's (1972b) evolutionary vision gives primacy to the Divine evolutionary force, his path of Integral Yoga presupposes the possibility of conscious participation in evolution. In Sri Aurobindo's vision, the individual, being capable of conscious participation, has the potential to help in the collective evolutionary journey. Perceiving all life as yoga Sri Aurobindo (1972c) instructs that every aspect of life should be taken up in Integral Yoga to realise its goal of a spiritual evolution and world-transformation.

Sri Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator, the Mother (born Mirra Alfassa) took upon herself the work of manifesting on earth his vision of “a new world, a new humanity, a new society” (1978a, p.210). And to that end, she founded first the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and then, in 1968, the universal township of Auroville, “based on the teaching of Sri Aurobindo, where men [sic] of all countries would be at home”. Supported since its inception by UNESCO and the Government of India, Auroville, located in rural Tamil Nadu at present comprises 1,500 people from India and thirty-four other countries (Census, 2006).

A remarkable urban experiment in human unity, Auroville's relevance accrues from the fact that it offers a new definition of self, society and spirituality in a globalised, market-driven world that increasingly faces religious turmoil and alienation of the individual self from the society. On the basis of qualitative, interpretive research, this paper examines Auroville as a spiritualised society based on the ideals of Integral Yoga.

It is important to note at the outset, the societies that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother set up, namely the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville are different from monastic groups and Buddhist sanghas, which are based around collective intentions and practices. While such communities undoubtedly benefit the people who comprise them, Sri Aurobindo felt that though such spiritual communities reached out to the masses, they tended merely towards, ‘the creation of the religious temperament, the most outward form of spirituality’ (cited in Heehs, 2000, p.217) and were thus incapable of effecting the spiritual and supramental change in humanity that was the goal of his yoga. In the context of Auroville, the Mother repeatedly clarified that both the process and the goal of a collective ideal had to be worked out by each individual in her own way. And she was

reluctant to frame rules and laws for Auroville, believing that “things will get formulated as the underlying truth of the township emerges and takes shape progressively” (1981b, p.450).

Sri Aurobindo (1972b) also sees the necessity of including people from all walks of life and at all stages of development in Integral Yoga in order to effect a collective spiritual transformation through the action of the divine force. States the Mother, “by the very nature of things, it [the supramental transformation] is a collective ideal that calls for a collective effort so that it may be realised in the terms of an integral human perfection” (1978a, p.210). In other words, the supramental transformation cannot be brought about by a single individual, for he/she represents only one particular type of personality. In order to achieve a complete transformation of human nature, all personality-types need to be represented in this collective yoga for humanity. Consequently Auroville’s population of 1500 (Census, 2006) is extremely diverse encompassing people with varying literacy levels and belonging to different cultures and economic classes.

While Martinez, a commentator on Auroville’s social processes, seeks to theoretically describe the growth of Auroville’s society through Sri Aurobindo’s (1972a) perspective of the human cycle, I personally find Auroville, being less than 40 years old, less than the life-span of a human-being, is too young a society to be subject to such an analysis. While there are definitely parallels between the Mother’s intentional act of creating Auroville and a symbolic society based on spiritual values, such comparisons could be too facile or the categories arbitrarily imposed without being supported by qualitative data. From my study, I would rather draw the tentative inference that different sections of the Auroville society exhibit the different characteristics of typical, conventional, individualistic, and subjective (false and true) societies described by Sri Aurobindo.

Methodology

The particular qualitative methodology selected for this study is basic interpretive qualitative research, which is defined by Merriam as a form of qualitative research that interprets “a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved or a combination of these” (2002, p.6). In other words, this methodology allows for a generalised interpretation of the lived experience that is being researched in all its totality rather than being limited, as in most other qualitative methods, to studying a single situation or an isolated phenomenon.

The researcher as the primary instrument of research

At the outset, and at the considerable risk of being outcast by the upholders of objectivity in academic research, I need to confess that I myself am an Aurovilian since 1995. As a researcher, I seek to combine as Ferrer and Sherman (in press) advocate, an attitude of critical detachment with participatory engagement. In addition to the growing number of feminist, transpersonal and postmodern scholars who question the epistemic authority of critical rationality (e. g. see Braud and Anderson, 1998; Flood, 1999; Jaggar, 1990), I hold that such an attitude of both participating in life and relationships as well as critically observing them is intrinsic to the multidimensional reality of human consciousness.

The research process

The research was carried out during my stay at Auroville from December 15, 2006 to October 15, 2007. It comprised participant observation of the daily life of the community especially focusing on community meetings, informal conversations, formal recorded interviews, a community survey, and the collection and analysis of written documents such as the community journals, *News and Notes* and *Auroville Today* and postings on the electronic forum, *Auroville Net*.

A significant amount of data was collected through a community-wide survey that sought to identify the joys and challenges of living in Auroville. 131 Aurovilians, over 10% of the actual population contacted, responded to the survey, which by marketing-survey standards is an acceptable response rate. To secure individual points of view, 11 semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted in two separate phases, a pilot study before the administration and analysis of the community survey, and a main study after the survey was over.

Analysis of data

The social science research technique of content analysis was used to analyse the data. This technique focuses on systematically identifying and interpreting key elements in the content of a communication rather than analysing or deconstructing the structure of the narrative (Berg, 2003, p.224).

Analysis of the survey

The two main categories of joys and challenges indicated in the survey form were further classified under three headings of (a) situational factors (b) personal factors and (c) interpersonal factors. In a further analytical step, under the category of joys, repeated key words such as freedom, growth, work, adventure, experiment, Mother’s force were noted, and further sub-divisions were

introduced under the headings of personal and interpersonal factors.

Analysis of interviews

The digitally-recorded interviews were manually transcribed and a software program called Hyperresearch 2.8 was used to help with the organisation, coding, and analysis of data. Using the constant comparative analysis method of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), codes or categories for organising the data were inductively derived from the data itself.

Inferences drawn from the study

My research findings indicate that while Auroville is far from being the spiritual or supramental society described by Sri Aurobindo, it exhibits certain characteristics, such as embodiment, engagement in social and environmental issues, a re-definition of one's personal sense of identity, and a different attitude to work and to interpersonal relationships, that have been identified as the characteristics of an emerging mystical society (Wexler, 2000) or a constructive postmodern spirituality (Griffin, 1998). These characteristics, as well as characteristics that are unique to the spiritual discipline of Integral Yoga, are detailed below:

Economics in a spiritual society:

It is perhaps erroneous to assume, as Wilber (1995, 2000) does, that the economics of constant production could possibly form the basis of a spiritual society. Sri Aurobindo (1972a), foreseeing the end of both capitalism and socialism, views economics in terms of spiritual values rather than of material necessities:

The aim of its [that of a spiritual society] economics would be not to create a huge engine of production, whether of the competitive or the co-operative kind, but to give to men – not only to some but to all men each in his highest possible measure – the joy of work according to their own nature, and free leisure to grow inwardly, as well as a simple, rich and beautiful life for all. (p.257)

Griffin (1998) similarly points out that both socialism and capitalism are products of a modern worldview and calls for constructive postmodern alternatives to the current economic paradigms. While in terms of its ideals, Auroville envisions an idealistic stage where one works for the joy of expressing oneself or serving and not to earn a living, in practice, Aurovilians have not yet found a suitable economic structure that would embody or help foster the ideals. Auroville currently exhibits a mix of capitalistic (even sometimes monopolistic)

and socialist systems. Many Aurovilians, in accordance with Sri Aurobindo's vision deliberately adopt a lifestyle of "voluntary simplicity" as was mentioned to me by Andy (3) an interviewee.

Aurovilians' attitudes towards work:

Ideally, according to the Mother (1978b), work "would not be a way to earn one's living but a way to express oneself and to develop one's capacities and possibilities while being of service to the community as a whole, which, for its own part, would provide for each individual's subsistence and sphere of action" (p. 94). This ideal practically manifests itself in the fact that Aurovilians give themselves the freedom to change their place and type of work regardless of whether they have the necessary qualifications or experience for a particular job. On the issue of work, responses such as these were common:

1. The freedom to work in areas I'm interested but not educated in,
2. The freedom to find one's deeper self and one's own work.
3. The inner experience, possibilities to take up different works regardless of 'official' qualifications.

The ideal of voluntary service

The Mother (1978c) also specified that Auroville is a place for "Karma Yoga" (p. 227) — that is, a place for realising the Divine by offering one's work as service to the Divine. Four people, in their community survey, even though they were not specifically asked to comment on their attitude to work, said that what they liked about Auroville was Karma Yoga, which one defined as "all work is for the Divine, not for a paycheck". (4) One described her work as "the most wonderful and powerful experience" as she did not have to work for herself anymore. An interviewee, Cathy, who resonates with the ideal of work as service says that she was happy to take up whatever work was offered to her or needed to be done at any given time," and "often taught herself the skills that were needed for a particular job." Bharati, a young Tamil man who came to Auroville from a local village as an adolescent, advocates community service and insists that making money has never been primary motive for working. Says he, "You do a good service, money will automatically come," adding that he often voluntarily did jobs that needed to be done, or even collectively organised voluntary community services such as "Auroville Night Guards" and summer camps for children.

There is no strict quid pro quo between the work one does and the pay one receives. In general, commercial or profit-oriented business pay better wages while service-oriented businesses and administrative working groups pay lower

wages or none at all. For service-oriented businesses, the ideal of work as a community service runs strong. Donald, a manager of the community store, *Pour Tous*, draws a minimal salary of Rs. 4,000, considerably less than other Auroville workers at the same stall, while working 9-10 hours a day including Sundays because of his overwhelming work load. One would be hard pressed to foster such a dedicated attitude through enforced structures.

At a casual conversation over tea one day, Raja, a sculptor friend and a fellow Aurovilian, who does routine administrative work at the Solar Kitchen booking and organising meals, described how when he first started his work, he inwardly revolted at the routine nature of his work for he had to come to terms with his own self-image of himself as a creative artist. “And now,” he said, with his characteristic, enigmatic smile, “I am the Solar Kitchen.” Upon further questioning, it turned out that Raja had not taken up the job because he needed to earn money for a living, but because he deliberately wanted to challenge himself to take up a job that part of his being considered boring or demeaning. He also clarified that his cryptic statement that he was the Solar Kitchen did not imply a narcissistic, self-importance on his part, but that he did not make the subjective/objective distinctions between him and his work. “I am there [at the Solar Kitchen], when I am needed. Even on Sundays. I don’t count the hours that I put in, even though I know other Aurovilians do,” says he (personal communication, July 12, 2007).

When work is voluntarily undertaken for the sake of a greater collective good and not for economic incentive or even for personal job satisfaction, one has a completely different attitude towards work, an attitude, I daresay, that can be identified as Buber’s (1970) dialogical notion of an I-Thou relation where both I and Thou are co-created through a mutual encounter. This seemed to be implied in Raja’s description about his work at the Solar Kitchen and was made explicit by an Aurovilian forester who said, in the context of managing Auroville’s forests, “I walk through the forests and the land ‘speaks’ to me, and I know what is to be done. I don’t mean that the land actually talks to me in a new-agey sense. I just intuitively know what to plant where” (personal communication, May 23, 2007).

Consciousness, experimentation and collaboration in work:

Other attitudes towards work that similarly suggest a holy I-thou relationship are prevalent in Auroville. Such attitudes contrast sharply with the I-It relationship towards work that one normally finds in work places driven by economic forces. To begin with, part of the spiritual discipline of Integral Yoga is to work consciously for as the Mother (1978a) says, it is only through work that one can

consciously develop matter and help to transform it. To be conscious about one’s work could mean maintaining a certain awareness while working or simply thinking about it deeply before acting. As Bharati says about his work at the Auroville Bakery: “I always know what I am doing. Because sometimes I think after what I do. But many times I know what I am doing. I think three, four times before I [do something].”

For Andy, an architect, one of the biggest inspirations about being in Auroville is the freedom to be able to work in a more holistic way — not to be driven by the goal but to have the possibility to experiment with the processes itself:

What I liked about Auroville was the possibility of working as an architect in a more profound way . . . Outside . . . it’s such a straitjacket. You are strapped by monetary considerations all around — insurance policies and the like. But here one can decide on the process of how one goes about to create a building. It’s much more than just designing. . . I can’t just sit and make sketches of buildings without a deeper understanding of what is seeking to be manifested in the whole bigger picture.

Speaking about a particular building that he helped construct, Andy says, it was, right from the outset, an experimental group process, where for four months, Andy and his co-architect presented sets of drawings to their client, the community of *Verité*, till all were satisfied with the vision of the building. Andy described that moment of acceptance as being epiphanic. And while Andy admits that this experimental process, where the design kept evolving even at the stage of construction, had significant cost-overruns, for him it validated his belief that a conscious, collaborative process results in a superior product. Work, in this context, is not just about putting individual consciousness into matter, but making the more difficult effort to foster a group consciousness by completely surrendering one’s own egoistic preferences in order to co-create something together.

Last but not least, for many Aurovilians, there is a transpersonal element to one’s work — the belief in Mother’s force guiding them in their work. Bharati, with explaining how he tackles problems in his work insists, “To me definitely some force [of the Mother] will be with everyone. How they use it, how they take, how they receive it, how they ask for it, that’s what matters. How they utilise it you know.” Many Aurovilians, particularly Andy and Bharati amongst my interviewees, state that given the challenging socio-environmental conditions and the circumstances, it would never have been possible for Auroville to develop as much as it has without being aided by a divine force.

Distinctions between manual labour and management

Another way in which Aurovilians subvert class distinctions prevalent in the normal economic arena is by blurring the distinction between managerial work and manual labour. Bharati talks about how he resisted being chosen as an executive of the Auroville Bakery for he did not like the distinctions made between managers and labourers. He told the person who nominated him that no matter what his position, he would continue to work the way he is used to: “I will do the same thing. It’s not that if I am Executive I will wear pant, suit and tie . . . you can still come and see in the Bakery I will be working with the people — with shorts, sweating... kneading the dough.” The only difference is he says that now, presumably because of his greater responsibility, “I have been working more than my hours.” And this is in keeping with the ideal of Auroville that “in the general organisation intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority will find expression not in the enhancement of the pleasures and the powers of life but in the increase of duties and responsibilities” (The Mother, 1978c, p.94).

Spirituality as part of everyday life

Spirituality in Auroville is individually practised in diverse forms and yet somehow contained within the broad context of Integral Yoga and its evolutionary character. Most Aurovilians actually do not seem to follow any formal spiritual practices. And there seems to be an unvoiced but commonly accepted view, and as was hinted by two interviewees, that just through their work and by choosing to live in Auroville, Aurovilians participate in the spiritual evolution of humankind. People imbue their daily life in with symbolic, spiritual values that at once includes and transcends physical reality:

- I like everything that I do and the kind of life that I have here. It is difficult for me to stress some aspects more than others, but if I try to underline some I would like to mention: the possibility to align my inner aspirations with the totality of my life and my work here. I have a sense of living in a permanent adventure in my work, my studies, in all my daily activities.
- My everyday life is part of my spiritual path, as well as being part of building the city “the earth needs”.

Though other commentators on post-secular spirituality do not emphasise on this issue, I believe that having a spiritual orientation to all of one’s life is a crucial indicator of a turn towards a spiritualised life and society. It heals the deep schism between objectivity and subjectivity that was brought about by modernity and allows for a holistic lifestyle that does not differentiate between the sacred and the secular. By doing so, I believe, we naturally move towards

the aperspectival vision-logic of a higher consciousness that is advocated by Wilber (1995). A holistic outlook recasts the customary dualistic perspective on life into an integral perspective as is evident from the following responses by Aurovilians:

- AV [Auroville] is a community: where I live, eat, work and play is integrated/ one. This is critical for my quality of life
- I live in Auroville. Full point. I would sincerely not be able to answer this question as I have stopped thinking in terms of likes and dislikes ever since I started living in Auroville in September’94.

Freedom on the path

Contemporary democratic societies have liberated individuals from the tyrannical hold of institutionalised religions. This freedom allows individuals to choose a religious or spiritual practice that they resonate with. In Integral Yoga such freedom stems from the belief that each individual has a unique relationship to the Divine and therefore a unique path to the Divine. Because of this belief, Aurovilians are largely free to define their lifestyles and standard of living in ways they choose. The freedom that Auroville accords to individuals is actually greater than that of capitalistic, mainstream societies as Aurovilians are not restricted by social roles and distinctions. This sense of freedom to explore a different identity extends to the transpersonal realm as was evident from the following answers in response to the question about “what do you like about living in Auroville”:

- The freedom in the choice of ways to rise in consciousness
- The relative freedom to live a life that is more directed by inner forces than outer
- Freedom and the ambition to choose our way to a higher consciousness
- The freedom to find one’s deeper self
- Living with so much open-ended possibility to explore, create and manifest what one is guided to do

There is always the danger that freedom, especially freedom without the discipline of a regular practice, can, and probably in a number of cases does, lead to unrestricted hedonism of the egoistic self. In a mature personality however, the sense of freedom is seen as being crucial for growth. For example, one survey respondent wrote, “the freedom in AV [Auroville] taught me the best discipline to be myself.”

I would further like to conjecture that freedom perhaps plays a crucial role in this yoga of transformation. What I have observed in Auroville, in myself and in others, is that, perhaps because life is not bounded by social rules, roles,

distinctions and categories, sometimes one's worst traits of personality are exhibited in interpersonal interactions. But it could well be that precisely because such deformations of one's character are given expression rather than being suppressed, there is the possibility for their transformation by the light and action of the divine Force, not only at an individual level but also at planetary level because of the inherent oneness of the universe. As Sri Aurobindo explains, "If only sattwic [virtuous] and cultured men [sic] come from yoga, men without very much of the vital difficulty in them, then, because the difficulty of the vital element in terrestrial nature has not been faced and overcome, it might well be that the endeavour would fail" (1972d, p.828).

Evolutionary perspectives

While a few survey respondents spoke of their spiritual path in Auroville in general terms, the vast majority of the survey respondents specifically mentioned aspects of Integral Yoga in the delineation of their path. As these were responses were made to the general question of "what do you like about Auroville," it again points to the fact that spirituality is the overriding factor in many people's lives in Auroville. While some Aurovilians spoke of Auroville's ideals in general terms, such as "this is a good place for integral yoga," "leading a spiritual life according to Sri Aurobindo and The Mother," fulfilling "Mother's dream," and "building the city the earth needs," others mentioned specific aspects of integral yoga. For example, two respondents viewed their life in terms of Integral Yoga's co-creative evolutionary goal citing "participation to the discovery of a new human being, centred on its Divine reality" and "sharing the conscious co-creation for our evolution."

An immanent notion of the Divine

Constructive postmodernism spirituality, eschewing supernaturalism and atheism, "affirms a vision . . . according to which the world is present in deity and deity is present in the world" (Griffin, 1998, p. 17). Such a concept of immanent divinity is at the core of Sri Aurobindo's teaching and was echoed by a survey respondent who stated that he/she lived in Auroville "to see the one in all existence, to see all existence in the one" and "to have forever the experience of *satyam ritam brihat ananda* [a Vedic formulation of the nature of the immanent Divine used by Sri Aurobindo] (1972b). Practitioners of Integral Yoga, actually take this concept of the immanent Divine, a step further in that they see each person as being a unique embodiment of the Divine working out a unique relationship with the transcendent and immanent Divine. This realisation fosters tolerance and acceptance. Oliver hinted as such when he mentioned

that one of the most challenging aspects of his life in Auroville was to live in community with people that he, at first, felt did not subscribe to Auroville's ideals. Accepting the fact that these people were also an integral part of the spiritual experiment of Auroville consequently led to Oliver's own growth.

Interconnection with nature

The Divine's presence in the world is not restricted to anthropic ideas about seeing the Divine's immanence only in human beings and the human world. Griffin (1998) and Spretnak (1998) espouse that postsecular spirituality is marked by a deeper connection to the natural world, where individuals do not feel alienated from nature but are at home with it. Auroville's commendable work in greening the earth has resulted in fostering a relationship between the residents and the natural world. Over half-a-dozen survey respondents mentioned their appreciation for the natural environment, and a couple of people reflected their connection to nature in terms of their own spiritual growth:

- The natural environment provides a balance in my life never before experienced.
- A stimulating environment that encourages a close contact with Nature and one Self.

A different notion of self

A connection to nature indicates that the personal self is "open and debounded, rather than separate and defended" (Wexler, 2000, p. 135-36). The modern alienated self, says Wexler, divorced from spirituality feels the need to defend itself from hostile others. In contrast, in Integral Yoga, one aspires for a self that is open at all levels to the influx of the Divine force. A Tamil woman coming from an urban milieu reflecting on her self-identity in Auroville indicates such a growth towards a transpersonal notion of self, when she writes: "AV [Auroville] made me my own self. Just 10 kms down in Puducherry [a nearby town], I might be living nearby as a daughter, wife, lawyer etc. but not myself . . . And this self, I want to happily offer for 'divine consciousness.' "

Specifically, my research indicates that Auroville allows its residents the freedom to explore their personal identity to a greater depth than would have been possible in the societies and cultures that they originally came from. Twelve Tamil Aurovilian women that I talked to mentioned that Auroville gave them a greater degree of freedom and independence than would have been in the rural culture that they came from: "We can express ourselves more freely here — wear whatever clothes we please, talk openly with others including men, and speak out our minds." As indicated in the text, "To be a true Aurovilian," a

couple of participants specifically mentioned finding a new self-identity by breaking free from their original social and cultural conditioning. And this inevitably results in happiness as notably expressed by one person who wrote: “I am deeply happy here, in spite of occasional difficulties, inner or outward. I have never felt so free in my life. It took several years for my self-image, collected during a rather long life from conditioning, professional expectations and appreciation, and society in general to scrape off and shed all that crust.”

Interpersonal relationships:

As opposed to the narcissistic individualism of modernism and the nihilistic relativism of deconstructive postmodernism, a constructive postmodern or postsecular spirituality accords a high value to intersubjective relationships between individuals (Cobb, 1998; Griffin, 1998; Keller, 1998). Griffin explains that in such a society individuals do not see themselves as self-contained entities but rather accept that “the relations one has with one’s body, one’s larger natural environment, one’s family and culture are indeed *constitutive* [emphasis in original] of one’s very identity” (p. 14). Integral Yoga differs philosophically from this stance in that it views the individual, in its aspect of its soul as being a unique and autonomous entity (Sri Aurobindo, 1972b). Similarly in a text titled, “*To be a true Aurovilian*,” the Mother (1978a) writes: “The first necessity is the inner discovery by which one learns who one really is behind the social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At our inmost centre there is a free being, wide and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the acting centre of our being and our life in Auroville” (p.213).

Rather than emphasising an individual’s relationship with others, Integral Yoga, as evidenced in the first line of the Auroville charter, sees the individual’s relationship with the divine consciousness as the essential base for all of life’s activities. In their lived experience, Aurovilians, as was evident from the survey responses, are often saddened and frustrated by the lack of community in Auroville. And yet, what inspires many people to continue to live here is a felt sense of the divine consciousness. Oliver recollects how in the early years, he would feel a tangible vibration, “as though the air had changed” when he, after having been out, was re-entering the Auroville area. “For a long time now,” he continues, “I had stopped feeling it, and just the other day, when I was just out cycling, I felt it again. It was there!”

This does not necessarily mean that Aurovilians are not affected by their interpersonal relationships with each other. There are quite a few who left Auroville precisely because of their frustration at the lack of community in Auroville. More tellingly, an Aurovilian who has lived here for about 25 years

but now feels ambivalent about the experiment expressed to me that he feels that the larger community of Auroville “rather than encouraging people to do their yoga somehow brings out the worst in people” (personal communication, Oct 22, 2007).

But then again, for other Aurovilians, “the experience of being in the social world increasingly resembles core elements of mystical experience rather than mechanical interchanges” (Wexler, 2000, p. 4). One of my survey respondents wrote that in Auroville she/her felt “a spontaneous, inner connection with individuals, sometimes even if I don’t know them well. (I experienced this before I came to AV, but never so often or with such a diversity of individuals).”

Ideally, Integral Yoga envisions that social relationships with others would always be informed by the individual’s primal relationship with the Divine. And this, to a certain extent, seems to be embodied in the lives and work of some Aurovilians. Andy, an architect describes how the group called Dreamcatchers seek to bring about innovative solutions to town planning through a collective, participatory process that honours both the transcendental ideal of Auroville and the immanent, ongoing relationship with others. Says he:

This is what appeals to me about the Dreamcatchers. The idea that we, as Aurovilians, can dream this city into existence. Not just that this is the city is there and we have to call it down, but that each of us has the possibility to see some of what the vision of the city is and help call it down. When I talk about dreams, I don't talk about mini dreams, personal dreams, but Mother's dream. It's Her dream that we are trying to catch and this takes us out of our egoic, small selves. That's the aim. Trying to find methods, which mean we can create more holistically together.

Whether Aurovilians view their interpersonal relationships with others in positive or negative terms, where Auroville differs significantly from mainstream, capitalistic societies is in the fact, that given the small size of the community and the proximity of its members, inter-subjective communication is not just an interchange of signified texts “but of multiple substances of vitality, bodily breath and fluid” . . . these interchanges are not exchanges but transformations” (Wexler, 2003, p. 137). As in other intentional communities where people construct their lives together around a shared ideal, social interaction in Auroville is embodied in ways that would just not be possible in mainstream societies where individuals largely lead alienated lives. There is a visceral quality to interactions amongst Aurovilians, which is absent in modern and radically postmodern societies.

Wexler (2000) suggests that “against the disorientation, decathexis, and

desensitisation that characterise modernity and postmodernity, the emerging form of life in a mystical society is characterised by unification rather than dispersion”(p.3). My analysis of Auroville reveals that while, because of the immense freedom granted to individuals, there is a certain element of differentiation and dispersion in Auroville, common belief in certain transpersonal ideals acts as a unifying factor. In my interviews, both Swaminathan, an Aurovilian from the local village, and Oliver, an Austrian Aurovilian, mentioned how their brothers just could not comprehend why they work at menial jobs in Auroville instead of building a successful, financial career. And as opposed to this, Oliver continued, “when I meet an Aurovilian abroad, outside of Auroville, I feel immediately that this person is family even though I may not know him very well, or on some occasion or the other may have quarrelled with him/her.” There is a bonding that is born out of a shared, common passion for certain transpersonal ideals and the commitment that one shows in working to manifest these ideals into reality.

Being a willing servitor of the Divine consciousness

As seen earlier, a central tenet of Integral Yoga is the belief in a transcendental and immanent Divine working in oneself and in the world, to bring about a spiritual evolution both in the individual and in society. It could be noted here that both in its practice and philosophy, Integral Yoga does away with narcissistic experientialism that has, as Ferrer (2002) points out, vexed the movement of transpersonal psychology. Apart from Franz describing his first meeting with the Mother, none of my informants detailed transpersonal experiences even when directly asked what spirituality meant to them. To be a willing servitor of the Divine essentially means to forego one’s own ambitions and desire for transpersonal experiences or personal growth and merely play the part that one feels individually called by the Divine to play.

This aspect of surrendering or sacrificing one’s own interests to the Divine is an important practice in the yoga so much so that one person, abdicating her own free will in joining Auroville, writes: “I feel I didn’t really choose to live here – rather I have to live here and I surrender.” For another Aurovilian, psychologically, being a willing servitor of the Divine, is not so much of surrendering to the Divine will as aspiring to understand and fulfil it. He writes: “It [Auroville] fulfils a dream, a desire to rise to the Divine’s imagination of how our lives should be in Auroville.” Still another Aurovilian speaks of the joy that one gets in playing such a servile role and at the same time seems to admit that one may not always fully understand the Divine will. She/he writes: “It is wonderful to feel oneself as an instrument on the hands of the Divine. It is

humiliating to be a puppet by Grace.”

There is also a widely prevalent belief in Auroville that, when one does not voluntarily surrender to the Divine’s will, one gets knocks and blows in one’s life that teaches one to go within, identify and detach from one’s egoistic motives. This principle was best explained to me by Jean who said that he left his comfortable life in France because he was “not experiencing anything directly, cocooned in a sheltered, virtual life,” where he was living life vicariously through the emotions of characters in films or novels. “Here, I am constantly interacting with others in our common effort to build the city, and these interactions are often challenging. But I learn and grow through these challenges. The stone that hurts me as I walk on my path is also my teacher,” he concludes (personal communication October 31, 2007).

Action of the Divine force

Many Aurovilians mentioned their belief or their experience of the Mother’s force, which can be equated with the Supramental Force as the Mother is regarded as a personal embodiment of the Divine. While attitudes towards the Mother greatly vary even amongst those Aurovilians who specifically believe her to be a divine being, what is common is that each, in their own individual way, seeks a relationship with her or her disembodied presence. In Franz’s life, that first meeting with the Mother was unique in its transformational power, and while he seeks to recreate the depth and peace of that powerful moment on his own through meditations, or in his interactions with others, nothing so far is comparable to that singular event. Franz consequently doubts others when they claim about having a personal connection to the Mother without ever having met her. Bharati seeks to maintain his relationship to her by laboriously copying her or Sri Aurobindo’s words in calligraphy. Yet another informant, Jean, who had met the Mother, shared that what keeps him in Auroville, despite current challenges, “is the Mother.” From Jean, as I gathered from further questioning, the Mother symbolises the evolutionary drive within him that seeks personal growth often through challenging interactions and to work for a better world. This transmutation of the Mother as a human figure to an impersonal force is evident from an anecdote that Jean relates:

On the morning of November 18, 1973, I got the news that the Mother had passed away the previous evening. The news was shocking. None of us had ever expected it. Aurovilians were flocking to the Ashram that morning for a last “darshan” of the Mother. For a moment, I was shaken and undecided, and then I clearly felt that Mother wanted me to do her work and not to worship her. And so I continued as usual with my planned work for the day — concreting

the floor of my workshop (personal communication October 31, 2007).

For practitioners of Integral Yoga, the most expeditious way to develop or evolve oneself is to simply remain open to this evolutionary Force of the Mother and to have faith that it would work things out in the proper manner and in the proper time. Integral Yoga views the individual's relationship to the Divine in co-creative and participatory ways, but the Divine being omnipotent is seen as being vastly more powerful than the human persona. In short, the fastest and safest path to spiritual growth in Integral Yoga is to remain open to the working of the Divine force from above (Sri Aurobindo, 1972d). In my study, the Mother's force was mentioned both as a spiritual belief and as a transpersonal experience as indicated by the following response:

- I am grateful that Mother and Sri Aurobindo have created AV and continue to support and guide it and that I am given the possibility to live and work here.
- I feel very grateful . . . to have met the Mother. I . . . thank Mother for having led me here.
- I am happy and content. I always feel the presence of The Mother.
- Auroville is the physical manifestation of the Mother's Dream and I feel favoured to be in AV.
- It is grace even just to live in AV. Feeling that this is the Mother's project.
- I was "touched" by the Mother in 1972. The yoga of Sri Aurobindo keeps inspiring me.
- I like to live in the Presence. The presence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, the presence of the AV spirit; no place elsewhere can give me that kind of nourishment and safety on a subtle level.

Also as evident from the above responses, this force or presence of the Mother not only greatly adds to people's sense of psychological well-being in terms of feeling grateful, happy, content and inspired, but is also seen as being necessary for spiritual progress. A few Aurovilians mention the force in impersonal, general terms rather than explicitly identifying it as the Mother's Force:

- To live in AV is to be an instrument in the hands of Spirit of Auroville, which is dynamically active behind all that happens in AV.
- It is indeed a place where one can feel that there is something beyond human organisational power.
- I feel "something" in the land of AV [Auroville]. I feel that "something" more at *Matrimandir*, *Savitri Bhavan* and in the forest area of AV.
- The inevitable feeling that the Divine is close though at lives very heavily masked.

- The power radiating all over Auroville
- This place is being guided by a conscious force.

As explicitly stated by her, the Mother is believed to have placed her force in Auroville that acts as a protective force-field for the experiment. Beliefs such as these are quite common: "The high power put by 'Mother' . . . it gives support and evolution [sic]. As stated by Sri Aurobindo (1972b), not all are seen as being capable of withstanding and assimilating the power of this force as evidenced from comments such as this: "the guidance of the Mother is very strong here, and it's quite something to get used to."

The Matrimandir

At the very centre of the city is *Matrimandir*, a sacred edifice, which is considered the "soul of Auroville" (The Mother, 1981a, p.229). One cannot emphasise enough the importance of *Matrimandir* in the collective life of Auroville. Aurovilians believe that the *Matrimandir* is "a kind of dynamo for channelling and directing the Force of the Great Mother to support the development of Auroville and the transformation of the world" (Van Vrekhem, 2000, p.524).

In the early, pioneering years, the *Matrimandir* literally helped in building solidarity among the Aurovilians for most of them physically and collaboratively worked at the construction site of the *Matrimandir*. And the repetitive, manual work of construction often took on a numinous quality: The late Ruud Lohman, an ex-Franciscan priest and an Aurovilian who was known for his dedication to constructing the *Matrimandir*, describes the digging of the immense crater for its foundation thus: "We dug on and on, for nobody digs to dig a hole, but just to dig in one's subconscious — to carry things up, to bring them into clear daylight, to organise them" (Lohman, 1978, as cited in Sullivan, 1994, p.114). To give a sense of the charged quality that physical work had for these Aurovilians, I quote at length, from an article by another Aurovilian Tim Wrey who describes a particular's day work at the *Matrimandir*. The sudden insight that gains has the force of a spiritual revelation:

When I arrived I found an atmosphere of quietly dedicated activity in all directions. Men and women of all nationalities and ages were involved in the shovelling stones, emptying cement sacks, manning the concrete mixer, pushing trolleys of concrete mix and attaching them to hoists. They communicated in a variety of languages, or in silence, their smiles and integrated action being all that was required to carry the work forward stage by stage. Everywhere there was a radiance and sense of common

purpose. . . .

The truth burst upon me with all its beauty and simplicity, as I realised that there could be no such thing as a “significant contribution” except in the context of my own ego. . . .

Only by everyone working together and each contributing his humble part to the whole, and doing it to the highest standards, could the *Matrimandir* be built. It progressed through unity, and to work on it was to learn the lesson of unity. (Wrey, 1976, as cited in Sullivan, 1994, pp.122-23).

The number of Aurovilians currently engaged with the building of the *Matrimandir* has dramatically decreased, but as Doris (2007) relates, the old-timers (people who have lived in Auroville for a long time) who worked at the *Matrimandir* fondly remember those times as being truly special.

Over the years, from 1965-1973, the Mother spoke at length about *Matrimandir* and its spiritual significance, indicating that it is a place meant for concentration . . . with a view to try to finding one’s consciousness” (Gilles, 2004, p. 25). Many Aurovilians attest that meditating in the inner chamber of *Matrimandir* is a unique experience. For example, one survey respondent wrote: “my attachment is to the “*Matrimandir* Chamber”. I realise the high presence in the chamber; every sitting is a new experience to me. This is amazing, which keeps me in AV [Auroville].” Another Aurovillian, decrying religious attitudes towards *Matrimandir* as a holy place, cryptically said it was a place for individual initiation.

Perhaps given the Mother’s comment (1978a) that the *Matrimandir* is a shrine to the principle of the divine, creative energy, some Aurovilians do not distinguish between *Matrimandir* as a physical building and the presence of the Mother, as when a survey respondent equates the two in a single paragraph: The *Matrimandir* as the soul of AV [Auroville] is my “home”. I simply would not wish to be anywhere else on earth but here; near Her.” For others, the place offers a spiritual refuge as when Gayatri told me that whenever she is disappointed and frustrated with her problems, she goes and sits in the inner chamber. For others still, the *Matrimandir* stands as a reminder that one is in Auroville for a spiritual purpose. Some Aurovilians mentioned that what they liked about Auroville was:

- Time and space and *Matrimandir* which is given to contemplate the Divine play.
- That the Divine is at the Centre, the *Matrimandir*
- All.... (almost!) *Matrimandir*, the spirit of AV, the growing “*sangha-Deva*”

And finally, a few deeply believe in the Mother’s words (1978a) that upon its completion, the *Matrimandir* would somehow help Aurovilians. Jonas, who has been here 22 years, mentioned to me that he felt there was a subtle and growing sense of a spiritual collective in Auroville, which he was sure would reveal itself to the fore once the *Matrimandir* was finished (personal communication, September 24, 2007).

Philosophy of material transformation

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had a radical view that, in the course of evolution, physical matter itself would undergo a supramental change and exhibit new properties. To help bring about this transformation, the Mother enjoined on the Aurovilians to consciously engage with matter and not to treat matter as being dead or inert, but to recognise it as incarnate spirit. An Aurovillian, a self-taught designer, architect, and constructor, told me that what he sought was “the impossible, for what is possible is already done. And nothing is impossible in matter” (personal communication, October 31, 2007).

Given this world-affirming philosophy that seeks material transformation as opposed to liberation, Aurovilians are actively engaged in improving the degraded physical environment and impoverished social environment of their bioregion. Auroville has won acclaim for its efforts in reclaiming over 2,500 acres of wasteland, planting over two million trees, restoring the indigenous forest type, promoting organic agriculture, renewable energy systems and appropriate building technologies. The passion for environmental sustainability in Auroville is matched by an equal concern at the lack of basic facilities, such as drinking water, health care, education, and income-generation opportunities in the villages that surround Auroville. And to that end, over a dozen rural outreach units in Auroville have worked to make primary health care, water and sanitation facilities available in 17 villages, provided educational facilities and women empowerment programmes in 40 villages (*The city the earth needs*, 1999). Many Aurovilians have also actively participated in other similar efforts in India. At a general collective level, such socially engaged efforts in creating a better world can be seen, as Ferrer (2002) suggests, as being eminently spiritual. But at a personal and individual level, a more detailed, phenomenological study would be needed to be conducted to ensure that the social and environmental practices of Aurovilians do not lead to subtle forms of egoism. As Sri Aurobindo (1972b) cites, there are innumerable ways in the spiritual path, for the aggrandisement of the ego. While this issue has not been the focus of my study, one of my informants, Swaminathan, not only elaborated on his understanding of spirituality as helping the immediate local, village community and through it the world, but

he did in ways, which attested to his own passion in being an instrument in that collective process rather than an egoistic being who took pride in his role of uplifting the masses.

The true individual

In consonance with Sri Aurobindo's writings about the psychic being — our true and unique individual self, is the belief that each one of us has a unique gift to offer to the world. This belief is voiced in Swaminathan's assertion, "my thing is teaching, I don't want to do anything else." Finding this gift and offering it for the service of the Divine and the community is regarded as part of the yoga. Jean explains to me how each architect in Auroville is uniquely talented in one particular area — one in design and layout, one in appropriate building technologies, one in the details of finishing and so on, but each one egoistically thinks that they are equipped to take up a whole architectural project. "If they could all come together," he says, "to design and build the city, that would be the mark of true collectivity." "We are here to be servitors of the Divine and not of our egos. It is only when we offer our gifts to the Divine's work, we transform our egos and access our true psychic nature," he concludes (personal communication, October 31, 2007).

Such a conscious, collective effort would perhaps be the decisive first step towards the spiritualised society based on the realisation of the oneness of all that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother envisioned. For while there are a significant number of individuals in Auroville, who instead of having a materialistic outlook on life are governed by spiritual motives, they are, as of yet, too individualistic in their practices to embody the ideal of fraternity that Sri Aurobindo (1972a) speaks of — the third great ideal of the French revolution that would vouchsafe the other two ideals of liberty and equality.

Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated, the attitudes that Aurovilians exhibit already mark them to be among the forerunners of the emergent postsecular spiritual society described by Griffin (1998) and Wexler (2000). It is also evident that Aurovilians consciously practise Integral Yoga, but it is not easy to conclusively determine the fruits of this yoga, given its far-reaching evolutionary goal. As a pioneering research project into a spiritual society, this study was limited by its methodology in that it could not fully plummet into the depths of the Spirit and its action as experienced by individuals. There is a need to come up with innovative, transpersonal and phenomenological methodology not only to determine but also perhaps to qualitatively gauge psycho-spiritual traits in spiritual communities and societies.

Finally, I would like to mention that the Mother (1981d) once spoke of India as being "the representation of all human difficulties on earth, and it is in India that there will be the . . . cure" (pp.41-42). She goes on to mention in the same passage that it is precisely to help in this process of world transformation that she created Auroville in India. In this context given the tremendous changes in contemporary Indian urban society brought about by its participation in a global economy, I see the urgent need for research into current psycho-spiritual traits in the Indian society in the context of Sri Aurobindo's writings on the evolution of society and the Mother's hopes for Auroville, India and the world.

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Footnotes

(1) Sri Aurobindo's view of a conscious Divine force as the basic motor of the evolutionary drive seems to be borne out by scientific evidence, which reveals that very often the evolution of the universe proceeded on a knife's edge called the "Goldilocks zone" where conditions were just right to allow for the emergence of intelligence life. Changing these conditions by the tiniest fraction would have resulted in an inert and dead universe (Kaku, 2005).

(2) Such a symbolic stage of life can also be glimpsed in ancient Greek, Egyptian and Celtic societies that were steeped in occult mysteries and led by a priestly class.

(3) Names of all my informants have been changed in order to maintain confidentiality.

(4) Raw data in terms of audio recordings, interview transcripts and survey responses are available with me, the researcher. To distinguish intentionally collected data from data collected during informal conversations, I have listed only the latter as "personal communication."

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The Role of Ashrams in India

Beloo Mehra

[Note By author

Ashrams, as spiritual retreats are a magnet for visitors seeking for the spirit of India. Certainly, the practice of *tirtha-yatra* or pilgrimage has been an element of Indian social life since ancient times and nowadays remains the mainstay of the domestic tourism industry. There is little doubt that India also continues to attract large numbers of travellers from various parts of the world seeking to experience spiritual India. Visiting ashrams is an important part of such religious and spiritual tourism.

A few months after I first moved to Pondicherry, the home of the world-famous Sri Aurobindo Ashram, I was asked to prepare a presentation for a group of visiting tourists from Italy. This was not an ordinary group of tourists, they were a group of students and teachers who were serious practitioners of *yoga-asana*, meditation and other spiritual practices and were on a visit to India with a specific purpose of experiencing a bit of 'spiritual India'. The topic of my talk/presentation was – *The Role of Ashrams in India*. This article is based on some of the thoughts I had penned down for this talk]

Summer 1947. Just a few weeks before the much-awaited independence of India won after a long freedom struggle against British Empire. Freedom had been won, but at a heavy price of the partition of India. A small group of people with three young children, the youngest being a boy of 13, were among the millions of families who would be forced by the bloody and dangerous times to leave behind almost everything they owned and migrate from what is now known as the nation of Pakistan to the newly divided India. This particular family's intended destination was an Ashram near the holy town of Haridwar.

The reason they decided to go to this Ashram was simple: this was the only place in what was a foreign India to them that the grandfather in the family could call 'home.' This was the place where the family would literally take *ashray*, refuge from the treacherous journey across the border, refuge from the horror and misery of those times. Here they lived for almost 7 years till they could afford to build a home for themselves. In this Ashram lived a saint, who was the guru for my great grandfather.

The 13-year-old boy is now my father who still remembers those first years he spent at the *Avadhoot Mandal Ashram* near Haridwar.

Many Roles of an Ashram

As the above story suggests, the Sanskrit word *ashray* – refuge or shelter – may partly describe the role of an ashram. In one sense, an ashram may be a place where one finds some type of refuge and protection from the troubles of world, a place of retreat for body, mind and soul. The term 'ashram' is literally derived from the Sanskrit word *srama*, which may mean religious or spiritual exercise, or more broadly, to do labour, to work for one's spiritual release or liberation. It is important to note that *srama* or work forms the foundation of life in an ashram. This suggests that in order to attain something, including spiritual growth and self-development, one has to struggle and put in sincere effort, do serious labour and practise discipline.

More generally, the word 'ashram' is used to describe a spiritual community or institution, usually established by a self-realised and enlightened sage or guru. Today, the term also refers to an intentional community formed primarily for spiritual upliftment of its members, often headed by a religious or spiritual leader. There are innumerable ashrams in India (and elsewhere) ranging from the homes of gurus to large, purposefully built establishments with resident populations of disciples of specific spiritual traditions, lineages and paths.

The word 'ashram' often conjures up the image of a hermitage where saints, sages and their disciples live in peace and tranquility amidst nature. In other words, a refuge or retreat from the world. Traditionally, ashrams were usually located far from human habitation – far from the maddening crowd, so to speak – in forests or mountainous regions, amidst tranquil natural surroundings conducive to spiritual instruction, contemplation and meditation.

To this day the Himalayan terrain is full of ashrams and hermitages where residents and guests participate in the practice of various spiritual disciplines and exercises. *Asana*, *Pranayama*, structured instruction in spiritual philosophy, *satsang*, *kirtans*, chanting, *swadhyaya*, self-study are some of the main practices in which residents of an ashram may engage. A simple, communal lifestyle in which everybody contributes according to their ability and aptitude is often the basis of collective life in most ashrams.

Like in the ancient times, many of the present-day ashrams also serve as gurukulam or residential schools for students of a spiritual discipline or path. However, many of these schools are not exclusively meant for spiritual instruction, education in many so-called secular subjects is also imparted in these ashram schools.

Many of the modern ashrams also provide various other services such as hospitals and Ayurvedic treatment centres at no or nominal cost, some also engage in a number of charitable and philanthropic activities such as running orphanages and shelters for people in distress. Most ashrams also have guest houses for visitors.

Ashrams have been a powerful symbol in Indian history. Most Hindu kings are known to have had a *rajguru*, royal teacher, a sage who would advise the royal family in religious or spiritual matters, or in times of crisis. A world-weary emperor going to his guru's ashram and finding solace and tranquillity is a recurring motif in many Indian legends and folktales. The goal of a royal visit to an ashram was not always tranquillity. Many a time the purpose was to receive specific instruction in some particular art, especially warfare. This is an interesting point because it suggests that many of the sages and highly learned rishis in ancient India were also great authorities in various 'secular' realms, some of them were also great scientists and experts in the development and use of highly sophisticated weaponry. This contradicts the usual stereotype that India was only the land of world-negating spirituality and all rishis and sages of India focused exclusively on attaining *Moksha* and escape from the mundane, temporal world.

The tradition tells us about the ashrams of sages such as Vashishtha, Viswamitra, Agastya and others, where people of all social classes would visit and relevant sciences and subjects were taught to them according to their aptitude and needs. In the *Ramayana*, the young princes Rama and Lakshmana go to Rishi Vishvamitra's ashram to protect his *yajñas* from being defiled by emissary-demons of Ravana. After they succeed in their mission, the princes receive martial instruction from the sage, especially in the use of *divyastras* (highly sophisticated and rare, heavenly-inspired missile weapons). Many years later when Rama, Lakshmana and Sita are exiled to live in forest for 14 years, they would again visit several ashrams of the well-known sages of the time.

As per the *Bhagavata Purana*, Sri Krishna was a resident-student at the ashram of sage Sandipani, where he gained knowledge in both intellectual and spiritual matters. In the *Mahabharata*, we learn of the Pandavas who after losing their kingdom and entire possessions in the dice-game spent many years of their exile term visiting and living in different ashrams.

The key role of an ashram in ancient as well as in modern India is that it serves as a centre for organising individual and collective life around spiritual pursuit and inner seeking. In his book, *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on the Indian Culture*, Sri Aurobindo writes:

“The whole root of difference between Indian and European culture springs from the spiritual aim of Indian civilisation....A spiritual aspiration was the governing force of this culture, its core of thought, its ruling passion. Not only did it make spirituality the highest aim of life, but it even tried, as far as that could be done in the past conditions of the human race, to turn the whole of life towards spirituality.” (CWSA, Vol.20, p. 178)

This characteristic of Indian tradition and culture – that of spirituality being the highest aim of life and turning of all life towards spirituality – was and continues to be visibly represented by the institution of ashram. Presence of a Guru or enlightened Master represents the soul of the ashram, and the disciples and devotees gather around it surrendering the responsibility of their external life and inner development to the Master.

In traditional lineages, after the physical passing of the guru, someone among the chief disciples takes the place of the living guru (generally as per the Guru's declared wish) and the tradition continues, and most likely renews itself in the presence of the new guru. In traditional ashrams, there is typically a special process of initiation for the entry of new members, and often it is the guru who has the final say in the matter.

Ashrams in India are generally understood as abode of sanyasins, renunciates and ascetics, those who have given up the worldly life and all worldly pursuits and are pursuing a specific spiritual path or order. Ashrams provide a physical, psychological and spiritual centre for these aspirants. A deep, psychological unity and a strong sense of community of seekers pursuing the same aim in life are important advantages offered by the collective living experience in an ashram.

In the past, in most ashrams in India only men were allowed to join, and an emphasis was placed on leading a celibate life. This tradition continues to this day in many ashrams. Some spiritual masters allowed women to join the ashram community, but even there some type of segregation was practised, so men and women devotees would not interact freely outside of the regular ashram activities like *satsangs*, *kirtans* and *pujas*. The householder devotees of the gurus in these ashrams were not typically living in the ashram community and would only occasionally visit the guru and the ashram. Many of them, however, lived in the vicinity of the ashram to soak in the spiritual ambiance of the community.

The Guru of the Ashram

The Presence of the Guru is indeed the soul of an Ashram. In India the spiritual quest or seeking for the Divine generally begins with a journey for the search for a guru. As Sri Aurobindo writes in one of his letters – “The Guru is

the Guide in the yoga. When the Divine is accepted as the Guide, He is accepted as the Guru.” (CWSA, *Letters on Yoga* — II, Vol. 29, p.192)

It is the presence of the guru, the spiritual energy and force of a self-realised master that is generally the starting point for the foundation of an ashram, a community of people attracted to the teachings of this master, the methods of spiritual sadhana taught by him or her. The psychological comfort and a sense of deep relaxation one may experience in the presence of the master or when surrounded by the special force, energy or vibration of the place where the master lives are generally what keep bringing the individual back to that guru.

Those who are deeply attracted to the guru’s teachings and feel a sense of ‘call’ to follow the path of the guru may over time decide to form a community with other seekers on the path, giving birth to an ashram. The organisational structure of such a form of community is developed and refined over time as and when needs emerge. What is generally asked of the disciples is a complete surrender to the Guru. Sri Aurobindo was once asked a question – “What makes the surrender to the Guru so grand and glorious as to be called the surrender beyond all surrenders?” Through his response to this question, Sri Aurobindo gives us the deeper reason for surrender in these words:

“Because through it you surrender not only to the impersonal, but to the personal, not only to the Divine in self but to the Divine outside you; you get a chance for the surpassing of the ego not only by retreat into the self where ego does not exist, but in the personal nature where it is the ruler.” (p.193)

However, he also makes an important distinction between surrender to the Divine and surrender to the Guru when he writes:

“In surrendering to the Guru, it is to the Divine in him that one surrenders – if it were only to a human entity, it would be ineffective. But it is the consciousness of the Divine Presence that makes the Guru a real Guru, so that even if the disciple surrenders to him thinking of the human being to whom he surrenders, that Presence will still make it effective.” (pp.193-194)

It is therefore, the Divine Presence of the Guru that becomes the primary reason for the deep sense of psychological shelter or refuge one feels in an ashram.

Another important point to emphasise when speaking of ashrams in India concerns the diversity of spiritual paths, lineages or *sampradayas*, traditions

and teachings that are at the centre of these institutions. This diversity is an inherent characteristic of Indian spirituality. Yet this diversity is meaningful only when seen as a multitude of paths leading to the One and the Oneness that pervades all.

This Unity in Diversity is a key aspect of Indian spiritual culture, and when combined with an equally significant aspect, namely, maximum spiritual freedom to approach the Divine, it has resulted in an unbroken chain of pursuit for spiritual knowledge. The result has been a large number of gurus, enlightened masters and teachers offering a large number of paths and practices. The process by which a seeker finds the right guru is often a deeply personal one, and something that is generally not explainable through logic. It will be perhaps correct to say that in most cases it is not the seeker who finds the guru, but rather the Divine through the Guru or the Divine in the Guru who seeks out his or her disciples and facilitates a sort of meeting of souls. However, in some cases people may also end up choosing a guru simply because their parents or grandparents were aspirants on that particular path. It will be quite appropriate here to listen once again to the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“All true Gurus are the same, the one Guru, because all are the one Divine. That is a fundamental and universal truth. But there is also a truth of difference; the Divine dwells in different personalities with different minds, teachings, influences so that He may lead different disciples with their special need, character, destiny by different ways to the realisation. Because all Gurus are the same Divine, it does not follow that the disciple does well if he leaves the one meant for him to follow another. Fidelity to the Guru is demanded of every disciple, according to the Indian tradition. “All are the same” is a spiritual truth, but you cannot convert it indiscriminately into action; you cannot deal with all persons in the same way because they are the one Brahman: if one did, the result pragmatically would be an awful mess. It is a rigid mental logic that makes the difficulty but in spiritual matters mental logic easily blunders; intuition, faith, a plastic spiritual reason are here the only guides.” (p.194)

By continuing to keep alive the tradition or path started by a guru, the ashrams have served an important role in providing a continuity to the tradition or lineage. At the same time they facilitate and encourage aspirants of that tradition and devotees of that guru to continue their individual journeys of inner seeking while benefitting from the spiritual and psychological comfort provided by a collective life with other individuals pursuing the same aim in life.

A Few Examples

Let us now take a look at some of the famous ashrams in present-day India to illustrate some of their key roles. These examples illustrate the outer organisational diversity of the ‘institution’ called ashram, while at the same time highlighting the inner oneness of the deeper purpose or role served by an ashram.

But before we go to our examples, a small note about the so-called ‘secular’ ashrams of modern times is in order. These days one also sees ashrams built for specific purposes such as providing homes for elderly people. These *vridha-ashrams* are now growing in number as the old system of joint family is breaking down and more and more older people are finding themselves alone and unable to take care of themselves. Homes built for street children and other oppressed sections of society are also sometimes given the name of ashram as they provide the function of offering refuge and shelter to the homeless and the abandoned.

The world-famous Belur Math¹, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, has now become a place of pilgrimage for people from all over the world, professing different religious faiths. Sanctified by Swami Vivekananda and several other illumined monks of Ramakrishna Order, the Belur Math premises include the main monastery, several temples and offices of the Mission. The Ramakrishna Order of monks came into existence in 1886 with the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna. The Order stands as a symbol of the eternal truths of Religion, when defined most widely and universally as a Godward search, realised and embodied by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and their message of harmony of religions, divinity of the soul, renunciation and service.

Today, the Ramakrishna movement has become a great worldwide force for promoting equality and brotherhood in India and abroad. In today’s world the ideals of mutual respect, goodwill and brotherly feelings towards one and all have great relevance. Another factor contributing much to the appeal of this movement is the rational approach it brings to bear upon every vital problem of life. The ideal of selfless service as a means of God-realisation also attracts many people to the Ramakrishna movement.

The Art of Living International Centre in Bangalore started by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is an important centre for spiritual retreats, yoga and meditation classes, and other related workshops. Additionally, it offers schooling opportunities for rural children and also other rural development programmes. The Ashram’s educational programme known as *Ved Vignana Maha Vidya Peeth*, provides free holistic education through its more than 400 schools serving more than 40,000 students.² The ashram also has a unique Gurukul, or Heritage School³ which serves to promote the traditional knowledge systems and Vedic studies.

Students at Heritage School are provided an education that caters to the needs of the students in modern times and lays great emphasis on the traditional Vedic methods of teaching. The Centre also has an *Agama Pathshala*, a school dedicated to train the students from all over the country in the Dravidian style of temple worship as enshrined in the Shaivite traditions, while at the same time receiving general education and computer training.

In Amritapuri⁴, the ashram-city founded by Ma Amritanandmayi popularly known as Amma, in addition to all the facilities catering to the usual roles of an ashram one also finds institutions dedicated to higher technical learning and modern healthcare, all started by the Amma’s Ashram.

A few words may also be said about the famous Sabarmati Ashram of Mahatma Gandhi, where he stayed from 1915 to 1933. This ashram is a witness to many important historical events, perhaps the most famous being that it was from here that Gandhiji started the Salt March or Dandi March – his protest against the salt tax of the British government. A British prison was located near the site of the ashram, and on another side was a crematorium. When Gandhiji first visited the place – the site itself was a wasteland full of snakes – for assessing if it was suitable for carrying out his work, he is said to have remarked, “This is the right place for our activities to carry on the search for Truth and develop Fearlessness – for on one side, are the iron bolts of the foreigners, and on the other, thunderbolts of Mother Nature.”⁵ During the construction of the ashram, an order was issued not to kill the snakes.

A few other notable examples include Sri Ramanashram⁶ in Tiruvannamalai and Sri Aurobindo Ashram⁷ in Pondicherry. While the former may be seen as a highly traditional ashram, with a schedule for various religious activities and spiritual practices for the residents and students of the ashram, the latter is a very different ashram in the sense that here we find no obligatory practices, no rituals, no compulsory meditations or systematic instructions in Yoga.

A Few Words on Sri Aurobindo Ashram

Sri Aurobindo himself once wrote about the organic ‘development’ of the Ashram in a letter:

“There was no Ashram at first, only a few people came to live near Sri Aurobindo and practise Yoga. It was only sometime after the Mother came from Japan [in 1920] that it took the form of the Ashram, more from the wish of the sadhaks who desired to entrust their whole inner and outer life to the Mother than from any intention or plan of hers or of Sri Aurobindo.” (CWSA, Vol.36, pp.102-103).

Situated in a busy city of more than a million people this Ashram cannot really be considered a quiet place of retreat but a vibrant centre of life in a modern urban setting. But allow me to make this statement a bit more personal.

I recall the time when I was going through what may be called as a state of ‘indecisive turmoil’ about moving to Pondicherry – of course, I wasn’t going to be part of the Ashram as such, but undoubtedly the move to Pondicherry was led by an inner call to be closer to the Ashram here, to be in the spiritual ambience of this city where Sri Aurobindo had lived for 40 years. Though my inner decision was actually made spontaneously, on one particular evening outside the gate of the Ashram school, it was my rational mind that needed some convincing. That process happened over the next two years. During this mental turmoil period I once had a conversation about it with one of my teachers. And his words still echo in my ears. I paraphrase below what he told me back then —

“If you are looking for peace and quiet, you shouldn’t move to Pondicherry. Because Pondicherry Ashram is not a place to come if someone is looking for peace, it is a place meant to help you see all that is imperfect and false and distorted and insincere in you. Where is the room for peace in such a process? It is a place that will force you to begin a deep and sincere in-search. But if you yourself aren’t aspiring enough for such a process, circumstances will definitely arise in life that will compel you to go through an inner heat of sort (after all, the word ‘*tapas*’ or ‘*tapasya*’ itself means intense heat). It is a place meant to help people awaken to a true life-affirming spirituality, spirituality in this life and this world, not as a retreat away from life and world. It is a place to do some serious work on yourself, the inner you, which is not really a peaceful process most of the time.”

And eight years after I moved to Pondicherry, I can most comfortably say – how correct he was! Heat is the first thing that comes to mind now when I think of what it is like to be in Pondicherry. And I am not speaking of the hot Pondicherry weather, but the fiery heat that is generated from an intense process of going within, every time a life circumstance or situation forces me to dig deeper and deeper. The deep lessons learned through such a process, lessons about myself and the manifold imperfections of my outer nature, difficult and often discomforting though some of these lessons maybe, are worth the effort and the heat.

But of course, if we dig deeper we find that the search for that inner peace is not separate from an intense heat-generating in-search, an intense inner journey to know ourselves more and more, in all our parts and their movements.

A few important details about Sri Aurobindo Ashram

- Non-religious, non-political, non-philanthropic. Vibrant centre and field of practice of Integral Yoga.
- A dynamic institution with a vision to establish a viable self-sufficient community of individuals where each individual had freedom to follow his or her own line of development while at the same time contributing to the general upliftment of the community and the larger body of humanity.

As also mentioned on the Ashram’s website⁸, the dynamic character of the community reflects the life-affirming aim of Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga. The Mother had once called the Sri Aurobindo Ashram a veritable laboratory to work out the future society.

“[L]ife in Sri Aurobindo Ashram is organised around its central objective, viz., development of consciousness. This effort involves the study and exploration of consciousness at all levels of life. It is a serious practice of the discipline or yoga of integral consciousness, within and without, by each individual. This means a continuous effort at becoming aware of oneself in every activity of the mind, heart, life-force and the very body. Simultaneously, one seeks to become aware of consciousness in things around and to relate oneself to it. This is done at the physical level, the pranic level, the emotional level, the mental level and the spiritual. Whatever the form of activity, it is geared to this aim; its practical, outer results are consequential. Following the motto, “All Life is Yoga”, every single activity is invested with this significance: to become conscious and raise its quality in the subjective existence along with an effort to inject this motive in the activities of everyday life. The community life proceeds on these lines of growth of consciousness in every field of exertion. Support systems have been evolved through the years, which ensure that things are done with due regard to the presence of consciousness in every form and individual effort is poured in to lift up the levels of consciousness, subjectively and objectively.”⁹

Sri Aurobindo Ashram is also unique in another regard. Unlike most traditional ashrams in India, right from the beginning the Ashram admitted women members.

Women and men members participate in all Ashram activities with no restrictions of any sort. In fact, the Ashram community also includes hundreds of children who are studying at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (which is based on the philosophy of Integral Education, from early childhood education to undergraduate level). These children generally come from the families of devotees living near or around the Ashram, or from other parts of India.

Another important characteristic of Sri Aurobindo Ashram is that here sadhaks are left free to determine the course and pace of their sadhana in accordance with their own natures, though it is understood that they have accepted Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as their gurus. But since there is no 'living' guru in the Ashram, the sadhaks are supposed to look for guidance within and by trying to get in touch with the Higher Consciousness.

Work as an offering to the Divine is an essential aspect of the Yoga, and all members of the Ashram do a certain amount of productive work each day in one or another of the Ashram's departments.

Yoga of Works: Karma Yoga

- The Ashram includes a "full spectrum of activities: agricultural farms, dairies, poultry, bakery, laundry, flower gardens, food and clothing services, engineering and construction, hand-made paper and other cottage industries, high-quality furniture production, two large printing presses issuing publications in 14 languages, and others.
- In 1950 the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education was opened which now receives students from all over the world for kindergarten through college level and includes a large library of English, French, German and Indian literature, a theatre for drama and dance, dormitories and fully equipped gymnastic, field and aquatic facilities for a complete programme of physical education.

To conclude, a few words from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo will reveal a bit more about what makes Sri Aurobindo Ashram rather unique among most of the Ashrams in India.

"Here we do not have religion. We replace religion by the spiritual life, which is truer, deeper and higher at the same time, that is to say, closer to

the Divine. For the Divine is in everything, but we are not conscious of it. This is the immense progress that man must make." (The Mother, CWM, Vol.13, p.110)

"The As[h]ram is not a religious association. Those who are here come from all religions and some are of no religion. There is no creed or set of dogmas, no governing religious body; there are only the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and certain psychological practices of concentration and meditation, etc., for the enlarging of the consciousness, receptivity to the Truth, mastery over the desires, the discovery of the divine self and consciousness concealed within each human being, a higher evolution of the nature." (Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, Vol.36, p.531)

In light of the above quote it must be clarified that the reference to the "teachings" of Sri Aurobindo here by no means suggests any exclusive, limiting or narrow worldview. In fact, those who have read even a little bit of Sri Aurobindo know for a fact that his dynamic and futuristic vision of Life, Existence, Truth, Reality, Spirituality, and Everything is perhaps the widest, highest and deepest. There is no exclusivity or narrowness there of any kind. More on his teachings may be read at: <<http://www.sriarobindoashram.org/ashram/yoga/index.php>>

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Link

¹<http://belurmath.org/>

²<http://www.artoflivingschools.org/>

³<http://www.artofliving.org/gurukul-rekindling-ancient-knowledge>

⁴<http://www.amritapuri.org/>

⁵<http://www.gandhiashramsabarmati.org/en/about-gandhi-ashram-menu.html>

⁶<http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/>

⁷<http://www.sriarobindoashram.org/>

⁸<http://www.sriarobindoashram.org/ashram/saa/index.php>

⁹<http://www.sriarobindoashram.org/research/research.php>

¹⁰<http://www.sriarobindoashram.org/ashram/saa/departments.php>

The Future Poetry and Beyond: a Search for a Complete Theory of Poetry

Goutam Ghosal

The Future Poetry was a silent revolution between 1917 and 1920 amidst the noise of loudly publicised modern poetic theories in favour of intellectual poetry. It was just the time when people in Europe and America were listening to T.S. Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry with great attention.

In a little known corner of the globe and in a less known journal, Sri Aurobindo was then busy preparing the passage for man to move up to a new species. In the years between 1914 and 1921, he was absorbed in mighty experiential prose works, some of which were either moving together or stopping in parallel with *The Future Poetry* as instalments in the *Arya*. *The Life Divine* stopped coming out as a serial in January 1919, *Essays on the Gita* in July 1920, *The Synthesis of Yoga* just a few months later in January 1921, *The Psychology of Social Development* in July 1918. The aesthetics proper and a half-developed theory of poetry came in the closing session of a great series, as if to give the final shape to the Aurobindonian worldview. Contrary to the common belief in our English departments, where the other major prose works are thought of as irrelevant to Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics and theory of poetry, I must say that his poetics can only be grasped thoroughly with reference to his total view of life. How is *The Life Divine* related to his art and poetry? Just a brief explanation from *The Future Poetry* will tell all:

Poetry and art most of all our powers can help to bring this truth home to the mind of man with an illumining and catholic force, for while philosophy may lose itself in abstractions and religion turn to an intolerant other-worldliness and asceticism, poetry and art are born mediators between the immaterial and the concrete, the spirit and life. This mediation between the truth of spirit and the truth of life will be one of the chief functions of the poetry of the future. (*The Future Poetry*, p.199)

The Future Poetry is not just a search for mantric poetry; it touches on various planes of life, society and culture in general. It starts with a focus on a lost poetry, then becomes a revised history of English poetry, and in the final chapters struggles keenly to define and characterise *mantra* and stops short of a total clarification despite his wonderful language encircling all the time the secret sources of overhead poetry. Never was the language of poetry criticism such a unique blend of revelation and argument, poetry and logic, with the long drawn out Ciceronian, the suspended syntax, balanced by a cool clarified statement. *The Future Poetry* will restore the element of sight and listening, the rhythmic speech, as it rose in the past from the heart of the seer and from the native home of the truth. The *mantra* will return with a more deliberate subjectivising, a more deliberate exploration of the self. Talking of the evolution of society, Sri Aurobindo remembers the lost art and its distortion in the very first chapter of *The Human Cycle*, refusing to look on it as a 'naughty-girl of the mind', and 'a revel of intellect and fancy.' (SABCL, Vol.15, p.5)

The poets of the old days just saw and sang. Teaching, preaching, philosophising and sermonising had nothing to do with them. *Kavi* is 'the Sanskrit word for poet. In classical Sanskrit, it is applied to any maker of verse or even of prose, but in the Vedic it meant the poet-seer who saw and found the inspired word of his vision' (SABCL, vol.9, *The Future Poetry*, p.29, fn). Here are some significant highlights from *The Future Poetry*, where he seeks to express his ultimate choice as a theoretician and a practitioner.

But poetry is the Mantra only when it is the voice of the inmost truth and is couched in the highest power of the very rhythm and speech of that truth. (*The Future Poetry*, p.194)

But still all life is one and a new human mind moves towards the realisation of its totality and oneness. The poetry which voices the oneness and totality of our being and Nature and the worlds and God, will not make the actuality of our earthly life less but more real and rich and full and wide and living to men. (Ibid, p.224)

It will be a mistake to consider this poetry as just revivalistic. *The Future Poetry* speaks more about the present and the future than about the past. Here is a relevant passage:

But now the mind of man is opening more largely to the deepest truth of the Divine, the Self, the Spirit, the eternal Presence not separate and distant, but

near us, around us and in us, the Spirit in the world, the greater Self in man and his kind, the Spirit in all that is and lives, the Godhead, the Existence, the Power, the Beauty, the eternal Delight that broods over all, supports all and manifests itself in every turn of creation. (Ibid., p.223)

The frequent use of the comparative degree in *The Future Poetry* simply indicates the progressive awareness of the subjective self. The vision of the 'more' is not just a mere comparative degree. Sri Aurobindo has a distinct perception beyond Tagore, Whitman, Carpenter, A.E., Yeats, Stephen Phillips and the other poets near to him. There is no mention about himself, simply because he was not practising fully what he was preaching then. But then, he might be having a prescience of his own poetic output between 1926 and 1950, the poetry of K. D. Sethna, Harindanath, J.A. Chadwick, Nirodbaran and Nolini Kanta, and also of Themis and the Aurovilian poets of today, R.Y. Deshpande, and others working around us.

Yet there was something more to be said in *The Future Poetry*, which would have completed a very interesting poetics. The master yearned for revisions. He played the instrument masterfully, but wished to tell something more, something that was still beyond his reach, beyond the capacity of his expressive skill or may be the thing he was trying to formulate took time to shape itself out with reference to his poetics. The knowledge about the planes was certainly there, as he had already spoken of them in *The Life Divine*. But somehow there was still a lack of integration. The excessive stress on *The Future Poetry* (1917-20) as a pointer to Sri Aurobindo's final theory of poetry has made the book quite popular at the expense of the full view of his aesthetics, which only becomes clear in his post-1926 letters, especially the letters to K.D. Sethna.

The last nine chapters of *The Future Poetry* speak of significant overlooked areas, which confirm that Sri Aurobindo is not speaking of a revival but of a dynamic subjectivity following the expanding zones of human consciousness. Sri Aurobindo wished thorough revisions of the book, which could not be done and for which, maybe, the book remained unpublished during his life time. He must have felt the problem of objective correlative in the book and that could have been the reason why 24 of the book's 32 chapters received some revision at one time or another. Only once in *The Future Poetry*, that too very briefly towards the close of the book, we get a lone reference to the 'overmind' with a nearly accurate focus:

It will be first and most a poetry of the intuitive reason, the intuitive senses,

the intuitive delight-soul in us, getting from this enhanced source of inspiration a more sovereign poetic enthusiasm and ecstasy, and then, it may even be, rise towards a still greater power of revelation nearer to the direct vision and word of the overmind from which all creative inspiration comes. (SABCL, Vol.9, p.207)

Regarding the influence of the overmind on poetry, Sri Aurobindo does not say anything more beyond that. It is only in his letters to Mr. Sethna that we see repeated references to, and adequate explanations of, the term overmind. It is curious that Sri Aurobindo had been talking of the overmind in *The Life Divine* in detail with reference to the spiritual planes, as mapped by him. We see just a brief reference to that in *The Future Poetry*, which started coming out in 1917. There are frequent references to *mantra* in *The Future Poetry*, but we do not know as yet that the operating plane is the last summit of the mind, which either influences the style or the substance or both. Hence much of Sri Aurobindo's theory of poetry remains unexplained in *The Future Poetry*. Unless we read the letters to Mr. Sethna, no clear view of mantric poetry, or inspired poetry from comparatively low planes, can emerge. Judged from this point of view, it will not be proper to call *The Future Poetry* the complete poetic manifesto of Sri Aurobindo. Yet *The Future Poetry* should be there, the whole of it, along with the letters, in our search for the whole poetics of Sri Aurobindo. In an incomplete chapter entitled "*Mantra*", which is now put in Appendix III, he made perhaps his last attempt to clarify the nature of *mantra* in the book. This time he was very close as he had been in the chapter "The Word and the Spirit."

Speech, the expressive word, has such a summit or absolute, a perfection which is the touch of the infinite upon its finite possibilities and the seal upon it of its Creator. This absolute of the expressive Word can be given the name which was found for it by the inspired singers of the Veda, the Mantra....the Mantra is the word that carries the godhead in it or the power of the godhead .. (*The Future Poetry*, p.279).

And yet this is far behind the post-1926 clarity, which we see in the letters. Sri Aurobindo became a relaxed guru after 1926. Apart from that, the Mother's influence might have been a significant force behind the clarity of his post-1926 letters. One suspects he learnt a lot about expressive skill from the Mother's writings. There is an obvious change in his prose style in the '30s and the progressive clarity reached a supreme height in *The Supramental*

Manifestation on Earth. While writing the introduction to his *Overhead Poetry: Poems with Sri Aurobindo's Comments*, Sethna shuns his complicated and exhaustive language and opts for clarity to explain the overhead aesthetics:

The Future Poetry would be written from those rarer levels whose voices have occasionally joined the utterances from the usual sources to make the profoundest moments of past poetry. The rarest of those levels give birth to overhead poetry: they are “planes” whose afflatus comes as if from an infinitude of conscious being above our brain-clamped mentality. (Sethna, p.i)

These commentaries are extremely helpful in our effort to tie up the scattered materials and for our own practice of criticism of overhead poetry, the poetry that comes from the overhead planes: (1) the Higher mind, (2) the Illumined Mind, (3) the Intuition and (4) the Overmind. In these letters, Sri Aurobindo teaches us, through Sethna, how to identify the sources, starting from the voice of the self, the psychic poetry, and then going up from that gateway towards the spiritual planes. He clarifies the fluctuation of the influences, as there is no consistent influence of a particular source on the whole unit. He speaks of how the planes operate separately or mixed up in their touches on a line or lines. All overhead poetry cannot be called *mantra*, as the purest kinds come either by the overmind touch or by the touch of very high spiritual Intuition, which is a plane just below the overmind. Much of the supermind substance percolates down to the overmind, as all our colleagues from the philosophy and yoga-psychology branches present here know very well. And that could be the reason behind Sri Aurobindo's statement in *The Future Poetry*, which takes us by surprise because of its direct reference to the Supermind.

The voice of poetry comes from a region above us, a plane of our being above and beyond our personal intelligence, a supermind which sees things in their innermost and largest truth by a spiritual identity and with a lustrous effulgence and rapture and its native language is a revelatory, inspired, intuitive word limpid or subtly vibrant or densely packed with the glory of this ecstasy and lustre (*The Future Poetry*, p.264).

The most significant phrases, clauses and sentences in these letters to Sethna may be underlined and by repeated readings of these letters the perception has to be formed. Because this is not intellectual poetry, our intellectual judgments will fail to characterise such lines. A different kind of language habit will

strengthen that perception. Sri Aurobindo frequently uses words and phrases like ‘inevitability’, ‘absolute inevitability’, ‘supreme inevitability’, ‘inevitable word’, ‘revelation’, ‘direct overmind transmission’, etc. Sri Aurobindo's letters cited in Sethna's *Overhead Poetry* complete the image of *Mantra* and shows Sri Aurobindo's humility in statements like the following:

The Mantra as I have tried to describe it in *The Future Poetry* is a word of power and light that comes from the overmind inspiration or some very high plane of intuition. Its characteristics are a language that conveys infinitely more than the mere surface sense of the words seems to indicate, a rhythm that means even more than the language and is born out of the infinite and disappears into it.... (Sethna, p.12)

The overmind expresses a cosmic consciousness, even by its touch, as the full overmind inspiration rarely comes down upon human poetry. It may be a touch on the substance or the style of a line which may or may not have any relation with mysticism or spirituality proper or it may affect both the style and the substance in its more powerful touch. Sri Aurobindo also speaks of a “mental overmind” (Ibid, p.18) as contrasted with the overmind proper which has some Gnostic light in it. There are at least four divisions of the overmind in his letters to Sethna: mental overmind, intuitive overmind, true overmind and supramentalised overmind. Sri Aurobindo frankly admitted to Sethna that he was not in a position at that point of time to describe the workings of the “overmind Gnosis.”

Sri Aurobindo stresses the point of feeling and perception, because there is still a problem of objective correlative for the critic while dealing with lines that drop in from the overmind. There may be an inspired selection, an unusual bringing together of words and obviously they come as discovery refusing to be intercepted by the intellectual mind. One cannot improve such lines, like *The winds come to me from the fields of sleep* or *Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn*. Despite the clarity in the letters to Sethna and a detailed exposition of overmind aesthetics, there are important omissions or the issues were forgotten by Sethna, like the stress on the words ‘song’ and the ‘singer’, which we see so frequently in *The Future Poetry*. Mantric poetry has a close kinship with song and that seems to be a reason behind Sri Aurobindo's memory of Tagore, a singer poet from a regional language, while his discussion was centreing round the flashes of *Mantra* in the English language. Why was the Bengali poet so frequently remembered

in the last few chapters of *The Future Poetry*? The old lights up the new in Tagore's songs. I have chosen just one example for my esteemed non-Bengali audience —

“*aaji joto tara tobo akashe.*” The ananda from all directions has attained a profound fragrance my mind, it sweeps across your temple. Now I know no one anywhere I hear nothing else, but the breath of the cosmos plays through my heart to the tune of a flute.

The Future Poetry must be properly linked up with Sri Aurobindo's letters on psychic and overhead poetry to form a complete view of his poetics. Many of the lines from today's anti-Aurobindonian school unknowingly focus on Sri Aurobindo's theory of the overhead inspiration kissing the mundane substance. I should not pretend to locate the exact plane, but it will be interesting to have a look at Nissim Ezekiel's surprising line from *Marriage*, where a sudden unusual vibration is caught in the following line describing the walk of a couple:

Wordless they walked like a breeze.

The mundane catching the suggestion of the infinite is certainly not the end point in Sri Aurobindo's poetics. His more significant prophecies relating to the return of incantation in English poetry does not seem unreal for the poets writing from Pondicherry and Auroville. Let us wish the vibration to spread beyond these two cities.

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Timeless Eternal and Eternity in Time: in Sri Aurobindo's Vision and Classical Indian Art

Susmita Bhattacharya

Space and Time are two mysterious concepts that figure prominently on our map of reality. They serve to order things and events in our life and therefore play an important role to understand our life and surroundings. Time, as we conceive it, is only our means to realise things in succession, thus, in our vocabulary we always use these forms of expressions like 'before-after', 'past', 'present' 'future' etc. It works as a condition and also is cause of conditions. But noticeably, it varies on different planes of existence and varies also for beings who are on one and the same plane. So, for us, it is not something that can be called 'Absolute' in a true sense. In our experience, what we observe is a kind of division and succession and moreover 'change' through which we can live our so-called 'normal' life with accepted or given conditions. Thus, successions and change always motivate us to read, re-read and discuss the temporal concept throughout human cognitive approach from time immemorial. But, the question is: first, has time got any Absolute status or is it Relative or is it both at the same time? If we accept it as 'Absolute', then in what sense can it be called so? Second, is time 'Eternal' or changeless? If so, then, how can we explain change? Or, can it be both at the same time, i.e. eternal and changing? Is it itself a condition or does it lie beyond all conditions? It is human rationality or logic which makes us accept one alternative by denying the other if they seem to us contradictory or opposite concepts. Thus, rationally two contradictory concepts can never be reconciled at any cost.

Sri Aurobindo, in his magnum opus, *The Life Divine*, discusses this issue of time with special reference to the Supreme or Absolute Consciousness and distinguishes between 'Timeless Eternal' and 'Time Eternity' and he conceives both the concepts not as contradictory concepts but which can be easily

reconciled if we are able to see things in their totality from altogether a different perspective. We can get a reflection of this view in the classical Indian art form also. So, let us look into these two concepts: Timeless Eternal and Eternity in Time — apparently two opposite aspects and show how significantly they are unified in the light of Sri Aurobindo's vision and illustrated in classical Indian art form.

(1)

In Upanishadic philosophy there is the idea of Transcendental Unity, Oneness and Stability behind all the flux and variety of phenomenal life. This transcendental, indefinable, immutable something cannot be touched or conditioned by time, perturbed by motion, indivisible because not conditioned by Causality.

.....For that which is in Time must be born and perish; but the unity and stability of things is eternal and must therefore transcend Time. That which is in Space must increase and diminish, have parts and relations, but the unity and stability of things is immovable,independent of the changefulness of its parts and untouched by the shifting of their relations, and must therefore transcend Space; – and if it transcends Space, it cannot really have parts, since Space is the condition of material divisibility;Finally that which is subject to Causality, is necessarily subject to Change; but the unity and stability of things is immutable, the same now as it was aeons ago and will be aeons hereafter, and must therefore transcend Causality.¹

Now the problem is: what exactly is the notion of Timeless Eternal and Eternity in time in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy? Or, what according to Sri Aurobindo, is the exact status of time? Is it only a construct or an independent ontic entity? If Spirit is the fundamental reality, Time and Space as we know them are the conceptive conditions under which the Spirit sees its own movement of energy or different appearances or status according to the status of consciousness in which they manifest. But what do we exactly mean by timeless? According to Sri Aurobindo

The non-manifest is the timeless, the utterly eternal, an irreducible absolute self-existence to which the manifestation can give no clue or only a clue that by its insufficiency is illusory and deceptive.²

Thus it is the problem between the Non-manifest and the manifestation. Accordingly, this raises the problem of time to the timeless spirit. In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy what is unmanifest in the timeless Eternal is manifested in Time Eternity. According to Sri Aurobindo

.....what we mean by the Timeless is a spiritual status of existence not subject to the time movement or to the successive or the relative time-experience of a past, present and future.³

What is in the timeless unmanifested, implied, essential appears in Time in movement, or at least in design and relation, in result and circumstance. Thus Eternity is the common term between Time and the Timeless Spirit. Thus, the two, i.e. the unmanifest and the manifest are the same Eternal in a double status. One an eternity of immobile status, the other is an eternity of motion in status.

The original status of the Reality, according to Sri Aurobindo, is timeless and space-less. Space and Time are names given by us for the self-extension of the One Reality. We are apt to see Space as a static extension in which all things can move or stay together, and Time as a mobile extension which is measured by movement and event. Thus Space would be an Absolute in self-extended status and Time would be the same in self-extended movement. So, Space and Time would then be a dual aspect of One and the same self-extension of the Cosmic Eternal.

Now the problem is: if Time is Eternal, then what about the Time observation and Time movement? Are they also real and Eternal? If they are not Eternal in a strict sense, then they will be relative. If they are relative then what will be the parameter by which time can be measured? Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine* very aptly suggests an answer:

If we go behind Time by a similar inward motion, drawing back from the physical and seeing it without being involved in it, we discover that Time observation and Time movement are relative, but Time itself is real and Eternal.⁴

Thus Time observation is not entirely dependent on the measurement, but on the consciousness and the position of the observer. The fundamental point is: each state of consciousness has its own time and yet there can be relations of time between them. According to Sri Aurobindo,

... when we go behind the physical surface, we find several different Time statuses and Time movements co-existent in the same consciousness. This is evident in dream Time where a long sequence of happenings can occur in a period which corresponds to a second or a few seconds of physical Time. There is then a certain relation between different Time statuses but no ascertainable correspondence of measure. ⁵

Someone may object, if Time has no objective reality then it utterly depends on conditions and actions of consciousness and in that case it would seem to be purely subjective. Then how will it be possible to measure time objectively? Here Sri Aurobindo raises a pertinent point: subjectivity and objectivity are not at all different but two sides of the same consciousness and force of the being. He illustrates this issue in this way. Any given time or space or time-space as a whole is a status of being in which there is a movement of the consciousness; it is such a movement that creates or manifests events and incidents. Moreover, it is the relation of the consciousness that sees and the power which actualises the happenings, a relation inbuilt in our consciousness which determines the sense of time and creates our awareness of Time-movement, Time-relation and Time-measure. Thus, the cardinal fact is that, the original status of Time behind all its variations is none other than the eternity of the Eternal, just as, in case of Space, it is the infinity of the Infinite.

Hence, time itself is a particular movement of Infinite consciousness. It can be called a mode or derivative of Eternal Consciousness; it has not its own existence apart from the Eternal Consciousness.

Now, Sri Aurobindo in this regard further illustrates the time-movement by pointing out that the Eternal Being can have three different states of its consciousness with regard to its own eternity:

1. The first is that in which there is the immobile status of the Self in its essential existence, self-absorber or self-conscious, but in either case without development of consciousness in movement or happening; this is what we distinguish as its timeless eternity. ⁶
2. The second is its whole-consciousness of its successive relations of all things belonging to a destined or an actually proceeding manifestation, in which what we call past, present and future stand together as if in a map or a settled design or very much as an artist or painter or architect might hold all the detail of his work viewed as a whole, intended or reviewed in

his mind or arranged in a plan for execution; this is the stable status or simultaneous integrality of Time. ⁷

T. S. Eliot expresses this notion of time in his famous poem, *Four Quartets* such as:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable. ⁸ (*Burnt Norton*)

In this connection, Sri Aurobindo makes us aware that this kind of time-observation is not at all a part of our normal awareness of events as they happen, although we can view the past, because it is already known and can be grasped as a whole but we do not have that exceptional state of consciousness to view things simultaneously of the past, present and future.

3. The third status is that of a progressive movement of Consciousness-Force and its successive working out of what has been seen by it in the static vision of the Eternal; this is the Time-movement. ⁹

It is clear from his above arguments that there are three different statuses of Consciousness with regard to one Eternity. There are not really two eternities, i.e. one an eternity of status or immobility and another an eternity of movement. Rather there are three different statuses or positions taken by Consciousness with regard to the one Eternity. It is possible only for this Eternity to see Time development from above and inside Time, exceeding it and not within it. It can take a stable position within the time-movement and is able to see the before and the after in a fixed, determined or destined succession. Again, it can take a mobile position in the movement, by moving from moment to moment and see all that has happened receding back into the past and all that has to happen moving toward it from the future. Apart from these, there is another possibility in which the Eternal Consciousness may concentrate on the moment it occupies and see nothing but what is in that moment and immediately around or behind it. Before manifestation of this creation it was Timeless but developed the Time-movement without ceasing to be timeless, it can engulf the whole movement of creation in a static and dynamic vision and put out at the same time something of itself into the moment vision.

It is very interesting to note that this opposite or contradictory simultaneity is utterly confusing and inconsistent to our finite consciousness. Since we have a limited perception, we can see one status only at a time. So any sort of opposite simultaneity makes us believe that it is logically impossible and unreal at the same time. We can never conceive any diverse presentation of concomitant aspects of the One Reality due to our monochromic point of view. But to an infinite consciousness these concomitant aspects and simultaneity of time-movement are perfectly logical and consistent. In the infinite consciousness and Reality multiple, diverse, concomitant aspects can be harmoniously arranged since there exists a co-relation of the two powers of self-awareness: one is a power of status and non-manifestation and second is the power of self-effecting action, movement and manifestation. This power of status and the dynamic power of action or self-manifestation, however contradictory and irreconcilable to our finite consciousness, are absolutely intrinsic, normal to the eternal self-knowledge or Maya of the self-existent *Sachchidananda*.

(2)

The dual contrary aspects of one Infinite, Eternal Reality are thus (a) a power of static, non-manifested form and (b) a power of movement, manifestation in phenomenal world. Let us now have a look at the Hindu Mythology, as rendered in the Classical Indian Art Form and in the philosophy of Tantra to see how far these dual contradictory aspects of Time had been reflected in another mode of language.

In Hindu Mythology Shiva is the personification of the Absolute. Shiva is *Maha-Kala*, Great Time, Eternity, the swallower of time, swallower of all ages and cycles of ages. The renowned Austro-German thinker, Heinrich Zimmer, in his famous book, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilisation* describes this state of *Maha-Kala* as

He (i.e Shiva) reduces the phenomenal rhythm and whirlpool to nought, dissolving all things, all beings, all divinities, in the crystal pure, motionless ocean of Eternity — from the viewpoint of which nothing whatsoever fundamentally comes to pass.¹⁰

Shiva is apparently two opposite aspects: archetypal ascetic and archetypal dancer. On the one hand, he is total Tranquillity, absorbed in itself where all distinctions merge and dissolve; on the other hand he is total activity, life's

energy. These aspects are the dual manifestations of an absolutely non-dual ultimate Reality.

Now if we delve into the study of Shaivaite-Tantric tradition we can get the impression of the same truth. To explain this Truth we will take the help of some Indian paintings i.e. Rajput and Kangra painting of 1800 A.D.

Plate 1

It is the pictorial representation of the '*Mani-dvipa*', i.e. Islands of Jewels. It is rich with allegorical meaning in every detail. It reveals the pair of opposites, in union with each other, growing out of each other, supporting and counterbalancing each other.

There are deep blue, tranquil waters of the ocean of life substance. This is the ocean of eternal life in its primal state. It is full of potentialities but dormant in itself. It contains the germs of all conflicting opposites.

The ocean standing for universal consciousness is comparable to the ubiquitous, subtle element of the *akasa* (ether), which constitutes, substantially, all space, and supplies the stage for all subsequent evolution and development.

The Island, in contradiction to this surrounding fluid, is regarded as metaphysical Point of Power. It is called '*Bindu*', which spreads, unfolds, expands and becomes transmuted into the tangible realm of our limited consciousness and the universe.

The Island is represented as a golden, circular figure. The shores are made of gems (*mani*) —hence the name of Island, *Mani-dvipa*. In the centre stands a palace made of the precious stone that grants all desires (*cintamani*). Within the palace is a jewelled *mandapa* (awning), under which, on a jewelled and golden throne, is seated the Universal Mother. She is the deity, energy of *Bindu*, which in turn was the first concentrated point of dynamic force of universal Divine substance.

The goddess is red in colour, for here she is creative. Red is the active colour as we all know. She is the primordial energy, *Śakti*, planning and producing the evolution of the universe. She is the potentiality and maternal measure of the world.

Plate 2

The '*Bindu*' which we have already discussed in the context of plate1, actually belongs to the Tantrik tradition. The '*Bindu*' or the seed may be symbolised in the *Shri Yantra* (Plate 2) by a central dot, the original point of energy which has location but no magnitude, usually depicted as white. It makes

its fundamental originating movement in the shape of a female, downward pointing triangle, which is red. There are nine triangles in the figure, interpenetrating, five pointing downward, four upward. The downward pointing triangle is a female symbol, it is known as ‘śakti’. The upward pointing triangle is the male, is called ‘Vahni’ (the fire) or *tejas*. Thus the *Vahni* triangle denotes the male essence of the God, and the *Śakti*-triangles, the female essence of the consort.

The most significant point to be noted is that the Absolute itself, the Really Real, is not represented in the diagram. It cannot be represented because it is beyond form and space. The Absolute is to be visualised as a “*Bindu*” amidst the interplay of all the triangles. The ‘*Bindu*’ is the power-point, elusive centre from which the entire diagram expands.

Like the *Shiva-Shakti* images, the *Shri Yantra* symbolises life, both universal life and individual, as an incessant interaction of co-operating opposites. The five female triangles expanding from above and four male emerging from below, signify the continuous process of creation.

Let us now concentrate again on Plate1.

Within the Throne-hall of the *Mani-Dvipa* the goddess of the red hue sits upon two inert, more or less corpse-like, male figures, which are lying one upon the other on the six-sided throne. Both represent Shiva as the Absolute. The upper figure is called “*Sakala*” Shiva. *Kala* means a small part of anything, “a digit of the moon”; *sa* means ‘with’. The moon possessed of all its digits, is the Full Moon. The opposite of *sakala* is “*Niskala*”—“devoid of digits or constituent parts”. It can be called New Moon, which, though virtually existent, is imperceptible, intangible, and apparently non-existent.

The upper figure, that is *Sakala Shiva*, is all-containing, omniscient supra-consciousness. It is in the state of actualisation because he is in bodily contact with his own universal energy, the *shakti*, the feminine active principle, the efficient and material cause of the universe. The figure beneath is *Niskala Shiva*, i.e. the Absolute in its Transcendent, dormant, quiescent state — mere potentiality. The lower *Shiva* is in deep slumber, all containing, but apparently unconscious, is in the state of complete quiescence.

The two are antagonistic, but equally valid aspects of the Absolute, which contains and reflects all and everything, and in which all distinctions and oppositions disappear and come to rest. The Absolute is both plenitude and Voidness, everything and nought. It is the source and receptacle of every energy, but at the same time utter inertia, the slumber of all slumbers, deep and quiet. *Niskala Shiva* is called ‘the dead body, the corpse (*sava*)’. In Sanskrit there is

a meaningful play implied in this juxtaposition of the two names, *Shava* and *Shiva*. In the classical Devanagari script, it is written as: *sa= va= Shiva* is written, and *Shava*, i.e. sign is omitted from the name *Shiva*, there is left the script equivalent for *Shava*.

Who or what, then, is the enlivening vowel-sign, or *i*, if not the *Śakti*, the supreme representative of movement and life? The Absolute Reality regarded in and by itself, devoid of this activating, vitalising energy, is but a corpse.

The three figures — *Niskala Shiva*, *Sakala Shiva* and *Śakti* — superimposed as they are, one upon the other, can be read either upward or downward as, respectively, the evolution and the involution of the Absolute in its unfolding and re-absorption of the universe. *Nishkala Shiva* is the Absolute, the Divine essence in and by itself, beyond event and change, inactive, dormant. *Sakala Shiva* is the state in which the Absolute shows its infinite potentiality for differentiation into the universe. *Śakti* is the energy of the Absolute making itself manifest, its static repose transmuted into procreative energy.

Thus reading the picture from bottom to top, we see that the Absolute evolves through three aspects, passing from the pole of inertia, complete inactivity and voidness to that of Infinite activity and dynamic differentiation, the universe teeming with its creatures and abundant in its variety of forms. Reading from top to bottom, three figures express in abbreviation the progress from normal consciousness to the realisation of the Self.

Plate-3

In *Tantra*, the principal divine figure is called *Mahakala*, the great Time, and *Kali*, the female personification of Time. In a Tantric representation of *Kali* standing on *Shiva-Shava*, shown in Plate 3, the total aspect of Goddess is to be seen. She is black entirely with death and her tongue is out to lick up the world; her teeth are hideous fangs. Beneath the feet of this *Kali* are the two *Shivas* again. The lower is ‘*Shava*’, the plenitude of the Absolute as total void, as Nietzsche said in his *Thus Spake Zarathustra* “dead for immortality”. The upper *Shiva* lies as if in a dream, as if about to awake. The living *Shiva* raises his head and begins to lift his left arm, animated by his contact with the feet of the Goddess who is the embodiment of his very essence and who, as such, reveals herself to be the destroyer.

Thus, it would be the same Eternity viewed by a dual self-awareness. Actually there can be no opposition between the two powers of the Self-awareness of the Infinite and Eternal Reality, i.e. as Sri Aurobindo points out ‘a power of status and non-manifestation’ and secondly ‘a power of self-effecting action and movement and manifestation’.



Plate - 1 *The Island of Jewels (Rajput), c. 1800 A.D.*



Plate - 3 *Kali on Shiva-Shava (Kangra), c. 1800 A.D.*



Shri Yantra (Plate - 2)

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Notes On Authors

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

Bindu Mohanty is a writer, educator and sustainability consultant who has lived in Auroville since 1994. As a consultant, she has worked in the fields of rural development and waste management. As an educator, she has served as senior faculty for an international study-abroad programme, facilitated workshops, and helped in curriculum development. She is passionate about social transformation and the evolution of consciousness on earth and is at her happiest, when she out in nature.

Ph.D., Comparative Studies in Integral Yoga and Transpersonal Theories, CIIS
M.A., English Literature, University of Kentucky
B.A., English Literature, Sambalpur University

Susmita Bhattacharya Assistant Professor in Post Graduate Department of Philosophy, Krishnagar Govt. College, Nadia, West Bengal. Awarded Ph.D Degree in Philosophy by Jadavpur University, Kolkata, in 2014 on the topic: “*Human Existence: Crisis and Beyond — Visions of Sri Aurobindo and Sören Kierkegaard*”. Presently engaged in Post-Doctoral UGC Minor Research Project on: “*Revisiting Subjectivity: A Brief Survey from Cartesian Legacy to Postmodern Era and Beyond.*” Published papers on *Existentialism and the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* in various refereed journals of different universities and also in *Srinvantu*, published from Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata.

E-mail id: susmitab196@rediffmail.com

Udar Born in a Roman Catholic family, Laurence Marshal Pinto — later known as Udar, the name given by Sri Aurobindo, (24.4.1907—7.12.2001) — had his early education at St. Mary’s School at Hubli. Later he went to St. Joseph’s European and Anglo-Indian High School at Bangalore from where he did his Senior Cambridge. After completing his bachelor’s degree from the Karnatak

College at Dharwar, he left for England where he studied aeronautical engineering. He was offered a very lucrative employment in England but he chose to return to India. However, there was no hope of aeroplane construction in India at that time so he had to look for other means of earning. He went to Pondicherry and joined Robert Gaebele in an export business which flourished considerably. In August 1937 he had his first *Darshan* of Sri Aurobindo. Soon he came close to Sri Aurobindo Ashram, more particularly to the Mother and was accepted as an inmate. On 26 April 1938 Sri Aurobindo gave him the new name, Udar, meaning “noble, generous, upright and sincere.” During the Second World War Sri Aurobindo encouraged him to go to Delhi to help recruit and train the staff of the newly formed Indian Air Force. After a year he returned for good to Pondicherry having sold off his property in Hubli and offering the money to the Mother. He set up the Harpagon Workshop and was put in charge of the Purchasing Department; he also designed the furniture in Sri Aurobindo’s renovated room which were made under his direction at Harpagon. He also played a pivotal role in organising the Physical Education Department. Under the Mother’s direction he started several units like the Handmade Paper Unit, the Laboratoires Senteurs, developed Coco Garden Cement Concrete Works, managed Honesty Engineers and Contractors. He also helped to establish the New Horizon Sugar Mills and the New Horizon Stainless Steel Factory.