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Śraddhā શ્રદ્ધા



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21 February 2016

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Answering earth's yearning and her cry for bliss,
A greatness from our other countries came.

.....
A mind of light, a life of rhythmic force,
A body instinct with hidden divinity
Prepared an image of the coming god;
Savitri, Bk.IV, Canto I, pp.353,357

Śraddhā

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The Mother and Sri Aurobindo*

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Editorial

No, it was not ‘a midsummer night’s dream’ but a midsummer noon’s dream. This is what happened to her on a hot and languorous April afternoon. It was hot and humid and there was a faint whiff of dullness and fatigue in the air. She had taken a full meal and making herself comfortable in bed, settled for a long noon reading session. Soon, however, the eyelids were drooping, her hands became limp, the book slipped on to the bed and she fell into a sleep or ‘perchance to dream’. She dreamt, or rather saw – for later she swore that, to make sure that she was not dreaming things but actually witnessing the scenes in full consciousness, she distinctly felt the pressure where she had pinched herself on her right arm – that she was entering a huge building with a tall gate. There was a pathway lined with some lovely flowering plants in pots arranged in haphazard grace leading to a large square courtyard part concrete, part filled with sand and hedged on two sides with evergreens in pots laid out with affable artistry. In all that she saw she found a touch of dignity, grace and simple beauty. Then, as it so often happens in dreams, when one cannot quite explain the logical sequence of events, she found herself amidst a large group of people, a vast concourse, which seemed to swell and take on the shape of a sea of humanity, ill defined and blurred, where individuals could not be distinguished. She knew not where she was headed for; she found herself pushed along on the surging tide of this shapeless mass of human beings which swayed and moved aimlessly through many dark, ill-lit serpentine corridors. Then all of a sudden, as they took a turn to the right she found herself alone in that empty, sprawling space. For a moment she felt a cold fear of the Unknown gripping her. She held her breath for a while, remained calm and steadied her faith. Then she noticed looming through the surrounding haze, the mystic outline of the figure of a woman of surpassing beauty nodding towards her summoning her to approach. She advanced but as she kept moving, the figure, too, moved swiftly and soon she lost her, then found her again. It was as if she was playing hide and seek with her. This went on for a while till she noticed from afar that the figure was seated in the high-backed chair near the exit of the hall just above the Meditation Hall. She could not discern her face but the figure itself was that of a female human being, the head perfectly shaped, the face resplendent

with a diamond light. Lightness and pliability gave the body the look of a swift flowing robe of radiance, sweetness, charm and grace. As she neared and kneeled before her, the woman rested her hand on the suppliant’s head, let fall on her that ethereal, heaven-winning smile of hers and half-parting those beauteous lips dropped sweet words of honey ‘Do you recognise me now? Come closer and look at me, here I am in my new body just as I promised you. The entire world is waiting for this moment. Look on it, feast your eyes and be blessed for ever’.

On this hallowed day, let us once again renew our pledge to be her ‘docile instruments’ and ‘faithful servitors’. Let us send our prayers and deepest aspirations to her in her own words:

We stand before Thee that Thy will may be fulfilled in us, in every element, in every activity of our being, from our supreme heights to the smallest cells of the body.

Grant that we may be faithful to Thee utterly and for ever.

.....
We would be completely under Thy influence to the exclusion of every other.

.....
Grant that everything in us may collaborate in Thy work and all be ready for Thy realisation. (CWM, *Prayers and Meditations*, vol.1, p.377)

We thank

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श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṃl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Opening and Surrender to the Mother

Sri Aurobindo

The Central Secret of Sadhana

By remaining psychically open to the Mother, all that is necessary for work or Sadhana develops progressively, that is one of the chief secrets, the central secret of the Sadhana. 13-2-1933

But it is not by *upadeśa* that this Sadhana is given or carried on. It is only those who are capable by aspiration and meditation on the Mother to open and receive her action and working within that can succeed in this Yoga. 21-6-1937

Keep yourself open to the Mother and in perfect union with her. Make yourself entirely plastic to her touch and let her mould you swiftly towards perfection. 9-3-1934

You have only to aspire, to keep yourself open to the Mother, to reject all that is contrary to her will and to let her work in you — doing also all your work for her and in the faith that it is through her force that you can do it. If you remain open in this way, the knowledge and realisation will come to you in due course.

To practise Yoga implies the will to overcome all attachments and turn to the Divine alone. The principal thing in the Yoga is to trust in the Divine Grace at every step, to direct the thought continually to the Divine and to offer oneself till the being opens and the Mother's force can be felt working in the adhara.

Right Way of Opening

Q: What is the meaning of opening?

A: It is the receptivity to the Mother's presence and her forces.

Q: What is the right and perfect way to get this opening?

A: Aspiration, quietude, widening of oneself to receive, rejection of all that tries to shut you to the Divine.

Q: How to know that I am opening to the Mother and not to other forces?

A: You have to be vigilant and see that there is no movement of disturbance, desire, ego.

Q: What are the indications of a real opening to the Mother?

A: That shows itself at once — when you feel the divine peace, equality, wideness, light, Ananda, Knowledge, strength, when you are aware of the Mother's nearness or presence or the working of her Force, etc, etc. If any of these things are felt, it is the opening — the more are felt, the more complete the opening. April, 1933

Q: Opening — what does it mean? Is it: "not to keep anything secret from the Mother"?

A: That is the first step towards opening. 17-6-1933

Q: How to open to the Divine Mother?

A: By faith and surrender in a quiet mind. 18-6-1933

Openness to the Mother

To be open is simply to be so turned to the Mother that her Force can work in you without anything refusing or obstructing her action. If the mind is shut up in its own ideas and refuses to allow her to bring in the Light and the Truth, if the vital clings to its desires and does not admit the true initiative and impulsions that the Mother's power brings, if the physical is shut up in its desires, habits and inertia and does not allow the Light and Force to enter in it and work, then one is not open. It is not possible to be entirely open all at once in all the movements, but there must be a central opening in each part and a dominant aspiration or will in each part (not in the mind alone) to admit only the Mother's "workings", the rest will then be progressively done. 28-10-1934

To remain open to the Mother is to remain always quiet and happy and confident — not restless, not grieving or despondent, to let her force work in you, guide you, give you knowledge, give you peace and Ananda. If you cannot keep yourself open, then aspire constantly but quietly that you may be open.

Progressive Opening

Openness is not always complete from the first — a part of the being opens, other parts of the consciousness remain still closed or half open only — one has to aspire till all is open. Even with the best and most powerful Sadhaks the full opening takes time; nor is there anyone who has been able to abandon everything at once without any struggle. There is no reason to feel therefore that if you call you will not be heard — the Mother knows the difficulties of human nature and will help you through. Persevere always, call always and then after each difficulty there will be a progress.

20-4-1935

The Inner and the Higher Opening

It is by the constant remembrance that the being is prepared for the full opening. By the opening of the heart the Mother's presence begins to be felt and, by the opening to her Power above, the Force of the higher consciousness comes down into the body and works there to change the whole nature.

7-8-1934

There is no method in this Yoga except to concentrate, preferably in the heart, and call the presence and power of the Mother to take up the being and by the workings of her force transform the consciousness; one can concentrate also in the head or between the eyebrows, but for many this is a too difficult opening. When the mind falls quiet and the concentration becomes strong and the aspiration intense, then there is a beginning of experience. The more the faith, the more rapid the result is likely to be. For the rest one must not depend on one's own efforts only, but succeed in establishing a contact with the Divine and a receptivity to the Mother's Power and Presence.

The Only Way to Succeed

There is in a very fundamental part of your nature a strong formation of ego-individuality which has mixed in your spiritual aspiration a clinging element of pride and spiritual ambition. This formation has never consented to be broken up in order to give place to something more true and divine. Therefore, when the Mother has put her force upon you, or when you yourself have pulled the force upon you, this in you has always prevented it from doing its work in its own way. It has begun itself building according to the ideas of the mind or some demand of the ego, trying to make its own creation in its "own way", by its own

strength, its own Sadhana, its own Tapasya. There has never been here any real surrender, any giving up of yourself freely and simply into the hands of the Divine Mother. And yet that is the only way to succeed in the supramental Yoga. To be a Yogi, a Sannyasi, a Tapaswi is not the object here. The object is transformation, and the transformation can only be done by a force infinitely greater than your own; it can only be done by being truly like a child in the hands of the Divine Mother.

Everyone who is turned to the Mother is doing my Yoga. It is a great mistake to suppose that one can "do" the Purna Yoga — i.e. carry out and fulfil all the sides of the Yoga by one's own effort. No human being can do that. What one has to do is to put oneself in the Mother's hands and open oneself to her by service, by Bhakti, by aspiration; then the Mother by her light and force works in him so that the Sadhana is done. It is a mistake also to have the ambition to be a big Purna Yogi or a supramental being and ask oneself how far have I got towards that. The right attitude is to be devoted and given to the Mother and to wish to be whatever she wants you to be. The rest is for the Mother to decide and do in you.

April, 1935

The best way is to live in the psychic being, for that is always surrendered to the Mother and can lead the others in the right way. For control one has to centralise somewhere — some do it in the mind or above the mind, others do it in the heart and through the heart in the psychic centre.

11-6-1933

Real and Complete Submission

It is necessary if you want to progress in your Sadhana that you should make the submission and surrender of which you speak sincere, real and complete. This cannot be as long as you mix up your desires with your spiritual aspiration. It cannot be as long as you cherish vital attachment to family, child or anything or anybody else. If you are to do this Yoga, you must have only one desire and aspiration, to receive the spiritual Truth and manifest it in all your thoughts, feelings, actions and nature. You must not hunger after any relations with anyone. The relations of the Sadhak with others must be created for him from within, when he has the true consciousness and lives in the Light. They will be determined within him by the power and will of the Divine Mother according to the supramental Truth for the divine life and divine work; they must not be determined by his mind and his vital desires. This is the thing you have to remember. Your psychic being is capable of giving itself to the Mother

and living and growing in the Truth; but your lower vital being has been full of attachments and *samskaras* and an impure movement of desire and your external physical mind was not able to shake off its ignorant ideas and habits and open to the Truth. That was the reason why you were unable to progress, because you were keeping up an element and movements which could not be allowed to remain; for they were the exact opposite of what has to be established in a divine life. The Mother can only free you from these things, if you really want it, not only in your psychic being, but in your physical mind and all your vital nature. The sign will be that you no longer cherish or insist on your personal notions, attachments or desires, and that whatever the distance and wherever you may be, you will feel yourself open and the power and presence of the Mother with you and working in you and will be contented, quiet, confident, wanting nothing else, awaiting always the Mother's Will.

Put all before the Mother in your heart so that her Light may work on it for the best. 21-4-1935

The effort demanded of the Sadhak is that of aspiration, rejection and surrender. If these three are done the rest is to come of itself by the Grace of the Mother and the working of her force in you. But of the three the most important is surrender of which the first necessary form is trust and confidence and patience in difficulty. 26-10-1936

(Reproduced from SABCL, vol.25, pp.121-135 with thanks and acknowledgement to Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust)

Pruśna Upanishad

The Upanishad of the Six Questions — Part 1

Alok Pande

Brief Background

The *Pruśna Upanishad* is an interesting piece of spiritual literature full of mystic symbols and significant imagery. The symbolic nature of this writing is consistent with its being a part of the Vedic lore. It is generally regarded as a part of the *Atharva Veda* which deals not only with deep metaphysical and mystic doctrines but also occult knowledge that may be applied to our everyday living. Due to its immense importance, it finds a place as an independent Upanishad as well. The spiritual, the occult, the symbolic come close to each other in this amazing work, even fuse sometimes beautifully blending into each other so well that it is hard to separate the them. Among the many meanings for the word *Atharvan*, the one that goes best is the 'Priest of the Fire'. Possibly it referred to a lineage of Rishis who followed a mystic line of Fire-worship like the Rishis of the *Rig Veda*. The Fire of course is not the physical fire, though that is a symbol, but an inner fire, that burns in the depths of creation as also at its apex and in the middle. It is the Creative Will or more simply the Will of the Creator that moves all things as well as giving birth to them by the sheer pressure of a veiled consciousness.

This particular portion of the *Athava Veda* called the *Pruśna Upanishad* deals with six pertinent question concerning human existence. These questions follow a clear logical order, starting from the Origin of things and culminating in the Supreme Being who is not only the Origin but also the goal of creation and man.

The first question is about the birth of all things and as such it deals with the very origin of origins.

The second question is about the powers and forces that sustain, support and maintain the creation.

The third question is about the journey of life, the birth and death and the impulsion of life itself.

The fourth question concerns what lies beyond our world of waking, beyond our brief ephemeral existence, beyond even the doors of death.

The fifth question that quite naturally follows is the meditative path through which man can arrive at this highest Self-Knowledge.

The sixth and the final question concerns the Supreme Being Himself, He who is at once the Manifest and the Unmanifest; He who joins the dance of Time with the rhythms of the Eternal.

AdhikarBheda or the needed preparation for the higher Self-Knowledge

Before proceeding with the relevant questions and their answers, it first sets the right note for the seeker. There are two ways of raising questions when we approach the higher Reality. The first is the way of faith where we have a fundamental faith that a higher Truth exists and we approach it with the humility of a true seeker. The other way is the way of doubt wherein we presume that there is no such higher Truth and our curiosity is either an idle curiosity or else simply a means to provoke a response and then through argument and debate prove our point. Such a ground as the latter (full of doubt) is not the right soil for the spiritual seed to bloom. The soil of the seeker has to be receptive. His consciousness must be free from the crudities so that he may not only hear but also understand rightly the words of the seer pouring the Light of Wisdom and Truth into the ears of the hearer. If the eyes and ears are full of mud, if the sight and hearing is stained by the poison fumes of desires then our muddy consciousness continues to interfere and cloud what we have seen and heard. Therefore this Upanishad starts with this invocation:

OM. May we hear what is auspicious with our ears, O ye Gods; May we see what is auspicious with our eyes, O ye of the sacrifice; giving praise with steady limbs, with motionless bodies, may we enter into that life which is founded in the Gods. Ordain weal unto us Indra of high-heaped glories; ordain weal unto us Pushan, the all-knowing Sun; ordain weal unto us TarkshyaArishtanemi; Brihaspati ordain weal unto us.

OM. Peace! peace! peace!

The seeker first invokes the Supreme and the powers and energies of Truth (the Gods) to clear the inner space, to purify the passage through which the Light of Truth would enter. In ancient times this is how the seeker prepared the

ground of consciousness to receive the higher Knowledge. The mantra OM creates within and around us the right state to receive the higher Knowledge. The gods clear the obstacle and by establishing their energies in the heart and mind and life of the seeker help the incoming Knowledge to fix itself in the consciousness of the disciple.

The gods are ever engaged in sacrifice. They are steadfast in Knowledge of Truth, full of Peace in their action however mighty it be (motionless). The seeker not only wants to know but also enter into the higher life founded upon Truth. He wants to mould his entire living according to the Truth, hence he invokes the great Gods, the Godheads of Light and Wisdom and Truth to prepare him and pour into his consciousness their Light and Power.

*

Thus the seekers approach the great Master Pippalada with an aspiration to know. They come with faith and trust in the Master that he will lead them to the universal Reality that hides behind individual appearances. The seekers are not just novices but fairly well-versed in the spiritual lore. They come from different schools of Yoga that have trained and nursed their quest so far. But when the time comes for their quest to go further they come seeking for a still greater Knowledge. It is interesting that though there were many Gurus in ancient times, each great in his own respect, yet there was very little of sectarianism that we find much more common today. The seekers sought not just a path but the Knowledge of the Supreme and whoever could lead them to That was approached. Thus the students of Truth, the disciples of God-Knowledge coming from different schools of Wisdom approach the great Master with a seeking for the yet greater Beyond.

With this background, a background no less important, starts the first question.

Then the Chapter of the First Question.

1. OM! Salutation to the Supreme Spirit. The Supreme is OM. Sukesha the Bharadwaja; the Shaivya, Satyakama; Gargya, son of the Solar race; the Koshalan, son of Ashwala; the Bhargava of Vidarbha; and Kabandhi Katyana; — these sought the Most High God, believing in the Supreme and to the Supreme devoted. Therefore they came to the Lord Pippalada, for they said “This is he that shall tell us of that Universal.”

*

2. The Rishi said to them, “Another year do ye dwell in holiness and faith and askesis; then ask what ye will, and if I know, surely I will conceal nothing.”

Mere questioning is not enough. The seeking must be genuine, the preparation rigorous before the Light of Truth can come and settle down in our being. Unlike many modern schools of yoga and philosophy running after disciples and taking pride in numbers, the ancient Schools laid a great stress on *adhikara-bheda*. Not all are ready for Truth. Mere mental curiosity and intellectual deliberations are not enough. Something more is needed, something even more critical in receiving the Truth than our questioning mind. In fact the restless mind that runs after every appearance and mistakes it for truth must be first quietened. The discursiveness of the intellect, the digressions of the mental being must all be first brought to a focal point as it were, the nature purified and freed from the turbulences of gross desires and crass selfishness before one is ready. The first step towards true Knowledge is purification. The mind must get rid of its preconceived notions about Reality, the heart must be freed from the grip of violent emotions, the life-force restrained and controlled, mastered and channelised, the entire nature refined and quietened. Most are not ready for this. They expect an immediate intellectual answer to the query! But even a most satisfying intellectual answer does not help much to take us far onto the path. That is the big difference between a query and a quest. Queries and questions may be answered intellectually, for the quest one must go further. That is why in ancient schools of initiation there was so much insistence on testing the disciple to see whether he is ready for Truth, whether he is a genuine seeker or simply a restless wanderer moved by a superficial impulse to ask or a restless mind that seeks a change.

Therefore the great seer advises him to wait and see, to stay near him for a year dwelling in purity and keeping the flame of faith and aspiration alive through askesis. This would also be a test of their sincerity after which the Seer promises them to reveal whatever he knows. Mark the words 'if I know'; even such a great Master does not claim to be knowing all the entirety of Truth. But how come, we may ask, a Master of such renown does not claim to know the total Truth. For the simple reason that the Truth sought and found by the great Ones is neither a mental formula nor a limited definable entity but the Infinite Itself. Being Infinite, none can lay a complete claim to It. To claim that we know IT is to actually reveal our Ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo reveals this to us through the beauty of His luminous poetic prose:

Certitudes

In the deep there is a greater deep, in the heights a greater height. Sooner shall man arrive at the borders of infinity than at the fullness of his own

being. For that being is infinity, is God — I aspire to infinite force, infinite knowledge, infinite bliss. Can I attain it? Yes, but the nature of infinity is that it has no end. Say not therefore that I attain it. I become it. Only so can man attain God by becoming God.

But before attaining he can enter into relations with him. To enter into relations with God is Yoga, the highest rapture & the noblest utility. There are relations within the compass of the humanity we have developed. These are called prayer, worship, adoration, sacrifice, thought, faith, science, philosophy. There are other relations beyond our developed capacity, but within the compass of the humanity we have yet to develop. Those are the relations that are attained by the various practices we usually call Yoga.

We may not know him as God, we may know him as Nature, our Higher Self, Infinity, some ineffable goal. It was so that Buddha approached Him; so approaches him the rigid Adwaitin. He is accessible even to the Atheist. To the materialist He disguises Himself in matter. For the Nihilist he waits ambushed in the bosom of Annihilation.

Ye yathā mām prapdyante taris-tathaiva bhayāmjaham. (Sri Aurobindo: CWSA, vol.12: 5)

Gitanuvachan

(Third Series)
(Chapters XIII & XIV)

Srimat Anirvan

Question:

‘I consider the Knowledge of *kshetra* and *kshetrajña* as the real Knowledge’ (13/2). What shall I understand by the ‘knowledge of *kshetra* and *kshetrajña*’? Please elucidate.

Answer:

The third *shataka* of the Gita starts from the thirteenth chapter. The area of human knowledge can be divided into three categories — to know oneself; to know and realise the Divine and to know the universe in that light. The first *shataka* has elaborated the process of self-knowledge by yoga and the second *shataka* to reach him by bhakti. Like the second *shataka*, the lord has started this one by himself, without waiting for any questions from Arjuna. The oldest commentary of Gita has been composed by Shankaracharya. There is no reference of Arjuna’s question there. It is wonderful to know myself and based on that I know and reach him. This much might appear as the ultimate good. But the lord said, ‘No, that is not all. One has to know the universe taking help from that *jñāna* (knowledge of Self) and *vijñāna* (knowledge of divinity). Then only will be the fulfilment of all knowing.’ That is the reason for the beginning of the third *shataka*.

The reality of universal knowledge is the knowledge of *kshetra* and *kshetrajña*. And since this is approved by Sri Krishna, this is the highest knowledge (13/2).

The analogy of field or *kshetra* with universe is already there in the Veda. In the place of *kshetrajña*, there are two epithets — the lord of *kshetra* (*kshetrapati*) and the knower of *kshetra* (*kshetravit*). The supreme Purusha is *kshetrapati* and the knower of Atman and Brahman is also the knower of *kshetra* (*kshetravit*). In the epithet of Gita both of these have been combined

into one. Following the Samkhya philosophy, the Gita has termed Prakriti as *kshetra* and Purusha as *kshetrajña* (13/19). But in the Gita, Prakriti is the Self-Nature of the Divine ((4/6, 7/4-5), hence consciousness in essence. Elsewhere, the lord has described this *kshetra* or Prakriti as ‘*Mahad Brahman*’ or the womb, where as the sire he casts his seeds (14/3-4). Again as Purusha is the onlooker, so is he the enjoyer and master. Therefore all three qualities of seeing, enjoying and mastery have been combined in him (13/22).

From the union of Prakriti-Purusha of *kshetra-kshetrajña* all movable and immovable creation has evolved (13/26). In the universal play, Prakriti is the cause of doership and Purusha of enjoyment (13/20). Actually, a cause is the initiator — it makes thing happen without itself getting involved.

As mentioned before, the world play is the play of the union between *kshetra* and *kshetrajña*. We can watch this from the closest point from within ourselves. The Veda has called that as spiritual vision or *adhyatma drishti* which has at its root the vision of gods or seeing the divine play in the universe.

From a spiritual point of view, our body is *kshetra* and one who knows it is *kshetrajña* (13/1). That means every being is a *kshetrajña* because everyone has a direct experience about whatever is happening in his body. But this is not necessarily a complete knowledge. This is like the light of moon borrowed from the sun. He, who is established in the heart of each individual as the supreme effulgence beyond all darkness, that highest being is the only *kshetrajña* in the real sense of the term. He is the *kshetrajña* of all *kshetras* (13/2) and residing in the heart of all, he is causing each being to rotate as if on a machine (18/61). That is why he is the lord of *kshetra* as well. Only by knowing him, the knowledge of *kshetra* and *kshetrajña* become complete (13/12).

Again, from a spiritual point of view it will not do to understand the material body only. One has to include and understand the five elements, senses and organs; the dualities of mind expressed in likes and dislikes, happiness and sorrow; the clash of ego and intelligence and their organisation to attain certain objects; ‘*dhruti*’, that controls and directs them to achieve the goal (18/33); extensive consciousness working as the ‘cause’ behind all these and above everything the objects receptive to five senses. All these together give an overall idea of *kshetra* (13/5-6). In short, *kshetra*, here, is the entire universe of the individual being — the Sri Kshetra with Lord Jagannath as its presiding deity. Actually this is verily his own field. Hence another epithet for him is *kshetri*, which is a combination of the concept of *kshetrajña* as well as *kshetrapati*. As the single sun reveals the entire world, so does the *kshetri* reveal all *kshetra* by being *kshetrajña* and *kshetrapati* at the same time (13/33).

A *kshetrajña jiva* is the self-manifestation of the same *kshetrapati*. As

the seed of consciousness he is sprouting in each being. Some day the seedling will develop as a fully grown tree; someday knowing and understanding *kshetra* and the lord of *kshetra*, *jiva* will become a *kshetrapati* and attain his *bhava* too. This is the divine destiny of man (13/18). The pure knowledge or *vijñāna* of *kshetra* and *kshetrajñā* is waiting for us to fulfil that destiny.

To start with, we have to reach the knowledge by practising discrimination. In spite of being *kshetrajñā* essentially, we are involved with *kshetra*. Therefore, we are not *kshetrajñā* or *kshetrapati* in reality. Hence we have to free ourselves from the fetters of Prakriti by differentiating *kshetrajñā* from *kshetra* or following Samkhya, Purusha from Prakriti (13/34). Then only the supreme knowledge of *kshetra* and *kshetrajñā* will be within our reach.

Question:

‘This, what has been told is knowledge (*jñāna* — the rest is ignorance’ (13/12). What is the purport of the list of the methods of sadhana? In that case does not *jñāna* become conditional to performance and attainment? But the scripture says that *jñāna* is not conditioned to anything. It is known by itself, it is self-effulgent.

Answer:

Here, the term ‘*jñāna*’ indicates the means for attainment of knowledge. Of course the realisation that comes as the result is also *jñāna*. That has been expressed in detail later (13/17).

Though practice without any sequential order is not rare, but this sadhana follows an order. It is thus:

Led by the blind vital force, we plunge into *samsara* and do not find any fault with it in the beginning. But one day the surge of vital activities slows down; disease and decay attack body, with the horror of death approaching fast. Retrospection proves that apart from physical disability, sadness of mind also has created havoc in life. Though death brings an end to all sufferings but there is rebirth after death and sorrow is inevitable for a living being. The wheel of sorrow moves from birth to rebirth.

Not everyone is timely aware of this. One, who is, gets over all illusions of *samsara*. He can clearly see all imperfections of life (13/8). As a result, the attachment falls away. No more does he want to cling to wife, children or family (13/9). Mental renunciation spreads over the senses too. Material enjoyment becomes tasteless (13/8). Self-conceit and pride born out of ego that goaded him to hold his head high among others dissipates and the head

wants to bow down in humility (13/8). Now is the time to surrender oneself at the lotus feet of a guide with ardent submission, a questioning spirit and service (4/34).

The new birth starts from the worship of a teacher. The habitual life falls behind. The world remains as it was before, but the inside of the devotee is completely changed. The association with the pure and serene Guru has purified him too and made him calm and composed. Self-searching has made it easier to control senses (13/7). There is no enmity to anyone; even serious offences can be easily pardoned; good or bad, whatever may come, nothing can spoil the equality of mind (13/9). Somehow life has become straight and simple. There is no more the desire to be involved in outer world; to live with and within one’s own self is more desirable; no inclination to mix with people either (13/10). Day by day my own reality is getting clearer and clearer and along with that gets clearer the reality of all. As a result, there is a graceful contentment in mind and one-pointedness in intelligence (2/65) that culminates in a gradual flow of unflinching and one-pointed devotion to the Divine, which is the ultimate goal of *jiva* (13/10).

This is the path of transcendence from material attachment to bhakti. This sadhana has been termed as *jñāna*. Actually, *jñāna* can be the way, the object as well as the attainment — all three. The supreme Purusha as the embodiment of *jñāna* is the object of our sadhana or knowledge. The sadhana or practice to reach him is also *jñāna*. And having him is the ultimate *jñāna*. To traverse the path that is as sharp as the razor’s edge, initial effort is inevitable. At that point *jñāna* is conditional and there is no harm in that. When the sadhana becomes effortless — being in him and with him becomes part of my nature then only *jñāna* becomes natural and innate. Then I understand that this is my reality or nature. Reality can never be conditional. This unconditional therefore natural sense of reality is called ‘*sambodhi*’, which, according to Sri Ramakrishna, is ‘knowing through knowledge’. All the drills and exercises are to be performed only to reach what is natural and inborn. Remember that too is *jñāna*, and because of the sadhana to be performed it is conditional. In the Upanishad, supreme knowledge (*prajñā*) is evidence, reaching evidence and evident — all three together. (he can be reached only with *prajñā*; and again verily *prajñā* is Brahman). There is a rare method of reaching *prajñā* directly through *prajñā* as Shukdeva did. But a master of that stature is few and far between. The whole thing is like the blossoming of a flower in the light of the sun. For a few seconds such condition might come to many but that does not stay long. The Upanishad has given a simile with flashing and extinguishing of lightning. Patanjali has called conditional *jñāna* ‘knowledge by hearing and inference’. But if you

see from a higher angle both (conditional and unconditional) are *prajña*.

Question:

The Supreme Brahman is neither *sat* nor *asat* — then what? In the Veda and Upanishads, Brahman has sometimes been called *sat* and sometimes *asat*. Why?

Answer:

In the path of knowledge (*jñāna marg*), the object of sadhana is Brahman. Again, he is verily *jñāna* itself. Therefore, I receive him as *jñāna* with the help of my *jñāna*. But then my *jñāna* melts in his. It is like when we see the morning star, we know that now the sun will rise. As if the morning star is saying, ‘There, there comes the light’ (*Aajyotiriti*). But the light of the morning star is actually the light of the sun. When the sun rises, the morning star merges in its light. As long as she could say, ‘There, there comes light’ — the light was *sat* to her, meaning it had a separate existence. But as she merges into that light, she has no longer a separate existence. Hence there is no more the light she had seen earlier. At that point, from her point of view the light is *asat* — does not exist. But in reality, light is ever existent. One cannot judge its veracity with the appearance or disappearance of the morning star. Similarly eternal light is neither *sat* nor *asat*. It is inexpressible. The same is Brahman — beyond expression by our limited knowledge. Though we cannot measure him with our limited knowledge, yet he can be perceived by higher perception.

Sat and *asat* may have four options: (1) *sat*, (2) *asat*, (3) *sat* and *asat* together, (4) Neither *sat* nor *asat*. Each of these four extremes is applicable to Brahman. Yet there is no end. Hence it is said that he is neither *sat*, nor *asat*; neither ‘*sadasat*’ (both *sat* and *asat*) nor ‘non-*sat* non-*asat*. It is not impossible to express him. He is, at one point, beyond all perceptions too. Some say, Brahman is effulgence like the sun. To him Brahman is *sat*. Some say, the sun sets, it is the void that remains. That *akash* or void is Brahman. To him Brahman is *asat*. Some conceive *akash* and the sun together and say that Brahman is the sun as well as the *akash*. To him Brahman is ‘*sadasat*’. Some go beyond the duality of *sat* and *asat* and think he is neither *sat* nor *asat*. He is something from which both *sat* and *asat* have come out.

All four realisations are true. In the Veda and Upanishads, all four have been mentioned in detail. (‘*sat*’ *Rig* 1/164/46; ‘*asat*’ 10/72/2-3; ‘*sat* and *asat*’ 10/5/7; neither *sat* nor *asat* 10/129/1 etc. Further *Taittiriya*, *Chhandogya*, *Swetaswatara*). All these perceptions are true both individually as well as en

bloc. Yet there is no end of him.

Question:

‘With every sense having the semblance of gunas, yet void of all senses’ (13/14). What is the mystic explanation of this sloka? ‘Without gunas’ yet ‘enjoyer of gunas’ — how is that possible?

Answer:

Brahman is neither *sat* nor *asat*. Again he is both *sat* and *asat*. Whatever is perceptible to our senses is *sat*; anything beyond sense is *asat*. When the Veda mentions of ‘the Purusha with ‘thousand heads, thousand eyes and thousand feet’, who is covering the existence from every side, it refers to the *sat* Brahman. Then ‘All this is verily Brahman’. ‘All this’ perceptible to our senses is nothing but Brahman. But he again, ‘stays beyond the measure of ten fingers’ and that is beyond our sense perception. Hence there Brahman is *asat*.

Yet from that *asat* aspect, he is being manifested as *sat*. Apparently there is a limit to his *sat* aspect and that limit is the limit of our sense perception. But as *asat*, he is limitless. Neither eyes, nor speech not even mind can go there. Yet there is something — an extra-sensory perception. At the same time, all qualities of senses are coming out in our waking state from that transcendental state. Therefore that condition can be termed as ‘having semblance of senses in spite of being void of senses.’ This semblance is a form of shakti in the senses. When the shakti opens her eyes there is creation and Brahman is in his *sat* form; when she closes her eyes, there is dissolution and Brahman is in *asat* form. But Brahman is not void of his shakti even when she closes her eyes, the urge for opening is always there. That is what is called here ‘the semblance of the gunas even while void of all senses — just as we see in an embryo or a seed. We see a masterpiece of artistic form of this in the *vighraha* of Jagannath in Neelachala.

Brahman is simultaneously *sat* and *asat*. These two slokas have expressed that. As he has universal form so is he formless. In his universal manifestations is going on the play of the three gunas and he, established in Prakriti is enjoying the play. Hence he is the enjoyer of Gunas. But at the same time he is formless beyond universe. No play of gunas can reach there. There he is untouched and beyond the play of gunas. As he is without gunas, so is he the enjoyer of gunas — not sequentially but simultaneously. It is the lower intelligence that creates conflict between with or without gunas. The Upanishad has called that intelligence impure — that does not know the truth, therefore sees the duality. Pure intelligence sees oneness. It accepts duality and yet sees unity. On one side

adwaita is beyond duality and on the other it is embracing duality.

That is why it is said that Brahman is ‘*asakta*’ or detached yet ‘*sarvavrit*’— holding everything. Yet he is not involved anywhere. Because he is beyond *gunas*, so is he never involved and because he is the enjoyer of *gunas*, so is he ‘*sarvavrit*’— holder of All.

This is the vision of Brahman in his totality, not a sequential vision of parts as with or without *gunas*. Initially, in order to reach the ‘*nirguna*’ state, one has to reject ‘*saguna*’ as ‘this is not the end, this is not the end’. But once established in the *nirguna* state, we find that all *gunas* are coming from there. Then *nirguna* becomes a compliment of *saguna*, not a hindrance. This sense of Oneness has been expounded in the following slokas.

Question:

‘As knowledge, object of knowledge and attainable by knowledge, he is established in each heart’ (13/17). What is the significance of this sloka? Would you please explain each word?

Answer:

The significance of this sloka has already been discussed. *Jñana* or knowledge is the Self-symbol of Brahman. In other words he is verily the integral consciousness. Knowledge in ‘attainable by knowledge’ indicates the discipline and practice of *jñana* — a *sadhana* or discipline to be performed by *jiva*. How to do that has already been explained in detail (13/7-11). With the help of this knowledge he becomes the object of knowledge, meaning the supreme goal for all creation. But I have to know him in my heart, not externally. All my knowledge is nothing but an aspect of divine knowledge. My knowledge is a spark and he is the effulgence of all effulgence (13/17). That way he is established or manifested in innumerable hues in each heart. It is the light of the divine knowledge that is sprouting in various forms and degrees in each heart. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, ‘In some places there are single candles, in others, there are eighteen’. My self-knowledge will transform into knowledge of divine reality by *sadhana* (13/111). And this knowledge of Brahman along with self-Knowledge will give me the knowledge of reality of the universe, which is the main theme of the third *shataka* of the Gita. I have already mentioned that as the object of knowledge, he is the one to be attained, and as knowledge he is both the way and the goal.

Question:

Are the observer, giver of permission, the sustainer, the enjoyer, the highest lord and supreme Self all in one? What are their individual functions in the

body?

Answer:

From the standpoint of Samkhya, the knowledge of *kshetra* and *kshetrajña* can be called the knowledge of Prakriti and Purusha as well (13/19-23). But in the Samkhya philosophy expounded in the Gita, the lower Prakriti is also essentially the nature of the highest being and therefore fully conscient; all material actions ensue from an urge and will of consciousness. We have to remember that.

Here, we get three aspects of *kshetrajña*. First, the body is *kshetra* and whoever knows it, is *kshetrajña* (13/1). He can be an ordinary individual being as well as a knower of the self. I have already mentioned that the latter has been mentioned as *kshetravid* in the *Rig Veda*.

But the real *kshetrajña*, even in an ordinary being is the lord himself who is seated in the heart of each being as the controller (18/61). Again, he has two aspects — Brahman and *Paramatman*. As Brahman, the *kshetrajña* is our object of knowledge, attainable by knowledge and ultimately the embodiment of knowledge (13/17). In that aspect, he is also situated in each heart. Otherwise he would not have been attainable by knowledge nor any direct concept would have been possible. He is both in and out of all creation, in spite of being whole in each he appears to be divided; he is immovable yet moving; all risings and settings are in him; at the same time he has cosmic and transcendental aspects; so on and so forth (13/12-17). One most illustrious aspect of him is that he is the holder of All. As the single ocean expands itself in multitudes of waves, foam and bubbles, so also the innumerable objects of creation come out from him (13/20). As a holder of all specifications he remains as an indefinite expansive consciousness like *akash*. This is the second aspect of *kshetrajña*.

The third aspect of *kshetrajña* is the unchangeable *Akshar Brahman* as *Paramatman* (13/21). The concept of *Paramatman* is derived from the concept of Prakriti and Purusha. Purusha is consciousness and Prakriti is shakti — the eternal couple. Under the guidance of Purusha, with the upheaval of *gunas* as medium Prakriti is going on creating the universal distortions (13/19;9/10). This, of course, is the highest Purusha and the Prakriti is his ‘very own’ (9/7-8) or the highest Prakriti. Again it is the highest Purusha only who is born from innumerable wombs as *jiva*. When he comes as *jiva*, Prakriti is manifested as *para* (higher) and *apara* (lower). In lower nature is going on the mechanical activities of *jiva* but that is sustained by the higher nature (7/4-5), which is the cause of upward movement of each *jiva*. The Veda has called it the expansion of *prajña* or gradual ascension (*Aitareya* 2/3/2). The ultimate *prajña* is in self-realisation

which is possible only by separating the self from lower nature. This is true for the individual being. But for the totality of created beings, more than the spiritual freedom of individual beings, the true reality lies in the perception of *Paramatman*. The absolute Purusha has two aspects — Brahman and *Paramatman*. In reality, Brahman is the *Akshara Purusha* (9/3, 15/16). The Veda says that even the Absolute *akshara* does exude — ‘*ksharati aksharam*’ (*Rig* 1/164/42) or splashing of the immovable as ‘a fountain overflows in hundred sprouts’ (*Rig* 3/26/9) [Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj has given the simile of thousands of sparks from a single flame]. Elsewhere this has been described as casting of seeds (14/3,4). At that point, like Vedic bull and cow, Brahman and Shakti are united in an inseparable couple (*Yuganaddha* or *Ardhanariswar*) — he is his own womb — the *Mahad Brahman* (*Brahmakshara Samudbhavam* 3/15). Here *Mahat* is *kshetra* (field) and Brahman is *kshetrajña* (knower of the field).

The similar thoughts work for *Paramatman* or supreme Purusha (13/22) and his own Prakriti which is the vessel for individual creation (7/4-6). There the ‘own Prakriti’ is *kshetra* and *Paramatman* is *kshetrajña*. As mentioned before, this is the third concept of *kshetra* and *kshetrajña*.

This is the closest concept because this can be felt ‘in the body’ (13/22). Not only one can realise oneself as Atman in this body but one can realise deeply the highest being. Herein lies the excellence of the perception. This is verily the perception of *Purushottama* within oneself because *Paramatman* and *Purushottama* are the same (15/17). Elsewhere the same *Paramatman* has been termed as *Adhiyajña Purusha* (8/4) because in spite of being the highest lord of all (*sarva loka Maheswara*), he remains in this very body as the enjoyer of all our sacrifice and askesis as well as our greatest friend (5/29).

Again, the perception of *Paramatman* is higher than the perception of *Akshara Brahman* (15/18) because not only does the perception of *Paramatman* give the simultaneous feeling of transcendence and cosmic aspects but since this is a physical feeling, that gives the perception of *vigraha* as well. Earlier, this has been described as ‘*Raja Vidya Raja Guhya*’ (9/3). This is to feel him as the highest lord and absolute master in the human form. The deepest and the most intimate part of the sadhana is to perceive him in this very body. As the bhakta says, ‘when you know that this body and that body have the same form, you discover a well of *rasa*’. Thus this becomes the perception of atman and *Paramatman* at the same time. Self-realisation in the process of gradual ascension is culminating in the realisation of *Paramatman*. The sloka gives a deep hint to that. The feelings of a sadhaka and a *siddha* are intertwined here.

The sequence is as follows: the first one is the state of an observer. Purusha, the observer, is just watching the work of Prakriti, standing close to her. Action

is performed by Prakriti since she is the source of all doership or cause and effect and Purusha, the knower of the Field is the non-doer and merely an observer (13/20,22). From a universal point of view, this is the indefinite (*nirguna*) quality of Brahman (13/14). In the language of the Upanishad, he is the Witness Consciousness, solitary as well as indefinite (*Swetaswata*. 6/11).

There is one point to note here. The Purusha has three aspects. He is observer, enjoyer and master. According to Samkhya philosophy, out of these, observing is the real identity of the Purusha. As observer, the Purusha is detached from the Prakriti, does not get involved with her doings, hence neither enjoys the happiness nor suffers the pain coming from her and has no inclination to participate in her work. Neither is he an enjoyer nor a doer, only an observer.

The Samkhya has called his a state of reality of observer — a very high state beyond the play of the gunas. Such a state exists at the root of creation too and the Veda has described it in various terms as *asat*, dissolution, non-Manifest etc. It is said that only one quarter of the Purusha is the cause of the creation and the remaining three-fourths remain as immortality in heaven (*Rig* 10/90/30). There is no individual creation there, hence no play of Prakriti there and the Purusha is inert too.

But that does not mean he is powerless. Even in that transcendental state, he is with his shakti or ‘*Maya*’ as per the Vedic language. The Gita has spoken about *Self Maya* of Purusha (4/6) or *Yogamaya* (7/25). Please note that this *Maya* is not the same as ‘*avidya*’. On the other hand, it is, according to the Upanishad, ‘the eternal supreme knowledge’ or the eternal *prajña* (*Swetaswata*. 4/18). In the Veda, we come across many a time the use of ‘*Maya*’ to denote *Prajña*.

Before the dawn of creation, when the Purusha is contracted within himself, *Maya* is inseparable and his own state (*swadha*) or *sree* indicating his state of being within himself; she is his ‘*rama*’ or self-enjoyment. And this is his base. From here he exudes in spite of being *akshar*, moves in spite of being immovable. The universe exists in his movement. We too are in it and we are moving as well. This movement is the play of gunas of Prakriti — swinging back and forth between good and bad, happiness and sadness. Most of the times we like it, but not always. We try to find out a solid state but don’t get it and even if we do, we cannot hold it for long.

Sometimes our life takes a turn. Somehow we want to reach that state of *akshara* and do not want to come back again.

The Samkhya philosophers showed us the way. They say to be completely detached from the lower nature. Do not accept either the enjoyment or the doership she offers. You are neither an enjoyer nor a doer, be just an observer.

But the Gita has not rejected enjoyment and work from life. The goal of Gita is to follow the supreme Purusha in each and every aspect; to be absorbed in his thoughts with full knowledge and understanding of all creation (13/18). The supreme Purusha is the observer or principal (9/10). The Upanishad says, he sees himself as unmanifest beyond universe and manifested in the universe. By seeing himself like this he derives an *ananda* saturated with *rasa*.

I am just seeing in the most detached condition without involving myself with the scene. That I can keep myself completely detached gives me the chance to get to know myself most intimately. That happiness, 'beyond senses and grasped only by *buddhi*' is the endless gain of Atman. If we can hold on to that, even deep sorrows of the world would not move us (6/20-22). This perception of absence of sorrow even in the midst of deepest suffering has been termed as Yoga (6/23) in the Gita. In the ascending order that is the state of absence of sorrow and by descending order that is the state of extreme happiness (6/21). This way, enjoyment coupled with observing is a state of tasting the extra sensory happiness that can be attained only by *buddhi*. And from that state of being an extraordinary concept of doership reveals itself to an observer. The Gita has given lucid description which can be applied both for the Brahman as well as *jiva* who is a manifestation of Brahman. (6/27, 5/24, 18/53, 54). If you understand this from the point of gradual ascension of yogic consciousness, it would be easier to grasp the reality.

Initially, the Purusha is the observer (*upadrashta*) as detached, a bystander and indifferent. (9/90—the lord is unattached to work and indifferent; 14/23, 12/16). But in the process of continuous seeing, when the heart is filled with flavour (*rasa*), the Purusha does not feel the necessity of keeping himself aloof as a seer from the scene. The flavour creates the beginning of union between the seer and the scene—this comes as a realisation. At that level the Purusha can easily participate in the play of the Prakriti. Giving full sanction to her independence and as if he says, 'Do whatever you feel like doing. I am enjoying the show.' Then the observer (*upadrashta*) becomes the sanction-giver (*anumanta*). As a result, the relation between the Purusha and Prakriti gets closer. Thus the ultimate aim of Prakriti's work, which is directed towards the achievement of enjoyment as well as freedom of Purusha becomes gradually clearer and clearer. The harmony that is at the basis of all Prakriti's work as an expression of Truth-Will becomes evident. But in reality the Purusha is Truth-Consciousness. Hence the Will also is his. This way he is the sustainer or master of all that the Prakriti does to attain her goal. All work of Prakriti is being done with his sanction and sustenance. Prakriti is verily the executrix of the Purusha's will.

Thereafter there is no function of the lower nature; all is done by the higher

and Supreme Prakriti of the Purusha. There is no question of separation from her. Now the Purusha is the enjoyer and the supreme master of the Prakriti. In enjoyment comes out his *ananda* and in mastery his power. This way in every action of Prakriti, the Purusha becomes the observer, sanction-giver, sustainer, enjoyer, and the supreme master. The supreme Purusha is verily termed as *Paramatman* or *Purushottama* and his human form (*vigraha*) can be felt even in this body (13/22, 15/17; *Adhiyajña Purusha* 8/4). The Upanishad has spoken about the most blissful aspect of the golden Purusha. Yet it is said that he is beyond all forms (*Isha* 16, *Chhandogya* 1/6/6-7, *Katha* 2/8/9, *Swetaswatara* 4/20). Moreover the Veda said that he has cosmic form. I have already mentioned that in the Gita you would find a summation of all three. *Paramatman* or *Purushottama* is then the ultimate identification of *kshetrajña*. His field (*kshetra*) covers both micro as well as macro.

Question:

It is said, 'Some see Atman in Atman with the help of meditation; some with Samkhya Yoga and others with Karma Yoga (13/24)' So we see that the path to see Atman is not limited to one. Do the different paths depend upon the *samskaras* from previous births?

Answer:

We have seen that everything in this Universe — inner or outer, movable or immovable — the whole existence is born out of the combination of *kshetra* and *kshetrajña* (13/26). Under the guidance of the supreme Purusha as *kshetrajña*, Prakriti as *kshetra* has given birth to the universe (9/10, 14/3-4). Like a foetus in the mother's womb, we are bound in the *kshetra*, referred to elsewhere as '*Brahma Yoni*' or the supreme source (14/4-5) and are completely unaware of the supreme lord both subjectively as well as objectively.

We have to know the *kshetrajña*, we have to know the Prakriti and the play of her gunas and after knowing we have to be 'free from bondage' (*Swetaswatara* 1/7). This is our ultimate goal (13/23). The way to freedom is through the knowledge of discrimination. Coming out of the mother's womb and being separated from her, we have to see her face, we have to see our father's face too. In other words we have to know Prakriti and her play of gunas and her 'sustainer, enjoyer, supreme lord' — the Purusha. This is to know the difference between *kshetra* and *kshetrajña* with discriminative perception (13/34). Now the lord is telling us a few ways to attain that Knowledge.

There are three principal ways — Samkhya Yoga, Karma Yoga and Yoga of worship (13/24). But the chief characteristic of all yogas is meditation on one-

pointed flow of indrawn mind. To know the object of knowledge as an outside phenomenon is indirect knowledge. Real knowledge comes with direct perception, when we bring the outside object within and become one with it as it is with a mother who knows her child in the womb by becoming one with it and yet being more than that.

Indirect knowledge consists of three aspects — knowledge, the object of knowledge and the knower. The knower is the Atman but the object of knowledge is outside Atman. Hence it is not my own and the power of knowledge is the go-between of the two. Knowledge is a propensity of the knower but when it circles round the outside object, it is possessed by non-Atman elements. Whatever we want to know through senses can never be known in full. Even when extremely desirable, it still remains an outside object — never belonging to our Self.

That is why to attain the knowledge of reality, the mind has to be drawn inward. In that state, knowledge submerges into the knower along with the object of knowledge and the knower, the knowledge and the object of knowledge all become Atman. Then I know you by me and as me, the same way you know when in love. Mind then is merged in meditation. This is the way to know that Atman in Atman and by Atman through meditation is a general symptom of all knowledge of reality.

Though the same discipline ultimately takes all the followers to the same goal, everyone does not start at the same point. For example, different people might want to reach the centre of the circle following a straight line. Yet each would have a different path depending on the point of the circumference from where one starts.

Reflections, feelings and will—these are the three propensities of consciousness present in all beings; yet according to *samskaras* people are attracted to either of them. That is why the Veda has classified three schools of sadhana — *jñāna*, *karma* and worship. Here Sri Krishna has done the same but by expanding the meaning of the terms to the extreme. Persons with strong inclination for knowledge follow the path of Samkhya; for work follow the path of Karma Yoga and the ones with deep feelings follow the path of Bhakti. The second and the third chapters of the Gita have spoken about *jñāna* and *karma* yogas in detail. The twelfth chapter too talks of Bhakti Yoga as the ‘the worship of the nectar of all dharma’ with *śraddhā* and single-minded devotion (12/20,6). But there is no clash between one path and another. There is no conflict between Samkhya and Karma (2/39, 5/4-5); none between *karma* and bhakti (12/6,10); nor between *jñāna* and bhakti because the ever attached one pointed *jñāni* is his particular bhakta (7/17-19, 12/19).

In the eighteenth chapter very openly the lord has combined all three and said, ‘From whom come all the propensities of every being, he, who is all-pervasive (this knowledge is verily *jñāna* itself 2/17), by worshipping him through performance of one’s own allotted work, man attains perfection’ (18/46). This is the highest injunction of the Gita.

It is to be noted that the Yoga of *upasana* or worship has been termed as the Vedic way. (13/25). *Upasana* has been mentioned all over Upanishads. The path of a rishi is to reach Brahman through worship of gods and the principal method of the *munis* is to find out the Atman — to know the Self different and detached from the Prakriti.

Question:

Please explain the significance of the last three slokas (32,33,34) of the thirteenth chapter of the Gita? Has vision of knowledge been termed as the divine vision? How can one acquire the distinguishing vision between *kshetra* and *kshetrajñā*?

Answer:

The last three slokas describe the self-realisation of a ‘*jivanmukta*’. The foundation of that is to know the *kshetrajñā* different from the *kshetra* with the help of inner vision. This vision is verily the vision of knowledge. The entire creation is either consequence or distortion of the movement of Prakriti. I have already mentioned that this elemental nature has been referred to as ‘*Mahad Brahman*’ or the Brahmic womb elsewhere in the Gita. We remain as embryo in this womb. Our ultimate aim is to come out of it.

This could happen with knowledge; the embryo in the womb, in reality, is the seed of consciousness cast by the sire. Mother is above and beyond the embryo and the father is above and beyond the mother. The consciousness of the father is pervading the mother as well as the embryo. There is a deep interrelation among all three — *jiva*, Prakriti and Purusha.

Jiva or a being has a physical existence which is part of Prakriti, which is *kshetra* or field. The separating consciousness that is deeply infused in the *jiva* is Purusha or *kshetrajñā*. Knowing the *kshetrajñā* separated from the *kshetra* makes it possible to get free from the entanglement of creation and Prakriti and that is the ultimate goal (13/34).

Sri Krishna has referred to two ancient hints to discriminative knowledge. The Veda has described Purusha as *akash* or *surya*. *Akash* is formless and *surya* has the most auspicious form. *Akash* as the subtlest of the subtle is pervaded everywhere; yet it is involved nowhere (9/9). The same is with *surya*,

bringing life and revealing everything with its radiance yet as unattached as the *akash*. Self-consciousness is like *akash*, and *surya*. It is deeply ingrained in every part of the body as the sense of I-ness and here *akash* is the analogy. Again every part of the body is radiated to the fullest potential by the same consciousness and there *surya* is the analogy. It has already been mentioned at the beginning (13/1-6) that though the body has been referred to as the *kshetra* but *kshetra* denotes the whole gamut of receptivity as a whole.

Some Upanishads speak of *akash*-body, the Veda of sun-skin which further has been transformed into golden body in the Brahmana and the body of the yogic fire in other Upanishads. The object is not to discard *kshetra* but first to transform that with the concept of Existence-Consciousness and eventually transcend to reach the *kshetrajña*. That is the ultimate *siddhi* of the yoga of discrimination and separation between *kshetra* and *kshetrajña*. And this discrimination is the nature of *Paramatman*. That is how in spite of being beyond Prakriti, he still is her ‘approver, sustainer, enjoyer and the absolute master.’

Some of the previous slokas (3/26-29) have already mentioned about him; The *Parameswar* is ‘equally’ present in all created beings. The beings are mortal but he is immortal. He is ever united with the Prakriti that created the beings. Actually the creation ensues from the union of the two. But though unified with the Prakriti, he is beyond her. Therefore he is simultaneously unified and separated everywhere.

To know him like this is the foundation of ultimate knowledge and that has been hinted at the very beginning of the next chapter.

Question:

What is the ‘best knowledge among all’ (14/1)? How is that knowledge, embracing which one can attain *sadharmya* with the Divine? What is the difference between *swadharma* and *sajuyya*?

Answer:

This chapter is a continuation of the previous one. Prakriti is *kshetra* and *kshetrajña* is the Purusha. To understand the reality of both, one has to know them unitedly as well as separately. The very existence of both movable and immovable objects is born out of the union of the two (13/26). At that point all existence is part of *kshetra* or Prakriti and the *kshetrajña* or *Parameswar* (13/27) is beyond and above. But as the Purusha is beyond Prakriti, so is he in it (13/21). At that point he might be bound or free. When he, as *jiva*, is bound, he wants to be free and the way is to be separated from the Prakriti. But the supreme Purusha is ever free from as well as ever united with the Prakriti. In

spite of being in the Prakriti he is the sustainer, enjoyer and the master. Hence the mystery of his freedom lies in being united and free at the same time. When a sadhaka aiming for salvation is on his way to attain the apex of yoga (6/3), he separates himself from the lower nature and follows the higher. At that point, discrimination is the most powerful trait in him. Yet he can see even at that stage the supreme Purusha, in spite of being within every creature is beyond all. For all creation is transient, only He is Eternal (13/27).

When the aspired soul settles in the yoga, he too takes a part in the play. He can see the Divine equally and simultaneously established in all and because of unification with the Divine he sees himself too as a part of that. Then all become images of his own Atman, and he has no conflict with anyone. This is his ultimate goal or attainment of his sadhana (13/28). As thousand rays spread out from one solar disc, so also, he sees the manifestation of the various creations from the same *akshara* and *Mahad Brahman*. But seeing is becoming. So he also becomes one with Brahman (13/30). And that happens in this very body. The body is *kshetra* and the Atman is *kshetrajña* there. In his Atman he feels *Paramatman*, the Atman of all Atman (5/7). Even in the midst of all, he realises that in reality he is eternal, imperishable, without gunas and inactive; nay, though he is coming in contact with the gunas and actions of Prakriti (the contact is inevitable for an embodied soul) he can remain completely unattached (13/31).

Yet, his outward dealings remain the same. But due to the sense of discrimination still strong in him, he sees that whatever has to be done is being done by Prakriti; he himself does nothing (13/29).

This is the knowledge of difference, separation and/or detachment between the *kshetra* and *kshetrajña* and the result is freedom from elemental nature (13/34). The elemental nature is *kshetra*. But this *kshetra* is neither *Sri Kshetra* nor *Kashi Kshetra* — the land of eternal freedom. We have to always remember that.

It is to be perceived that three aspects of the highest goal have been referred to in this respect—to realise the supreme Purusha or *kshetrajña* as *Parameswar*, *Parabrahman* and *Paramatman*. These are the three aspects of the One and only one reality (*Bhagavat* 1/2/11),

This, though, is the knowledge of separation between *kshetra* and *kshetrajña* and not of unification. Here the consciousness is going upwards. Purusha is the seer of Prakriti; at best the sanction-giver. This is the state of *sajuyya* or oneness with him beyond this world.

But as he is beyond and above, so is he the inner soul of all. ‘The Purusha is all this’ (*Rigveda* 10/90/2) There he is united with Prakriti. The nature of this union has been explained in the following (14/3-4) slokas. The knowledge of

this union is the ‘highest of all knowledge’ in the same way as the ‘best knowledge’ is to realise his supreme aspect and the lordship of all in his human body (9/11). To take shelter in this knowledge can lead to *sadharmya*. *Sajuyya* gives salvation and *sadharmya* brings perfection (14/1) — meaning sharing the qualities of the sustainer, enjoyer and the supreme master. But remember that there is no conflict between the cosmic and transcendental aspects. A realised soul equally enjoys the play of creation and dissolution because he is above both.

Question:

‘The *Mahad Brahman* is the womb and I am the sire, casting the seeds’ (14/4). Did the creation by the original Purusha occur by action or by will? What is the ‘seed’ for all creation? How is creation possible without unification of male and female? What is the difference between mental and physical creation? Has not the feeling of the original father been transferred to the mortal fathers?

Answer:

Akshar Brahman is the sire, casting the seed and *Mahad Brahman* is the womb of the mother. The creation through seed is, according to the Veda, the exudation of the Immutable, which is the source of the universe (*Rigveda* 1/164/42). In spite of continuous oozing, he remains immutable like a never-ending fountain that flows in hundreds of streams (*Rigveda* 3/26/9). Hence the Veda has said, ‘Only one part of him is the entire universe, and the other three remain as Immortality beyond.’ This way he is the complete Purusha (*Rigveda* 10/90/2-3). In the mystic language of the Upanishad it is said, ‘That is whole, this too is whole, whole is overflowing from the whole; and in spite of taking whole from the whole, whole only remains’ (*Brihadaranyaka* 5/1/1).

This is the divine union of *kshetra* and *kshetrajña*, which is the ‘highest knowledge’ because it is more than the separated aspect of the two. This *kshetrajña* Purusha is the *Purushottama* and the Prakriti is his ‘own Prakriti’ and ‘*self Maya*’. His ‘appearance’ or manifestation of Self or ‘divine birth’ (and the divine work) that occurs with the support of his supreme Prakriti has been termed in the *Puranas* as the ‘auspicious tales of his *avatars*’ (4/6-9).

Verily it is he that is becoming all the beings as well the universe — coming down from consciousness to matter. This is his universal original descent. The Veda says that at the beginning of creation, immovable and in himself, he exhaled without air. The exhalation is his desire or ‘mental semen’ or the upsurge of his

mental seed, that led to the beginning of creation (*Rigveda*, gist of 10/129, 2.4.6). Therefore, desire or Will is the origin of creation. According to the expression of the Upanishad, ‘I will be many. I will be born’. This Will is *Maya* or the supreme knowledge of the *kshetrajña* Purusha. And the space where his will or desire gets active and manifests the unmanifest is his *kshetra* or Prakriti, which has been expressed here as, ‘my womb is the *Mahad Brahman*’ (14/3). The ‘mental semen of the supreme Purusha, entering the *Mahad Brahman* arouses the creative Shakti or the fertilised egg of the Prakriti. This aspect of Prakriti has been called ‘*Gouri*’ or the ‘*Madhyama Vak*’ in the Veda, who with the desire to become many goes on breaking herself as cells (*Rigveda* 1/164/41).

In the highest abode, this is how the union between the *kshetra* and *kshetrajña* takes place and its imitation goes on in the creation of children among earthly parents.

But the celestial conception takes place in absolute consciousness under his control and Prakriti is nothing but the womb of the Purusha. Hence there is no difference between the two (14/3) but the terrestrial conception takes place unconsciously and without control. This is the difference between the two. But even in the ordinary action, the supreme knowledge of the highest Purusha enters deeply in the earthly parents as *antaryamin* and that acts as the originator of the upcoming of *jiva*. Once in a while, during a transitional period, he comes down with full consciousness and will in his play as *jiva*. Then occurs the advent of *avatar* and then both his birth and work are divine, in constant remembrance of which we too can go beyond birth and death (4/5.7-9)

Question:

‘In this very body (sometimes) expansion (knowledge) appears. Know for sure that where there is knowledge, that *sattwa* is taking the predominance’ (14/1). What is the mystic explanation of this sloka? How does expansion occur in all gates of the body? How does *sattwa* control all senses? Can each sense organ express the quality of *sattwa*?

Answer:

As we have to know the *kshetrajña* Purusha, so also we have to know his field or Prakriti. Play of gunas is the eternally associated with of the Prakriti. We have to know and understand the play and go beyond that and beyond the gunas while still living in it. That is our ultimate aim (14/19-20). The play of the gunas has been a little elaborately discussed here for the completion of the

knowledge of the field and its knower.

The actual meaning of the word *guna* is ‘rope’ — that binds. In reality the Purusha is unborn and infinite (4/6). But as he takes up a body, he gets bound by the chain of birth and death and falls victim to the three *gunas* — *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas* born out of Prakriti at the inception of creation (14/5). From the names itself, it is understood that the suggestion came from the rising and setting of the sun. There is darkness before the sun rises and that is *tamas*; when the sun is about to rise and the eastern sky gets red, it is *rajas*. The condition is in-between light and darkness (14/18). After that the sun rises in full. Whatever was lifeless in dark is revived and gains existence and that is *sattwa*.

It so happens that the three *gunas* do not only bind, but liberate as well. The Vedic rishis have explained this beautifully with the analogy of the rotation of day and night.

It can be easily said that the advent of light starts after midnight. Later, Dawn crosses the darkness and brings out the radiance of light. The sun rises. Its effulgence gradually overflows and eventually midday when the sun is at the zenith, we have light in its fullest capacity. After that again the fading of light till it dissolves at dusk and the darkness deepens at night. The victorious march of light, defeating darkness, starts again after midnight. This way a circular movement of light and darkness is going on day after day.

Out of this, our natural inclination is towards light. It is a Vedic thought that light is our life, our higher knowledge (*Rigveda* 1/113/16). Light comes out of darkness and we are floating joyfully in its flow tide. Though we are sinking in darkness during the neap tide, yet, we are again coming up at the bank of light.

The Samkhya philosopher showed that this conflict between light and darkness is everywhere in life. As if the *rajas* is continuously pushing the shuttle between *sattwa* and *tamas*. As a result, all the three *gunas* are always intertwined in us, one pushing the other two down. Sometimes one is getting stronger and sometimes the other (14/10). In our inner nature, sometimes it is the inertia of *tamas*, sometimes the restlessness of *rajas* and sometimes the light of *sattwa* is being victorious but because it is always a mixed state, hence no individual *guna* stays permanently.

But the real aim of Prakriti is to free the Purusha from the illusion of *tamas* and restlessness of *rajas* and pass him over to *sattwa*. The quality of *sattwa* is revelation, of *rajas* is disturbance and of *tamas* is illusion (14/6-8). With an analogy of light, the *sattwa* is colourless white, *rajas* is the multicoloured and *tamas* is where the light goes on fading till it is engulfed by darkness.

Again, the pure white light is a symbol for knowledge. That light reveals a thing in its true reality — there is no motive or bias imposed. As a result, mind gets blissful with the expression of truth and the glimpse of the bliss and consciousness of Brahman as well. But one has to be very careful. There should be no attachment even towards this bliss-consciousness. That would bring in the adulteration of *rajas* in *sattwa* and would create bondage (14/9,6,7). It is very hard to detect the mixture. Knowledge and happiness, consciousness and bliss — these are the states of reality of Atman. But these expressions of reality should come naturally as a result of the liberation from the slough. As long as knowledge and happiness are to be attained by *sadhana*, attachment and desire work as motivation. Hence they are not pure.

Therefore to reach pure *sattwa*, one has to go beyond *gunas*. There, the expression of pure *sattwa* comes out easily as *swadharma* of Purusha. In the Upanishad, this has been explained with the simile of *akash* and the sun. In the front of the golden Purusha is the white effulgence and at his back is the deep blue beyond the ultimate darkness. The *akash* and the sun have merged in him. *Akash* is colourless and *aditya* is the aggregation of all colours. This is the state of pure *sattwa*. During midday, when the sun is at the zenith, there is no possibility of the least darkness nor is there any play of colours. Yet all colours are coming out that blazing white. To us this white effulgence is the higher nature of Purusha manifested as *jiva* and to him it is his ‘own Prakriti’, ‘*Self Maya*’ or ‘*Yogamaya*’. Unless and until you understand what this pure *sattwa* is, you would not be able to understand the characteristics of one beyond *gunas* (14/22).

Yet there is equality of *gunas* even in the state beyond *gunas*. And that is the equality of *gunas* in Purusha. There *sattwa* is pure *prajña*; *rajas* is unwavering valour (2/31) and *tamas* is undisturbed tranquillity. Here there is no conflict between the *gunas*. In the language of the Veda, in the void the Purusha is ‘stationed’ and in the sun he ‘embraces the universe’ (*Rig* 10/90/1). In *akash* he is formless and in *aditya* he is radiance.

This Purusha has to be meditated upon as *Parameswar* in this very body as a result of which, residing in our self he would light the lamp of knowledge in our heart (10/11) and its radiance would spread out through the gates of our sense organs. Then the body of a *jñani* devotee would become like the image of *dakshinamurty*. Shankaracharya has given a unique analogy. If a lamp is lit within the hollow trunk with many holes of a banyan tree, that would somehow resemble the *vighraha* of *dakshinamurty* — exuding light of knowledge from within himself.

At that point, even the outer objects bring to and reveal the touch of Brahman through each and every sense organ. There is light, light and light everywhere — it is like seeing light in light and with light. This is termed as purification of elements in the Upanishad, meaning total transformation of senses or achieving equality between human and divine perceptions.

Question:

What is the mystic significance of the slokas 26 and 27 of the fourteenth chapter of the Gita? What is the hidden meaning of ‘Brahman is established in Me?’ Is there not a hint of a kind of combination of *jñāna* and bhakti in the last sloka? It appears that the Brahman beyond gunas can be reached also by following the path of bhakti. Since both the paths (*jñāna* and bhakti) can take us to the same goal, why is there so much conflict between the followers of each?

Answer:

As Prakriti is the executrix of and is pervaded by gunas, so the Purusha is the enjoyer of gunas. But the enjoyment of a *jiva* and that of the master are not the same. *Jiva* enjoys as a servant of the gunas and the master enjoys as the master, being beyond the gunas. He enjoys as a great lord and his enjoyment is the overflow of *rasa*. But the enjoyment of *jiva* is full of suffering because of duality and illusion of like and dislike (7/27). He has to go beyond gunas in order to save himself from the suffering (14/20). For that it does not matter whether he follows the path of *jñāna* or bhakti.

The lord has elaborately described the characteristics of one beyond gunas (14/22-25). It appears to start with a *jñani* but immediately afterwards refers to a bhakta (14/26). But remember, the qualities of a bhakta mentioned in the Bhakti Yoga are identical in sense and language with that of the *jñani* mentioned here (12/13-19).

Therefore, the basis of Jñana Yoga is the same as that of Bhakti Yoga. Doubt in lower mind creates a difference at the onset of sadhana. But that does not exist at the end unless we keep it alive with our prejudice.

From the standpoint of philosophical reasoning though there could be some point for the apparent difference. The nature of Purusha is *swadha* or establishment of Self which is the aim of a *jñani* and the nature of Prakriti is *swaha* or self-surrender, the ultimate goal of a bhakta. Samkhya tells us about the existence of Purusha in his reality and the total dependence of Prakriti on him. That also means the same. Again, consciousness is unwavering and steadfast

but Shakti has opening and closing. From that point of view too, Shakti is sheltered by consciousness and the solitary Purusha introduces the glorious wealth of Prakriti.

But all these are nothing but results of theory of division. With true perception, we realise that Purusha and Prakriti are inseparably united and it is but natural that their characteristics are intermingled in us in the form of universal nature. In reality there can be no difference between *jñāna* and bhakti. Actually, both pure *jñāna* and pure bhakti are beyond gunas and seated high above, they support and sustain the lower gunas. In Gita we find both bhakta and *jñani* are ‘one with Brahman’ (14/26, 18/52; ‘and that is the supreme state of faith and knowledge’ (18/50).

While beyond gunas, Brahman is ‘supreme *Akshar Brahman*’ (8/3). But as I have mentioned earlier, from the Immutable (*akshara*), mutability (*kshara*) oozes out. At that point Brahman acts as the ‘womb of Brahman’ or *Mahad Brahman*.

According to the Upanishad, the ‘womb of Brahman is verily *ananda*’. Since all mutability comes out of him at that point, we can call him *Kshara Brahman*. The term ‘Brahman’ itself carries the thought of vastness or extensive consciousness. Therefore, *akshara* (Immutable) or *kshara* (mutable) are both just conditions, whereas the Brahman is all-pervading (3/15, 13/30). The Upanishad has expressed this expansion as ‘spreading out of the rays of the sun’. The opposite of that is the contraction of the rays as concentrated force or power, resulting in the orb of the sun. This orb is the symbol of *Paramatman* which leads the Gita to connect *Paramatman* with the body again and again (13/22, 31, 32). That the state of *Paramatman* is higher than that of Brahman will be mentioned next (15/17). Here the lord has given hint of that by saying that the ‘Brahman is established in Me’. The duality of *kshara* and *akshara* in Brahman has been solved in the establishment. *Paramatman* or *Purushottama* (15/17-15) is not only *kshara* nor only *akshara* but with the union of both he is the absolute *Purna Brahman*.

The adjectives attributed to Brahman are to be pondered upon here. The *Akshar Brahman* has been introduced as unchangeable as well as eternal. Actually both the epithets convey the same meaning. The Veda says that three fourth of the Brahman is eternal beyond universe. In extreme ecstasy, Brahman as *akshara* overflows as universal manifestations. That takes the shape of his *kshara* identity. The Upanishad says, ‘the *ananda* aspect of Brahman is expressed all over’ and the Veda says that this *ananda* of Brahman is fulfilled here, on this earth, through *yajña*. The highest of all *yajñas* is *Somyag* or *Ananda*

Yajña and the basis of *soma* is *ananda* as per the Veda. This *Ananda Yajña*, which encompasses the whole human life has been termed as ‘*Purusha Yajña*’ in the Upanishad. Sri Krishna received its injunctions from Rishi Ghora Angirasa. Hence he has mentioned Brahman as ‘ultimate happiness’ and ‘eternal dharma’. *Yajña* has been referred to as the original dharma of the universe in the *Purusha Sukta* of the Veda (*Rig* 10/0/16). While describing the cycle of Brahman, Sri Krishna has said, *akshara* is born of Brahman; therefore the all-pervading Brahman is ever established in *yajña*’(3/14-15)

In these attributions we get a comprehensive picture of *Sat-Chit-Ananda* and Shakti of the Absolute Brahman.

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

[This is the end of Q/A on Chapter XIII (*Kshetra Kshetrajña Bibhag Yoga*) and Chapter XIV (*Gunatraya Bibhag Yoga*) in the *Gitanuvachan*]

The Supramental Manifestation – Theme I

Debashish Banerji

In Sri Aurobindo’s teaching, the supramental manifestation occupies the omega point. In fact, one may say that this is the fruit of Sri Aurobindo’s teaching. Sri Aurobindo started his journey of yoga trying to answer the central question surrounding our experience of Ignorance — why is it that we experience the world as we do, as a world of suffering, ignorance and mortality, when it is possible to experience the Oneness of things, a harmony intrinsic to Being, and the innate and inviolable delight and indestructibility of Being? This question is at the heart of Sri Aurobindo’s own explorations and at the heart of his epic *Savitri*. It is embodied in Aswapati’s seeking, and in his journeys through the cosmic planes of consciousness, he looks for a solution to this very problem of the manifest existence. Is there a power that can intervene between the supreme Oneness, Infinity and Delight of the Divine and the struggling Ignorance and Falsehood in which we find ourselves haplessly thrown in our everyday existence and mortal lives? It is to answer this question that Aswapati, who is the protagonist of the first part of *Savitri*, the yogi-king and father of Savitri, makes his ascension and discovers the plane of consciousness that Sri Aurobindo has called the Supermind.

Supermind is an originary plane of consciousness whose Idea (not a mental idea, but reality as idea, Real-Idea) has become this manifestation that we experience as the Ignorance. This supramental reality has created its own opposites for the joy of its self-exploration and self-growth. It has taken the form of its opposite, a Nescience or Inconscience in place of its infinite self-consciousness; and a fragmented multiplicity in place of its unity, so that it may experience time and explore its infinite possibilities and individualised processes of growth in consciousness, power and delight towards the recovery of its fullness and the interplay of its qualitative powers. This process is the evolution of consciousness which we are a part of and which we see all around us in our cosmos. This is the discovery that Aswapati makes in his journey through the

planes to the discovery of the universal parting of the ways between the Knowledge and the Ignorance.

Having encountered this plane of consciousness, Aswapati realises that it is this origin of the Ignorance that alone can evolve the power of consciousness necessary for the transformation of this world of suffering and death into a divine life. It is not enough for him to experience this consciousness and know its eventual possibilities, he seeks to make it an active power in our world.

In our earlier consideration of Mind, Overmind and Supermind, we saw how the principle of division originates in Overmind, which thus acts as an agent for the fragmentation of Infinite Being. But we also saw how Overmind is a specialised operation and delegate of the Supermind, under conditions of self-limitation. Thus the true origin of the power of Ignorance and Fragmentation can be identified as the Supermind. In Supermind, there coexist four forms of knowledge. The primary form of knowledge is the knowledge of its oneness, knowledge by identity of one infinite being through its self-evident self-consciousness. It knows itself because it is conscious of its own existence. But it can also apprehend its infinite possibilities as forms of objectified knowledge using a power of self-projection. The first form of the knowledge of the one by the one is known as *vijñāna* in the Upanishads, as brought out by Sri Aurobindo. But if it views its possibilities objectively through self-projection, the form of knowledge is no longer self-evident, but self-regarding. This form of knowledge is known as *prajñāna*. In Supermind, the self-evident knowledge of the One (*vijñāna*) is not lost or diminished in its objectified self-regard (*prajñāna*), the One and the Many are still experienced as the One. It is an integral knowledge. In the many, each knows itself to be indissolubly the infinite One configured in a unique way and the One knows all its self-projections to be specialised qualitative configurations of itself. The All-Consciousness, the extension of the infinite transcendental Being is still the One Being and its infinite parts and portions are each experienced by themselves and It as nothing other than the One. This integral unity characterises *prajñāna* in Supermind. But if through an act of consciousness Supermind were to forget its oneness in *prajñāna*, then its multiplicity would be experienced as an infinite fragmentation in which separate centres of consciousness struggle blindly to recreate the unity from which they have fallen and which they carry as a faint instinctive memory within themselves. This act of self-limiting consciousness introduces the medium of Overmind, within which *prajñāna* operates as a power of objective knowledge but lacks the experience of unity. This is the condition of Ignorance, whose essence is the consciousness of a self-loss, a self-denial and a self-recovery.

This struggle gives rise to the evolution of consciousness and form in the cosmos, the stages by which each of the fragmented or separately individualised possibilities of Being expresses its self-finding, which can be thought of as the multiplied self-discovery of the One and the play of its varied Delight. Aswapati, reflecting Sri Aurobindo's own yogic journey, discovers this truth and realises that this appearance of separative consciousness could be overcome if the supramental power of integral unity were to "descend" and transform the self-limitation by which it has appeared as the medium of Overmind. In his *Record of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo has called this action "supramentalising the Overmind." The separative ignorance would then be seen as an operation of Overmind *prajñāna*, which would be replaced by the unity-in-difference of the supramental *prajñāna*, resulting in a divine life on earth.

Aswapati's realisation of the Supermind puts him in contact with this possibility. But he also comprehends that this realisation of supramental being, in and by itself, is not enough. It is the conscious power of this being that needs to be brought into action in a universal way on earth in the realm of Ignorance. To make this happen, he invokes that power. This power is the *shakti* of the Supermind; since this power is Consciousness meditating (*chit-tapas*) on the infinite real-idea-forms (*vijñāna*) and orders of Being (*sat*), it is the supreme Creatrix, which stands in the relation of Self and Mother to every manifestation and its possibility. This is what Sri Aurobindo calls the Divine Mother. Aswapati relates to the supramental Shakti in this form; he invokes it and communes with it, receiving finally its sanction and promise to incarnate as his daughter, Savitri, so as to perform the mobilisation of supramental power for the transformation of the Ignorance and Falsehood. Thus Savitri is born to Aswapati as a divine intervention in the evolving Ignorance; and she carries within herself the supramental power of integrality, which knows its transcendence of the dualities, such as being and non-being or unity and multiplicity. She is the power of being in non-being and the presence of unity in the multiplicity. One could say the opposite too: she is the power of non-being within being and the presence of the multiple within the One. In either case, it is a consciousness alien to our own, which is circumscribed by Overmind, bound by the law of non-contradiction. This law belongs to the domain of finites or quanta/discretions of space and time. The supramental consciousness is infinite, a different modality of being than finite consciousness, capable of transforming it. Savitri carries out in her life the effectuation of this consciousness-force (*chit-shakti*) of the supermind overcoming the iron law of Death. In the light of Savitri's consciousness, Death appears as a falsehood and a convention accepted by the soul of man bound to the cosmic law of Ignorance, but having no absolute right of existence. The

soul's choice of acceptance of its reality could equally be reversed if the choice was made from a consciousness transcending that of this cosmic appearance of Non-Being. Savitri deploys such a transcendent power of consciousness in her debate with Death over the soul of Satyavan, leading to the vanquishing of Death. This prepares in a symbolic form a new era for the earth, the era of the supramental manifestation, when the soul of humanity as a whole would be capable of effectuating its divine possibilities freely in a material cosmos, because the doors of separative consciousness have been ruptured by the Shakti avatar.

Thus, we may say that the supramental manifestation is the seed of *Savitri*. We may ask the question what this has to do with us. We live dispersed over the earth at a certain point in human history, what are called modern times, but this story is about a supposed happening in the Vedic past, a mythical time. Moreover, the story involves a cosmic vastness and a psychic intensity pertaining to the romance of one man and one woman. What bearing does this have with the condition of the earth at all and the condition of the earth today? To see these implications we must contemplate the epic as a symbol. Sri Aurobindo provides a pointer in this direction by subtitling it 'A Legend and a Symbol.' He uses it as a medium to describe his own yoga and that of his spiritual collaborator, the Mother, carried out in the context of our times. In this sense, though a story set in the mythical past, *Savitri* is a prophecy. In fact it is a bridge between the three times – recalling an ancient past, seeing it as a pattern relived and extended in the present in the lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and prophesying the future in terms of the inner work to be done by all humans and the possibilities available due to the new openings made available by the action of the dual supramental avatar(s).

Like Aswapati in the epic, Sri Aurobindo internalised the aspiration of our times, particularly the aspiration of modern humanity for a universal Enlightenment, and he tried, in the tradition of wisdom teachers of India like Gautama Buddha, to find a solution in consciousness to this aspiration. Modernity, as a worldwide epoch takes its origin in the European Enlightenment of the 17th c., a movement in intellectual history which substituted universal Reason, or Logos, as the Divine in place of a mythical God authorised and mediated by the Church. The ideal of an Age of Universal Reason ensued as the realisation of Enlightenment. It was supposed that reality was "reasonable" – i.e. made up of laws accessible to reason, and if all humankind were to yoke themselves to the use of the reason and its method to uncover the laws of matter, life and mind, everything in the world and in human nature would soon be known. This would be a universal Enlightenment, in which the purified intelligence of humans would make rational choices to use the laws of things in a perfect or utopian world. But the limitations

of Reason soon began to be recognised; and by the time of Sri Aurobindo, it was clear that the most "reasonable" and "enlightened" nations of Europe were incapable of controlling their rapaciousness and that the Age of Universal Reason was an impossibility. Colonised populations were exposed early to this rapaciousness, but the 20th c. was racked with two world wars, putting to an end the last morsel of human faith in a "reasonable man." To Sri Aurobindo, the ideal of universal Enlightenment was a spiritual ideal, not realisable by the reasoning mind, but by another kind of Mind, a Divine Mind or Supermind, which was the origin of the principle of mental Reason, but whose own supramental Reason was a creative deployment of the truths of its infinite Being, thus existing as immanent configurations of the Real-Idea in all its manifestations. The creative power of this transcendental Logos is what Aswapati sought to overcome the foundational cosmic laws, and it is this same integral power of the supramental Shakti which Sri Aurobindo encountered as the fulfilment to the aspiration of our torn and fragmented world. It is in this sense that we may say that the supramental manifestation is a symbolic possibility in the legendary Vedic past, but it is a universal actuality necessary to our present and future. This is why Sri Aurobindo holds out the promise of the supramental manifestation as the key to the civilisational future and the fulfilment of humanity in modern, and one may say, postmodern times.

This notion of a supramental manifestation for the earth is also closely linked to the idea of the "end of history," a phrase coined by the 19th c. philosopher G.W.F. Hegel to describe the completion of the western Enlightenment project, as he conceived it. But apart from this philosophical tradition, even in various religions, the idea of an end-time hangs about our epoch. In Sri Aurobindo's writings we find that humankind today has reached a point in the evolution of consciousness where mind is at its limit. Nature has evolved life out of matter, mind out of life and all the creatures that embody these principles of consciousness. In the human being the faculty of mind has reached a point where it can hardly go further. In his view, we are at a special historical moment where humanity is feeling the pressure from within to go beyond the mental faculty. Mind has come up against the walls of its own limitations; it has also encountered the possibilities of its own full manifestation as an unrealisable ideal given its limitations.

Indeed Sri Aurobindo is not the only one to feel this way in modern times. It is a pervasive mood shared by many thinkers at many levels. For example, science fiction writer, H G Wells, who was Sri Aurobindo's contemporary, wrote a history of the world whose last chapter was titled 'Mind at the End of its Tether'. A tether is the rope that ties a grazing domesticated animal, to a peg in

the ground, so that it may go no further than the radius of the rope. When it reaches this end in its grazing, that is the end of its tether. Thus many thinkers of our times have sensed this limit condition of the mind reached by humanity today.

I have spoken about Hegel, a German philosopher of the 19th c., as a late Enlightenment philosopher, who coined the term “the end of history.” Hegel, along with others of his time and place, conceived of the philosophy of History. To Hegel, the end of time is the culmination of the power of rationality because to him what is evolving in and through nature is the Logos as the power of Reason, which he calls Consciousness. This was immanent in Matter and has been evolving through history now reaching a point where we can foresee the culmination of the universal manifestation of Reason, individualised in humans, which is why he calls it the end of history. One can see the logic in this, because once we assume that Rationality is divinity, there is no further to go once human beings possess the fruits of rationality in their completeness. In Hegel’s time, he thought this fulfilment was soon to come in the form of a universal protestant liberalism. In our own times, Francis Fukuyama, a follower of Hegel, has declared that western societies have already arrived at such a completion in socio-political evolution, in capitalist liberal democracy. But is this the Golden Age of the Eternal Day implied by a fulfilled “end of history”? Through the advancement of science and technology we enjoy today a global condition in which we may contact any point on the earth instantaneously, when universal encyclopaedic knowledge, consumer products and services are available to us at the touch of a button. This is our present technological condition. Yet the central problems of humanity remain the same – the consequences of selfishness, anger, hatred and the natural limitations of ignorance, disease, helplessness and eventual death. We live lives dominated by petty concerns, divided from and fighting one another, attempting to build a precarious harmony in a world where, like sorcerer’s apprentices, we have unwittingly unleashed tremendous powers that can obliterate and extinct us. We know instinctively that all our rational knowledge of ourselves and our world cannot save us. Mind has come to the limit of its own condition.

The philosopher who stands at the head of the modern age is Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche talks of the death of God but in the same breath he announces the death of man and the coming of the superman. This idea of the superman as the being who will exceed our humanity, exceed the Enlightenment’s god-power of Reason for the Super-reason of the true Enlightenment is also what Sri Aurobindo sees in the possibility of a supramental manifestation. In our times, other thinkers such as Michel Foucault have also announced the age of the disappearance of man. Indeed, man may disappear either through his

extinction as a race through the consequences of his own over-ambitious use of Reason; or, as with Foucault’s prediction, his privileged self-definition as a divine possessor of Reason may be overpassed by the machine or the genetically spliced hybrid of a swiftly approaching age; or else, through another shift of identity, humankind may effect a self-exceeding into a greater consciousness which fulfils Reason by surpassing its limitations, not by rejection.

Sri Aurobindo holds out the promise for this self-exceeding of man to a supra-rational superman leading to a supramental manifestation. In *The Life Divine* he provides a clear picture of the location of the human in the modern world and why it is necessary to find a greater power of spirit, carrying a greater consciousness of unity and harmony, so as to solve the problems at the heart of humanity and most manifest in our modern era. He writes:

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way. A structure of the external life has been raised up by man’s ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organised collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it. This new fullness of the means of life might be, by its power for a release from the incessant unsatisfied stress of his economic and physical needs, an opportunity for the full pursuit of other and greater aims surpassing the material existence, for the discovery of a higher truth and good and beauty, for the discovery of a greater and diviner spirit which would intervene and use life for a higher perfection of the being; but it is being used instead for the multiplication of new wants and an aggressive expansion of the collective ego. (CWSA, vol.22, p.1090)

He continues

A life of unity, mutuality and harmony born of a deeper and wider truth of our being is the only truth of life that can successfully replace the imperfect mental constructions of the past which were a combination of association and regulated conflict, an accommodation of egos and interests grouped or dovetailed into each other to form a society, a consolidation by common general life-motives, a unification by need and the pressure of struggle with outside forces. It is such a change and such a reshaping of life for which humanity is blindly beginning to seek, now more and more with a sense that its very existence depends upon finding the way. The evolution of mind working upon life has developed an organisation of the activity of mind and use of Matter which can no longer be supported by human capacity without an inner change. (Ibid,p.1092)

He concludes this passage by saying

For the problem is fundamental and in putting it evolutionary Nature in man is confronting herself with a critical choice which must one day be solved in the true sense if the race is to arrive or even to survive. The evolutionary nîsus is pushing towards a development of the cosmic Force in terrestrial life which needs a larger mental and vital being to support it, a wider mind, a greater wider more conscious unanimsed Life-Soul, Anima, and that again needs an unveiling of the supporting Soul and spiritual Self within to maintain it. (Ibid, pp.1092-93)

Sri Aurobindo came to realise that for this arrival or survival of the human race an individual supramental solution, by a superhuman being like Aswapati, or like Sri Aurobindo himself, was not sufficient. A universal change for humankind which is the necessity of the evolution of nature and of the modern age can be contemplated only through a generalised “turning” by a critical mass of representative humans. Yet, such a collective adherence could be facilitated by “strong forerunners” and initiated by one or a few exceptional person(s) who could bring down the power of integrality as an occult force aiding the subtilisation of the mind and its receptivity to the formative and transformative power of supermind. It is this descent or intervention, effected through aspiration, yoga power and Grace by two people, which is at the heart of *Savitri*, mirroring Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s achievement in our times. The future of such an action is that at first individuals will aspire to a power of consciousness capable of overcoming our limitations, then this

will organise itself into groups. Sri Aurobindo gives us an agenda for the supramental manifestation. He says

It is, then, this spiritual fulfilment of the urge to individual perfection and an inner completeness of being that we mean first when we speak of a divine life. It is the first essential condition of a perfected life on earth, and we are therefore right in making the utmost possible individual perfection our first supreme business. The perfection of the spiritual and pragmatic relation of the individual with all around him is our second preoccupation; the solution of this second desideratum lies in a complete universality and oneness with all life upon earth which is the other concomitant result of an evolution into the gnostic consciousness and nature. But there still remains the third desideratum, a new world, a change in the total life of humanity or, at the least, a new perfected collective life in the earth-nature. This calls for the appearance not only of isolated evolved individuals acting in the unevolved mass, but of many gnostic individuals forming a new kind of beings and a new common life superior to the present individual and common existence. A collective life of this kind must obviously constitute itself on the same principle as the life of the gnostic individual. (Ibid, p.1067)

Continuing about this common life, he writes in a prophetic vein:

All will be united by the evolution of the Truth-consciousness in them; in the changed way of being which this consciousness would bring about in them, they will feel themselves to be embodiments of a single self, souls of a single Reality; illumined and motivated by a fundamental unity of knowledge, actuated by a fundamental unified will and feeling, a life expressing the spiritual Truth would find through them its own natural forms of becoming. An order there would be, for truth of oneness creates its own order: a law or laws of living there might be, but these would be self-determined; they would be an expression of the truth of a spiritually united being and the truth of a spiritually united life. The whole formation of the common existence would be a self-building of the spiritual forces that must work themselves out spontaneously in such a life: these forces would be received inwardly by the inner being and expressed or self-expressed in a native harmony of idea and action and purpose. (Ibid, p.1068)

This is the drift of the supramental manifestation as Sri Aurobindo saw and prophesied it. It is not merely the description of a visionary or seer, but of one who lived and embodied the forces involved; and made a collective and planetary manifestation possible through his own and the Mother's yoga. It is this that he encapsulates in a symbolic form in *Savitri*.

(To be continued)

Glimpses of the Mother's Supramental Manifestation

Larry Seidlitz

This essay is about the latter part of the Mother's life, and in particular about the latter stages of her sadhana as recorded in the 13 volume work, *Mother's Agenda*. The *Agenda* primarily consists of a series of transcribed conversations of the Mother with a disciple, Satprem, that span the years 1956 to 1973, the year of the Mother's passing. It also includes some correspondence between the two as well as some statements by the Mother dating back to 1951.

The experiences recorded in the *Agenda* pertain to a great extent to the supramental transformation of the body, or we could say, a divinisation of the body. Whereas in principle the body is already divine, because the Divine is all that is, physical matter as it is presently is not consciously divine, and because it is not fully conscious, it is open to all kinds of limitation and falsehood. In particular, the body is subject to pain, illness, and death. According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, in order to be truly divinised it must be transformed by the supramental consciousness, which is a particularly high level of divine consciousness that carries the full, divine power. For this transformation to occur, one must first inwardly ascend in the consciousness to this supramental level, and then it must be brought down first into the mind and life energies and then into the physical body itself. By the time these conversations were recorded, the Mother's mind and vital had been largely supramentalised, though a complete supramentalisation of these also requires a supramentalisation of the body. The conversations in the *Agenda* that I will highlight pertain to the action of the supramental consciousness in the body.

It should be emphasised that the processes to be discussed were primarily the result of a working of a divine consciousness and force on the body, and not so much the result of physical or vital activities or movement of energies. It is true that the Mother placed great importance on physical culture in order to

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train and enlighten the body consciousness. The physical education department in the Ashram was given a central position in the sadhana and most of the sadhaks were involved in a variety of daily physical exercises from *hatha yoga* to martial arts to sports like tennis, basketball, and swimming, to gymnastics and track and field. The Mother herself played tennis regularly until she was 80 years old. Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother believed that such physical activities develop the consciousness of the body and make it more receptive to the higher spiritual consciousness and force, and this is why they gave it such importance in the Ashram. But the conscious ascent into the higher levels of the spiritual consciousness and their descent into the mind and life and body were accomplished primarily by inner psychological and spiritual methods and processes.

As a result of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's yoga, a new consciousness and force, which they called the supramental consciousness, manifested in the earth consciousness on February 29, 1956. Supermind and supramental have a specific meaning and significance in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and yoga, and I may as well begin by clarifying the meaning of these terms. There are many levels of consciousness between the ordinary human consciousness and the supermind – Sri Aurobindo described these as the higher mind, the illumined mind, the intuitive consciousness, and the overmind. Even the lowest of these – the higher mind, is far superior to the ordinary rational mind in its ability to reflect the higher truth. For example, Sri Aurobindo said that in the higher mind one is constantly aware of the Self, the One everywhere, and lives in a vast peace and calm enlightenment (*The Future Poetry*, p. 342; *The Life Divine*, p.944). Each of these higher gradations is able to envision and express the Absolute Reality in a more luminous and comprehensive way. The Supermind is above all these, and represents a fundamentally new principle. Unlike the levels below it, it no longer simply reflects the truth of things, however purely or brightly or broadly, but is itself the very substance of the Truth.

In *The Synthesis of Yoga* there is a chapter called "The Nature of the Supermind," in which Sri Aurobindo described the Supermind. He said,

"The fundamental nature of this supermind is that all its knowledge is originally a knowledge by identity and oneness... The spirit is one everywhere and it knows all things as itself and in itself, so sees them always and therefore knows them intimately, completely, in their reality as well as their appearance, in their truth, their law, the entire spirit and sense and figure of their nature and their workings." (p. 757).

He also said that the supermind is

"not only a direct truth consciousness, but an illumined, direct and spontaneous truth-will. There is not and cannot be in the will of the self-knowing spirit any contradiction, division or difference between its will and its knowledge. The spiritual will is the Tapas or enlightened force of the conscious being of the spirit effecting infallibly what is there within it..." (p.761)

The supramental will and action are therefore a will of action of the spontaneous self-fulfilling truth of the spirit, the right and at the highest the infallible movement of a direct and total knowledge." (p.763)

On 29 February, 1956 the Mother experienced the first manifestation of the supramental consciousness in the overall earth consciousness. It happened during the collective meditation in the ashram. She said about it:

"This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine.

As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that "THE TIME HAS COME," and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces. Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow." (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol.1, Feb.29, 1956, p.69)

When the Mother said that this consciousness manifested in the earth-consciousness on February 29th 1956, she meant that this Truth-consciousness and Force began to act here on a terrestrial scale, seeking and preparing instruments for its manifestation in the evolutionary formula. It began its work to prepare the field and to prepare the new species that would manifest this consciousness and replace humanity as the leader of the earth evolution. Moreover, human beings could cooperate with this new Light and Force in the manifestation of its higher possibilities in the human formula, and thereby create a transitional being between ordinary mental humanity and the full supramental species.

Just 20 days after the supramental manifestation, on March 19th, 1956, the Mother wrote a brief statement about a personal experience she had

(a straightening of her bent vertebrae) which she attributed to the influence of this descent of the supramental consciousness into her body. At the top of that written statement, she put the heading, “Agenda of the Supramental Action on Earth,” thus giving the name that eventually became the 13 volume *Mother’s Agenda*. Although Satprem used the title *Mother’s Agenda* on the cover, on the first page inside the cover the full title is given.

In October of 1957, she commented more at length on these effects in her body. She said,

“One of the very first results of the supramental manifestation was to give the body a freedom and an autonomy it has never before known.... For the first time, the cells themselves have felt that they are free, that they have the power to decide. When the new vibrations came and combined with the old ones, I felt it at once and it showed me that a new world was really taking birth.” (Ibid, Oct.17, 1957, p.112)

She said that this new vibration in the body allowed her to understand the mechanism of the transformation:

“It is not something that comes from a higher Will, not a higher consciousness that imposes itself upon the body: it is the body itself awakening in its cells, a freedom of the cells themselves, an absolutely new vibration that sets disorders right....

.... this is a gradual process, but ...little by little this new consciousness will grow, gain ground and victoriously resist the old forces of destruction and annihilation, and this Fatality we believed to be so inexorable.” (Ibid, p.113)

On February 3rd 1958, she had a remarkable experience that further confirmed this birth of a new world taking place. She said,

“Before, I had an individual, subjective contact with the supramental world, whereas on February 3, I went strolling there in a concrete way — as concretely as I used to go strolling in Paris in times past — in a world that EXISTS IN ITSELF, beyond all subjectivity. It is like a bridge being built between the two worlds.” (Ibid, Feb.3, 1958, p.137)

She said,

“The supramental world exists in a permanent way, and I am there

permanently in a supramental body. I had proof of this today when my earthly consciousness went there and consciously remained there between two and three o’clock in the afternoon. I now know that for the two worlds to join in a constant and conscious relationship what is missing is an intermediate zone between the existing physical world and the supramental world as it exists. This zone has yet to be built, both in the individual consciousness and in the objective world, and it is being built. When I formerly used to speak of the new world that is being created, I was speaking of this intermediate zone. And similarly, when I am on ‘this’ side — that is, in the realm of the physical consciousness — and I see the supramental power, the supramental light and substance constantly permeating matter, I am seeing and participating in the construction of this zone.” (Ibid, pp.137-38)

She then goes on to relate the experience in detail, which involved an immense ship that had just arrived at the shore of the supramental world. On this ship were people whom she knew, whose forms were in various stages of transformation. Those whose substance had been sufficiently supramentalised were disembarking, and there were other supramental beings on shore waiting to receive them. The Mother herself, who had a supramental substance, and a bright sun for a head, was directing the whole operation.

Probably in February or March of 1959, the Mother began repeating a mantra. On May 19th, she said that she had “come to realise that for this sadhana of the body, the mantra is essential.” (Ibid, May.19, 1959, p.301), She said that the purely psychological method is inadequate and that *japa*, the repetition of a mantra, is necessary, because only it has a direct action on the body. She said that now with her mantra, she had done ten years of work in a few months. She said she repeated her mantra constantly — when she was awake and even when she slept. She said it was always there in the background.

On October 6, 1959, she said,

“For the West, with all its outward development, a few centuries may be needed before the junction between the two worlds can be made. And yet these two worlds — the physical world and the world of Truth — are not distant from one another. They are as if superimposed. The world of Truth is there, close by, like a lining of the other.” (Ibid, Oct.6, 1959, p.327)

She indicated that shortly before August 15th, she had had an experience that exemplified this. First she had felt the supramental light entering directly into her body without passing through the inner beings. It entered through the

feet and rose towards the head, and as it rose a fever also rose because the body was unaccustomed to the intensity. As it neared the head she thought she would burst and that the experience would have to be stopped, but she called down calm and peace and widened the body consciousness so it could contain the supramental light. Suddenly there was a second of fainting, and then, she said,

“I found myself in another world, but not far away (I was not in a total trance). This world was almost as substantial as the physical world. There were rooms — Sri Aurobindo’s room with the bed he rests on — and he was living there, he was there all the time: it was his abode. Even my room was there, with a large mirror like the one I have here, combs, all kinds of things. And the substance of these objects was almost as dense as in the physical world, but they shone with their own light. It was not translucent, not transparent, not radiant, but self-luminous. The various objects and the material of the rooms did not have this same opacity as the physical objects here, they were not dry and hard as in the physical world we know.” (Ibid)

She said,

“You see, it’s not as if this world of Truth had to be created from nothing: it is fully ready, it is there, like a lining of our own present world. Everything is there, EVERYTHING is there....

Sri Aurobindo gave me two days of this — total bliss. But all the same, by the end of the second day I realised that I could not continue to remain there, for the work was not advancing. The work must be done in the body; the realisation must be attained here in this physical world, for otherwise it is not complete. So I withdrew from that world and set to work here again.

And yet, it would take little, very little, to pass from this world to the other, or for the other to become the real world. A little click would be enough, or rather a little reversal in the inner attitude.” (Ibid, pp.328-29)

On June 15th, 1968, she had an interesting discussion about the transformation of the body. She first indicated that it was becoming increasingly established that health or illness is the result of a choice of the cells of the body, and groups of cells. Many of her cells had become conscious, and they could choose between the true consciousness, or disorder and disequilibrium. And she suggested that there was a natural variation in cells or groups of cells in their ability to follow the movement of progressive harmony. She said most of the time it is just

laziness, something unwilling to make the effort or the resolve. She called it the remnant, the residue of the inconscient. She said, “it’s a sort of spinelessness ...which accepts a general, impersonal law:” (Ibid, Jun.15, 1968. p..164) On the other side, there is “the sense of the true attitude, which in the cells is expressed with great simplicity: ‘There is the Lord, who is the all-powerful Master.... It depends entirely on Him.’ (Ibid,) For the cells it’s not sentences, but “expresses itself by repeating the mantra.... ‘May Your Will be done,’ and a tranquillity — a luminous tranquillity.” (Ibid) And she wondered,

“What I don’t know yet, what’s not very clear, is... what will be the fate of this residue? To people’s ordinary thought, it’s what they call ‘death,’ that is to say, the rejection of the cells that weren’t able to enter this plastic state of consciousness. But the way the work is being done, there is no categorical division [into groups of conscious or unconscious cells in Mother’s body]: there are imperceptible (almost) states of variations between the different parts of the being.” (Ibid, p.166)

She seems to mean that some cells lag behind, have difficulty taking the proper attitude, so it takes longer. The next year she received from within an answer to her dilemma. She reframed the question this way:

“All this work of the transformation of the cells, of consciousness in the cells, with the ordinary way [of dying], won’t it be wasted since the body is going to disintegrate?” (Ibid, vol.10, 19 Mar. 1969,p.95)

And then she said,

“Then there came in a very precise, almost concrete manner: ‘there is a way, which is, before dying, to prepare within oneself a body with all the transformed, illumined, conscious cells, to collect them together and form a body with the maximum number of conscious cells; then, when the work is over, the full consciousness enters it and the other body can dissolve, it no longer matters.’” (Ibid)

Then on May 9th, 1970, Mother had an experience of her supramentalised body in the subtle physical. She said,

“I was walking around naked, but DELIBERATELY naked from here to there (*gesture from the top of the chest to the thighs*); here (above), there

may have been clothes. I was DELIBERATELY showing myself to certain people.... Ah, and that part I was showing was sexless, that is to say, neither man nor woman: there was nothing; and its colour was ... a little like Auroville's colour [orange], like that, but vibrant, that is, as if ... not luminous, but with a sort of luminosity." (Ibid, May 9, 1970, pp.185-86)

In the experience, someone was with her whom she called "the physical Mother," and in another place she called "Nature." Nature was wearing a dress of the same orange colour, and said, "See, I've put on your dress, I've put it on to tell you that it's accepted — I've put on your dress." (Ibid, p.186) Mother explained, "it means that material Nature has adopted the new creation." (Ibid, p.187)

On July 1, 1970 Mother had another experience in which she discovered another important aspect of the transformation, that "it is this psychic being that is to become the supramental being." (Ibid, Jul.1,1970, p.246) She had this experience when a disciple had come to her and was kneeling in front of her. And she saw this disciple's psychic being towering above her, about eight inches taller. And it was a sexless being: neither man nor woman, that had features of both combined. It exceeded her on every side by about eight inches. And its colour was, if it became very material, would be Auroville's colour. "It was softer, as if behind a veil, it wasn't absolutely precise, but it was this colour.... You're wondering what the supramental being will be — here it is! Here it is, this is it." (Ibid)

Then on March 24, 1972, Mother again sees her own supramental body. She said,

"I don't know whether it's the supramental body or ... (what shall I say?) a transitional body, but I had a completely new body, in the sense that it was sexless: it was neither woman nor man.

It was very white. But that could be because I have white skin, I don't know.

It was very slender.... Really lovely, a truly harmonious form." (Ibid, Mar.24, 1972, p.96)

And two days later she said,

"Yes, I was like that. It was me; I didn't look at myself in a mirror, I saw myself like this (*Mother bends her head to look at her body*), I was .. I just was like that." (Ibid, Mar.25, 1972, p.98)

Satprem asked her, "But this form is in the subtle physical, isn't it?" She answered, "It must be already like that in the subtle physical." (Ibid)

As 1972 wore on, and up until the end, it appears Mother began to have more difficulty. Perhaps as more and more of her body consciousness was supramentalised, more and more she encountered the resistance, the remnant of the unconscious. She alternated between two states, one of absolute surrender and openness to the Divine, living in a divine peace and bliss, and living in a painful hell, the very contradiction of that peace. For example, on November 4th, she said,

"The whole subconscious is ... (*gesture of something rising up en masse*). And then ... it's a certitude — a certitude in the perception — that Bliss is there ... right there, WAITING FOR US, but a whole world of contradictions that have been repressed in the subconscious keeps rising up from the subconscious to prevent us from feeling it. So ... you could say it's a battlefield, but in a perfect calm.

It's impossible to describe...

When I remain still and enter that Consciousness, time flies with fantastic speed, in a kind of ... luminous calm. But the slightest thing that pulls me out of it seems to pull me into hell. Exactly. The discomfort is so great one feels one couldn't last a minute or a few minutes like that. So one ... one calls the Divine ... You feel like curling up in the Divine.

And then it goes well." (Ibid, Nov.4, 1972, p.308)

There are several themes in this account that should be emphasised. From the very beginning, Mother seemed primarily concerned with the influence of the supramental on the consciousness of the body. There is little mention of its effect on the mental or vital levels. In one place she seems to suggest that these were instruments to knead matter, to awaken it to consciousness, and that once this was done they would be replaced by something else. In her, especially after the crisis in 1962, the mental and vital beings were sent away, and she was left with her body consciousness, so that it would itself open to the supramental light and power. She seemed often to be identified with her physical body, and preoccupied with its opening and transformation.

Another important recurring theme was that the supramental world, the supramental truth was here, already established, and the work was really in establishing a more and more complete link with it. This was for her personally

and also for the earth as a whole. That world was quite real and concrete, in many ways more than this one. She seemed to sometimes find herself in that world, and sometimes in this one. She seemed to go back and forth between the two as a result of a subtle shift in consciousness, in the inner attitude. She said it was like a lining beneath this physical world. It was very close, not far away in some rare ether of consciousness. Sometimes she would walk out into that world, do things, meet people, and the effects of her actions would be there in this physical world. It seemed as she forged this link between the two, this closeness and interpenetration increased.

A third theme that perhaps did not come out so much in the excerpts I read, but really was implied in all of them, is that Mother was like a lightning rod for the supramental action on the earth. Sometimes when she would be silent and open to the Divine and supramental forces, she would see them flowing through her to points all around her, all over the world and perhaps beyond. For she was universalised in her consciousness, parts of her consciousness, even her physical consciousness, were identified with the whole world, the whole universe. Her physical presence, her physical opening to the supramental light and power enabled these to penetrate into the physical world around us, and also to act on people and events in very specific ways.

And finally, the whole tenor of her sadhana, was in a sense unchanged, fundamentally it was the same as it is for the beginner. It was very simply a surrender into the hands of the Divine. Whoever does this sadhana must surrender to the Divine. And the more we do, the more we become conscious, we begin to see the more within us which withholds its surrender. Then this too must open up to the Divine. This progressive surrender of more and more of the being seems to be the character of the sadhana up until the very end. For Mother, this progressive opening and surrender was occurring in her body consciousness. She said one of the first results of the supramental descent was that the body began to realise its autonomy, its ability to choose between the divine and the old way of being. And her progress in the sadhana seemed to involve precisely more and more of these cells, this body consciousness, surrendering and uniting with the Divine. And as more of this body consciousness opened up, it became a part of her supramental body that would survive the death of the remnant which she laid down on November 17, 1973.

The Mother's primary mission was to bring down the supramental consciousness on earth, to establish it as a new principle in the evolving terrestrial consciousness. This she did, with Sri Aurobindo's help, in 1956. For the next 17 years, she worked to establish it into her very cells, into matter. It is fair to assume that she took this work as far as was possible in the present

circumstances. It also appears, from what she has said in the *Agenda*, that the supramental consciousness is actively at work here, is assured of its eventual manifestation in a new race of supramental beings, and is working to manifest its light and power in human beings who are open to it. Finally, we can assume that the Mother herself is directing this work, and exists in a supramental form in a world close to ours, a world that is like a lining of our own.

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A Manifestation sheathed in Light

(Continued from the previous issue)

Rick Lipschutz

The Mind of Light

When Sri Aurobindo left his body on December 5, 1950, he left Mother and all of us a “parting gift,” a legacy we could do more with if only we knew. This was his longest darshan, as he lay for almost five days in Mahasamadhi. As scores of thousands passed in this “universal sunset,” his body stubbornly refused to deteriorate — as attested in so many words and by certified physicians. The Force emanating from him was palpable, a dense warm radiating plenitude. An all-powerful peace so pervasive it was almost frightening. A flood of physical Oneness, Unendurable bliss, blissfully enduring. This was felt by most and even seen by some of the scores of thousands from all over India and the world who walked past his body during this time.

One disciple, who when she was quite young, a young teenager, kept the clocks wound so that they all told the same time for Sri Aurobindo as he walked through his rooms, told me that his presence during those Mahasamadhi days was much more powerful than she had felt at any Darshan that she had attended while he was yet breathing.

And it was during these days that, the Mother stated: “He passed to me all the Supramental force he had accumulated in his body; I could feel the friction of the passage.” She wrote a few years later to K.D. Sethna: “The Supramental Light and Force being received by the physical mind — this is the Mind of Light.”

What is this mysterious Mind of Light, Sri Aurobindo’s parting gift to us? Mind of Light was the preliminary fixation of the Supramental Force on the earth, and a prelude to the Supramental Manifestation a little more than five years later (February 29, 1956). The chief bar to all realisation, yet also the most profoundly stabilising force to fix the Light in matter, is the physical mind (or at a much, much deeper level, the mind of the cells). The physical mind keeps us from perceiving, beyond our senses and our reason, the more direct

spiritual perceptions. It is like a dog “barking in the kennel of objective certitude” (as rhymed in *Savitri*). Everywhere its defeatism masquerades as wisdom. Mortal thinking is our mortal enemy: it deadens human life under a pretence of protecting it. Yet at the same time it does preserve our slowly hard-won gains, establishing them securely in consciousness and solidly in our bodies. Amal Kiran expands a narrow interpretation of physical mind so as to encompass most of our embodied human mental action, or the portion of it that has evolved upwards from the Inconscience. The crude perceptions of the physical mind, along with those of the vital-physical, are the bulk and bane of our existence. Transformed though, it is a vital step to realisation. Now, according to Amal Kiran (as he interprets Sri Aurobindo’s *The Supramental Manifestation on Earth*, Sri Aurobindo’s last extensive prose writing) there are three levels of the Mind of Light. In the ordinary human, it forms the necessary missing step out of Ignorance, so that the human mental being can begin to experience the higher spiritual mind, intuition, illumined mind. The Mind of Light, created directly out of the Supermind itself, fixes the break in the ladder that keeps most of us chained to our lower minds, so that we can step beyond and begin with confidence to climb not only towards but through the spiritual transformation (the second step of the triple transformation described in detail in *The Life Divine*).

For those with a closer connection to the intuitive worlds, it makes that transformative journey swifter and more complete, lifting one to the feet of the Supermind. Those who have gone further, like the Mother, who received it from Sri Aurobindo first as she stated, it moves into the supramental experience and facilitates its expression by the mind, which needs to express singly and stepwise the simultaneous multidimensional perceptions of Supermind. Again, for most of us, the Supermind making its permanent entry in our physical mind and physical consciousness, as the Mind of Light, fixing that gaping hole in the ladder of the worlds (where so many get stuck so as not to fall between the rungs, so to speak) is even not so much a parting gift, but the gift that opens us. Let’s keep in our consciousness that Mind of Light is not of the spiritual-mind worlds, or even of the Overmind; it is of the Supermind itself, though it may hide itself as it works in us, sublime and practical at the same time, unrecognisable. As lustrous and radiant and intense as the Overmind may be, Mind of Light is greater, for it is supramental even in the way it hides its greatness! In this paragraph and the next, we take some time to ask ourselves, what is the Mother’s Force? I believe a good answer, from the standpoint of flooding supramental experience, is found in *Mother’s Agenda*, May 24, 1960.

She speaks here of *Sachchidananda* not only in consciousness but in physical

sensation: “the divine *Sachchidananda* spreading in a constant flood throughout the universe.” “It was a continuous and all-powerful flood, continuous and extraordinarily varied, of the Lord manifesting himself.” “The three Supreme Principles were very clearly there” in “an active, realising Consciousness.” “There was all the Joy — this perpetual downpour in a limitless splendour.”

This is a direct unmediated expression of “Mother’s Force.” More technically, it is the force of the divine consciousness (the force of the higher nature, not that of the lower *prakriti*). Individuality serves to put those who seek help and support in contact with the Force, which is truly *Sachchidananda* in the cells of the body, the divine power perpetually pouring down and spreading out in splendour without limit a constant flood everywhere. *Sachchidananda* in the cells of the body puts everyone who reaches out for help and support in contact with this flood, like a point of special concentration of this cascade of divine Force. This Force is characterised by a variety that is extraordinary. It is after all the Supreme manifesting through the Eternal Mother. This force can flow through you towards any person on any shifting piece of the planet. What differentiates Integral Yoga from other integralisms or the integral movement is its emphasis on the soul and psychic being; on the Supreme Shakti and the Mother; and on the Supermind.

Mediating all these emphases most centrally is the Mother’s Force. Thirty minutes after the Supramental Manifestation that took place, significantly on the Ashram Playground, on February 29, 1956, the new creation, called down but only into the higher regions by Sri Aurobindo perhaps in the 1940s, manifested on the Earth, close to, even mingling within the old. It is the Mother’s own statement that the new creation manifested on Earth a half-hour after the Supramental Manifestation.

The manifestation sheathed in light, the earthly supramental world, is pressing on and mingling with and precipitating slowly into the Earth. It can be fully and openly the Light beyond the Light within the Light. It does not need that sheath of darkness. This is working its way into the world. Still yet to manifest are the Supramental Ananda, the Supramental Truth, and the Supramental Existence; but the beginnings of the Supramental Consciousness-as-Force with the self-luminous Supramental Light, have been introduced, an irreversible action.

The presently unfolding future

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have brought something new into this creation and worked tirelessly to establish it here: he has in fact brought a new creation, and she worked then and works now, for its manifestation, tends the growth of this new child on and as the Earth. Supermind is now a Shakti, engaged with all

the other Shaktis that exert power and overtly act with the forces that have taken hold on the Earth in their combined energetic workings. It begins its work to integrate all these other Shaktis with itself, silent with the patient intensity of joy that knows how to abide with time, so that they too can concord and harmonise with the smiling substance of immortality.

After Sri Aurobindo left his body, promising to the Mother, according to her own account, to always keep the Earth in his active awareness and eventually return here “in the first supramental body built in the supramental way,” there were meditators in different parts of the world who reported they saw him swallowing a monstrous dose of poison, like the blue-throated Shiva.

He continues his work unstained and his global mission is ongoing. He is continuing to supramentalise the Overmind and to work to overcome resistance from our Inconscient material foundations, eventually to transform even the Inconscient into an entirely new kind of supramental material foundation. A major landmark in this mission, again, was his work behind the scenes after his Mahasamadhi, collaborating with the Mother when she smashed the golden door (called by Swami Ramalingam the *Para Apra Veli*) high in the Overmind, and in her vivid description “then the Supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.”

This was certainly a major victory in the Supramentalisation of the Overmind and the rest of the universal nature. Although most of this Light may have been swallowed by the Inconscient, as the Mother mentioned many years later, still it is percolating up from within that Inconscient and making direct permanent change, but very slowly. Oh, this slowness is kind, as stated before, because gradual change allows the transformation that is occurring to be more inclusive. And what will be the transformation of the principles of Sri Aurobindo’s revolutionary programme as it is coming into being with its forceful overthrow of old Overmind creation? No difference in standpoint between your true self and the supreme self of truth — that is *Swaraj*. Not one effectual ray of difference between the productions of the supreme power of truth and what is self-produced by your own true power — this is *Swadeshi*. No difference between the supreme knowledge educed from the supreme soul, and the knowledge that your own Self-power brings forth from the wisdom within you become one with the wisdom chained below your base — such is supranational education; Self-knowledge, world knowledge, knowledge universal and supreme. And boycott means this, that if that is what you want, that is what you will have and be. If you seek no other thing, what else can you become but that supramental being you already have started to turn into, in that small part of you made of the same stuff as itself. While yet in bodied being you will live in the heaven that the

gods do not know. No, they don't, because you being human have what they do not (unless they take human birth): the Supreme's presence, what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo call a psychic being, an individual soul-form that grows as you evolve. Your true being slowly is taking form as a transformed body: in it *Swaraj*, *Swadeshi*, universal Self-education are fulfilled in every cell.

Since Nature is collaborating with the new creation and its consciousness, as Nature promised Mother it would do in 1958, and Mother said then that the splendour of that collaboration would be great, we in turn can collaborate with Nature, work with this nascent new creation.

And we are doing so, whenever our activities range, in new thinking and dynamic novelties, in growing and significant ways. It is beyond the scope of this chapter, but we see it happening in so many ways today in this world. Among the innovations, in science and technology, in economics and other sectors, are growing collectivities where people are gathering into communities aspiring to live a Gnostic consciousness, though the words may differ. As we get a grip on a new life, and grasp in our members as well as our mind the straightforward principles of this dynamic unifying awareness, we see, evident even to the fallible intellect of our physical mind, outlines of a new world growing up in our midst. "A new world is born, born, born," Mother intoned.

But this new creation, or cosmos reconstructed, seems rather nebulous. Does it exist anywhere now? There is nowhere on earth that it is not. In the sunrise of the pages of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, flashes one of those mantric sentences of Sri Aurobindo: "To be perpetually reborn is the condition of a material immortality." Supermind, the border breached so it begins to enter here, lavishes in all its touches constant renewal from an inextinguishable source. We have here a tell-tale sign that the new creation is no pipedream but that it is palpably surfacing. It is the sign of those wiggling hands, the sign of agreement with our most hopeful future: we are switching inevitably and irreversibly to renewable energies. In the presently unfolding future, we now are in the midst of this revolutionary switch. This turn to sustainable technologies, supramental in origin, is being planted firmly in physical nature. Along these lines Mother stated, in her *Agenda*, that scientists in the 1970s were unearthing secrets to link us to supramental energies through modest material means. She went on to say that scientists even then knew how to draw energy "from above" and no longer "from below": to her view, fossil-fuel energies by their nature through continued use would turn earth into a dead, lunar world, whereas the sun and other energies, of the wind and the waters above and around us, would make for a living "solar" world.

We live at the time that the old fossil age is giving way to the energy of the

dawn. Following the money, we see new venture capital flowing rapidly into research and development of renewables, making our good turn towards better, safer energies inevitable. By decade's end this trend, now subtle, will be unmistakable. To complement the information-sharing Internet, energy-sharing "intergrids" are springing up: knowledge and power are becoming one now in the body of earth, even as wisdom and will have always flown the friendly skies united in the infinite Supermind. The lateral, horizontal, distributed nature of nascent energies and decentralised new economies reflects, clumsily at first, the networked nature of the Gnosis; hierarchies everywhere tumble and turn into webs and nets. This is the way the World Wide Web works: the way mushroom mycelia, the galactic clusters, hurricanes, the nervous system and lung mesh are constructed for greatest momentum with least effort, maximum robustness, redundancy the better to advance life's strategic diversities.

Nature takes another step toward new creation, with mushrooms. Yes, mycelia, those fuzzy-white cobwebby networks common under any forest log, have been shown by Paul Stamets and other mycologists to repair impaired, devitalised soils, treat a network of diseases related only by a degree or two of separation, and to transform oil spills and toxic wastes into luxuriant oases, even as these same mycelia have transformed vast debris fields, during planet-wide extinction events in the past, to clear new ground for fresh resurrection. Mycelia can prevent viral storm and bio-attacks, mycofiltrate polluted waters, even save a home from carpenter ants.

We are finding ways to partner with mycelia, far more sensitive than we are to the threats to an ecosystem. And in other dark places, where decay has seemed irreversible, loom unforeseen sources of regrowth, for instance through stem cells: "dead matter" comes to life, brain tissue regenerates in an exuberance of neuroplasticity. Life will go on. Hope though abandoned, returns, through the backdoors of fractured dimensions, to the physically paralysed, and re-enters the lives of those doomed to suffer severe emotional distress. A new form of network family therapy, Finnish Open Dialogue, has all but removed the scourge of schizophrenia from Finnish Western Lapland. Eighty percent not only enjoy lasting symptom relief but return to work and loving relationships. Psychotic breaks, treated immediately, no longer progress to full-blown schizophrenia. Both planning and treatment take place in the same circle for all. Dialogue concerning the patient and family not only is transparent but open to all. Expertise lies not in diagnostic judgments but in generating dialogue in all. The treating team trade observations with each other right in front of the family, in their "reflective process" that stimulates robust and healthy responses. Transformed into practice, postmodernism is saving lives, at the same time cutting down

mushrooming costs to societies from what was once and still is for many, but will soon be no more, the living death of schizophrenia. There's something new under the Arctic sun.

And one of nature's best-kept secrets is being told through the Mandelbrot Set. Fractals, blown up multicolour on computer screens, depict how chaos comes clambering out of order, how each explains the other. We can see it for ourselves, as Benoit Mandelbrot first saw. Here is mathematics where we can almost see life itself: developing from this or that simple formula, yet producing profuse variations. In fragments of coastline and florets of cauliflower, in the newfound dynamic fluctuations of a healthy heartbeat, in any fractal, self-similar shapes repeat on all scales. Spiritual applications there have been and more need to be made, though Mandelbrot himself stuck to the science and the economics. In computer simulations, in fractal antennas, in ecosystem dynamics and galactic cluster models, with new toys, through satellites that protect our planet from global terrorism, everywhere we turn, someone is finding fresh creative relevancies for the lowly fractal. A sadhak of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Pravir Malik, inspired by Mandelbrot but more fundamentally by Sri Aurobindo's World-Stair climbing in *Savitri*, has developed a fractal-of-progress business growth model: he has transformed cutting-edge math and science into a body of practices increasingly employed to solve problems by leading global businesses. The Mother had seen that one of the most recalcitrant areas for the new consciousness to enter was business: so it may be that the Supramental is pushing further and deeper into our business-as-usual than we'd dare think. Now established as a shakti among the other shaktis operating in this world, moving slowly, infiltrating invisibly, even getting down to business, the Supermind already is changing the world in its characteristic ways. These are only a few stealthy ways it is slipping unnoticed into our ordinary human life. Could these be early gleamings of the Mind of Light? On the World Wide Web you can watch the narrative of the fractal unfold, from its mathematical discovery through its multiplying developments, featuring discussion with scientists, technologists and the unclassifiable Mandelbrot himself, in British scientist/2001 co-author Arthur C. Clarke's presentation, "*Fractals: The Colours of Infinity*" on YouTube.

Oh, and coincidentally, the film concludes with a quotation from Sri Aurobindo. The heart of the matter beats in a passage where Sri Aurobindo tells us why he has focused and still gives all his energy to bring Supermind home. Even as it has a home above, it will grow native on the Earth in all that lives here. In a selection to follow, covering three themes, he speaks from his heart.

1) Why he spared no effort to bring the supramental Light and Force and

Consciousness to earth. His purpose has been to bring us the discovery of life and the experience of being in bodies, not as it has been, processed by our grey matter, but in its truth that will become self-evident now that the overmental door that has shut it away from us has been shattered to pieces.

2) The effects, again in the ordinary day-to-day, of the supramental Ananda: though not yet widely manifested, it is yet on its irresistible way, if not here and now, then here and there, to render that Delight, the ether in which we live and breathe, less ethereal.

3) A strong expression of the supramental Love: what that will bring, slowly then all at once, as it surfaces. Here are some of Sri Aurobindo's words from a letter he seems to have addressed to us, and not just to the one who first opened it up.

'The Supramental is not something grand, aloof, austere; it is not something inconsistent with a full vital and physical manifestation; on the contrary, it carries in it the only possibility of the full fullness of the vital force and the physical life on earth. It is because it is so, because it was so revealed to me, and for no other reason that I have followed after it and persevered till I came into contact with it and was able to draw down some power of it and its influence. I am concerned with the earth, not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits'.

'The utmost Ananda that body and life are now capable of is a brief excitement to the vital mind or the nerves or the cells which is limited, imperfect, and soon passes; with the supramental change all the cells, nerves, vital forces, embodied mental forces can become filled with a thousandfold Ananda, capable of an intensity of bliss that passes description and need not fade away. The supramental love means an intense unity of soul with soul, mind with mind, life with life, and an entire flooding of the body consciousness with the physical experience of oneness, the presence of the Beloved in every part, in every cell of the body'.

Supermind in our lives, in our minds, in our cells. Slowly, on a path carrying along as many as possible, like a slow-motion tsunami of hope, we are moving irresistibly towards a species based no more on death, division, and the darkness of ignorance. The Mystic Fire meeting the Mother's Force makes for a marvellous fulfilment. A more flexible material foundation may free the manifest form of the mounting Flame.

Manifestation is forever moving forward. The manifestation is sheathed in light.

Afterword

Sri Aurobindo was the first to call for complete independence from the British. This grew beyond bounds of politics, transfigured to the call for complete independence from the empire of the Overmind (with its own form of the National Congress, with the same kinds of moderate demands expressed through “prayer, petition, and protest” that could never truly change our state at root). Complete independence, of the integral spirit embracing, even coming to embody, material affairs, can be achieved through growing attunement with Sri Aurobindo’s four great realisations, expressed in highest quality of life embodied in full direct action of spirit as matter (“Mother’s force”). The beginning rungs are in our reach if we but show some early foot; once we’re on the ladder, Grace may come to lift, or to keep each small step ringing. The first and second realisations, the third and fourth as well, run as an eternal portion of the course of one continuous river of realisation. Our own true being fully connected to its source enjoys this great fourfold realisation; and our own purpose here, perceived most completely and concretely, is to embody it. Complete independence can be achieved only through the medium of a concrete interdependence. The summit stage of supramental consciousness alone is the necessary and sufficient condition, the whole key to the integral embrace, expression, and embodiment of this fourfold realisation; only the true individual in us is fit to receive and instrumental to radiate, densely, warmly, and fully the fourfold realisation. The true individual alone can stand intact to the abysmal pull — something like the gravitational attraction of a supermassive black hole — of the *Parabrahman*, the Supreme Reality beyond the bifurcations, of which the silent and the active Brahman are the two aspects. Only by becoming our true individuality, soul-and-Self-complex, through the Mother’s Grace — for Selfhood is Her project — can we attune more truly with the Brahman as Sri Aurobindo realised it in his supreme realisation. This is the subjective crown of the sadhana that once one is oneself intact with the pull to withstand, gives the one-who-has-become-one the pull to attract all necessary aid and sufficient conditions to achieve the practical Shakti in life and even rid oneself of the outermost ego of the physical self.

What we can be, each in our own fashion, are “travelling samadhis,” ever-living relics of Sri Aurobindo, carrying the full force of the fourfold realisation. The Supreme kneads us to become perfect in matter. Every revolution requires appropriate force to achieve its intended objectives. The extreme change that churns us through ignorance to knowledge requires the same force that was powerful and knowledgeable enough to become ignorance; it is a force more powerful than the battlefields of the material world have seen. The force needed

for the revolution to overthrow the present government of the cosmos is that of the original consciousness-as-force that became this divided world by its power of exclusive concentration, and this alone can be the missing link. Or we could say, the forceful means needed to overthrow the present overmental rule of the cosmos, the force that Sri Aurobindo has opened the way for, and that Mother embodies and which she specialises and materialises, is the Mother’s Force. This force alone can bring us the fourfold realisation (as it brought Sri Aurobindo), moving us stage to stage and across the perilous bridges unseen; only by harbouring this force can and will we eventually conquer death. The first realisation came to Sri Aurobindo, as he himself said in conversation, through the grace of the Eternal Brahman; the three subsequent realisations and their hundreds of tributaries, through the grace of Mahakali and Krishna.

Grace is always the natural manifestation of the Divine, and the supreme Grace is the grace that is the natural expression of the Supreme Reality itself: it is the Supreme Shakti and it is that which becomes the Supreme Shakti and is the practical expression of the Shakti throughout. Everywhere we go we carry the peace of complete silence of the consciousness overthrowing the noises of the world, the equal tranquil state that is the true material foundation; we carry the power of decisive action direct from the Supreme; we carry the pull and attraction of the Absolute itself to the same absolute in every person, place, and thing, and the Ananda of the Supreme Shakti that alone can pierce the Unknowable and flow out of it as Person, World and Soul; and we carry the integrating summit Grace-Shakti that can illuminate every abyss with the superlight underlying everything, acting on the smallest scale with the appearance of a bounded soul to do all that works to the world’s delight.

All forms in the world and their function have their foundation in Supermind, where omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence of *Sachchidananda* are undiminished (there is no impairment or impoverishment in the original intensity, sings the verse of Vallalar). This, therefore, is delightful conscious existence replacing with its radiance, turning into itself the grave sorrowful stupidity of the world: the world can go on, but now with the fully stable and concrete *Sachchidananda* in the cells of every body. We put Sri Aurobindo back on trial for “waging war against the king” when we fail to align ourselves to the full with the full extent of the change he has come for. A simple aspiration coupled with straightforward attunement, rejecting all that stands in the way, culminating in the crown of our subjective sadhana, the complete surrender of each moment of life and every movement of our consciousness and body cell: nothing more is asked of us.

(Concluded)

Notes and References

1. Krishna appears in true form in the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*.
2. K.D. Sethna, "The Passing of Sri Aurobindo: Its Inner Significance and Consequence" in *The Indian Spirit and the World's Future*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1953, pp.186-210.
3. Rishabhchand, *Sri Aurobindo: His Life Unique*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1981, p.5.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL), Vol. 1, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972.
5. A.B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Third Edition (complete in one volume), Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1982, p.37.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, p.801.
7. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *On the Mother*, Third (Revised) Edition, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1994, p.140. From a letter written by Sri Aurobindo to the Mother, May 20, 1915. See also Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, 1972, p.425.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, SABCL, Vols. 18-19, 1970, p.1033.
9. *Ibid.*, pp.919-963.
10. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, SABCL, Vols. 28-29, 1970, pp.95-102.
11. Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, 1972, p.64. In a dictated clarification, written c. 1945, he briefly describes the nature of the permanently stabilised concrete experiences, which speaking in the third person, he terms "the four great realisations on which his Yoga and spiritual philosophy are founded."
12. The Mother, *Words of the Mother, Collected Works of the Mother* (CWM), Vol. 13, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1980, p.13. See also Wayne Bloomquist, *God Shall Grow Up: Body, Soul, and Earth Evolving Together*, Pondy Publishing, 2001, where the supramentalised portion of the subtle-physical is presented as direct experience in several places.
13. Sri Aurobindo, *The Upanishads*, SABCL, Vol. 12, 1972, p.16. (See also his treatment of *Parabrahman* in essays contained in *The Hour of God*, SABCL, Vol. 1, 1972.)
14. M. Alan Kazlev, www.kheper.net/integral/noetic_absolute.html
15. Purani, op. cit., *Evening Talks*, see December 18, 1938, pp.343-344.
16. The Mother, *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 3, Institut de Recherches Evolutives, Paris, 1982, see 26 September 1962, p.355.
17. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, see 29 December 1938, p.75.
18. See "A Talk by the Mother on *Savitri*," written from memory by Mona Sarkar, November 5, 1967. Although not official it yet has credibility and is often quoted. The author feels that though inexact, the words express faithfully the views of the Mother.
19. Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, p.455-60.
20. The Mother, *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 2, 1981, see 7 November 1961, pp.377-384.
21. The Mother, *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 3, see 21 July 1962, letter from Sri Aurobindo to his younger brother Barin written in April 1920 (the date though given in the *Agenda* as April 7th is unfixable) and translated from the Bengali, pp.268-277.
22. The account in *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 2, from 7 November 1961 listed above in note 20, is the primary account of the "process" of Sri Aurobindo's path, their dual path, through the Supermind in the 1910s and 1920s. The author accepts the authenticity of the Mother's narrative in these subtle matters.
23. Iyengar, op. cit., p.212.
24. Purani, op. cit., p.20.
25. The Mother, *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 1, 1979, see 21 December 1955, p.415.
26. Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, pp.143-172.
27. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, pp.211-217.
28. *Ibid.*, p.216.
29. R.Y. Deshpande, "The Integral Yoga of the Future," <http://www.auromusic.org/online%20books/articles/RYPDeshpande/IntegralYogaofFuture.html>, basis for keynote address 2003 AUM. This has inspired much of the approach taken here to Sri Aurobindo's path through Supermind (though other sources that are Tamil have helped me through the discrimination between Supermind and Overmind). Note how Deshpande illumines the true nature of Krishna, as fundamentally the full power of Bliss. No misunderstandings or mistakes on my part can be ascribed to any source but me.
30. Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran, *Talk Six* by Amal Kiran in *Light and Laughter: Some Talks at Pondicherry*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, Second Revised Edition 1974, pp.78-79.
31. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.41.
32. Rishabhchand, *The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, Second Edition 1959 (Reprinted 2000), p. 434.
33. Peter Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, p.351 and others.
34. Purani, op. cit., *Evening Talks*, p.37.
35. Inspiration for the insight how Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary political programme translated into the "overthrow of Overmind" dawned during my reading a passage of Nirodbaran, recounting very simply Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary political principles. Nirodbaran did not refer there to any correlation with a spiritual programme. An intuitive flash came to me (which seemed to have been occasioned by this reading) that contained the remainder of this chapter, but in an instant. The rest of this chapter is my attempt to elucidate that intuition.
36. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.323. "For worlds were many, but the Self was one. This knowledge was now made a cosmos' seed: This seed was cased in the safety of the Light. It needed not a sheath of Ignorance."
37. T.R. Thulasiram, *Arut Perum Jothi and Deathless Body: A Comparative Study of Swami Ramalingam with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and Thirumoolar*, Vol. 1,

- University of Madras, 1980, pp.573-649.
38. Thulasiram, op. cit., pp.585-586 and following. Nayanmars and Alvars were respectively the Saivite and Vishnaivite poet-saints of South India. See Thulasiram's chapter 13, for detailed examples of the realisations they reached, in relation to distinguishing regions up to and including Overmind, from the poises (sessions) of the Supermind.
 39. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p.278.
 40. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p.950.
 41. See Thulasiram, op. cit., Chapter 13 as referenced above. This chapter (not to mention extensive passages in both volumes of the book) elucidates the *Avyakta Paratpara* (Positive Void, as Sri Aurobindo calls it) and the harmonising and making intact the soul and-Higher-Self complex, with direct references to both Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* and their precise correlation with Swami Ramalingam's sixth volume of *Thiru Arutpa* (his "holy book of songs"). Both arrived at these insights independently (Ramalingam's disappearance in 1874 having taken place a year and a half after Sri Aurobindo's birth, and Sri Aurobindo having never read Ramalingam's *Thiru Arutpa*). Also see Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, "Lines of the Descent of Consciousness," pp.50-51 for a most lucid account of the process leading towards coalescence of soul (psychic being) and Self (*Jivatman*) in the Supermind. See also *Savitri*, Book VII, Canto 5, pp.526-527 and following.
 42. The fivefold universal powers are to create, to preserve, to renew through destruction, to veil or conceal (involve), and to unfold through grace or reveal (evolve). These are found throughout *Saiva Siddhana* and other Hindu tradition.
 43. See Thulasiram, op. cit. for instance p.59 and p.671 in Vol. 1, and for exact and direct reference to the "door" in stanza 283 see Vol. 2, p.209, in first of two extensive sections on "*Joti Agaval*" poem, which contains 798 stanzas, or 1596 verses.
 44. Swami Ramalingam's sixth volume of *Thiru Arupta*, which is very extensive, is purely supramental in character. Earlier poems in *Thiru Arutpa* also relate supramental experiences. In addition his *Upadesha* (sayings taken down by disciples) and *Upakhyana* (commentaries, notably the "*Karanateeta Lokas*") contain extensive references to supramental experience. Other sources also exist. Thus, it has been said, perhaps justifiably, that his works contain over a thousand pages of his direct supramental experiences.
 45. The Mother, *Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 13, 1980, see 14 February 1961, written in English in the Mother's handwriting.
 46. Quoted by the excellent poet Joseph Kent, a close student of Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri, who recalled hearing Dr. Chaudhuri use this phrase.
 47. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Collected Works, The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 3, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1970, see "Lines of the Descent of Consciousness," p.35.
 48. Here again I'd like to share more highlights from my investigations in Tamil spirituality, especially *Arut Perum Jothi and Deathless Body*, Vols. 1 and 2 by Sri T.R. Thulasiram, an inmate and in fact the auditor and chief accountant of Sri Aurobindo Ashram from 1969 to his passing in 2007. The deeper sense of the full differences between Overmind and Supermind can be found in these extensive volumes, published in 1980. References to Swami Ramalingam's supramental yoga and that of other Tamil siddhas taken from these volumes. A work of the future, perhaps a way to assist Sri Aurobindo's ongoing project to supramentalise the Overmind and all planes leading to it, will be to find the harmony between, and the same principle underlying the Integral Yoga community founded by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and the *Suddha Sanmarga* community founded by Swami Ramalingam, both centred in Tamil Nadu, South India, but neither at present recognising the other.
 49. Thulasiram, op. cit, Vol. 1, pp.828-829. Also see chapter 11 on Tirumoolar, and Chapter 18 on transformation in Tirumoolar, Swami Ramalingam, and the Mother.
 50. Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, 1972, "*The Golden Light*", p.134.
 51. Amal Kiran, *Our Light and Delight: Recollections of Life with the Mother*, Amal Kiran, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1980, p.224.
 52. Deshpande, op. cit. "*The Integral Yoga of the Future*."
 53. Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, p.153.
 54. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2001, p.1008.
 55. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p.550.
 56. The Mother, *Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 3, see 13 April 1962, p.131.
 57. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.709. For the eleventh book of *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo holds a special fondness.
 58. Nirodbaran, op. cit., *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol 2, p.1008.
 59. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.445. This line in "The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain" is one of the final three passages Sri Aurobindo added to *Savitri* in his final month.
 60. "Parting gift" is a phrase used by R.Y. Deshpande in "*The Integral Yoga of the Future*," op. cit.
 61. K.D. Sethna, op. cit. , see Note 2 above.
 62. Bhavi Saklecha's mother told me this story on the cliffs above San Francisco a few years back.
 63. Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna), *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, Second Revised and Enlarged Edition 1992, see "The Supermind's Descent and the 'Mind of Light,' Some Facts and Interpretations," pp.104-134. The Mother's words preceding the above presentation of Amal Kiran's view of the Mind of Light can be found there.
 64. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.247.
 65. Sri Aurobindo, see chapters on the Mind of Light in "*The Supramental Manifestation on Earth*" in *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*, SABCL, Vol. 16, 1971.

66. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, see “The Triple Transformation,” pp.889-918.
67. The Mother, *Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 1, 1979, see 24 May 1960, pp.371-374.
68. M. Alan Kazlev, “Sri Aurobindo, the Mother, and the Integral Movement,” *Collaboration journal*, Spring 2011.
69. The Mother, *Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 15, 1980, p.108.
70. Iyengar, op. cit., p.495.
71. Debashish Banerji, “Living Laboratories of the Divine” (text of a talk delivered for the AUM Conference, Los Angeles, May 2003), *Posthuman Destinies* website, published November 23, 2008.
72. The Mother, *Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 1, see 29 February 1956, p.69.
73. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1957-1958*, CWM, Vol. 9, 1977, see 1 January 1958, p.245.
74. Ibid., see 1 July 1957, p.145.
75. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vols. 20-21, 1971, p.1.
76. The Mother, *Mother’s Agenda*, Vol. 1, see October 4, 1958 (at end of discussion), p.205.
77. Paul Stamets, *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, 2005.
78. Jaakko Seikkula et al, “Five-Year Experience of First-Episode Non-Affective Psychosis in Open-Dialogue Approach: Treatment Principles, Follow-up Outcomes, and Two Case Studies,” *Psychotherapy Research*, March 2006, pp.214-228.
79. Arthur C. Clarke presents “*Fractals: The Colours of Infinity*,” 1995, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lk6QU94xAb8> with concluding quotation from Sri Aurobindo.
80. These quotations, placed here into three paragraphs, are found in Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, pp.124-125.
81. A phrase taken from the fire of life and spoken by Wayne Bloomquist.
82. Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, p.77.
83. Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, SABCL, Vol. 25, 1972, pp.6-8. See his own statement on the contribution we can humanly make to the Yoga that all life is: aspiration, rejection, surrender.

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Sri Aurobindo: The Ideal Teacher

Prema Nandakumar

1. Bhartrihari

Who is the perfect teacher? Is he the one who teaches you a text word by word? Is he the one who makes you write and re-write your answers till they shine as unfaultable? Is he the one who gives you a bibliography and asks you to get lost in a library? I really do not know. But I have known one who has been an ideal teacher to me not for just half a dozen years in a school or a college or university. He has been a life-long *acharya*, for so many decades, asking for nothing in return except to grow within me the plant of discovering the glory and good in Indian literature and culture on my own. He is one who has himself been a discoverer of “beauty’s sunlit ways”, and laid out the path which we must walk. Sometimes he would just mention a name but seen in the context where it was embedded, you set out on your own discovery. If I returned to the name or context after a while, there were sure to be new continents to come across.

Coming from a family of South Indian Srivaishnavas who consider Sanskrit and Tamil as their twin windows into life, religion, philosophy and spirituality, I was no stranger to the presence of the Sanskrit ‘greats’ in our culture. However, it was English literature that drew me into its varied lanes and by-lanes with those high-rise buildings of Shakespeare, Milton and Charles Dickens. Also I loved reading world literature in English translation. Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy had an important place in this area. How could anyone else create the world of *Crime and Punishment* and *War and Peace*? But suddenly one day it just happened. I was reading Sri Aurobindo’s English translation of Bhartrihari’s *Niti Shatakam*. What he said in the introductory words arrested me:

“I had at first entitled the translation “*The Century of Morals*”, but the Sanskrit word *Niti* has a more complex sense. It includes also policy and

worldly wisdom, the rule of successful as well as the law of ideal conduct and gives scope for observation of all the turns and forces determining the movement of human character and action.” (Sri Aurobindo: *The Century of Life*, SABCL, vol.5, p.159)

If the expert translator Sri Aurobindo himself says translation is only the second best, and if you know the original language and so you are on the best possible turf, why should I not go to the original and in that manner improve my knowledge of Sanskrit? Thus was the seed laid for a life-long adventure which has made me watch the drama of life as acted out down the centuries by expert craftsmen of the *deva bhasha*. As it was the evocation of Bhartrihari’s name that opened “the magical casements into faery lands”, the opening homage will be to this author who lived in the 6th century, a logician, a grammarian and a poet as well. For us, the poet is at the forefront.

There are too many versions regarding the life history of this unique poet. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has a brief note on him. We may take it as our base to study his poetry:

“Of noble birth, Bhartrihari was attached for a time to the court of the Maitraka king of Valabhi (modern Vala, Gujarat), where most likely his taste for sensuous living and material possessions was formed. Following the example of Indian sages, he believed he had to renounce the world for a higher life. Seven times he attempted monastic living, but his attraction to women caused him to fail each time. Though intellectually he presumably understood the transitory nature of worldly pleasures and felt a call to Yoga and ascetic living, he was unable to control his desires. After a long self-struggle, Bhartrihari became a yogi and lived a life of dispassion in a cave in the vicinity of Ujjain until his death”.

Three of the works attributed to Bhartrihari are titled *shataka* (“century”): the *Sringara* (love) — *shataka*, *Niti* (ethics and polity) — *shataka*, and *Vairagya* (dispassion) — *shataka*. Most scholars are confident only that the first is his. Another work sometimes attributed to Bhartrihari, the *Bhattikavya* (“Poem of Bhatti”), performs linguistic gymnastics to demonstrate the subtleties of Sanskrit.”

This is good enough to begin with for here is an instance of a person so like us, battling through life towards an ideal and yet dragged back by the passions of the world. Sri Aurobindo has a fine image to describe this constant battle that goes on in our being:

“A tree beside the sandy river-beach
Holds up its topmost boughs
Like fingers towards the skies they cannot reach,
Earth-bound, heaven-amorous.

This is the soul of man. Body and brain
Hungry for earth our heavenly flight detain.” (*A Tree*, SABCL, Vol.5, p.47)

This is why when we read Bhartrihari, we feel completely at home. We might as well begin with his *Sringara Shataka* though we really do not know the order of composition of these poems. Though it is all about women and their attractions, there have not been many takers to translate the poems. One reason could be that it grows tiresome after a while. The ninth verse, for instance:

*Kumkuma pankā kalankita dehaa
Gaura payodhara kampita haaraa
Nupura hamsa ranat pada padmaa
Kam na vasikurute bhuvi raamaa.*

Is there a man who cannot be tempted by a woman’s body sprinkled with scented saffron? And golden breasts moving to the rhythm of her necklaces? And her lotus-like feet gliding like a swan to the sounds of tinkling anklets?

Indeed it is clear. The rhythm refuses to get transformed into English. And for us, “*kumkuma*” and “*padma*” are not the same as saffron and lotus. And how can we bring into English the word “*kampita*”? It is like shuddering, but not out of fear. It is the shudder of ecstasy, and yet it is not the same in English. This is how I learnt to get back to the original wherever or whenever I could do so. It has not been possible always, but I am a firm believer in a future life; maybe, I will be born in a Sanskrit pundit’s shack in Varanasi in future time. But now for the present, Bhartrihari and the English translation by Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo chose to translate the *Niti Shataka*. As we saw earlier, the verses are short statements, rather like aphorisms. There have been many translators for the *Niti Shataka* during the last two hundred years. Obviously Bhartrihari was not only an amorous lover but also a level-headed individual and so we enjoy the aphorisms as they seem to remind us of people we meet all the time at home and in the workplace. Pride, heroism, wisdom, wealth, wickedness, virtue, and of course the inevitability of fate. All this and more come to us distilled by his Sanskrit which is simple enough. The invocation in Sri Aurobindo’s crisp translation:

“To the calm Light inviolable all hail
Whom Time divides not, nor Space measures, One,
Boundless and Absolute who is alone,
The eternal vast I am immutable! (Ibid, *Invocation*, p.161)

Dik kaaladhyavanavachchinnaa ananta chinmaatra murthaye has been given a literal passage into English as only Sri Aurobindo could do it. From now on the *Niti Shataka* takes wing. Some fools are incurable. A statement on such obstinacy:

“Go, with strong violence thy jewel tear
From the fierce alligator’s yawning jaws;
Swim the wild surges when they lash the air
Billow on billow thundering without pause;
Or set an angry serpent in thy hair
For garland! Sooner shalt thou gain their ruth
Than conquer the fool’s obstinate heart with truth” (Ibid, *Obstinacy in Folly*, p.163)

Makara vakthra dhamshtraantharaat, alligator’s yawning jaws! The sea with its continuous waves like giant garlands seems to move towards us when we turn to the angry serpent that is coiled like a flower garland on the crown, and suddenly stop. All this is nothing when you have to deal with an obstinate heart, *muurka jana chiththam*! The ‘fool’ pales before the Sanskrit term, ‘*murkha*’! So many facets of the *murkha* but even Bhartrihari seems to think that this *murkha* can appear wise in an assembly if he wears the one jewel that would help him: *vibhushanam maunam*!

“One cloak on ignorance absolutely fits;
Justly if worn, some grace is even lent;
Silence in sessions of the learned sits
On the fool’s brow like a bright ornament.” (Ibid, *Folly’s Wisdom*, p.164)

We have had enough of folly. Let us turn briefly to wisdom with Sri Aurobindo’s help. In days far away and long ago when I was a school-going child, some verses were taught us to repeat by rote or for reciting on the stage for the annual day. It was only when I began reading Sri Aurobindo that I realised that I had been reciting Bhartrihari all the time, *keyuraani na*

bhushayanti purusham haraa na chandrojjvalaa:

“It is not armlets that adorn a man,
Nor necklaces all crammed with moonbright pearls,
Nor baths, nor ointments, nor arranged curls.
'Tis art of excellent speech that only can
Adorn him: jewels perish, garlands fade;
This only abides and glitters undecayed.” (Ibid, *The Real Ornament*, p.169)

‘armlets’, ‘moonbright’, excellent speech alone that is the true adornment, *vaagbhushanam bhushanam*! The verse immediately following this in Bhartrihari, *vidyanaama narasya rupamadhikam* was a favourite of my father, Prof. Srinivasa Iyengar:

“Knowledge is nobler beauty in a man
Than features: 'tis his hidden hoard of price;
This the long roll of Masters first began;
Pleasure it brings, just fame and constant bliss,
And is a helping friend in foreign lands,
And is a very god with puissant hands.
Knowledge, not wealth in great men is adored,
Nor better than a beast the mind unstored.” (Ibid, *The Praises of Knowledge*, p.169)

The sharp ending, “a beast the mind unstored”, *vidyaa viheenah pasuh*! And so the poetic-caustic-wise verses of Bhartrihari roll on, Sri Aurobindo following the footsteps, oh so closely! He even discovers the ‘The Universal Religion’ in Bhartrihari’s aphorisms on wisdom:

“All varying Scriptures that the earth divide,
Have yet one common rule that need o’erride
Dogma nor rite, nor any creed offend;
All to their heavens by one sole path intend.
'Tis this: – Abstain from slaughter; others’ wealth
To covet cease, and in thy speech no stealth
Of falsehood harbour; give in season due
According to thy power; from ribald view
Or word keep far of woman, wife or maid;

Be mild obedience to thy elders paid;
Dam longing like a river; each act beneath
Show mercy and kindness to all things that breathe.” (Ibid, *The Universal Religion*, p.172)

Only a child of Sanatana Dharma can give this perfect definition of religion, panth. *Samyamamah satyavaakyam, sarvabhutanukampaa*. Compassion for not merely the human being, but “to all things that breathe”, *sarva saakeshu*. We touch so many points in man’s life which includes pride and heroism, wealth and virtue. Fate fascinates the Sanskrit poet and his English translator. Fate is a presence in *Ilion*; it is so in *Savitri* too, but here there is a transcendence of fate. For ordinary mortals who lack *tapasya*, fate remains incorrigible. Bhartrihari’s views on fate are the same. According to him one cannot transcend it, and this no doubt, strengthened his *vairagya*, a detachment from worldly affairs and tuned him to renunciation. Swami Vivekananda, a great Sanskrit scholar like Sri Aurobindo used to explain the *Vairagya Shataka* to his European disciples when they travelled in Kashmir. He translated some of the verses for their use and this is how we have a few of his translations of the *Vairagya Shataka*. Inspired no doubt by the interest he had shown in identifying it as an important text for a renunciate’s life, the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati published an excellent word-to-word translation in 1916. The translator’s name is not mentioned.

Here again there are several groups that deal with the difficulties in overcoming the senses, the need to give up desire, the evanescent nature of life, the way of the renunciate and so on. After invoking Shiva with a beautiful prayer. The *Shataka* launches upon describing the vanity of desire.

"Hope is like a flowing river of which the ceaseless desires constitute the waters; it rages with the waves of keen longings and the attachments for various objects are its animals of prey; scheming thoughts of greed are the aquatic birds that abound on it, and it destroys in its course the big trees of patience and fortitude; it is rendered impassable by the whirlpools of ignorance and of profound depth of bed as it is, its banks of anxious deliberation are precipitous indeed. Such a river the great Yogis of pure mind pass across to enjoy supreme felicity.”

Aasaa naama nadhi manoratha jalaa: only *tapasya* can help us cross this river, the life of *tapasya* that great people like Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo lived, engaging themselves in ceaseless work for the good of humanity.

Of course, when we read Bhartrihari carefully, we might give up the desire for desirelessness, if we did want it. Such an impossible ideal! But remember, even Everest could be conquered one day! Reading Bhartrihari carefully, with the heart of a *sahridaya*, we can yet achieve the state which Swami Vivekananda did and gave us the amazing poem, “*The Song of the Sannyasin*.” He must have been inspired no end by the concluding verse of *Vairagya Shatakam*, *maatar medini taata marutah sakhe tejah subandho jalah ...*

“Oh Earth, my mother! Oh Wind, my father ! Oh Fire, my friend ! Oh Water, my good relative! Oh Sky, my brother! here is my last salutation to you with clasped hands! Having cast away Ignorance with its wonderful infatuations by means of pure knowledge resplendent with shining merits developed through my association with you all, I now merge in the Supreme Brahman.”

Practising *ātmanivedanam* (self-surrender): A master-key in *sādhanā*

Anuradha Choudry

Abstract

The final goal of most yogic traditions is liberation through Self-realisation. *Ātmanivedanam* which is one of the nine forms of *Bhakti*, is regarded as one of the most potent ways for an individual to attain this end. This paper is based on a personal experiment in *Ātmanivedanam*. It attempts to throw some light on the subtle psychological processes that are involved in the practice of surrender which result in the transformation of one's nature and facilitate Self-knowledge.

Keywords: *Ātmanivedanam*, surrender, psychological process, Indian psychology

Introduction

In the Indian context, the ultimate *puruṣārtha* which is also the final goal of most yogic traditions is *mokṣa* or liberation through Self-realisation. The various traditions also describe many time-tested valid ways of attaining this state of being through practices of knowledge, devotion, works or through the path of psychic control among several others. One of the most potent ways for an individual to attain this state as advocated by numerous texts and adepts in Yoga is *ātmanivedanam* meaning self-offering or surrender. It is listed as the last of the nine forms of *bhakti* in the *Bhāgavatam* (7.3.23-24) where the devotee is asked to offer herself completely to Vishnu. At the end of the *Bhagavadgītā* also, after explaining about the different possible paths to Self-realisation, Sri Krishna extols the importance of surrender when he tells Arjuna that he will reveal to him the 'most secret of secrets', *sarvaguhyatama*:

*Manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī mān namaskuru;
Mamevaisyasi satyam te pratijāne priyo'si me.* (18.65)

Become my-minded, my lover and adorer, a sacrificer to Me, bow thyself to Me, to Me thou shalt come, this is my pledge and promise to thee, for dear art thou to Me.

*Sarvadharmān parityajya māmekam śaraṇam vraja;
Ahaṁ twā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ.* (18.66)

Abandon all dharmas and take refuge in Me alone. I will deliver thee from all sin and evil, do not grieve.

On a similar note, The Mother categorically states,

You see, in the present condition of the world, circumstances are always difficult. (...) each individual feels his own difficulties and is faced by the same obstacles.

There is only one way for you. It is a total, complete and unconditional surrender.

(...) And there is no other remedy. It's the only remedy, for *everybody* without exception (Mother, CWM, vol.15, p.419, 1978).

This paper takes into account the great deal of importance accorded to this practice in Indian thought. Based on an experiment in 'rigorous subjectivity' using first person research methods, it attempts to throw some light on the subtle psychological processes that are involved in the practice of surrender which result in the transformation of one's nature and facilitate Self-knowledge. In the process, it seeks to understand and answer some fundamental questions related to the act of surrender like:

1) What exactly is surrender? 2) Who is surrendering? 3) Who am I? 4) What is being surrendered and to whom? 5) What happens when one surrenders? 6) Is it possible to surrender all the time? 7) Why is surrender considered as an essential means to Self-realisation? etc.

This paper will examine these questions from a phenomenological perspective and present certain insights gained as a result of a persistent application of the technique in various positive and negative circumstances that served to justify the importance attributed to it by various yoga texts and masters as a key tool for knowing oneself.

Different worldviews related to Surrender

While seeking answers to the questions raised above pertaining to surrender,

it became clear that there is no universal consensus regarding the importance of self-offering or surrender as I had assumed based on my cultural underpinnings. The term acquires different connotations in different cultures and is regarded as a positive or a negative practice depending on the worldview it relates to. It is worth briefly mentioning some salient features of what can be broadly categorised as Western and Eastern worldviews which will help the reader appreciate the difference in the approach as well as the implications of the practice of surrender. To facilitate a comparative understanding of the differences that mark Western and Eastern ontologies regarding surrender, one can use Ken Wilber's analogy of the spectrum of consciousness which regards human consciousness like a spectrum that spans the entire range of his consciousness starting from the unconscious parts of human nature to the conscious ego-self of the person and goes all the way till the superconscious potential of the individual.

Western worldview

Some dominant schools of mainstream Western psychology like Behaviourism seem to subscribe to Darwin's theory of evolution and view human beings as having evolved from the great apes with whom they share a majority of their genetic structure. Consequently, studies pertaining to human behaviour are often carried out on monkeys or mice! It is, however, acknowledged that, in addition, we are also endowed with the capacity for reasoning and higher thinking. They also believe an individual's nature is generally moulded based on the conditioning it receives. Freud, who founded the school of Psychoanalysis, divided a person's nature into the Id, the Ego and or the Superego (Cherry, 2014) responsible for the moral aspects of one's life. According to mainstream psychology, therefore, which is dominated by these schools amongst others, the spectrum of consciousness extends from the unconscious, instinctual, animalistic self to that of the higher intellect while maintaining the ego at the epicentre of identity. And the task of psychologists is mainly to find ways to help preserve and nurture her individuality for her to experience optimum well-being and growth.

In this context, the idea of surrendering oneself to another is synonymous with the notion of giving up of one's individuality to follow the will of another person. This is equivalent to the experience of losing one's identity which is a very frightening prospect as it amounts to willingly or unwillingly stepping into an unknown future thus resulting in a lot of uncertainty and insecurity for the individual. Hence, the practice of surrender is viewed rather suspiciously by those who subscribe to this worldview.

Eastern or Indian Worldview

Unlike the Western approach that believes that man is essentially an animal attempting to become human and then possibly aspiring for higher spiritual experiences, Eastern traditions, in particular the Indian, starts on the premise that an individual is fundamentally a divine being undergoing a human experience while also succumbing to lower animalistic tendencies under the influence of ignorance. The spectrum of consciousness in this case, therefore, spans from the unconscious depths of a person's animal-like nature to the more developed mental being and going all the way up to the transcendental or super-conscious aspect of her divine possibilities. It is important to note that in the Indian context, one talks of two selves: the self which signifies the limited and conditioned ego-self of the individual and the Self which represents her highest identity as the divine essence within which corresponds to an all-knowing state of being.

In this context, surrender implies giving up one's identity as the limited ego-self to the higher all-knowing Self within or in some cases to the representative Godhead of that same truth without. Consequently, it corresponds to the expansion of one's consciousness from a narrow ego-based existence to a vaster and more illumined state of being. In this light, surrender is a highly recommended practice as it is considered to play a key role in helping a person gain Self-knowledge and experience liberation.

Methodology

Most of the studies conducted on this topic as well as the literature available on it in the field of psychology, use a third person approach whereby the conclusions are based on studying other people's experiences with surrender. Having grown up with the philosophy of Integral yoga which lays tremendous emphasis on surrender, and learning of the importance attributed to it by texts like the *Gītā* as well as listening to historical accounts of people whose lives were completely transformed by this practice, I was keen to explore the psychological benefits and challenges of the practice by adopting a phenomenological approach to it.

The experiment therefore involved the following steps: 1) to offer my acts, thoughts and emotions as often as I could 2) to observe what this practice was doing to the quality of my work, my stress levels and its overall impact on the psychological dimension 3) to maintain a diary of the practice and my observations including its benefits and challenges over a period of three weeks.

Observations and analysis

In the course of the practice, one of the significant observations was that the

act of surrendering seemed to take place at two levels: a) Mental, using the continuous chanting of a mantra, which tended to be more mechanical and b) Emotional, based on visualising a godhead like Krishna or Shiva or more often my gurus, The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, with the spirit of surrender which resulted in the following: a) the surrender seemed to be more genuine and complete b) there was an increase in *bhakti* towards the Godhead or the guru c) I became more keenly aware of trying to implement the teachings of my gurus while performing my tasks.

These initial observations on the effect of practising surrender are further elaborated herewith with an attempt to analyse the sequence of the subtler psychological processes that accompanied the act itself along with its benefits and challenges.

Impact on Works

First and foremost, the practice of surrender had a significant impact on the quality of work that was being performed. Whenever I remembered to do an action, be it sweeping the floor or cooking or doing some reading or writing, with the attitude of surrender, I found the following results:

- 1) My attention and awareness increased more acutely of the present moment because of the thought, 'I surrender this to the Divine'
- 2) My concentration increased and proportionately the degree of sincerity in performing that chore
- 3) It helped me put in my best efforts as I was keen to offer my very best to my guru
- 4) The quality of work improved
- 5) There was a greater sense of satisfaction and happiness at an emotional level

Impact on the factor of Agency

An important aspect of the practice of surrender is the constant remembrance of the idea 'I am not the doer but a mere instrument of a higher Force within or without'. Psychologically, it entails the following:

- 1) Recognising that the basis of my actions is from the limited standpoint of my ego-self
- 2) Trusting that there is a higher Self within which knows the best course of action to be undertaken at any given time
- 3) Letting go of the controls from the ego-self and allowing oneself to be guided by the all-knowing greater Self.

- 4) Practically, this implies that one first pauses one's habitual tendencies of a constant mind-chatter that instantly reacts to/ judges every single stimulus it receives from the external circumstances. Next, one starts observing what in reality is happening while withholding one's judgements when one acts
- 5) 'Listening' very carefully to the 'guidance' that seems to emerge from somewhere deep within the being which suggests the 'wisest' way of acting, thinking and speaking and then implementing it with faith and conviction
- 6) In short, consciously transferring over the controls of one's actions from the ego-self to the higher Self

It is important to note at this point that, in reality, however, practising surrender to the level of actually becoming a genuine instrument, demands a high degree of uncompromising sincerity and objectivity regarding oneself. The impetus and motivation for our actions are generally conditioned by our past experiences, future expectations, beliefs, biases and so on, that subconsciously influence all we do. To be absolutely sure that the 'guidance' is coming from the real deeper Self requires diligent and persistent efforts. But based on the authoritative assurance of one's guru, who has previously rigorously undertaken the practice and succeeded, one has to persevere in being open to 'listening' to the undistorted indications of the Self and make that the basis of one's actions.

Personally, there was a lot of resistance from the ego-self to surrender and become an instrument. Fortunately, in one particular instance when I managed to be more sincere in my practice, I discovered that one of the benefits of acting with the thought of being an instrument was that one experiences much less fatigue even if the day has been long and exhausting. The act of accepting to become an instrument seemed to lighten the burden of responsibilities and exertion and left me feeling freer and relaxed at the end of an extremely busy day. Furthermore, it led naturally to the feeling of humility as the realisation dawned that our usual capabilities are so limited compared to magnificent potential of the Self within.

Surrender as a de-stressor

One of the greatest benefits that resulted from the practice of surrender was that it was helpful in resolving emotionally stressful situations by facilitating an attitude of detachment. To cite a specific case: Once I was terribly angry with a friend after a heated argument around 11 o'clock in the morning. I kept reminding myself that I should inwardly surrender all that had happened – the words exchanged as well as the anger – to my guru and move on. Psychologically,

this act of surrender would correspond to the act of accepting whatever happened and letting it go by handing it over to the guru and forgetting about it as well as forgiving the individual.

As matters stood that day, I tried consciously to surrender the heated argument and all that followed. For a while, my mind was calm but then within a few moments, all the pent up anger and retorts returned in my head as if the episode was being re-enacted again and again with the same vehemence and reasonings to justify my anger. This led me to raise some serious questions about the act of ‘surrendering’ itself that I was claiming to do. ‘What had I really surrendered?’ ‘If I had genuinely surrendered everything, then what was it that I was still brooding upon because nothing should have remained with me?’ and so on. I had no answers but I continued to visualise that I was offering the unpleasant incident to my guru. Sadly, nothing significant happened for the next couple of hours except for experiencing moments of calm followed by the emotional storm in my head. But I persisted with the attitude of surrender and suddenly, towards five o’clock in the evening when we were returning by car, my ‘aha’ moment happened! The psychological process of what happened is as follows:

- 1) All of a sudden, I was able to detach myself completely from the event and look at it as if I were a spectator to it and therefore being completely free from its emotional trappings while being fully present with it, an experience that resembled what happens when one cultivates *sākṣi bhāva* or Witness Consciousness.
- 2) I was then objectively able to revisit the episode and recognise where I had got emotionally carried away.
- 3) A clear understanding of what had transpired made it easier for me to i) accept my fault, ii) forgive him, iii) apologise to him for my unpleasant behaviour d) discuss the sequence of events that led to the unpleasantness in an open-minded amicable manner.

Thus, this experience served to teach me that surrender could be used as a powerful and effective emotional de-stressor when done sincerely.

Surrender and Gratitude

Another significant benefit that resulted from the practice of surrender was the experience of an overwhelming sense of gratitude. As I was watching a group of physically challenged children perform a dance with the spirit of surrender, I was enveloped by a deep sense of gratitude and thankfulness for having a normal body with all its faculties intact and for all that I had received in terms of the support I get from family and friends, the education and the

professional experiences I have got etc. A quote by an author, Melody Beattie (Beattie, 2014), powerfully summarises the psychological impact of gratitude that I underwent that day. She says:

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

Challenges in the practice of Surrender

The paper has thus far listed the major psychological benefits that were experienced as a result of practising surrender. There were, however, some real challenges that came up during this practise that are given below:

- 1) To remember to surrender as often as possible in the course of the day
- 2) To practise detachment while remaining fully involved in the activity
- 3) To overcome the resistance of ego-self which likes to remain in control always
- 4) To stop all forms mind-chatter resulting from partial knowledge and consciously aligning with the intention of surrender.
- 5) To recognise my ‘shadow self’ which became more apparent as a result of practising detachment and to deal with it in a healthy manner, free of judgments, guilt or self-depreciation by accepting to offer not just the best in myself but also the worst in order for it to be transformed.

Hence, three weeks of dedicated practice taught me that to surrender sincerely, one needs to be very extremely vigilant with oneself and persevere despite all forms of resistances and to be able to observe any significant and lasting benefit from it.

Conclusion

To summarise, I would like to say that despite having read a variety of literature on the practice of surrender from the Eastern and Western perspectives, it was only when I actually started applying it in my life in a systematic manner and keeping a regular record of its effects, that I started to really understand and appreciate its value and become aware of the different kinds of challenges it posed.

Moreover, I became aware that the degree of sincerity with which one practised surrender was directly proportional to its transformational impact on one’s nature. When it was not sincere, then it would become a pretext for

masking my weaknesses. But if done sincerely, it served to increase the conscious moments in my day and act as reminder of the two levels of our existence that we can potentially operate from – the surface superficial layer of our being that is governed by the ego-self and which is more fickle in its motivations and actions as well as limited in its perception and understanding of world around and its happenings. The other is the deeper and more authentic layer of our individuality which is intrinsically aware of the underlying purpose of our experiences and therefore capable of assessing events in the light of a broader perspective which then serves as a more reliable basis for all action and being.

To conclude, the practice of surrender enabled me to get a clearer understanding of some of the fundamental questions that arose when I started the experiment. More importantly, however, it became apparent how practising *Ātmanivedanam* served to build a bridge between the two selves of an individual in a manner to allow a conscious transfer of the controls of one's being and actions from the limited ego-self to a more omniscient Self. This leads to a major shift in the locus of one's identity resulting in a transformation of one's nature and facilitating Self-knowledge and liberation.

Finally, I would like to end by submitting that the selection of this particular topic was inspired by the following words of the Mother's on Surrender on 11th May 1967 (briefly quoted above) regarding the singular importance of this practice in the present conditions of the world.

You see, in the present condition of the world, circumstances are always difficult. The whole world is in a condition of strife, conflict, between the forces of truth and light wanting to manifest and the opposition of all that does not want to change, which represents in the past what is fixed, hardened and refuses to go. Naturally, each individual feels his own difficulties and is faced by the same obstacles.

There is only one way for you. It is a total, complete and unconditional surrender. What I mean by that is the giving up not only of your actions, work, ambitions, but also of all your feelings, in the sense that all that you do, all that you are, is exclusively for the Divine. So, you feel above the surrounding human reactions — not only above them but protected from them by the wall of the Divine's Grace. Once you have no more desires no more attachments, once you have given up all necessity of receiving a reward from human beings, whoever they are — knowing that the only reward that is worth getting is the one that comes from the Supreme and that never fails

— once you give up the attachment to all exterior beings and things, you at once feel in your heart this Presence, this Force, this Grace that is always with you.

And there is no other remedy. It's the only remedy, for *everybody* without exception. To all those who suffer, it is the same thing that has to be said: all suffering is the sign that the surrender is not total. Then, when you feel in you a "bang", like that, instead of saying, "Oh, this is bad" or "This circumstance is difficult," you say, "My surrender is not perfect." Then it's all right. And then you feel the Grace that helps you and leads you, and you go on. And one day you emerge into that peace that nothing can trouble. You answer to all the contrary forces, the contrary movements, the attacks, the misunderstandings, the bad wills, with the same smile that comes from full confidence in the Divine Grace. And that is the only way out, there is no other. This world is a world of conflict, suffering, difficulty, strain; it is made of it. It has not yet changed, it will take some time before changing. And for each one there is a possibility of getting out. If you lean back on the presence of the Supreme Grace, that is the only way out. (Mother, CWM, Ibid, pp.419-20)

In the course of three weeks of sincere and systematic efforts, I had a fleeting experience of Her guarantee of the power of Surrender but it was enough to reassure me that it can serve as a sunlit path in the wilderness of life's myriad challenges.

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Evolution of the Vedic Spirit: A Psychological Perspective

M.S. Srinivasan

What is the relevance of the Vedic spiritual ethos to the future of religion and spirituality? This article examines this question in a psychological and evolutionary perspective.

The Significance of Vedic Spirituality

The future of spirituality is moving towards something beyond the spirit of formal religion. One of the major defects of the religious spirit of the past is that it confined itself mainly to belief and dogma and a formal piety; it made no attempt towards a scientific, systematic, psychological and inward-turning quest for the highest spiritual truth leading to a spiritual transformation of consciousness. Even the mystic elements in religion which insisted on this spiritual conversion is satisfied with a self-contained and an exclusively in-drawn spirituality and made no attempt to bring down the light and power of the spiritual consciousness to the physical and vital life of man. The mystic who is able to achieve some state of inner spiritual illumination tends to dismiss the formal religion as a mass of ignorance and superstition and the worldly life as a tale of woe or an illusion. The quest of traditional mysticism in general is exclusive rather than comprehensive; no positive attempt is made to understand the deeper truth and evolutionary significance of the various motives and stages of human life; no creative spiritual compassion for the upliftment of the collective life of man. What is lacking in traditional mysticism is the comprehensive spiritual wisdom which rejects none of the human activities or motives but tries to gradually illumine and uplift them to higher and higher levels of motivation, idealism and truth until the whole of human life and its every activity — its religion, culture, science, economics, politics, society — are illumined with its highest truth, purpose and destiny and transformed in the light and force of an all-embracing spiritual illumination. The future of human evolution is moving towards

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such a comprehensive spirituality.

The Vedic Rishis possessed such a comprehensive spiritual wisdom and was relatively free from the negative trends of the religions or mysticism of the later periods. The Vedic Rishis tried to bring down the light and power of a higher spiritual consciousness into the physical life of man. The ritualistic method may not be suited to the present times but the central vision, ideals and aim of the Vedic Rishis have a living relevance for the future evolution of humanity. For the highest aim of the future will be the direct government of the material life of man by the spiritual consciousness. At present it is the powers of the mental world which govern the physical and vital life of man. But in future this government of mental intelligence will be replaced by the government of the spiritual consciousness or in other words as the Mother points out “that physical life must be governed by the higher consciousness and not by the mental world”.⁽¹⁾

For this to happen we need a dynamic spiritual philosophy and discipline which can give a total spiritual motivation and direction to the whole of the inner and outer life in all its dimension – physical, vital and mental. The Vedic spirituality is, in essence, such a dynamic spiritual philosophy and discipline. But the truth was concealed behind a system of esoteric symbolism. The meaning of the symbols and the inner discipline was revealed only to the fit initiates, the “twice born,” while the masses were given only an outer religious discipline made of symbolic rituals.

But esotericism, however well-intentioned and whatever may be its utility in the past, has no place in the present or future world, which is moving towards a new era in which as Sri Aurobindo prophesied

Even the multitude shall hear the voice
And turn to commune with the Spirit within ⁽²⁾.

We need a new expression of the essential spirit of the Vedas in a new form which can be understood by the modern mentality and accessible to the masses.

Fortunately the Vedic spirit is not a static entity like the spirit of other religion but a progressive, flexible and adaptive spiritual force which in the course of its later evolution gave birth to many innovative self-expressions of its essential truth. So to create new forms of the Vedic spirit for the present or future we can get sufficient clues from the later developments in our own spiritual traditions. If we can examine deeply the psychological evolution of the Vedic spirit we may possibly get all the important clues needed for creating a new life and body to the Vedic spirit suited to the modern age and the emerging future.

The Upanishadic Epiphany

The Upanishads are the first and the earliest self-expression of the Vedic spirit in its progressive evolution. The Vedas are the creation of the spiritual mind expressing directly through the sensational mentality of the physical being of man. For in the Vedic age, the intellectual-rational mind was not well developed. When the intellectual mind started developing the spiritual consciousness, it expressed itself through this newly developed faculty. The Upanishad is the expression of the Vedic spirit through the intellectual and thinking mind in the form of a compact, luminous and intuitive thought. In this process, the thinking mind of the community opened itself to the influence of the spiritual consciousness and this influence remained as one of the firmly implanted features of the Indian civilisation and culture. Most of the western and Indian scholars viewed the Upanishad as some sort of a radical and revolutionary departure from the Vedic spirit. But in fact there is no such revolt or radical shift in the spirit but only a shift in the faculty and form of expression. These scholars, unable to penetrate behind the mystic symbolism of the Vedic sages, mistook the luminous intellectual clarity of expression in the Upanishad as a sign of spiritual superiority. They tend to forget the fact that Upanishadic sages held the Vedic revelation in the highest respect and frequently quoted the Vedas as the highest authority for supporting their own intuitions.

So there is no radical discontinuity between the spirit of the Vedas and the spirit of the Upanishads. In fact there is a smooth and gradual evolutionary continuity, some of the earliest Upanishads like *Bṛihadaranyaka* using the same Vedic symbols. The essential experiences, the central spiritual intuitions and the seed-ideas of the Vedas are nowhere denied in the Upanishads but only re-experienced, rediscovered, clarified, developed and re-expressed in a different form and through a different mentality.⁽³⁾

So between the Upanishadic and Vedic age there is no radical change in the spirit but only a change in the forms of self-expression and in the psychology or mentality through which it is expressed. However we have to admit that there is a definite and gradual change in the psychology and temperament of the Upanishadic religion in the course of time, moving away from the synthetic and life-affirming spirituality of the Vedas and towards an exclusive and ascetic spirituality culminating in the trenchant life-denying formula *Brahman Satyam, Jagat Mithya*. “Brahman is Truth, world is an Illusion.” How and why this happened is a subject of historical interest which we will not be discussing here. We are interested mainly in the psychological significance of the Upanishadic movement and what light it can throw on the future evolution of the Vedic spirit.

The Upanishadic age begins with the manifestation of a new faculty, reflective and analytical thought, which is dormant in the Vedic age, comes into conscious activity in this age. The spiritual minds of the age, in making use of this faculty to express their intuitions and experiences, open the possibility for this part of human consciousness to receive and express the light of the Spirit. So the Upanishadic spirituality represents the taking up of the intellectual mind and will by the Spirit and creating in it the capacity to receive and express the spiritual truth. This gave birth to a new type of spiritual man; the seer-poet of the Vedas is replaced by the sage-philosopher. In this process a predominantly contemplative spirituality with a central emphasis on self-knowledge and on the impersonal aspect of the Reality replaced the more devotional, active, synthetic, theistic, gods-centred spirituality of the Vedas. Much of the positive and prominent features of the Vedic spirituality is pushed to the background. For example, the dynamic note with a constant emphasis on sacrificial action, — harmonious balance struck between heaven and earth or in other words this worldly interests and other-worldly aims — and a wise, compassionate and uplifting hand extended for the spiritual evolution of the secular life of the common man — all these unique features of the Vedic spirituality are to a certain extent veiled, pushed back or even lost in the Upanishadic spirituality, especially in the later Upanishads.

But the contribution of Upanishads to the religious, spiritual, philosophic and psychological thought of the world is something profound and immeasurable. No other scripture in the world has revealed the true nature of the Divinity and its relation to Man with such a striking boldness, clarity and creative force as the Upanishadic epiphany. Its message explodes into the human consciousness as a bombshell of light. The central intuitions of the Upanishadic thought surpass in their originality and creative force all other creative ideas of the human mind.

The first major achievement of the Upanishadic movement lies in the luminous clarity and originality of expression in communicating a concrete, living and vivid perception, intuition, experience and realisation of an infinite, eternal and universal Reality, a spaceless and timeless Existence, becoming, pervading and expanding into Space and Time and all that is in space and Time, an essential indivisible spiritual unity upholding the phenomenal diversity of creation and becoming the immortal soul in man. This idea of the Infinite is presented not as a food for speculative thought or as a utopian ideal with no bearing on life but as something to be lived and made real to the consciousness. And the result of such a realisation is *moksha*, a total inner spiritual freedom from ego and desire and conscious immortality. For the experience of the infinite unity of the self leads to total release from all bondage formed by ego and desire. Thus the idea

of infinity and eternity and the concept of *moksha* are psychologically related ideas, the latter is the psychological result on the human consciousness of the experience or realisation of the former.

The second intuition of the Upanishad is the identity of the individual self with the universal Self or in other words, the individual I and the universal I are one, what we call God or the Divine is our own essential, highest, deepest and inmost Self, beyond Mind, at once universal and transcendent beyond the universe; this highest self of you and me and all beings and the universe is one, rather a One, the ultimate Unity beyond or outside which and without which nothing exists. This self or Atman is the very ground of our being or the BE-ness or IS-ness of all that exists or in other words, it is that gives existence to all that is.

The third great intuition of the Upanishad is that the essential nature of this supreme and eternal Existence or Self is an eternal Consciousness with an eternal Force, *Devatman Shakti*, inherent in it and the nature of this eternal conscious-force is eternal Delight, Ananda. Thus an infinite and eternal Being or BE-ness whose nature is an infinite and eternal Consciousness-Force-Delight is the Upanishadic intuition of the nature of the supreme Reality.

Here comes the most optimistic and hopeful note of the Upanishadic thought which has a living relevance for the future of psychological thought and practice. For, according to Upanishad, the highest and the ultimate nature of life is not a sorrowful flame of illusion driven by desire which is finally extinguished in a void, but an eternal delight; delight is the *summum bonum* of existence; delight is the essence, source, sustenance and goal of human life and experience; world is the rhythmic outflowing of this delight. From delight we come, in delight we live, to delight we return and none can live or breathe even for a second without this delight, says *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Meditate on the self as “that delight,” says the sage of the *Kena Upanishad*. If we accept this Upanishadic intuition, that the essence of all the experiences of life, whether it is pleasurable, painful or neutral is delight, and base our thought and practice on this intuition, then our whole life acquires a positive, optimistic and hopeful motivation.

The fourth great intuition of the Upanishad is the psychological and spiritual evolution of man. In fact, the modern theories on evolution, the scientific theory of biological evolution of Darwin and the idea of spiritual evolution of Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin are foreshadowed in the Upanishads. The parable of *Aitareya Upanishad* hints at a theory of form evolution of Darwin. This parable says that when the consciousness of the divine Self in Man, Purusha, differentiated itself into various faculties like speech, hearing, vision, mind etc. and was trying to find a suitable material form to inhabit, first he was

offered some animal forms like cow, horse etc. but the gods — representing the various faculties of consciousness — refuse to enter into them because they are not suitable. And finally when the form of Man is shown the gods are pleased and enter into it. This Upanishadic parable also hints at one of the central ideas of spiritual evolution that it is the evolution of consciousness which determines the evolution of outer material form and not vice versa.

This idea of spiritual evolution of Man, which was developed into a comprehensive luminous vision by Sri Aurobindo, was also hinted in the Upanishad. In the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, Bhrigu, the sage, guides the disciple, who is his own son, step by step towards the highest truth. First he asks his son to do *tapas* which means to concentrate or energise the consciousness on the idea, *Annam* or Food or Matter which is Brahman. From matter everything is born, by which everything we live and into which everything returns. After the discipline has realised this idea in his consciousness he was again asked to do *tapas* on a higher principle, life-force or *prana* as Brahman and then again successively on the ideas of Mind, *manas* as Brahman, Supermind or *vijnana* as Brahman and finally Bliss or *ananda* as Brahman. The last two principles *vijnana* and *ananda* belong to the world of the Spirit.

And the individual Man is a microcosm of the Macrocosm. The five cosmic principles — matter, life, mind, supermind, and bliss — forming the five planes, worlds or *lokas* of the cosmic consciousness of the transcendent self, express themselves in the microcosmic individual human being as five distinct sheaths, *koshas*, each presided over by a unique poise of the divine self in man. They are *annamaya kosha*, the physical sheath presided over by a physical being, *annamaya purusha*; *pranamaya kosha*, vital sheath presided over by a *pranamaya purusha* vital being; *manomaya kosha*, mental sheath presided over by a *manomaya purusha*, mental being; and finally the spiritual dimension in man — made of the *vijnanamaya* and *anandamaya koshas* presided over by corresponding purushas.

This comprehensive intuition of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* has made some lasting and important contributions to Indian psychology and Yoga. First it gives a clear picture of the psycho-spiritual structure of man as a fourfold being with a physical, vital, mental and spiritual dimension; second, it gives a clear clue to the nature and process of the psychological and spiritual evolution of man in the individual and the collectivity. It is a movement from the physical to the vital, vital to the mental and from the mental to the spiritual, an inward subjective movement towards deeper and higher levels of consciousness, with a corresponding change in the vision and values of life; third it indicates the primary

means by which this inner psycho-spiritual evolution can be effected, *tapas* or concentration or energisation of consciousness.

These are the central intuitions of the Upanishad. Not all these ideas are entirely original. For as we have already said, most of these ideas are already there in the seed-form in the Vedas concealed behind images and symbols. For example the idea of chit or supreme consciousness is imaged in the Vedas in the figure of the Light or the Sun. And the concept of *Devatman Shakti* of the Upanishads, which became later the *chit-shakti* of the Tantras is already there in the Vedas in the living image of the great Goddess Aditi, the infinite and indivisible Mother of the Gods and in the other Vedic terms like *rta-chit* or *rtam jyoti*. And the highest spiritual worlds beyond the heaven of the Mind are described by the Vedic sages as the worlds of “Vast Bliss” *Mayas*.

This shows that the essential spiritual experiences of the Vedic and Upanishadic sages are not very different. The originality of the Upanishads is not in the newness of its ideas but in the nature and form of its creative expression which tears down the symbolic veil covering the Vedic truth and makes the truth intelligible to the higher intelligence.

But the most important and original contribution of the Upanishad from the point of view of Yogic psychology is that it lays down clearly all the basic principles of the practical psychological discipline by which all these spiritual truths revealed by it can be “realised” by the mind or to be more specific, by the intelligent will, *Buddhi*. The Upanishadic yoga is predominantly a yoga of knowledge which makes use of the highest faculty of knowledge in man, the *Buddhi*, the discriminative and intelligent will, to raise beyond the ordinary to the spiritual mind. The yogic philosophy of the Upanishad enunciates three principles: *tapas*, introversion and renunciation, which became the foundation of later Indian Yoga. These principles are or will be discussed in greater detail in other sections. In short we may say the Upanishadic movement makes the Vedic truth accessible to and realisable by the higher intelligence, the *Buddhi*.

But for an integral spiritual transformation it is not enough for *Buddhi* to be spiritualised. The dynamic vital will and emotions in man should also be able to receive and express the Truth. This should be the logical next step in the evolution of the Vedic spirit. And this next step is taken in the great spiritual synthesis of the Gita.

The Synthesis of the Gita

We have become so familiar with the Gita’s message we think we have “understood” this profound spiritual classic. While lauding its “eternal message which is relevant for all time” we have missed its specific relevance for the

future of mankind.

Here it would be interesting to narrate a traditional Indian lore about Gita, which like all ancient lores, hold within a web of hyperbolic exaggeration, a great truth about Gita. This traditional lore asks who knows the whole message of the Gita and goes on to say that Lord Krishna knows the entire truth of Gita, Vyasa who has composed it knows much of it, Arjuna to whom its message is revealed knows a little bit of it and others know nothing of it. Perhaps all the great illustrious commentators of the past on the Gita knew like Arjuna only a little bit of its message. But as Gita itself points out, even a little bit of its immortalising Dharma can save man from the “great fear”, so even if a fragment of the truth of Gita’s message which comes through the commentaries of the great spiritual minds of India could be made a part of human consciousness, it will guide humanity safely towards its evolutionary future.

The most glaring lacuna in the past commentaries of Gita is the lack of appreciation of the importance of Gita in understanding some of the central intuitions of the Vedas. For example, the inner meaning of the Vedic concept and practice of Sacrifice was revealed in the Gita with a luminous intellectual clarity and its philosophic and psychological significance laid bare divested of all mystic, symbolic and ritualistic veils. Gita gives an entirely philosophic and psychological meaning to the concept of sacrifice, *yajna*. “With sacrifice” says the Gita “the Lord of creatures of old created creatures and said, by this shall you bring forth fruits, let this be your milker of desires. Foster by this the gods and let the gods foster you; fostering each other, you shall attain to the supreme good. Fostered by sacrifice, the gods shall give you desired enjoyment; who enjoys their given enjoyments and has not given to them, he is a thief. The good are those who eat what is left from the sacrifice, and they are released from all sin; but evil are they and enjoy sin who cook (the food) for their own sake.” And in another verse Gita describes the spiritual significance of sacrifice: “Brahman is the giver, Brahman is the food-offering, by Brahman it is offered into the Brahman-fire, Brahman is that which is to be attained by *samadhi* in Brahman-action”. These two verses bring out clearly the law of unity and mutual interdependence of existence which is the spiritual and psychological rationale of sacrifice.

But the greatest contribution of the Gita is that it gives a simple but very effective psychological discipline by which the Vedic concept of sacrifice can be lived inwardly and the whole of life can be made into a living and devoted sacrifice to the Eternal. In the Gita’s disciplines of karma yoga we have a simple, non-ritualistic, easy-to-understand method of self-discipline which can be practised by anyone with a minimum of intelligence and can give a total

spiritual motivation and direction to the entire life of the individual. To be more specific, Gita provides the most effective and powerful discipline for the spiritual transformation of the dynamic will in man, which is turned towards action, and driven by desire. In other words, the Vedic Spirit acquires a new form and discipline accessible to and realisable by the vital will in man and creates the possibility for the spiritual light and power to descend into and take possession of this part of human nature.

So, if Upanishad opens the possibility for the spiritual light and power to descend into and spiritualise the intelligence, in Gita’s Karma yoga this possibility descends further down into the dynamic vital will. But the vital being in man is not only a being of desire and action but also the seat of feelings, emotions and sensations. No real spiritual transformation is possible without the transformation of this emotional being in man. This is the aim of the Bhakti Yoga of Gita. If the aim of Karma yoga of the Gita is to turn the vital will in man to God, the aim of Gita’s yoga of devotion is to turn the emotional being to God. This is sought to be done by turning the feelings and emotions with a deep love and adoration to the Godhead as the divine dwelling within the heart of every human being. There is an element of devotion in the Vedic and Upanishadic Yoga. But it is mainly made of worship and submission. The Gita brings in the element of deep and intimate adoration of the indwelling Godhead and an enlightened surrender of the whole being, especially the dynamic being in man driven by desire and the urge for action, to the divine Person and his Will.

The Path of Vaishnava Yoga

But only in the Vaishnava Yoga, the concept of bhakti attains a concentrated intensity by bringing in the element of intense personal intimacy and richness to the relations between man and God. This spiritual potentiality or possibility of an intimate personal relation with the indwelling godhead revealed in Vaishnavism was further explored by the later bhakti schools in India in the form of a many-sided relationship with the Divine as Father, Mother, Friend, Lover, Child, turning all these human relationships and the corresponding emotions Godward.

Vaishnavism lacks the dynamic integrality and comprehensiveness of Gita’s Yog; it is only a specialised and exclusive cut-view or bypaths of Gita’s vast and integral synthetic vision. But Vaishnavism explores certain new spiritual possibilities of the emotional being in man which remained either unexplored or underdeveloped in the earlier spiritual systems. One of these possibilities is the complete spiritual transformation of the emotional being of man by turning all his emotions including some of his negative emotions like anger, hatred, jealousy, sex etc. towards God.

This is to a certain extent a revolutionary spiritual innovation. In the earlier yogas, the leading power of yoga is either the will or the higher thinking intelligence. The emotional being is stilled and subjected to the control of *buddhi*, the thinking intelligence; it is allowed to have only those feelings permitted by the *buddhi*. But in the Vaishnava yoga the situation is reversed. The emotional being is made the leading power of yoga and the *buddhi* is subordinated to it. The emotions are allowed free play in the entire range of its feeling from the sublime, not-so-sublime and the lower passions, but all directed to the indwelling Divine with the faith that this will purify and transform the emotions. How far and to what extent this faith and the method is valid or effective in the transformation of the emotional being is a controversial question. There is a deep psychological insight behind the Vaishnava yoga. But in applying this insight to practical sadhana we cannot say that the Vaishnava yoga succeeded entirely in transforming the emotional being. But from an evolutionary perspective, the attempt of the Vaishnava yoga to spiritualise the emotional being, by turning even the negative emotions towards the Divine is a great experiment in the spiritual history of humanity.

The Tantric Experiment

But even Gita and Vaishnavism taken together do not express all the dynamic comprehensiveness and integrality of the Vedic spirit but only some aspect of it. The Vedic emphasis on sacrificial action is given the most luminous, clear and practical form in the Gita. The other aspect of the Vedic spirit, that of life-acceptance was also affirmed by Gita but not with the same amount of joy or spiritual positivism as we find in the Vedas. There were still in the Gita some traces of the melancholic spirit of the later Vedanta, reflected for example in that famous verse of the Gita which addresses men “O mortal who has come into this sorrowful transient world”.

This other important aspect of the Vedic spirit, that of joyous acceptance of life, was rediscovered in the Tantras with an extraordinary creative vigour and boldness that surpasses in some respects even the spirit of Vedic sages. Here we have a spiritual thought and practice which is at once scientific, rational and intuitive, not rigidly systematised but thrown loosely in the form of symbols, legends, parables, myths, philosophies and systems of practice, bewildering to the ordinary rational mind, sometimes repulsive to the conventional morality, but absorbingly fascinating and highly evocative to the intuitive mind and the feeling heart. Here we have a spiritual philosophy based on an original intuition into the primal Two-in-One in the Absolute, Shiva and Shakti, the eternal self-existence and self-luminous conscious Being and the creative energy of

consciousness inherent in the Being, and a “scientific” conception of the world — world of matter, life and mind — as a creative movement of the Energy of Consciousness.

But the Tantric philosophy doesn’t have the saw-dust dryness of the modern scientific philosophies. The Energy which gives birth to the world is not an unconscious force or a mathematical abstraction but a living conscious being, the Mother of the worlds, the all-blissful, all-beautiful, all-gracious and adorable Creatrix of the Universe. World is the blissful *lila* or sport or one-act play of the Divine Mother, which she plays within her own consciousness, with many masks, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, herself the player, the play and the stage. The ultimate aim of the Tantric path is to become a conscious and joyful participant in the cosmic *lila* of the Mother and the dynamic instrument, *Adhikari Purusha*, of her cosmic purpose and will. The Tantric yoga like its philosophy is a loose, flexible and intuitive syntheses of every conceivable form of religious, psychological and spiritual methods; it takes each individual as he is according to his unique nature, temperament, capacity, qualities and evolutionary conditions and tries to provide a system of discipline specific to the unique needs of the individual and the type.

But, unfortunately, in some of the popular expositions of the Tantras, especially in the west, one of the bold and controversial experiments of the Tantric Yoga, the so-called “left-hand” path, *Vama Marga*, with its wine and women symbolism, is exaggerated, out of proportion and presented as the core of Tantric sadhana. But in the Tantric sadhana, the *Vama marga* is prescribed neither for the masses nor for the highest type of spiritual seekers but for a special category of seekers who are in-between. So to make the “left-hand” path of the Tantras as the core of Tantric sadhana is a gross misreading of this great, bold and fascinating spiritual system.

But the most important contribution of Tantras from the yogic point of view is its famous *kundalini yoga*. The central idea of *kundalini yoga* is that our body or the physical being is the base and foundation of all other higher forms of energies and contains potentially within itself all the possibilities of divine perfection.

The *kundalini shakti*, according to the Tantras is the microcosmic expression of the cosmic shakti or *Mahakundalini* in the individual. It lies coiled and folded up in the lowest energy centre at the bottom of the spine in the human body as potential energy inherent in the sex-fluid. When this bottom most energy centre is activated by *tapas*, inner heat produced by concentration, the sleeping *kundalini* is awakened, uncoils itself, raises upwards, piercing through different higher energy-centres in the body and finally reaches the highest energy-centre

in the head where it is said, that the *kundalini shakti* is united with Shiva. This is the state of highest beatitude, perfection and liberation for the Tantric Yogi.

There are, according to the Tantras, centres in the human body, each of which links the human being to the corresponding levels or planes of the cosmic consciousness. As the *kundalini shakti* raises upwards, she opens up these centres, enabling the yogi to enter into conscious contact with these higher level of the cosmic planes with its corresponding worlds, beings, psychic and spiritual states and new and greater faculties of knowledge, power, mastery and enjoyment.

The process of this ascension of the *kundalini* is described in the Tantric texts as a progressive reabsorption of the grosser into finer elements from earth into water, water into fire, fire into air and from air into the primal ether. This represents a progressive transformation of the physical energy — imaged in the figure of the earth — into finer and finer forms of energy until it is transformed into *ojas*, the primal spiritual energy inherent in the ether, Space. This is the reverse of creative evolution by which spirit becomes matter by a progressive contracting or condensation of its consciousness-force. The raising of the *kundalini shakti* represents the “re-evolution” of matter towards the spirit by a progressive and pervasive “decondensation” of the consciousness-force inherent in Matter until it becomes one in nature with its own original status as the consciousness-force of the spirit.

Thus the ultimate aim of Tantric yoga is the union of the two ends of the being, Matter and Spirit, and the transformation of physical energy into spiritual energy. For the union of ascending *kundalini shakti* — who in her unawakened status is primarily a biological energy sleeping at the bottom of the spine — with the Shiva, represents the union of the Spirit and Matter.

So the Tantric system is not a path of negation but a path of affirmation involving a progressive integration and assimilation of the cosmos into the self. It aims at a comprehensive spiritual perfection of which *Mukti* or liberation is only one aspect or part of the goal. The other aspect of the goal is mastery, *siddhi*, and enjoyment *bhukti* — mastery over the energies of Nature and the enjoyment of the cosmic life as blissful *lila* of the Mother.

The other unique features of the Tantric religion are the institution of temple worship and the system of rituals. Temple in the Tantric system is not merely a place of communal worship. In its original conception, the institution of temple worship has two distinct aims. Its spiritual aim is to bring down and establish a living spiritual power in the community for the spiritual as well as material progress and protection of the community; its social aim is to create a centre for the religious and cultural integration of the community. For the temple in ancient India is not merely a religious institution but also the centre of culture,

throbbing with cultural activities like music, dance and learning And finally a note on Tantric rituals which form an important part of Tantric yoga. The Tantric rituals are not merely a concession thrown to the inferior category of worshippers. They are based on a sound psychological knowledge of the mutual interaction of the body and mind. For the large mass of worshipers who live predominantly in their bodily consciousness and whose emotion and intelligence are not yet sufficiently developed for the practice of inner adoration or contemplation, the physical gesture of rituals can be a very effective means of concentration and opening their consciousness to some glimpse, feeling or intuition into of spiritual reality. And for the higher category of seeker, ritual is a means for invoking the deity or the cosmic energy into the body.

Thus we can see that Tantras is a bold, catholic and innovative spiritual system which comes very close to a complete recovery of the Vedic Spirit in all its comprehensiveness.

We can find in the Tantras all the major features of the Vedic Spirit, which were more or less lost in the other yogas, fully recovered and given a new form. We have the same joyous life-affirming spirituality and harmonious balance between this-worldly and other-worldly aims, the same compassionate uplifting hand extended to the common man and the same Vedic emphasis on the psychological and spiritual potentialities inherent in the body or physical being. But from the evolutionary point of view, the significance of the Tantras lies in the importance it gave to the body. For the Tantric Yogi body is not an illusion or a clod of flesh to be despised but a form and the physical manifestation of the divine Mother-power and therefore sacred. And a major part of the Tantric sadhana aims at making the body conscious of itself as the expression and instrument of the divine shakti. As John B. Woodroffe, the well-known authority on Tantras describes the Tantric standpoint:

“The body is Shakti. Its needs are Shakti’s needs; when man enjoys, it is Shakti who enjoys through him. In all he sees and does, it is the Mother who looks and acts. His eyes and hands are hers. The whole body and all its functions are her manifestations. To fully realise her as such is to perfect this particular manifestation of Hers in himself” (*Shakti and Shakta*, p.440)

Thus to feel the divinity in the body and every activity of the body is the Tantric ideal.

The Indian mythology, what are called in Indian religions as *puranas*, and the dharma expounded in them, are based primarily on the Tantric synthesis but sufficiently diluted to suit the religious aspirations of the common man or the masses. But the dilution is minimum and the central ideas of the Vedantic and

tantric tradition are preserved intact throughout the rich plethora of symbolic legends, stories and parables. In fact, the Purano-tantric religion is one of the most creative and innovative movements in the diffusion of spirituality to the masses, a creative tour-de-force in mass communication.

Two remarkable achievements of the Purana-tantric religions are first, it was able to communicate effectively and establish successfully in the collective consciousness of the Indian masses most of the central truths of the Indian spirituality and Yoga without much dilution in the process of communication; second, it was able to create a new system of religious symbolism with a deeper and a more cosmic and psychological significance than the purely naturalistic symbolism of the Vedas. This opened the possibility for even the common man to arrive at a deeper, more inward and psychologically concrete religious experience than that of his counterpart in the Vedic period.

Thus, the purano-tantric religion not only brings down but diffuses the spiritual possibility into the physical consciousness in which most of human mass lives.

Mahayana Buddhism

The other notable spiritual movement which is not part of the Hindu-Vedic tradition, but very much influenced by it is Mahayana Buddhism. It is a remarkable synthesis of some of the intuitions of Buddhism, Gita and Tantras. For all practical purposes we may say Mahayana is a branch of Vedic-Hindu tradition. For in Mahayana we find more of the catholic, synthetic, flexible and intuitive Spirit of the Hindu-Vedic tradition than the exclusive rationalistic and ascetic spirit of the Buddhism. Sri Aurobindo calls Mahayana as “Hinduised Buddhism” and observes further.

“Gita seems to have largely influenced Mahayanist Buddhism and texts are taken bodily from it into the Buddhist Scriptures. It may therefore have helped largely to turn Buddhism, originally a school of quietistic and illuminated ascetics, into that religion of meditative devotion and compassionate action which has so powerfully influenced Asiatic culture.”⁽⁴⁾

But the importance of Mahayana lies in bringing forward to the Indian religious mind a spiritual ideal which is either missing or ignored or suppressed in the Vedic-Hindu tradition. This is the ultra-altruistic ideal of the *Bodhisattwa* and *Mahakaruna*, the ideal of the supercompassionate *Bodhisattwa* who is ready to sacrifice his own personal spiritual salvation for the sake of the salvation of humanity. Here we find for the first time in the religious history of the world a

complete subordination or even negation of the ideal of individual salvation to a greater spiritual ideal. This higher ideal is likely to be one of the leading ideals of the future spirituality.

The Central Significance

This is in essence the story of the inner psychological and spiritual evolution of the Vedic Spirit. The central significance of this evolution will be clear to all those who have followed this survey of Indian spirituality. It is the fixing of, establishing and generalising the spiritual possibility, in the various parts of the human nature, not only in the individual but also for the whole of human race. The Upanishadic movement brings the possibility to the intelligent will buddhi, Gita into the higher vital will and emotion, Vaishnavism into the lower emotions, Tantras into the physical being. The great attempt of the purano-tantric religion in the diffusion of spirituality to the masses or in other words, in the art and science of mass-communication of spiritual ideas to the common man and their equally innovative attempt to bring down a spiritual power into communal life through the institution of temple-worship, indicate some of the methods by which this spiritual possibility can be generalised for the whole race. The future of Indian spirituality must follow this curve and the tendencies inherent in its evolution and move towards the perfect fulfilment of these tendencies, which means spiritualisation of the whole of human nature and the generalisation of this spiritual possibility for the whole of humanity.

Indian spirituality has to recover fully the comprehensiveness and integrality of its parent and original Vedic spiritual vision, gathering whatever spiritual riches it has gained during its evolution and discarding the tendencies of one-sided exclusiveness, move towards a greater and richer synthesis. In the following passage, Sri Aurobindo indicates the nature of the future spiritual movement which can bring about the fulfilment of the deeper purpose of the evolution of the Indian spirituality:

“A wider spiritual culture must recognise that the spirit is not only the highest and inmost thing, but all is manifestation and creation of the spirit. It must have a wider outlook, a more embracing range of applicability and, even, a more aspiring and ambitious aim of its endeavour. Its aim must be not only to raise to inaccessible heights the few elect, but to draw all men and all life and the whole human being upward, to spiritualise life and in the end to divinise human nature. Not only must it be able to lay hold on his deepest individual being but to inspire too his communal existence. It must turn, by a spiritual change, all the members of his ignorance into members of the

knowledge; it must transmute all the instruments of the human being into instruments of a divine living. The total movement of Indian spirituality is towards this aim; in spite of all the difficulties, imperfections and fluctuations of its evolution it had this character. But like other cultures, it was not at all times and in all its parts and movements consciously aware of its own total significance. This large sense sometimes emerged into something like a conscious synthetic clarity, but was more often kept in the depths and on the surface dispersed in a multitude of subordinate and special standpoints. Still, it is only by an intelligence of the total drift that its manifold sides and rich variations of effort and teaching and discipline can receive their full reconciling unity and be understood in the light of its own most intrinsic purpose”⁽⁵⁾

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The History of the Ashram School – Part I

Kittu Reddy

[Kittu Reddy came to Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, in 1941 at the age of five. The Mother started the Ashram School on the 2nd of December 1943 and he was among the first students of the school. He had all his education at the Ashram and was appointed a teacher in December 1957. In the middle of 1958, he joined the Registrar's office and assisted the Registrar Kireet Joshi in the administration of the school. It is in that capacity that he often wrote to the Mother regarding the administration of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.]

The history of the Ashram school – now known as the International Centre of Education – can be probably divided into four periods. The first period is from 1943 to 1950, the second one is from 1951 to 1958, the third is from 1959 to 1967 and the fourth one is the period after that.

This article will deal mainly with the third period – that is to say from 1959 to 1967. However, the first two periods will be briefly touched upon.

Before the 1940s children were, as a rule, not permitted to live in the Ashram. But when, during the war, a number of families were admitted, it was found necessary to initiate a course of instruction for the children. Consequently, on 2 December 1943 the Mother opened a school for about thirty children. She herself was one of the teachers. The number of children increased gradually over the years to around 150 by the year 1950.

The first striking feature of the school in those early days was that almost all the students were children of devotees or disciples, most of whom resided in the Ashram as sadhaks.

Another feature was that the Mother was in constant touch with the teachers and students, guiding the teachers and following the students' progress. All students and teachers would meet Her at least once a day and the teachers would submit reports about their classes regularly. Sri Aurobindo too was kept informed of all the developments in the school, although he did not interact directly with the school.

On 2 December 1946, the Mother came for the first time to the playground

to see the demonstration of Physical Education. From then onwards, the Mother started coming regularly to the Playground in the evenings.

In 1950, Sri Aurobindo left his body and from 1951 the Mother started taking classes in the playground for the children (known as the Wednesday and Friday classes).

On 24 April 1951 the Mother presided over a convention where it was resolved to establish an "international university centre", and on 6 January 1952 she inaugurated the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre. In 1959 this was changed to the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.

In December 1958 the Mother stopped coming to the playground on a regular basis and the classes too were stopped.

The first two periods from 1943 to 1958 may be called the luminous seed-time and a period of enthusiastic effort guided by the direct presence of the Mother. That was the time when most of the basic ideas and concepts on education were expounded by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. This was done through the classes, their interaction with the students and teachers and their writings in the *Bulletin*. As a matter of fact, the Mother was constantly in touch with both students and teachers and intervened whenever she felt the need to do so.

However, the outward organisation was not too different from other schools. No doubt, the teachers and the administration were distinctly aware of what the Mother wanted but this was not translated in the organisational structure. The Mother's direct presence and involvement obviated the need for any such organisational structure. She was there to look after everything in its smallest detail.

Even though, the Mother stopped coming to the playground on a regular basis from December 1958, contact with her continued through letters or through interviews. Indeed, the Mother kept a constant watch over the school and playground activities from her room.

During this period, 1959-1967, certain experiments were made which were to have a great bearing on the future development of the Centre of Education. Firstly, some tentative experiments were made in organising the Free System of education with a small section of students and certain organisational structures were put in place; all these attempts were gradually evolving and were to prove very useful in arriving at the more developed and organised system that was built later on.

But more importantly, from 1959, the overall structure and organisation of the Centre of Education was laid down. Here are some of the main developments that took place during this period:

1. The Higher Course was restructured. It was divided into the Art and Science sections. Earlier, there was no clear demarcation between art and science courses.

From this point on, like in other institutions, art students and science students were divided into two distinct categories with different compulsory subjects.

At the same time, two other courses were introduced, the Common Course which was compulsory for all students and the Optional course open to both Art and Science students; in the Common course, both Arts and Science students had compulsorily to study selected books of Sri Aurobindo. There were five books in this course, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*. These were studied for one year. Thus all students of the Higher course had to study these 5 books spread over the three years.

In the first year, *The Ideal of Human Unity* was studied, in the second year, it was *The Human Cycle* and *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, and in the third year, *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

But in the Optional Course, the same books were studied over a period of two or three years. This more intensive study of the books was optional and was open to both Science and Art students. Each one of these books was studied after a preparatory course; thus for the book *The Ideal of Human Unity* there was a course on World History; for *The Human Cycle*, there was a course on Sociology, for *The Life Divine* there was course on Philosophy, both Western and Indian, for *The Synthesis of Yoga*, the course was History of Religions and for *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, a study of Indian History was added.

2. It was also during this period that the Boards for all subjects were constituted. Thus there was an English board, a French board, a Mathematics board and so on. A group of teachers was selected to form the Boards and these teachers overlooked all the details concerning their respective subjects. Their work was mainly to define the syllabus, the course, the text books and to monitor the overall performance of the students and teachers in their subjects.

3. A whole new system of evaluation was determined. This system was based on the following: regularity, punctuality, behaviour, homeworks, class tests and quarterly tests. This last item – quarterly tests – was introduced in 1959. All students of the secondary and the Higher course were to sit for tests four times a year, reduced from 1960 to three times a year. These tests conducted over a period of two weeks, were held at the end of March, June and October. The

tests for more important subjects like English, French, Mathematics etc were of three hours each, while for the other subjects they were of one and a half hour each. The results of the quarterly tests had a great bearing on the evaluation of the students.

Quite naturally, these tests were a period of great tension for the students, for the results were given great weight in the final evaluation of the student.

As I was working in the administrative office at that time, I was entrusted with the organisation of the Quarterly Tests. My duties consisted of the following tasks.

1. Fixing the dates, the timings, the rooms and the invigilators for the tests.
2. Collecting the question papers at least ten days in advance from all the teachers and getting them typed in strict confidentiality and finally distributing them to the concerned invigilators just before the commencement of the test.
3. Handing over the answer papers of the students to the respective teachers after completion of the test.
4. Getting the results of the tests from the teachers in the form of marks allotted and computing the final quarterly report for each student. The report for each student was based on the following principle: 40% marks were allotted to the Quarterly Tests, 30% marks were allotted to Class Tests, 20% marks were allotted to Home Works, and the remaining 10% marks were given to Regularity, Punctuality and Behaviour.

Evidently, it was quite a complicated exercise and entailed a fair amount of work and coordination among teachers and the administration.

This was a period of great tension for most students and slowly and in a sense, quite inevitably, certain tendencies started manifesting themselves right from the beginning in 1960 and began to take serious proportions in the later years.

These included copying from notebooks which the students smuggled into the test room, trying to find out the questions before the tests, and sometimes even tearing whole pages from the text books which they managed to smuggle into the test room.

In 1967, while invigilating a class, a student was found copying. I just tapped the boy on his shoulder but did not chide him or speak to anybody else; instead, I wrote a letter to the Mother. Here is an extract from the letter:

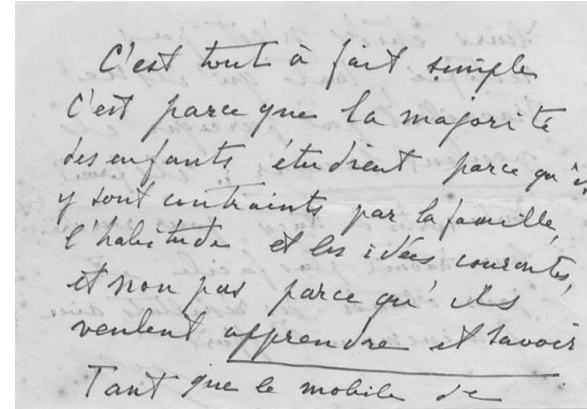
(Concerning cheating in tests)

What should I do? Must we do what is done outside — put three teachers in a room to invigilate? The teachers do not like doing things in this way here in the

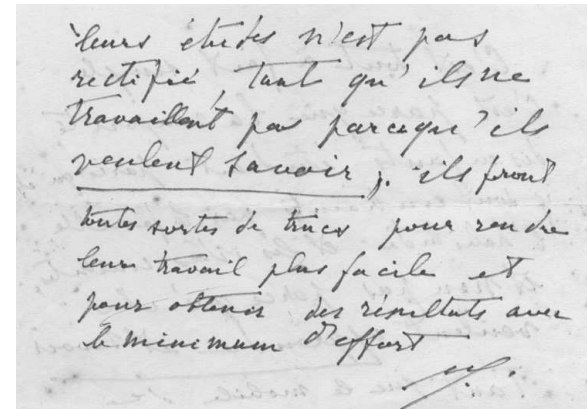
Ashram. Or should we abolish tests? I find this proposal doubtful, since the same thing happens with homework and essays.

In any case the problem exists, and in order to find the real solution we should understand why the children behave like this. Please tell me the cause of this misbehaviour and the solution to this problem.

Mother sent me a reply immediately reproduced here in full.



C'est tout à fait simple
C'est parce que la majorité
des enfants étudient parce qu'ils
y sont contraints par la famille,
l'habitude et les idées reçues,
et non pas parce qu'ils
veulent apprendre et savoir
Tant que le mobile se



leurs études n'est pas
rectifié tant qu'ils ne
travaillent pas parce qu'ils
veulent savoir, ils font
toutes sortes de trucs pour rendre
leur travail plus facile et
pour obtenir des résultats avec
le minimum d'effort

It is very simple. It is because most of the children study because they are compelled to do so by their families, by custom and prevalent ideas, and not because they want to learn and know. As long as their motive for studying is

not rectified, as long as they do not work because they want to know, they will find all kinds of tricks to make their work easier and to obtain results with a minimum of effort.

June 1967

She also added that a prayer should be repeated each day by all the students. Here is the prayer.

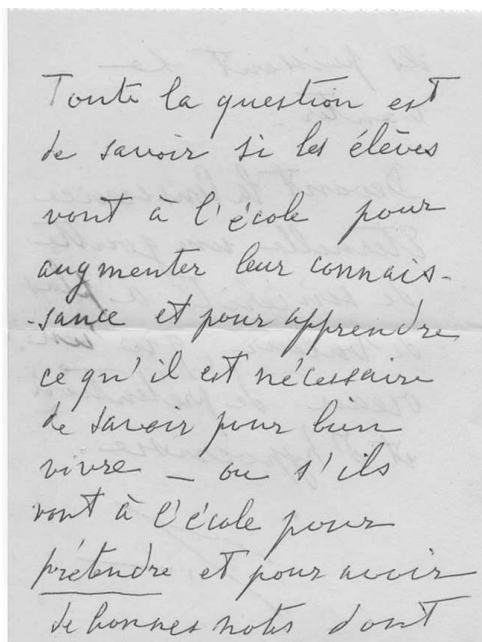
To be repeated each day by all the students:

It is not for our family, it is not to secure a good position, it is not to earn money, it is not to obtain a diploma, that we study.

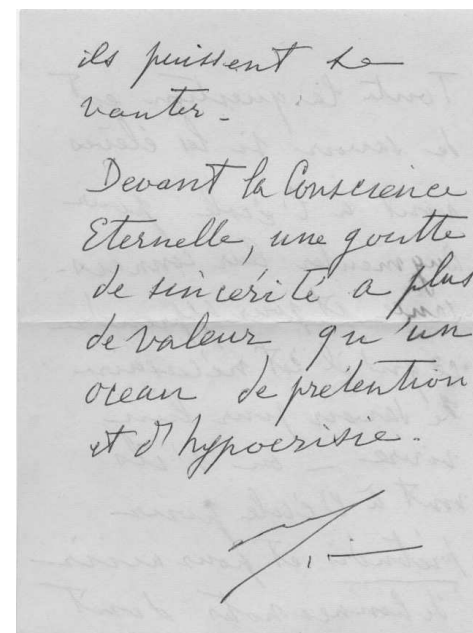
We study to learn, to know, to understand the world, and for the sake of the joy that it gives us.

June 1967

Later, she wrote to me another letter regarding the Quarterly tests. We reproduce it in full.



Toute la question est
de savoir si les élèves
vont à l'école pour
augmenter leur connais-
sance et pour apprendre
ce qu'il est nécessaire
de savoir pour bien
vivre — ou s'ils
vont à l'école pour
prétendre et pour avoir
de bonnes notes sont



ils puissent se
vanter -

Devant la Conscience
Eternelle, une goutte
de sincérité a plus
de valeur qu'un
océan de prétention
et d'hypocrisie.

The whole question is to know whether the students go to school to increase their knowledge and to learn what is necessary how to live well or whether they go to school to pretend and to have good marks of which they can boast.

In front of the Eternal Consciousness, a drop of sincerity has more value than an ocean of pretension and hypocrisy.

We reproduce below more letters on Tests written by the Mother in answer to teachers. Most of these letters were written during the period June-October 1967 with the exception of the first one.

Sometime I would like to know, Mother, Your intentions with regard to regrouping these classes in the new year, whether with an examination or without.

I consider an examination as quite necessary. In any case there will be one in French.

My love and blessings

29 October 1946

It is not by conventional examinations that students can be selected for a class. It is only by developing in oneself the true psychological sense. Select children who want to learn, not those who want to push themselves forward.
29 October 1965

The only solution is to annul this test and all that are to come. Keep all the papers with you in a closed bundle — as something that has not been — and continue quietly your classes.

At the end of the year you will give notes to the students, not based on written test-papers, but on their behaviour, their concentration, their regularity, their promptness to understand and their openness of intelligence.

For yourself you will take it as a discipline to rely more on inner contact, keen observation, and impartial outlook.

For the students it will be the necessity of understanding truly what they learn and not to repeat as a parrot what they have not fully understood. And thus a true progress will have been made in the teaching.

With blessings.
21 July 1967

I find tests an obsolete and ineffective way of knowing if the students are intelligent, willing and attentive. A silly, mechanical mind can very well answer a test if the memory is good and these are certainly not the qualities required for a man of the future.

It is by tolerance for the old habits that I consented that those who want tests can have them. But I hope that in future this concession will not be necessary. To know if a student is good needs, if the tests are abolished, a little more inner contact and psychological knowledge for the teacher. But our teachers are expected to do Yoga, so this ought not to be difficult for them.
22 July 1967

Naturally the teacher has to test the student to know if he or she has learnt something and has made a progress. But this test must be individual and adapted to each student, not the same mechanical test for all of them. It must be a spontaneous and unexpected test leaving no room for pretence and insincerity. Naturally also, this is much more difficult for the teacher but so much more living and interesting also. I enjoyed your remarks about your students. They prove that you have an individual relation with them — and that is essential for good teaching. Those who are insincere do not truly want to learn but to get good marks or compliments from the teacher — they are not interesting.

25 July 1967

The immediate impact of these events and remarks made by the Mother was a radical change in the attitude and organisation of the school.

Briefly, the consequences were:

All quarterly tests were abolished once and for all.

The secondary classes were restructured as the consequence of some interaction with the Mother by some teachers.

The Higher Course organisation was radically restructured.

We shall now go back in time to see how the Free Progress System was introduced in the school.

From the year 1959, many tentative experiments were being made in the Free Progress System. These attempts were first made on a small scale with a small number of students and teachers who were willing to try out the experiment. The source of inspiration for these experiments was in the writings and talks of Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

We are quoting one of the passages from *The Human Cycle* that served as an important source of inspiration:

“The discovery that education must be a bringing out of the child’s own intellectual and moral capacities to their highest possible value and must be based on the psychology of the child-nature was a step forward towards a more healthy because a more subjective system; but it still fell short because it still regarded him as an object to be handled and moulded by the teacher, to be educated. But at least there was a glimmering of the realisation that each human being is a self-developing soul and that the business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material. It is not yet realised what this soul is or that the true secret, whether with child or man, is to help him to find his deeper self, the real psychic entity within. That, if we ever give it a chance to come forward, and still more if we call it into the foreground as “the leader of the march set in our front”, will itself take up most of the business of education out of our hands and develop the capacity of the psychological being towards a realisation of its potentialities of which our present mechanical view of life and man and external routine methods of dealing with them prevent us from having any experience or forming any conception. These new educational methods are on the straight way to this truer dealing. The closer touch attempted with the psychical entity behind the vital and physical mentality and an increasing reliance on its possibilities must lead to the ultimate

discovery that man is inwardly a soul and a conscious power of the Divine and that the evocation of this real man within is the right object of education and indeed of all human life if it would find and live according to the hidden Truth and deepest law of its own being.”
(SABCL, Vol.15, pp.27-28)

Here is another passage from the Mother’s conversations which was often quoted and which became the basis for the Free Progress System.

“Essentially, the only thing you should do assiduously is to teach them to know themselves and choose their own destiny, the path they will follow; to teach them to look at themselves, understand themselves and to will what they want to be. That is infinitely more important than teaching them what happened on earth in former times, or even how the earth is built, or even... indeed, all sorts of things which are quite a necessary grounding if you want to live the ordinary life in the world, for if you don’t know them, anyone will immediately put you down intellectually: “Oh, he is an idiot, he knows nothing. But still, at any age, if you are studious and have the will to do it, you can also take up books and work; you don’t need to go to school for that. There are enough books in the world to teach you things. There are even many more books than necessary.

.....
But what is very important is to know what you want. And for this a minimum of freedom is necessary. You must not be under a compulsion or an obligation. You must be able to do things whole-heartedly. If you are lazy, well, you will know what it means to be lazy.... You know, in life idlers are obliged to work ten times more than others, for what they do they do badly, so they are obliged to do it again. But these are things one must learn by experience. They can’t be instilled into you.”
(CWM, Vol. 8, p.182)

The problem was how to create a system of education which would help **them to know themselves and choose their own destiny, with the ultimate result of** bringing the psychic being of the child forward as “**the leader of the march.**”

Gradually, these attempts began to increase in number and by the year 1962, there was one whole section of the school that was following this system. It was named *Vers la Perfection*. In this process some interesting experiments were tried out, some seemingly a bit impractical. However, the Mother allowed

things to develop and encouraged the teachers to find out by themselves how to implement the free progress system. As all these attempts were going on, quite naturally, a lot of discussion was generated among the teachers. The Director and the Registrar – Pavitrada and Kireet Joshi – were deeply involved in all these discussions and often the matter was referred to the Mother. As a result of all these discussions and efforts, some basic principles were laid down.

The basic principles on which the Free Progress system was founded were as follows:

- The first assumption was that every child was essentially a soul and the business of the educator was to help the child to bring it forward as the leader of his march.
- Since each child was a soul and therefore unique, he had to be treated according to his nature and temperament. The natural consequence was that individual attention was given great importance and consequently group classes were not encouraged too much.
- Another consequence was that each child was encouraged to work at his own pace, depending on his capacity. It followed also that a child could be at different levels for different subjects.
- There was also an effort to replace text books by worksheets which were prepared in such a way as to make it more relevant to the child’s needs and interests.
- Finally, the whole purpose was to encourage the child to take up the full responsibility of his own education and choose his own destiny.

Evidently, this was not easy for it meant a total reversal of the existing system of education; in a sense, it was a big risk that was being taken.

As already mentioned, the attempt was first made on a small scale with a limited number of students and teachers fully supported by the Mother. By the middle of the year 1962, it was felt that this system could be tried out on a bigger scale for all the secondary classes from December 1962.

Here another problem cropped up. It was understood that this system would be successful only with those students whose psychic being was somewhat prominent, for only then would they be able to use their freedom properly without being distracted by the vital and other pulls of the lower nature. The question was: who is to choose the students? Since most of the teachers did not feel confident in their own judgment, the matter was referred to the Mother and She graciously agreed to make the selection herself.

Accordingly, the students numbering about 150 were divided into 5 batches.

Mother came down to the first floor and the students, over a period of five days passed in front of her. She indicated which students could be selected and even in some cases made some remarks on certain students. All these were noted down by a teacher standing beside the Mother. I remember that in some cases, the Mother made some remarks about a child; in one case, she remarked about a young girl: “Oh, she is an old friend.”

It will be interesting to note that almost all the students were selected by the Mother for the New Classes.

The Functioning of the System

Let us now see how the system functioned on the ground level.

Firstly, there was no fixed time table; when the students came to the school, they went and sat in the class rooms allotted to them. Three or four teachers would be sitting in the same room. After the bell rang the students would start working on their own on any subject of their choice. Whenever they needed any help from the teacher, they would consult him. During the course of the work, if either the teacher or student felt the need to fix an appointment with the teacher for further consultation, it would be done by mutual consultation. Similarly whenever the teachers or students felt the need of a group class, that too was fixed by mutual consultation.

There was great freedom for the students and the teachers were there only to help and guide the students.

In sum, the whole responsibility of education was on the students themselves. They had to decide for themselves the subjects they would study, determine the pace at which they would work and even the quantity of work done.

Many teachers felt that the attempt was premature, but all agreed to give it a try. However within a few months, it appeared that the system was not working very well. The majority of students were misusing their time and were unable to use their freedom properly. Finally a group of teachers wrote a letter to the Mother. We reproduce in full the letter with the answer of the Mother.

Letter to the Mother through the Director of the School

Pavitra-da,

August 1st, 1963

For quite a long time, and particularly during the last few months, many of us — teachers of the New Classes — have noticed a growing disorder and confusion in the School. We therefore decided to make a report with the hope

that a timely intervention by the authorities might change the situation and improve matters. In making this report we have given our considered opinion and judgment, always keeping in mind the welfare of both of the students and the Institution.

The disorder that we see can be placed under three headings:

- 1) Indiscipline,
- 2) Irregularity and consequently
- 3) Poor work done by students.

Indiscipline: This problem which probably has always existed to a certain degree has now assumed rather serious proportions and has become quite acute. It is now quite a common feature to see students enter the class ten or fifteen minutes late and stroll out again a few minutes before the bell. Many of them go to the Newspaper Room, the Post Office and the Projector Room during class hours. Very often children are seen loitering about, sometimes in the streets and sometimes in the School compound during class hours. The other problem, which we shall only just mention, — for it is too well known — is that of the stealing of notebooks and books, both of teachers and students.

Irregularity: This is a problem of a somewhat different nature. Very few students have attended regularly all the classes. Many of them started with great enthusiasm, but after a certain time — particularly when they had to give a test — dropped out and rarely came back. Finally, when they restarted, they had forgotten much of what they had learnt and much valuable time was lost in catching up. This also makes it impossible for the teacher to do any kind of Project work; for he never knows when a student will turn up again the next time.

In the afternoons, also, many students are found in the Library; many others do not come to School at all. As a result, the number of hours that a student devotes to his studies is between 4 and 5 hours, as there is no homework to be done; much of the time in these 4 or 5 hours is spent in chatting and gossip and work without concentration.

The consequence of all this has been poor work by the students. Not only is the amount of work done insufficient but also the quality is poor.

Taking into account the overall performance of the students, 59 may be said to have done quite poor work, 45 very poor, while only 23 have done average work, 4 good and 3 very good.

Taking into consideration, subject-wise performance of work, we find that 77 out of 116 are below normal in English; 63 out of 71 are below normal in French; 130 out of 142 are below normal in Maths; 66 out of 69 are below

normal in Physics; 33 out of 38 in Chemistry; 99 out of 139 in Natural Science; 95 out of 127 in History; and 115 out of 127 in Geography.

We have all felt therefore that something should be done before it is too late. The first and most essential step, we feel, is to have a minimum number of fixed periods for each subject; this minimum number can only be decided later on. Some of us, however, feel that all classes should have fixed periods. The timetable will be fixed by the office and once a student decides to attend a class, he should be regular and punctual.

Another point which we should mention is that of teaching only through work-sheets. Many teachers feel that all subjects need some oral treatment, the proportion varying with the subject. A combination of the work-sheet method with oral exposition and discussions seems to be a possible solution.

Mother's Reply

First for the teachers:

I am satisfied with the figures indicated in the report. In spite of what one might think the proportion of very good students is satisfactory. If out of 150 students, there are 7 individuals of genuine value, it is very good.

Now for the organisation:

The classes as a whole may be reorganised so as to fulfil the needs of the majority, that is to say, of those who, in the absence of any outside pressure or imposed discipline, work badly and make no progress. But it is essential that the present system of education in the new classes should be maintained, in order to allow outstanding individuals to show themselves and develop freely. That is our true aim. It should be known — we should not hesitate to proclaim it — that the whole purpose of our school is to discover and encourage those in whom the need for progress has become conscious enough to direct their lives. It ought to be a privilege to be admitted to these Free Progress classes. At regular intervals (every month, for example) a selection should be made and those who cannot take advantage of this special education should be sent back into the normal stream. The criticisms made in the report apply to the teachers as much as to the students. For students of high capacity, one teacher well versed in his subject is enough — even a good textbook, together with encyclopaedias and dictionaries would be enough. But as one goes down the scale and the capacity of the student becomes lower, the teacher must have higher and higher capacities: discipline, self-control, consecration, psychological understanding, infectious enthusiasm, to awaken in the student the part which is asleep the will to know, the need

for progress, self-control, etc. Just as we organise the school in such a way as to be able to discover and help outstanding students, in the same way, the responsibility for classes should be given to outstanding teachers. So I ask each teacher to consider his work in the school as the best and quickest way of doing his Yoga. Moreover, every difficulty and every difficult student should be an opportunity for him to find a divine solution to the problem.

5 August 1963

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Sub. Maths. Science
Chem. English. Hindi
H. S. P. H. S. P.
P. H. S. P. H. S. P.

Pour les professeurs d'abord :

Je dis que je suis satisfait des chiffres que le rapport indique. En dépit de tout ce qu'on peut penser, la proportion de très bons élèves est satisfaisante. Et sur 150 élèves, il en a 7 qui sont des personnalités de valeur, c'est très bien.

Pour l'organisation maintenant :

L'ensemble des classes peut être réorganisé de façon à répondre aux besoins de la majorité, c'est-à-dire de ceux qui, sans pression extérieure, sans discipline imposée, travaillent ^{mal} et ne progressent pas.

Mais il est essentiel que le système d'éducation actuel des nouvelles classes soit maintenu, afin de permettre aux élèves d'élite de se manifester et de se développer librement. C'est cela notre vrai but. Il faut que l'on sache - il ne faut pas hésiter à le proclamer - que notre école est faite pour découvrir et encourager tout ce qui le besoin de progrès ont. Devant conduire au point d'orienter la vie. Ce doit être un privilège d'être admis dans ces classes de libre progrès.

À intervalles réguliers (tous les mois, par exemple) il faudra faire le tri et remettre dans la filière ordinaire ceux qui ne peuvent pas profiter de l'Éducation spéciale.

Les critiques faites dans le rapport s'adressent aux professeurs aussi bien qu'aux élèves. Pour un élève de qualité supérieure, un professeur très versé dans son sujet suffit (à la rigueur, un bon livre de classe, avec des encyclopédies et des dictionnaires, suffiraient). Mais à mesure que l'on descend l'échelle et que la qualité de l'élève baisse, il faut que le professeur ait, lui, des qualités de plus en plus hautes : discipline, maîtrise de soi, concentration, compréhension psychologique, enthousiasme communicatif, pour éveiller

dans l'élève ce qui est endormi : volonté de savoir, besoin de progrès, contrôle de soi, etc.

De même que nous organisons l'Ecole de façon à pouvoir découvrir et aider les élèves d'élite, de même il faudrait que la responsabilité des classes soit donnée à des professeurs d'élite. Je demande donc à chacun des professeurs de considérer son travail à l'école comme le meilleur et le plus rapide moyen de faire son Yoga. Et aussi il faudrait pour lui que chaque difficulté et chaque élève difficile soit une occasion de trouver une solution à un problème.

Bénédictions

5-8-63

What is important to note is that the Mother despite the apparent failure at the beginning was insistent that the Free Progress System should continue with whatever modifications in the organisation of the school. The direction for the future was clearly laid down by the Mother.

(To be continued)

The Organisational Cycle: from Reason to Subjectivity

Suhas K. Mehra and Beloo Mehra

The Road Travelled So Far

“History is not just the evolution of technology; it is the evolution of thought. By understanding the reality of the people who came before us, we can see why we look at the world the way we do, and what our contribution is toward further progress. We can pinpoint where we come in, so to speak, in the longer development of Civilisation, and that gives us a sense of where we are going.... to really understand where you are today, you must take yourself back to the year 1000 and then move forward through the entire millennium experientially, as though you actually lived through the whole period yourself in a single lifetime... The first thing you must understand is that the reality of this time is being defined by the powerful churchmen of the Christian church. Because of their position, these men hold great influence over the minds of the populace. But regardless of which class you're in, or the particular work that you do, you soon realise that social position is secondary to the spiritual reality of life as defined by the churchmen.”

This is a passage from the novel “*The Celestine Prophecy*” by James Redfield¹ (1993), a book celebrated for popularising various psychological and spiritual ideas rooted in Eastern thought. The novel captures the protagonist's journey to Peru to explore and understand a series of nine spiritual insights mentioned in an ancient manuscript. The above passage appears in the context of the second insight summarising the evolution of the human race. Interestingly, the evolutionary stages described in the novel are quite similar to Sri Aurobindo's psycho-social developmental stages as presented in *The Human Cycle*. The

above passage describes the conventional stage. In a later passage we find this description of the coming of the age of reasoning:

“The Medieval worldview, your worldview, begins to fall apart in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. First, you notice certain improprieties on the part of the churchmen themselves: secretly violating their vows of chastity, for example, or taking gratuities to look the other way when governmental officials violate scriptural laws... These improprieties alarm you because these churchmen hold themselves to be the only connection between yourself and God... Suddenly you are in the midst of an outright rebellion... As you watch in disbelief, the rebellion succeeds... After all, you have grown accustomed to having an authority in your life to define reality, and without that external direction you feel confused and lost. If the churchmen description of reality and the reason for human existence is wrong, you ask, then what is right? What is the impact of this collapse on the people of that day? I suppose it was somewhat unsettling... by the 1600s, astronomers had proved beyond a doubt that the sun and stars did not revolve around the Earth as maintained by the church. Clearly the Earth was only one small planet orbiting a minor sun in a galaxy that contained billions of such stars... Mankind has lost its place at the centre of God’s universe. In the past, you might have said God was responsible, or the devil. But as the medieval worldview breaks down, that certainty goes with it. All the things you took for granted now need new definition, especially the nature of God and your relationship to God.”

The above passage illustrates how the history of the West has witnessed an aggressive overthrow of old religious conventionalism ushering in a reign of critical reasoning which questions all the truths accepted so far by the human mind. Such a reign of reason which is largely destructive in nature, at least temporarily, is an imperative need for human progress especially when the dead conventions become a roadblock to further evolution. (Readers may recall the discussion on “creative destruction” in the previous article² in this series). However, India did not go through such destructive revolutions. Sri Aurobindo explains,

“In India, since the great Buddhistic upheaval of the national thought and life, there has been a series of recurrent attempts to rediscover the truth of the soul and life and get behind the veil of stifling conventions; but these have been conducted by a wide and tolerant spiritual reason, a plastic soul-

intuition and deep subjective seeking, insufficiently militant and destructive. Although productive of great internal and considerable external changes, they have never succeeded in getting rid of the predominant conventional order. The work of a dissolvent and destructive intellectual criticism, though not entirely absent from some of these movements, has never gone far enough; the constructive force, insufficiently aided by the destructive, has not been able to make a wide and free space for its new formation.”³

According to Sri Aurobindo, it was primarily a result of the European influence and prevalent circumstances that the Indian mind began adapting to a greater reliance on critical reasoning to govern life and its many spheres of activity^a. This influence has become so strong that today those wanting to revive and reintroduce into newer forms the eternal spirit of the ancient Indian truths – be it in the field of social-political discourse or modernising/renewing an old cultural practice for the purpose of present age – feel compelled to justify their ideas using appropriate standards of reason^b. In the world of business management also Indians have been mostly aping the practices, models and approaches that were developed primarily in the West, based upon critical reasoning and the data and observations emerging from within the Western world. In this context, the passages from Redfield’s *The Celestine Prophecy* become significant because they clearly demonstrate how the progression to an age of reason happened in the Western historical context.

The Road Ahead

In the previous article we discussed the abundant advantages as well as shortcomings of critical reasoning, as applied in the field of management via the Scientific Management revolution. We had also mentioned the emergence of Human Relations movement which tried to address some of the challenges thrown by the over-emphasis on application of scientific principles in the field of human resource management. Toward the end we posed a few questions some of which will form the basis for the discussion in the present and future articles in this series. To begin with, we take up the question – What role does subjectivism play in the evolutionary path of an organisation if it wants to move closer to its deeper purpose of existence? In this regard, we extend the analysis presented in the previous article by showing how a clear recognition of Reason’s limitations helps an organisation and its leaders recognise the significance of a more inwardly guided decision-making approach.

By doing so, we also aim to highlight the importance of widening our view of the field of business management and organisational studies by going beyond

what the West-centric approach has been primarily about, namely, the application of Reason to govern individual and collective behaviour in the context of an organisation. The East, and India in particular, has always emphasised a greater role of an inner knowing, a more subjective approach to knowing than what human reason and intellect are generally capable of acquiring. This paper through various examples hopes to bring out the fact that the expanding field of business management and organisational studies is in a way bringing together the strengths of the East and West for a greater harmony of ideas, approaches and practices that can help organisations furtherin their march to greater realisation and fulfilment of their purpose.

One key question which we will try to address in this paper is: Once the limitations of human reason to further the progress of an individual and a collective are recognised, what path does the evolutionary journey take to transcend those limits? The predominant tendency of Reason has been to look outside for data points on which theories may be developed, which in other words maybe described as the emergence of the Scientific Method. Tremendous progress in improving the lives of humanity can be attributed to the use of Science. It began first with its application in understanding the physical universe and gradually moving to areas that have more to do with human behaviour such as management, education, psychology and sociology.

Readers may recall the discussion in our previous article about the application of science in the sphere of human resource management, namely, Taylor's Scientific Management principles for improving the production efficiency. The application had found incredible usage in industries such as food, manufacturing, healthcare, etc. We also noted that its major shortcoming was that it tended to regard human beings as automatons.

Another business management area where scientific approach still remains as the most dominant toolis that of decision making. We now present a few examples from this area to further the discussion. We zoom in on this aspect of an organisational context because it is this which can have the most critical impact on making the organisation move ahead in its advance toward self-fulfilment.

Model-based Scientific Decision Making and its Limitations

It is very typical of human reason to develop some kind of systematic model to represent the diverse set of variables present in the existing reality. We find examples of such behaviour in fields as diverse as business analysis, justice system, educational programming and sociological policy-making. Using objective reason (to whatever extent possible) models are constructed to simulate various

scenarios based upon which a final decision is made. Such decision-making models are commonly used by individuals as well as organisations without even realising the processes used to construct these.

An interesting example of such decision-making is the food pyramid⁴ developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which synthesis thousands of scientific studies on diet and health into a single picture, a model. For nutritionists, physicians, healthcare professionals as well as ordinary public – people with varying backgrounds and levels of scientific sophistication – the USDA food pyramid serves as one of the most important guides. However, the very idea of synthesising a vast number of scientific findings into one simplified model must result in the loss of substantial information, considering the wide range of data, nuances and caveats in the original studies.

Let us take a look at a few more examples of model-based decision making. Recent advances in the computing power and the automated real-time data collection have helped develophighly sophisticated models which use complex algorithms regarding consumer behaviour, preferences and spending patterns. These models help businesses to improve performance by making highly accurate predictions or guiding consumers' choices. Use of such models has helped business companies to avoid some of the common biases that at times undermine their leaders' subjective judgments⁵. From 'loyalty programmes' at grocery stores to banks approving or rejecting consumer loans, insurance companies extending or limiting coverage, and credit card companies preventing frauds, we find several such examples of successful application of these objective reason-based models.

Nonetheless, over time these models may go out of sync due to unforeseen changes in marketplace, great advances in information technology, fast pace of development of computing power, use of artificial intelligence, etc. "Well-crafted models allow management to anticipate the future and solve problems. But once constructed, these mental models become self-reinforcing, self-sustaining and self-limiting. And when mental models are out of sync with reality, they cause management to make forecasting errors and poor decisions."⁶

One of the main reasons why all models will eventually fail is because of the inherent limitation of our mental knowledge. The reasoning mind tends to work with an assumption of continuity of existing reality, implying that since the status quo will always continue and prevail accurate prediction for future may be possible. Such an assumption leads to convergent thinking, which is the primary reason for models getting out of sync. "Convergent thinking focuses on clear problems and provides well-known solutions quickly. Order, simplicity, routine, clear responsibilities, unambiguous measurement systems and predictability are

the bedrock of convergent thinking... Convergent thinking can be effective at handling small, incremental changes and differences. But transformational changes completely flummox the system.”⁷ The assumption of discontinuity, however, “thrives on the divergent thinking, which focuses on broadening — diverging — the context of decision making. It is initially more concerned with questions than getting to the answers in the fastest possible way... It focuses as much on careful observation of the facts as on interpretation of the facts. It focuses as much on the skills of reflection (which requires time away from the problem) as on the skills of swift decision-making (which seek to avoid delay).”⁸

Thus we see that the model-based decision making is fundamentally limited in its value because of the very limitations of the mental reasoning. Mind, in reality, is not an instrument of knowledge, it is rather an instrument that processes the information received from outside. Often the mind is more prone to apply convergent thinking skills in order to arrive at a swift solution to the problem at hand. Only when the realisation sets in about the limits of external information, about the pitfalls of thinking fast, it begins to turn inward for reflection which requires a time away from the problem. The divergent thinking as described above sounds similar to the “stepping back” advice of the Mother whenever one is faced with a critical decision to make.

Another important limitation of the reason is its tendency and ability to justify each and every decision it takes. Recalling the example of Kodak, the photographic film manufacturing company, as cited in our previous article, we find that even though the company knew that the future of photography was all about the digital camera, it chose to stay away from transitioning to the digital media. And it chose to justify this decision on the ground that such a move would have destroyed its existing well-established photographic film business. Reason is also limited in value when it exclusively relies on objective facts. The Indian epic *Mahabharata* provides several helpful examples to illustrate this point. Objective facts such as those having to do with the primacy and legality of birth-based inheritance can be used to reasonably justify the claim of Duryodhana, the eldest son of King Dhritrashtra, on the throne of Hastinapur. Similarly, the fact that the eldest Pandav, Yudhishthira had duly consented to all the mutually-agreed-upon rules of the dice-game beforehand could be used to reasonably justify (or at least rationalise) any punishment or insult he, his younger brothers and his wife Draupadi had to undergo as part of their wager in the gamble. Only when we see these events in the light of a higher truth, a truth above and beyond the objective rationality or reason that we come closer to distinguishing between right and wrong, between what was true and what wasn't. This higher light is the light of dharma, a subjective light, a light so

subtle and discerning which cuts the darkness of the limitation imposed by rational mind. Only in this higher light, reason arrives at its true purpose of existence, to help discern between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, so that a correct decision may be possible. Thus, reason's value is enhanced when it is used as an instrument to seek higher knowledge and not merely to analyse the external data. And that is possible in the light of subtle knowledge obtained by a more inward-oriented subjective instrument.

Need for Turning Inward

We return back to the reading from “*The Celestine Prophecy*.”

“...you felt you had a method, a consensus-building process through which you could discover the nature of everything around you, including God, and including the true purpose of mankind is existence on the planet. So you sent these explorers out to find the true nature of your situation and to report back..., but because of the complexity of the universe they weren't able to return right away... When the scientific method couldn't bring back a new picture of God and of mankind its purpose on the planet. Eventually we arrived at what seemed to be a very logical solution. We are certainly learning enough to manipulate this new world for our own benefit, so why not work in the meantime to raise our standard of living, our sense of security in the world?... We shook off our feeling of being lost by taking matters into our own hands, by focusing on conquering the Earth and using its resources to better our situation, and only now, as we approach the end of the millennium can we see what happened. Our focus gradually became a preoccupation. We totally lost ourselves in creating a secular security, an economic security, to replace the spiritual one we had lost. The question of why we were alive, of what was actually going on here spiritually, was slowly pushed aside and repressed altogether... Working to establish a more comfortable style of survival has grown to feel complete in and of itself as a reason to live, and we have gradually, methodically, forgotten our original question... We have forgotten that we still don't know what we are surviving.”⁹

In the above passage “so why not work in the meantime to raise our standard of living, our sense of security in the world?” suggests a movement that is at the root of increased materialism and commercialism happening as a result of discoveries in physical sciences. In a way, this speaks to Sri Aurobindo's reference to the “profound vitalism” which is an important sign of this advanced age of reason, a vitalism which “has its eye fixed on life rather than on the soul”

and “seeks to interpret being in the terms of force and action rather than of light and knowledge.”¹⁰

To put it in simpler terms, in such an age the primary driving force for both the individual effort as well as the collective one is an impulse to make the outer life of the humanity more comfortable, organised and efficient. This excessive utilitarian and pragmatic approach to life in time leads to a gradual loss of meaning and deeper aim of life. Only an inward turning of a contemplative mind can offer a way out. Only an inward turning will open the way to a greater knowledge. To quote from Sri Aurobindo:

“But after a time it must become apparent that the knowledge of the physical world is not the whole of knowledge; it must appear that man is a mental as well as a physical and vital being and even much more essentially mental than physical or vital. Even though his psychology is strongly affected and limited by his physical being and environment, it is not at its roots determined by them, but constantly reacts, subtly determines their action, effects even their new-shaping by the force of his psychological demand on life. His economic state and social institutions are themselves governed by his psychological demand on the possibilities, circumstances, tendencies created by the relation between the mind and soul of humanity and its life and body. Therefore to find the truth of things and the law of his being in relation to that truth he must go deeper and fathom the subjective secret of himself and things as well as their objective forms and surroundings.

“This he may attempt to do for a time by the power of the critical and analytic reason which has already carried him so far; but not for very long. For in his study of himself and the world he cannot but come face to face with the soul in himself and the soul in the world and find it to be an entity so profound, so complex, so full of hidden secrets and powers that his intellectual reason betrays itself as an insufficient light and a fumbling seeker: it is successfully analytical only of superficialities and of what lies just behind the superficialities. The need of a deeper knowledge must then turn him to the discovery of new powers and means within himself.”¹¹

Looking Within

This need to discover new powers and means within oneself opens the path to knowing oneself. The well-known management thinker, Steven Covey stressed the importance of this knowledge when he speaks of the second of his famous seven habits¹² of highly effective people.

“Habit 2 [Begin with the End in Mind] is based on imagination — the ability

to envision in your mind what you cannot at present see with your eyes. It is based on the principle that all things are created twice. There is a mental (first) creation, and a physical (second) creation. The physical creation follows the mental, just as a building follows a blueprint. ... It’s about connecting again with your own uniqueness and then defining the personal, moral, and ethical guidelines within which you can most happily express and fulfil yourself.”¹³

This can serve as an excellent and important guideline for self-management. The question, however, is how to begin the discovery of one’s “own uniqueness.” And is this discovery a mental process or something else? A corresponding question can also be asked of a collective entity, say an organisation. How can an organisation discover its uniqueness?

In the bestselling book¹⁴ *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't* we come across a concept called the “Hedgehog Concept.” The author speaks of it as a simple, crystalline concept that serves as the guideline for all the actions of the organisation. It emerges from an organisation’s deep self-understanding resulting from the process of seeking answers to a few basic questions about itself.

1. What is it in which it can be the best in the world?
2. What drives its economic engine?
3. What is it deeply passionate about?

These fundamental questions are very important for an organisation to discover its essential purpose of existence. Just as in the case of an individual, such seeking is an inner subjective process, requiring new faculties and powers within. This may be referred to as a paradigm shift by some when the seeking for knowledge is done through turning inward. It is like the proverbial ‘falling of apple’ which brings with it a more direct approach to knowledge.

“He finds that he can only know himself entirely by becoming actively self-conscious and not merely self-critical, by more and more living in his soul and acting out of it rather than floundering on surfaces, by putting himself into conscious harmony with that which lies behind his superficial mentality and psychology and by enlightening his reason and making dynamic his action through this deeper light and power to which he thus opens. In this process the rationalistic ideal begins to subject itself to the ideal of intuitional knowledge and a deeper self-awareness; the utilitarian standard gives way to the aspiration towards self-consciousness and self-realisation...”¹⁵

Our Many Selves

This “aspiration towards self-consciousness and self-realisation” is the starting point for a subjective in-search, both for the individual as well as a collective. A

sincere inward turning initially helps us recognise that “[w]e are conscious of only an insignificant portion of our being; for the most part we are unconscious. It is this unconsciousness that keeps us down to our unregenerate nature and prevents change and transformation in it.”¹⁶

One of the first discoveries made by an individual in this path of becoming self-aware and self-conscious is that an individual is not one single, unified being. It is slowly revealed that we all are indeed a composite of many parts – physical, vital, mental, each with its own dharma, a law of being – held together by a central, true inmost being, the psychic being within. The body, vital and mind can be seen as instruments of the soul, the true being.

“...the distinct character of man is that he is a mental being.”¹⁷ Therefore, in one’s journey of becoming self-aware it is natural that one starts by acquiring a mental understanding of oneself. This could help one intellectually differentiate several different and complex parts of one’s being. This by itself requires “a very long training and long discipline of study and observation.”¹⁸ But as the Mother advises, it is never too early to begin, never too late to continue.

Summarising Sri Aurobindo’s description of the main parts of our being, Dalal¹⁹ speaks of the outer being, inner being and innermost being. The outer being has three parts — the mind (the mental), the life-nature (the vital) and the body (the physical). Each of these parts has its own distinct type of consciousness, “though in our ordinary awareness we are unable to distinguish among the mental, vital and physical constituents of our consciousness and tend to regard all these diverse elements simply as our “mind.” But in yoga psychology, “mind” refers specifically to the part of the being which has to do with cognition and intelligence, with ideas, with mental or thought perceptions, the reactions of thought to things, with the truly mental movements and formations...”²⁰

The vital being or life-nature is made up of desires, feelings, instincts and impulses. The life-energy which animates the body (*Prana*) is an aspect of the vital. The body too has its own distinct consciousness, which operates in the involuntary functionings of the various bodily organs and physiological systems. Body-consciousness is only part of the physical consciousness. The latter includes also the physical mind and the physical vital (see more about these in the footnote^d).

To describe briefly the inner being, we may say that it is the subliminal consciousness, working behind all the three layers of the outer being. There is an inner mind, an inner vital and an inner physical which are in direct contact with the environmental consciousness, the universal forces which exist around us and through those act upon the corresponding outer layers. It is the inmost being, which is a spark of the Universal Spirit, the Divine present in all things

and creatures — the “psychic being” in Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga terminology — which is the evolving soul, though immortal, passes through cycles of birth and death, growing from life to life.

A collective organisation, when it goes through a process of in-search, must also discover these different parts of its being. The body or the outer physical of an organisation is its physical space, buildings, corporate registration, etc. Its people, employees, management and staff constitute its vital, its life-force. And an organisation’s mind is the collective thought, intellect and reason of its people. Just as in the case of an individual, behind this outer being of the organisation is a subliminal inner being that influences the working of its outer parts. And then there is an inmost being of an organisation, a collective soul, a group soul which evolves through each cycle of the organisation’s renewal process. One may say that Jim Collins’ Hedgehog Concept as described earlier is an approximation of identifying this inmost being of the organisation. It is this inmost part that makes an organisation unique, which gives it its individualised stamp.

Becoming Conscious

For the purpose of our ongoing analysis, it is important to emphasise that a process of becoming self-conscious requires us to not only be aware of these different parts of our being, but more importantly to gradually be able to discern which of these parts is responsible for any particular movement happening within us. In other words, it is essential to develop the practice of identifying which of our decisions and actions are guided by which part of our being. Are we being led by our vital, our mind proper, or by something else? Without this growing self-awareness, we do not develop any ability to control and become master of our decisions and actions. The practical significance of this cannot be over-emphasised for both the individual as well as the collective life.

“This means to be conscious of one’s inner truth, conscious of the different parts of one’s being and their respective functions. You must know why you do this, why you do that; you must know your thoughts, know your feelings, all your activities, all your movements, of what you are capable, etc. And to know oneself is not enough: this knowledge must bring a conscious control. “To be in this state of attentive observation, you must have, so to say, antennae everywhere which are in constant contact with your true centre of consciousness. You register everything, you organise everything and, in this way, you cannot be taken unawares, you cannot be deceived, mistaken, and you cannot say anything other than what you wanted to say. But how many people normally live in this state? It is this I mean, precisely, when I speak of

“becoming conscious.” If you want to benefit most from the conditions and circumstances in which you find yourself, you must be fully awake: you must not be taken by surprise, you must not do things without knowing why, you must not say things without knowing why. You must be constantly awake. “It is thus that gradually, slowly, with perseverance, first of all with great care and much attention, one becomes conscious, learns to know oneself and then to become master of oneself.”²¹

Let us take an example to illustrate our point. During and after the torrential rains and floods in Chennai in December 2015, the city witnessed an outpouring of support from various organisations including business corporations. The various programmes initiated by the business corporations to help their employees and the people of Chennai by providing food, shelter, financial support, interest-free loans, health and legal services, work-from-home benefits, counselling, etc. could be considered a part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Such an act of giving by a corporation can be more deeply understood by examining it from the point of view of different parts of the being.

For example, it can be a movement of the vital part because it emerges as an impulse to help others, to be able to help others in distress might also become a means of feeling good about oneself. The same act of giving could be understood simply as a movement from an organisation’s outer physical part when it is done simply for the purpose of tax benefits. For another corporation this act could be just a mental-rational movement — if the company helps its distraught employees effected by the floods to get back to their feet they will then be able to return to work earlier and thus would help the company save money. Another rational calculation could be simply that such an act will help the company create goodwill in the city which can help the company’s future prospects. A genuine feeling of empathy towards fellow citizens’ misfortune could be a movement of higher vital-higher mind. The highest form of giving would be that which arises because of the oneness the organisation feels with the people and community it serves. That would be a movement arising from the organisation’s inmost being.

This example illustrates another important point which will help us move further in our analysis. The deeper an individual or a collective goes within, the clearer is the insight that it is the inmost being alone which can be the source of that Right Inner Voice, the voice that can guide our other parts to their right and true action and way of being. But since ordinarily, this inmost being remains hidden under many thick veils of our outermost physical-vital-mental nexus, we in our ignorance continue to follow the whims and fancies of these parts in their

un-illuminated forms.

Only when the light of the inmost being shines upon these outer parts can they find their true law of being, their dharmic action. And the extent to which this light can enter is dependent upon the extent to which these parts are open and receptive. The openness and receptivity, in turn, are a function of the development and refinement of these parts. The more fine-tuned, shaped up and refined these outer instruments are, the more they will be receptive to the voice of their master, the true being within.

An Inwardly Guided Decision-Making Approach

What does this all mean for how we should make a decision? Or how we should resolve the crisis within when we don’t know what is the right thing to do? Again, this is applicable for both, the individual and the collective organisation.

An example will help us illustrate. Thermax Limited, a Pune-based engineering company identifies itself as an organisation committed to “conserving energy and preserving the environment.”²² It was established in 1966 in collaboration with a Belgian company Wanson, to commence business operations under the name of Wanson India Ltd., manufacturing small boilers at a unit in Dadar, Mumbai. The company was renamed Thermax Limited in 1980. Its founder-chairperson, Rohinton D. Aga was a visionary, dynamic and charismatic leader and contributed much to the company’s growth. In February 1996 due to a sudden massive heart attack he died and his wife Anu Aga took charge as the company’s chairperson three days later. But barely a year after her husband’s death and all within a fortnight of each other Anu’s mother-in-law and their family pet died. And as if that was not cruel enough, while driving back from Bangalore after fixing a customer’s faulty boiler to regain a lost order, her son Kurush met with a fatal accident.²³

While on personal front Anu was grieving the irreplaceable losses of her husband, son, mother-in-law and her pet, in her work life she discovered that the company’s business was on a downward trend and some major decisions were to be made to halt this negative trend and bring the company back on track. Things couldn’t have been any tougher for this business leader.

In order to cope with her tremendous personal grief and also to come to terms with the new set of responsibilities thrust upon her, Anu Aga sought to look for something that will help her regain her inner poise. She decided to go through ten-day intensive Vipassana, the Buddhist discipline of meditation. According to her “Vipassana helped me to come [to] terms with my husband’s death. It was there that I realised that I could never be my husband, and I have the option to take help from others.”²⁴

Gradually, Aga regained confidence in her abilities to run the business and took some real tough decisions, and the company was eventually able to make a turnaround. Then in 2004 she handed over the reins of the business to her daughter, Meher Pudumjee. According to the *Forbes* magazine, Anu Aga was amongst the eight richest Indian women, and in 2007 was part of 40 richest Indians by net worth.²⁵

Let us take another example where a business leader sought inner guidance prior to making any important decision. In our previous articles we have given several examples from the story of Aravind Eye Hospital and its visionary founder, Dr. V. We share one more instance from the book *Infinite Vision: How Aravind became the World's greatest business case for compassion* by Mehta & Shenoy (2012).

“It is not unusual in Arvind’s history to see the brakes slammed on a project at an advanced stage by the same person who set the wheels in motion. Dr. V [the founder] was as beloved as he was notorious, for calling shots based solely on inner guidance and at certain times he was not to be reasoned with. “Sometimes when there is an important decision to be made, he will say, ‘Let me ask Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, says Natchair [sister of Dr. V]. “Then a couple [of days] later he comes with a very clear answer. But there are also times when, if you ask him about a particular step or changing some plan he will just look at you for a long while and not say anything...”²⁶

It is not difficult to guess that the reason for Dr. V’s silence could be that he wanted to think with a calm and silent mind before deciding on the course of an action or saying anything to his co-workers. When seen purely with a rational mind, such a ‘silent’ behaviour from a business leader might seem as not being fully transparent and rather vague and unreasonable. But when we begin to look at such behaviour from a subjective point of view, different explanations may emerge. Perhaps it is possible that the answers emerging from an inward turning are somewhat difficult to articulate and thus the best response is to stay silent lest the listener operating at a different level of consciousness should misunderstand or misinterpret. Or perhaps the subjective feeling of the leader is that the present time is not the right time to explain the deeper reasons behind a certain decision. Many such possibilities exist, and only the person making the decision in that moment knows which one is the ‘truest’ possibility based on the knowledge or insight obtained through his or her subjective in-search.

In the book *Infinite Vision* one also finds several diary entries of Dr. V. that give a good idea about his deep reverence and faith for Sri Aurobindo and the

Mother. One also finds entries reflecting his deep introspection and prayers. These were in a way, the ‘tools of his trade’ – the means he used to turn inwardly to seek answers, to know what he was meant to decide and how he was supposed to act in any particular situation. These subjective tools of Dr. V’s decision-making approach are not taught in standard business schools where the emphasis still remains on inculcating the value of a rational decision-making approach for business leaders and managers. But from times immemorial great leaders in all spheres of human activity have relied primarily on an ‘inner feeling’, some type of an intuitive or inspired knowledge to make the most critical decisions in their work. This is as true of scientists as it is of business leaders and pioneers. We present one more example to show how a subjective ‘feeling’ helped another Indian business tycoon in 19th century arrive at an important decision. Sometime in the middle of July 1893, Swami Vivekananda and Jamshedji Tata travelled together on a ship named SS Empress which was on its way to Vancouver. Swami Vivekananda was on his way to attend the World Parliament of Religions to be held in Chicago, and Jamshedji Tata was on a business trip to the USA. A few years later Tata wrote a letter (on November 23, 1898) to Swami Vivekananda recalling one of the discussions they had on the ship. The letter reads:

“Dear Swami Vivekananda, I trust you remember me as a fellow-traveller on your voyage from Japan to Chicago. I very much recall at this moment your views on the growth of the ascetic spirit in India, and the duty, not of destroying, but of diverting it into useful channels. I recall these ideas in connection with my scheme of the Research Institute of Science for India, of which you have doubtless heard or read. It seems to me that no better use can be made of the ascetic spirit than the establishment of monasteries or residential halls for men dominated by this spirit, where they should live with ordinary decency, and devote their lives to the cultivation of sciences—natural and humanistic. I am of opinion that if such a crusade in favour of an asceticism of this kind were undertaken by a competent leader, it would greatly help asceticism, science, and the good name of our common country: and I know not who would make a more fitting general of such a campaign than Vivekananda...”²⁷

What strikes us the most in this letter is Jamshedji Tata’s belief that Swami Vivekananda would make a perfect leader for an institution dedicated to Science. A more ‘rationality’ or ‘reason’ led business tycoon wanting to invest his money in a scientific research institute would look for a world-renowned scientist to

head such an organisation. But it takes an inwardly-open heart and mind like that of Jamshedji Tata to invite Swami Vivekananda, a *mahayogi*, an ascetic and a spiritual master to take up the task of leading a scientific research institution. From where does his belief come? Surely, the conversation he had with Swamiji aboard the ship would have had some impact. But again, what he got from that conversation is worth serious reflection. It is likely that he was able to subjectively grasp the deep similarity between the true spirit of Science and the true essence of spiritual seeking and asceticism. This wasn't just limited to an intellectual belief for him, this became part of his inner knowledge to such an extent that he was willing to put his money behind a science institution headed by a spiritual master and an ascetic. This was most definitely a decision he took using a deeper subjective knowledge than a reason-led model.

The sad part of the story is that due to the British reluctance and the hurdles created by the bureaucracy the institute could not be established until 1909. Swami Vivekananda had left his body in 1902, while Jamshedji Tata passed away in 1904.

All the examples shared above help us appreciate the role of subjectivity, an inward-turning that becomes the basis for making critical decisions for an organisation. This subjective phase for an organisation's evolution is essential for it to fully recognise that a collective, "like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and a soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist. One may say even that, like the individual, it essentially is a soul rather than has one; it is a group-soul that, once having attained to a separate distinctness, must become more and more self-conscious and find itself more and more fully as it develops its corporate action and mentality and its organic self-expressive life."²⁸ In this subjective process of becoming self-conscious and working toward self-fulfilment – individually or collectively – one recognises and experiences errors, pitfalls and wrong turns. An organisation must, therefore, duly prepare to guard itself from the potential dangers on the path which have to do with misrecognising the vital-self as the true-self of the collective.

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Foot Notes

- a. It must be noted that even before this direct contact with the European civilisation India had developed great traditions of philosophic and intellectual approaches to seek knowledge of the inner and outer worlds, as reflected in the great advances made by Indian civilisation in fields such as medicine, surgery, astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, metallurgy, ship-building, engineering, architecture and all forms of arts. So it is not that India did not recognise the value of Reason and Intellect as ways of knowing. But due to various historical reasons, over a period of time the overall life-spirit among the masses had more or less become enslaved

by the conventional social-cultural practices which often had the sanction of religion. But it was not the enlightened, dynamic religion (“religion enlightened by philosophy”, as Sri Aurobindo puts it), it was rather the old decaying forms of religion which led to the emergence of rigid conventions that had taken hold of the majority of Indian life. It may be said that the contact with the West in the form of European colonisation, made India confront with a foreign civilisation which was more dynamic, living and strongly materialistic and rationalistic in its approach which eventually helped to break this tamasic reliance on dead conventionalism.

- b. A couple of quick examples from recent socio-political discourse in India may be sufficient to establish this. In the debate on dietary preferences of Indians, advocates of a more plant-based diet were relying more on statistics and logical explanations to establish the environment-friendliness of vegetarianism rather than invoking a deeper consciousness-based subjective argument to champion the cause of vegetarianism. Similarly, the only way to effectively challenge the noisy ‘intolerance brigade’ was in the form of hard statistical data (<http://www.newslaundry.com/2015/10/14/think-india-has-become-more-communal-under-modi-the-numbers-will-disappoint-you/>), because despite the truth-value of a statement such as “but the majority of Hindus have always been tolerant, that is the very nature of Hinduism” argument will simply not fly in the face of an aggressive agenda-driven political noise.
- c. The author and his team started with over 1,400 companies. They examined their performance over a forty year period and selected eleven companies which had outperformed in their segment. The team tried to seek answer to the questions: “Are there companies that defy gravity and convert long-term mediocrity or worse into long-term superiority? And if so, what are the universal distinguishing characteristics that cause a company to go from good to great?”
- d. “Though separate and distinct, the three main divisions of the outer being... are interconnected and interact on one another, giving rise to distinguishable subdivisions in the main parts of the being. Thus besides the thinking mind (the mind proper), there is a vital mind, which is the part of the mind that is intermixed with the vital. The vital mind, unlike the thinking mind, is not governed by reason but is dominated by impulses and desires of the vital, and seeks to justify and rationalise actions, which are based on impulses and desires of the vital. Another subdivision is the physical mind, which is the part of the mind that is intermixed with the physical, and partakes of the characteristics of the physical consciousness such as inertia, obscurity and mechanical repetitiveness which manifest in the physical mind as mental torpor and conservatism, doubt, and obsessive thoughts. The part of the mind which is closest to the physical is called the mechanical mind;

its characteristic is that of a machine that goes on turning round and round whenever thoughts occur in it. Another subdivision which is important for self-understanding is the physical vital; it is the part of the vital which is turned entirely upon physical things, and is full of desires and seekings for pleasure on the physical plane. Closely connected with it is the vital physical, the part of the vital force which constitutes the nervous being; it is the vehicle of the nervous responses and is related to the reactions, desires and sensations of the body.” (A. S. Dalal, 2001)

A Tale of Love that Transcends Gender

Madhumita Dutta

Contrary to prevalent notions and practices of male domination and patriarchy, the Indian system of thought has always been 'trans'gender. Indian culture is basically and essentially spiritual, and spirituality has no gender. And if we are to bring in the concept of gender, then we may safely say that Indian culture has been more feminist rather than its opposite. The Indian theory of Creation takes into account both Consciousness and the Power/Energy by which that Consciousness manifests itself. Even taking Consciousness to be the Masculine principle and Energy to be the Feminine principle, and hence a derivative and secondary power, the theory explicitly postulates that both these are equal and indispensable for Creation. Consciousness without Power is Inconscient or Nescient. This aspect of the creative union of the Male-Female principle forms one of the main thematic concerns of a modern epic, by one of the greatest Indian poets, Sri Aurobindo. He based his epic, '*Savitri: a Legend and a Symbol*', on a minor episode of the ancient epic the *Mahabharata*, where it is recounted as tale of conjugal love and devotion of a woman who had acquired the power to bring back to life her dead husband. In a re-creation of this immensely popular legend, Sri Aurobindo explores in great detail the psychological, mystical, spiritual complexities of love, and exposes the power of Love that transcends gender. All constructed notions of 'femininity' are reversed when the poet equates the Woman with the Supreme Creatrix of the universe — the Sun, and places Savitri, the protagonist, at the spearhead of the evolutionary march of Man towards Superhumanhood. Working within the parameters of the original legend, Sri Aurobindo re-establishes the ancient truth of a social and religious order based on equality, harmony, love, where woman is not the 'other', but spiritually 'one' with man. One of the main themes of the epic is its focus on the transforming power of love and the role of the 'woman-body'. Allied to the concept of power is that of subjugation or surrender to an 'other', who is but part of the 'self'. On recognition of the 'other' all polarities cease to exist. Gender hierarchy and power structures, motivated by and constructed on the

basis of the myth of male superiority, are done away with. The poet has presented here an alternative model of femininity, related more to the spiritual Self vis-à-vis the social constructs of gender.

The Two who are one are the secret of all power,
The Two are one are the might and right in things.¹

Long cherished by Indian philosophers as the very foundation of their culture, this image of the Two-in One involves the concept of a fundamental Reality serving as the base of the world of polarities — the privileged androgyny of the universe. This eternal ontological pair symbolises the two poises of Reality, the Omnipresent Being and the Dynamic Force, the union of which gives birth to our teeming world of phenomena. Called by various names in Indian philosophy — Presence and Power, Purusa and Prakriti, Shiva and Shakti, Consciousness and Force, these are the Masculine and Feminine cosmic principles, one static and the other dynamic and surprisingly, the dynamic, creative, active principle is the Feminine, embodied in and as the biological Woman. The dichotomy of gender is grafted on this basic metaphysical androgyny, and Indian philosophy holds ultimate Reality to be non-dual, being a perfect equilibrium of Purusa (masculine principle) and Prakriti (feminine principle). Man by himself is taken to be inactive; it is only in union with his activating force, that is, the productive female power, that he can take part in creation. Thus, Man and Woman, opposite and equal, are involved not only in cosmogony, but in ordinary life too, which is a manifest play of their synergic interaction. The Tantric philosophy of India goes so far as to say that in the absence of Shakti (Energy or the feminine principle), Shiva (masculine) is like a corpse. Sri Aurobindo gives us a poetic image of this concept in these words:

Happy, inert, he lies beneath her feet:
His breast he offers for her cosmic dance
Of which our lives are the quivering theatre,²

Our spiritual heritage of the Vedantic and Tantric traditions never overlooked the fact that everything in the universe has an androgynous kernel. The Tantric philosophy especially, endows the Woman full ontological equivalence with the Man, if not a primacy. The common understanding of Power as an aspect of male supremacy is a significant departure from this. Gender inequality crept in as a result of the rise of patriarchy, and patriarchal monotheism, a later-stage development, is certainly an aberration of authentic Indian tradition, where the

cult of Goddess worship has had a long history and continues to this day. This involves the idea of the Divine feminine, the Woman being identified with Prakriti (manifested Nature), Shakti (Energy) and Maya (Divine power). In ancient Indian culture the woman was never relegated to an inferior position, but ironically, due to gross misreading of traditional values, it is here that woman's religious initiation has often been made synonymous with worship of her husband as God. This is evident in the concept of the 'Pativrata' woman, where her position is deliberately made subordinate to the man. For ages this ideal has crystallised into a tool for the subjugation of women. Subverting and circumventing such orthodox concepts, Sri Aurobindo in his epic, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, has offered an alternative model of femininity, building upon the philosophical concept of the amalgam of two opposite, equal principles, as also upon the husband-deifying ideology of *Pativrata*. Undergirded by this basic paradox, the epic is a panegyric to Love, transcending gender-hierarchy, where myths of superiority do not endure. As Sri Aurobindo says in his book, *The Life Divine*:

Purusha and Prakriti, Conscious Soul and executive Force of Nature, are... a two-aspected single truth, being and dynamis of the Reality; there can be no disequilibrium or predominance of one over the other.³

In Sri Aurobindo's epic, *Savitri*, the protagonist, and Satyavan, her husband, symbolise these cosmic principles in their feminine and masculine aspects. They are projected as embodiments of the primordial androgyny, Savitri, symbolising the dynamic aspect and Satyavan, the passive being in an act of complete surrender to the dynamic power. As Savitri says:

For I, the woman am the force of God.
He the Eternal's delegate soul in man.⁴

The legend of Savitri is an extremely popular one with Indian Hindus, which tells the story of the princess Savitri, who chooses to marry Satyavan, in spite of the foreknowledge of the fact of Satyavan's death within a year of their marriage. Satyavan dies, as prophesied, and the most charming part of the tale continues with the ordeal of Savitri in the kingdom of Death and how she retrieves her husband from there. Without going into the occult-spiritual symbolism of the apparently simple and fairy-tale like legend, it will suffice here to point out that in the original *Mahabharata* episode were embedded the social, ethical, religio-spiritual ideals of the race. Unfortunately, such a richly spiritual legend has been handed down to generations as a mere tale of conjugal fidelity and

chastity. The orthodox traditionalists, in a deliberate misinterpretation of the tale, have been more than content to see Savitri as the *Pativrata* wife, an ideal which has helped to strengthen the image of the typical submissive woman. They maintain that women be passive partners to their husbands, thus denying them the right to live as independent individuals. The dichotomy of power and powerlessness is carefully maintained to retain a set of false hierarchical structure. This discriminative perspective puts the woman in a position every way inferior to man, and in addition, identifies her with all that is impure, immoral, evil in the world. This perhaps has its roots in the ethic of asceticism and its patriarchal ethos, with its condemnation of women as obstacles to salvation. The woman was to be a submissive, quiet, docile being. The interpreters of the *Savitri* legend found in the *Pativrata* Savitri, the role model for the Hindu woman, focusing on her loyalty, chastity, devotion to her husband, and projecting these as virtues for emulation. But this is a misogynic deviation from the complexities involved in the *Pativrata* concept. Sri Aurobindo in his epic works upon this concept and elevates it to spiritual proportions. Savitri lives within a restricted social order. A princess before marriage, she goes to join her husband and in-laws to their hermitage in the forest. As daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, she is mindful of all the social, familial duties she has to perform. The socially-defined feminine code of behaviour emphasising modesty, silence, self-control, is never transgressed. Savitri is seen in all her representational roles of wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, and also the woman, responsible for the continuation of the family line. In these, constructed gender roles are all followed, but the individuality of Savitri as a woman never gets lost in the multiplicity of these roles. She does stand as the epitome of the *Pativrata* wife, but premium is put not on this aspect of her character, but on her womanhood as such, her individuality. The docile image of the self-surrendered wife is rejected and there is no hint even of patriarchal domination. Sri Aurobindo offers instead a liberating model of the independent woman. She has agency, autonomy, choice and freedom to act in accordance with that choice. This is evident in the fact that she is allowed to go in search of her marriage partner and having made her choice, to abide by that. (In fact, choosing a marriage partner was the prerogative of the woman in ancient India.) Her fierce independence of spirit is reflected in these words when she tells her father about her decision to stick by her choice of Satyavan as husband:

Once my heart chose and chooses not again
My father, I have chosen. This is done.⁵ (*Savitri*, 4th ed., 1993, p.432)

Savitri is the devoted, loyal wife and this wifely devotion becomes the foundation for other positive qualities in her to mature. It is against the background of her conjugal love and fidelity that her other roles are projected. The wife-subordination model is wholly rejected. In fact, passivity is transferred to Satyavan, the husband, and Savitri stands as the symbol of feminine strength. It may go against normative social behaviours, but in keeping with the true Indian ideal of the woman as Divine cosmogonic power, Sri Aurobindo endows Savitri with self-agency and autonomy, and in doing this, touches upon the cardinal point of feminism — considering Woman as a human being in her own right. The submissive, docile, subjugated figure of the woman is replaced by a powerful symbol in the figure of Savitri, who is a spiritual dynamo, a potent means for leading Man towards the Divine. She is identified with the Supreme creator, the Sun, a clue Sri Aurobindo has taken from the *Rig Veda* which eulogises her thus:

She the happy, and opulent and glorious, dawn has shone out for man bringing the Sun-world with her. ⁶

This formula of valorisation, equating the woman with the supreme power and energy of the universe, shakes the very foundations upon which notions of male supremacy endure. Sri Aurobindo offers an alternative model of heroism too in the figure of Savitri, whom he has modelled upon the character of the Aryan hero, ‘climbing in calm strength towards immortality’, against all odds. Heroism often comes to us as a gendered category, in that heroic action is accepted mainly as a masculine trait. Sri Aurobindo has contextualised the heroic ideal to uphold all that is noble in sacrifice, in suffering, in self-surrender, in Love. Heroism is power, strength employed in the service of the human race. Savitri is portrayed as a noble woman who has both power *and* authority to map out her own destiny. She, as embodiment of the original primeval might, remains ever calm, silent, courageous all through her ordeal and battle with the mighty power of Death. From her first choice of Satyavan as husband, to the redeeming of his life from the hands of Death, there is no slackening of her indomitable Will and Love. And this serves as the very means of her ultimate triumph. She draws upon the inexhaustible source of power within herself and in exhibiting her heroic-warrior attributes, she steps out of the constructed gender roles. But there is no sex-reversal here, only reversal of gender roles. For, Savitri essentially remains the ‘woman’, while exhibiting both feminine and masculine actions. She does not need to step out of her woman persona, or come in disguise impersonating a male warrior. In the popular imagination man’s

body is the supposed locus of heroic activity and the woman’s of eroticism, but in Sri Aurobindo’s work we see a rebuttal of this gender concept. It is on Savitri’s heroic strength that Satyavan’s fate depends, and he surrenders himself completely to the might of Savitri:

He knows her only, he has forgotten himself;
To her he abandons all....⁷

His soul, mind, life, body — all are given up to the mighty spiritual prowess. Sri Aurobindo does not work on the common assumption that woman is by nature weaker than man, an assumption on which male superiority and privilege is sustained. Here he elevates us to the level of the spiritual, without denying the role of the body. He emphasises the necessity of the human ‘body’ for the purposes of evolution. And for that reason, it is equal in value with the soul in the spiritual scheme. As Savitri says:

I have met Spirit with spirit, Self with self
But I have loved too the body of my God. ⁸

In fact, importance of the human body has nowhere been more emphasised than in the progressive integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. He never refuses to acknowledge the procreative function of the woman’s body, which in union with its male counterpart is responsible for creation. In physiological-metaphysical terms it is the creative union of the male seed and the female field, where the latter symbolises Nature in terms of fertility. What emerges out of this, again, is the concept of equality of the sexes. The separate identity is there, but no hierarchy of the male, for both are equally necessary for the propagation of the human race. Sexual duality is a feature of universal life and Sri Aurobindo represents Savitri and Satyavan as symbols of this primal androgyny, which at the symbolic level becomes also the union of two souls:

A rushing of two spirits to be one,
A burning of two bodies in one flame.⁹

So, far from being the locus of male subjectivity and cause of his destruction and fall, the woman has a cosmological relationship with him. In the legend, Savitri categorically states that without the ‘body’ of her husband Satyavan, her work on earth, will be incomplete:

..... not for my heart's sweet poignancy
 Nor for my happy body's bliss alone
 I have claimed from thee the living Satyavan,
 But for his work and mine, our sacred charge.¹⁰

And this 'sacred charge' is the propagation of the race. Sri Aurobindo points out the inherently pure and Divine nature of the human body in that it becomes an instrument of God-like activity, that is, of 'Creation'. So the 'woman-body', eternally condemned by ascetic tradition as the seat of impurity, sexuality, lust, desire, is seen as a vehicle of spiritual upliftment. Sri Aurobindo provides a constructive, progressive and positive alternative to the impure, puerile, sexist, seductive image of the woman-body by celebrating its sacredness and divinity. He undercuts the Mayavadin's philosophy of Woman as distraction or delusion who needs to be shunned in order to advance in the spiritual path. On the contrary, Sri Aurobindo sees in the marriage of the bodies a mystic union, which must lead to the birth of a greater age for humankind:

Then shall the holy marriage be achieved,
 Then shall the divine family be born.¹¹

The lower, baser, amorous aspect of this union is easily transcendentalised. Marriage is no play of the politics of domination/subjugation, but a self-giving, a self-surrender of each to the other. It is, in mystico-spiritual terms:

A diarchy of two united souls,
 Seated absorbed in deep creative joy;¹²

And the attraction for the body which leads to this union is the attraction for the Infinite and the Eternal seated within it. It is a mystic communion prompted by the intensity of Love. Sovereignty of Love is the prime focus of Sri Aurobindo's epic — the power of a Woman's silent love that conquers Death. The Love that unites Savitri to Satyavan is not mere physical passion or emotionalism or any paralysing entanglement. Free from vulgarity of any kind, love is sacred and divine, encompassing and transcending all levels of being, from the physical to the psychic. 'Love is a glory from eternity's spheres',¹³ and Savitri is the focal centre of such universal love. She passionately declares:

My love is not a hunger of the heart,

My love is not a craving of the flesh;
 It came to me from God, to God returns.¹⁴

Intensity of this love burns away the sheaths of egoism and each recognises the other as part of one's Self. What is attraction at the physical level, is a 'spiritual longing' for the other half of the self, at a higher level of consciousness. At the supreme moment of recognition, there is collapse of divisions when the Man and Woman reveal themselves as each other's spiritual mates. The relationship of the Self and the 'other' here is not that of the superior (man) and the inferior (woman), governed by patriarchal concerns. It is a spiritual conjunction, where gender polarities are transcended. Gender-dichotomy becomes an equation of recognition of an essential oneness. The 'other' is paradoxically a part of one's own Self and 'love is a yearning of the One for the One.'¹⁵ This idea of the 'Self' is basic to Indian monistic philosophy, which declares, 'not for the sake of the worlds are the worlds dear but the worlds are dear for the sake of the Self.'¹⁶ (Perhaps the greatest paradox of Vedantism is this paradox of 'Love of the Self'). Recognition of the 'other' as part of the same Self, culminates in a spiritual union, bringing bliss, joy, harmony in life. In the complementarity of gender-roles is implicit the image of the 'divine couple'. It is a far cry from the condemned image of the woman as *femme fatale*, from whose clutches man must escape. Sri Aurobindo preaches not escape from, but recognition of the woman as the other half of the man. So, in absence of a 'male self' and 'female other', no ground remains for male subjectivity. Yet, transcending of gender does not necessarily subsume the Man or Woman under the rubric of the neuter. Individual identities of Savitri and Satyavan are maintained. When at the end of their spiritual adventure Satyavan questions Savitri about her identity, she says:

I am the Madran, I am Savitri.
 All that I was before, I am to thee still,

 Thy body is my body's counterpart
 Whose every limb my answering limb desires

 Our wedded walk through life begins anew.¹⁷

Thus the physiological distinction and their complementary biological roles are preserved. What is done away with is gender hierarchy motivated by false

assumptions of the strong/weak, pure/impure, good/evil dichotomies. Savitri and Satyavan do not lose themselves into a distinction-negating union. Only routine gender-roles are transcended, making man and woman equal in the balance of cosmic forces. In Sri Aurobindo we encounter a different shade of feminism that does not devalue the male or the masculine, does not abandon traditional values, or negate social relationships, but links the physical and the spiritual (the Jungian *anima* and *animus*), putting Man and Woman on the same metaphysical-social-ethical level. And even while proclaiming the power of the ‘Eternal Feminine’, Sri Aurobindo looks back to the Indian tradition built upon the ideal of harmony, equality, love — a dynamic, spiritual tradition brought alive on the pages of a twentieth century text.

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4. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.633.
5. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.424.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1998), pp.392-3.
7. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.62.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.649.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.468.
10. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.633.
11. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.521.
12. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.295.
13. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.397.
14. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.612.
15. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, p.32.
16. S.Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads* (New Delhi: Harper, 1984), p.197.
17. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, pp.719-20.

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Nolini Kanta Gupta's Perceptions of Poetry

RY Deshpande

Between Genesis and the Apocalypse is the struggle and the striving and reaching out. Creation issuing out of God and Man's fulfilment as his destiny are the subjects of the two Testaments. But eating of the forbidden fruit of knowledge is another story and it is for the poets to write about it. Virgil's "tears in mortal things", Keats's "this nest of pain", Shelley's falling on the thorns of life and bleeding, Eliot's "hollow men" or "the inoperancy of the world of the spirit", even the Gita's "this transient and sorrowful world" are a poignancy that has to be borne on this difficult and dangerous pilgrim's march. The frustrating endeavour and travail lie in between the two glorious ends; a tortuous hiatus separates birth and death. But there is another dimension to this labour and toil, even to death in the sequence of life, put aphoristically by Sri Aurobindo: "He stung Himself with bliss and called it pain." To the woe of our heart He does not consent but tells us simply that its grief is just another name for joy. The horror of night about which we complain is but an opportunity to emerge into the day. Death is after all a passage towards life making the adventure worthwhile.

Nolini Kant Gupta believed that the entire history of mankind, seen in its essential psycho-spiritual sense, is a mighty effort of human life, almost a poetry of triumph, transcending itself and entering into the law of harmony, beauty, sweetness, truth, knowledge, even power, a wondrous movement born of and sustained by secret delight that is its own cause and its own effect, a great creative urge touching and pervading everything. The saga of evolution is an unwritten composition of the invisible poet and is sung by the bee and the lion and the hero. It is for us to join in its upward flight and the high-rising note. "We ascend the ascending grades in our heart and we sing the song of ascension. The journey's end is the heavenly Jerusalem, the House of the Lord." The ways of God are justified to Man. But Nolini Kanta Gupta goes far beyond the Augustinian Mantra when he recognises that

A finite movement of the Infinite
...winging its way through a wide air of Time

is indeed what has been thrown in this transient and sorrowful world as "a hook to clutch eternity". If Virgil was the noble singer of the glory of Rome that was to come, Nolini Kanta Gupta is certainly the high and lofty hymner and the chanter of the splendours of the Poetry of the Spirit. But there is a difference: the imperial majesty of Rome was, with the declining time, to shed off its purple grandeurs, a thing which never happens to the Word that comes straight from the source of original sound; it never dulls in time. On the contrary, with the growing cycles of the seasons it wears variegated hues and rhythms and flame-raptures as though the dreams of the stars come true in the earthly sleep, ever waking up to greater, newer dawns. The Poetry of the Spirit is not only a strange and tremulous vibrancy-and-glow of the Far that sits and enlivens our insentience, but is also a surge-and-breath that lifts our heaviness and sloth and grey slime to the sublimity of the unseen peaks, a power that luminously widens in leaf and rock and stream, a beauty that opens out its grace and charm to the blue of the formless, a thought that goes out to touch the Imponderable. Such is the conviction and commitment of Nolini Kanta Gupta; carrying a poet's heart it is with this admiration and absorption that he freely and royally travels in the "realms of gold". Yet the dazzle of those realms does not blind him, because he at once identifies himself with those realms' creative spirit merging with their line and sweep and delicacy of flow and bright patterned movement and rhythm, drinking the secret *rasa* all along. He doesn't have to surmise wildly if something is to enter into his eagle-eyed stare. Indeed, he has an access to the places where those wonders have their first birth, as he himself becomes a citizen of those gleam-magical lands. Nolini Kanta Gupta's perceptions of poetry are direct spiritual empathy, that which comes in spiritual consciousness.

But for acquiring the right of entry to the realms of gold he had to do a long apprenticeship. A *tapasvin* of literature, he had achieved that rare *siddhi* by arduous effort. To step into the sunlit continents and kingdoms of the Word's delight one has to prepare oneself by assimilating the best of the entire past, preferably in the light of the future that must illumine it. And what a privilege he had! Master of English and Bengali, Nolini Kanta Gupta knew several Indian and European languages. He could read the Vedas in the original; so too *The Divine Comedy* and *Aeneid*. Reminiscing about his early lessons of the Veda he tells us that "Sri Aurobindo would take up a hymn from the *Rigveda*, read it aloud once, explain the meaning of every line and phrase and finally

give a full translation. I used to take notes... His own method of interpreting the *Rigveda* was this: on reading the text he found its true meaning by direct intuitive vision through an inner concentration in the first instance, then he would give it an external verification in the light of reason, making the necessary changes accordingly.”

His lessons in literary classics started under Sri Aurobindo in the same way. He picked up Greek by taking directly Euripides’s *Medea* and Sophocles’s *Antigone*, Latin with Virgil, and Italian with Dante. Recollecting Sri Aurobindo’s method of teaching languages to the adults, Nolini Kanta Gupta narrates how he learnt French from him: “I started right away with a play from this volume [Molière’s Works], *L’Avare*. At several places in the margin he wrote out in his own hand the English equivalents for my convenience. I still possess that volume with the marginal notes in his handwriting.” What does one get by this method? “One feels as if one took a plunge into the inmost core of the language, into that secret heart where it is vibrant with life, with the quintessence of beauty, the fullness of strength. Perhaps it was this that has prompted me to write prose-poems and verse in French, for one feels as if identified with the very genius of the language.” A rare Teacher and a rare student, indeed!

With this grounding in the classics, with the heart of a Romantic, with the thought-mind of a Modernist, and living in the Aurobindonian Next Future, Nolini Kanta Gupta looks at poetry as the fulfiller of man’s agelong aspiration for the Truth-Beauty of Delight. He has truly acquired the patrimony in the realms of gold. He has done what the Gita calls in a generalised sense the askesis of speech, *vāṛigmaya tapa*. Thus for him the Vedic Riks are at once “beautiful things said in a beautiful way.” The gods themselves are the great creators of the Word, *kavis*, for the “Poet is he who by his poetic power raises forms of beauty in heaven — *kaviḥ kavitaḥ dīvi rūpam āśjat*.” When he listens to the Rik

Lo! The supreme Light of lights is come, a varied awakening is born, wide manifest,

or to the Upanishadic power-packed revelation

There the sun shines not, nor the moon, nor the stars; these lightnings too there shine not; how then this fire! That shines therefore all shines in its wake; by the sheen of That, all this shines,

or to Sri Aurobindo’s translation of the same *śloka*

there the sun shines not and the moon has no splendour and the stars are blind; there these lightnings flash not, how then shall burn this earthly fire? All that shines is but a shadow of his shining! All this universe is effulgent with his light,

he knows that it is

...the Word that ushers divine experience.

Here, in the Upanishadic utterance, is the poetic mantra in its quintessential purity because it is so pure as is also beautiful.

But the most daring thing Nolini Kanta Gupta has said is that even the formless can be beautiful. To see a statue by Praxiteles or a painting by Michelangelo is to admire the beauty of form in its harmonious measure and perfection, almost to feel the breath and vibration of the artist’s experience itself; but the massive stone-carved statue of the Buddha in the cave radiating peace — what Sarojini Naidu called “the peace annihilate from the world of men” — becomes inspiring and beautiful by the contours of the ungraspable and the formless. “The form of a thing can be beautiful; but the formless too has its beauty. Indeed, the beauty of the formless, that is to say, the very sum and substance, the ultimate essence, the soul of beauty — that is what suffuses with in-gathered colour and enthusiasm, the realisation and the poetic creation of the Upanishadic seer. All the forms that are scattered abroad in their manifest beauty hold within themselves a secret Beauty and are reflected or projected out of it. This veiled Name of Beauty... has no adequate image... below, *na tasya pratimā asti*, it cannot be defined or figured in the terms of phenomenal consciousness.” Rare are such insights in the aesthesis of poetry. It is from this point of view that Nolini Kanta Gupta differentiates the Vedic from the Upanishadic poetry. If the one is “rich and sensuous... luxuriating in high colour and ample decoration,” the other is a perception of a “concentrated essence”. If one is the form of the Formless, the other becomes formless in form.

Seen from such a consciousness, it is quite understandable that “the poet is a trinity himself... not only the revealer or creator, *śavitā*, he is also the builder or fashioner, *taṣṭā*, and he is the organiser, *vedhā*, of the Truth. As *Śavitā* he manifests the Truth, as *Taṣṭā* he gives a perfect body and form to the Truth, and as *Vedhā* he maintains the Truth in its dynamic working.” It would have been good had Nolini Kanta Gupta given some examples, but the import is clear: he is talking about the modes of spiritual poetry.

What is spiritual poetry and mystic poetry? “When the spirit speaks in its own language in its own name, we have spiritual poetry. If, however, the Spirit speaks — from choice or necessity — an alien language and manner, e.g. that of a profane consciousness or the consciousness of another domain, idealistic, philosophical or even occult, puts on or imitates spirit’s language and manner, we have what we propose to call mystic poetry proper.” This is how Nolini Kanta Gupta distinguishes the two types of poetry. Thus, if Tagore’s *Golden Boat* is a mystical and AE’s *Desire on its borderline*, Sri Aurobindo’s *Transformation* by its “poetic personality” and “stuff of consciousness” is immediately spiritual. Take the following lines from *Savitri*. If

Where mind like a moon illumines the world’s dark (*Savitri*, 1993, 4th rev ed, p.71)

is mystic,

Hearing that listens to thought’s inner sound (*Ibid*, p.325)

more occult than mystic, and

All the great Words that toiled to express the One
Were lifted into an absoluteness of light,
An ever-burning Revelation’s fire
And the immortality of the eternal Voice. (*Ibid*, p.90)

Mystico-spiritual, we have

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone
Has called out of the Silence his mute Force
Where she lay in the featureless and formless hush
Guarding from Time by her immobile sleep
The ineffable puissance of his solitude. (*Ibid*, p.67)

as purely spiritual. Or we have, coming from infinity and going to infinity, undulating with a tremendous presence and a power of effectuation,

The riven invisible atom’s omnipotent force. (*Ibid*, p.255)

as the sheer mantra of the highest poetry, at once intense in rhythm, thought-

substance, and soul’s vision, all bringing with it the supreme realisation of what the God of death actually is in creation.

However, Nolini Kanta Gupta’s concept of the mantra is not Agastyan; it is rather secular in character. His attribution of mantric characteristics to poetry does not belong only to the scriptural genre; it can touch any subject and any matter lifting them to the intensity and wideness of the spirit’s sky, yet bringing that ethereality as well as substantiality of soul-vision to material things. Sri Aurobindo describes the mantra as the “Word of power and light that comes from the Overmind inspiration or some very high plane of Intuition.” That is what the Vedic Rishis saw in it and spoke of it so: the Word, received by the heart and confirmed by the mind, carries the power of creation and of effectuating what it embodies. But for Nolini Kanta Gupta the Shakespearean or the Modernist’s Word too is mantra. “Mantra means a certain sum of syllables charged with dynamic force, creative consciousness.” Perhaps this is more of a Tantric formula and not so much a definition of that supreme poetic utterance. But let us take some examples from his writings to illustrate the point he is trying to make.

In the opening scene of *Hamlet* the apparition has appeared for the third time and Horatio is harrowed with fear and wonder. He charges him to speak but the Ghost disappears. Nolini Kanta Gupta tells us that in the entire description nothing seems to belong to the earthly stage; it has another tone and hue, another setting. What Shakespeare presents to us is all loaded with magical creative power. “It is the creative force of the articulate sound... mantra”

In the domain of the occult poetry Blake gives us another vision that was inaccessible to the classical or to the romantic. The marriage proposed by him is an ideal to be pursued for fulfilment on the earth. Here “Highest must come down wholly and inhabit the Lowest, the Lowest must give up altogether its own norms and lift itself into the substance and form of the Highest.” It is a ceremony attended and sanctified by the all-cleansing and transmuting power of the mantra. When the poet asks for the bow of burning gold and the chariot of fire we see that he is ready with the might of the Word to slay the forces that had built the dark satanic mills. He had received the command from Vak herself and given expression to it.

Even a Modernist Bengali poet, Dipak Majumdar, imparts to us, by the “collocation of words and images”, a neo-mantric experience: the streams meet in the body, one and all; like bats on the branches the dreams swing as if possessed; it is time to dance and go around the fire. True to the present sensibility, including its uncouthness and frightening shape, here the origin of form and substance is obvious in its intensity of expression. Nolini Kanta Gupta explains

that in the body-consciousness spoken of by the poet there is a definite expression and manifestation, a “concrete reality”, itself. The mantra in that sense has succeeded. “The cry of our poet is a cry literally *de profundis*, a deep cavernous voice surging, spectral and yet sirenlike, out of the unfathomed underground abysses.”

When contemporary Greek poet, George Seferis, asks

O nightingale, nightingale,
What is good? What is not good? What is in-between?

or tells us,

Suddenly I was walking and not walking,

or when Eliot emerges from the “still point” we have again a mantric utterance. The reason is, a Modernist invokes terror and pity “not for themselves but for the sake of purification.” While the modern sensibility does not give so much weightage to sound-value, it compensates that loss by thought-substance and boldness of metaphor or simile or image which can produce a certain impact that could be akin to the effect of the mantra with its purificatory possibility. This point of view has a certain merit but in the context of spiritual mantra this may not hold.

The Hymn of Darkness is ancient as Vedic literature, but it has acquired a new Baudelairean edge and penetration, a sheen and dazzle to illumine and open out the heart of night to a new day that lies beyond the invisible Apocalypse. This is indeed the glory of Transformation. We have here not the simplicity of the pastoral life, nor the winged ethereality of the world-disdaining visionary, but a complex urbanity asserting itself in heaviness of the diurnal routines. Its caves are dark, its waters are dark, its mountains are dark, its modernity is dark. Thus when Yves Bonnefoy moves

vers l'autre rive encore plus nocturne
(Towards the other bank still more a night)

the journey becomes suddenly frightful-Vedic. In this conception of the power of the Word even the sombre hymn becomes mantric. The contribution of the Modern Age is such that its poetry, its dark subconscious mysticism, too takes a bold step and throws open the unexplored domains of the Spirit to build forms of yet another sight-and-sound in its own figure of faultless beauty. It becomes a

means “to break open the doors of the luminous cavern.”

But Nolini Kanta Gupta does not linger too long in this Mysticism of the Subconscious. The subconscious aesthesis can be very dangerous. The horror experienced by Agastya while digging the abysses of consciousness need not be repeated or tasted. What one should await in the soul's delight is indeed *raso vai sah*. In our own time Tagore is one shining example whose work is “a constant music of the overpassing of the borders, a chant-filled realm in which the subtle sounds and lights of the spirit give new meanings to the finer subtleties of life.” Tagore was a dreamy silver-bright idyllic figure emerging out of the past, a lover of bird, flower, stream, Nature in her varied moods and seasons, the boatman, the lonely hut, all that is artistic and aesthetically pleasing, the song, the poem, the pergola arch, the wide blue sky. His soul was morning glory awaiting the sunlight. Not only an admirer or appreciator of beauty; his was a psychic sense that touched and received all that was noble and charming and wonderful. Through this he saw his one deity, the goddess of beauty. He was drawn not so much towards Pallas Athene as towards diviner Aphrodite with a cestus around her waist. Beauty, tells Nolini Kanta Gupta, “is the chief essential thing in the poetic creation of Rabindranath. He appreciates beauty and makes others do the same in a delightful manner... Beautiful is his diction. Varied and fascinating are the richness and intricacy of thought and the firmness and delicacy of feeling...”

The stars drop in the lap of the sky
From the chain hanging down to your breast.
The heart is overwhelmed with ecstasy
In the core of Man's being:
Blood runs riot in his veins.
Suddenly your girdles give way
On the horizon, O naked beauty.

What a visionary world of matchless and unique beauty is unveiled before the mind's eye! That is true Rabindranath, the creator of such magic wonders. Perfect perfection of beauty is inherent in the nature of his inner being.”

The search of beauty is an aspect of the hidden unknown. Rabindranath was a traveller of the Infinite. His was not the soul of a philosopher or researcher but that of a seeker, of the one who pursued beauty in her varied moods and guises and disguises. He would rather chase the colours of the butterfly than the ones coming from the tail of the rocket shooting out of sight to unseen skies. The intense aspiration led him on, and on, in search of his ideal that was dream-

delicate and dew-fresh. This itself is a kind of lyrical devotionism whose constant strain is a total offering to the beloved of the heart. That is its *raison d'être* too. "Tagore is no inventor or innovator when he posits Spirit as Beauty, the spiritual consciousness as the ardent rhythm of ecstasy. This experience is the very core of Vaishnavism and for which Tagore is sometimes called a Neo-Vaishnava." Therefore, when Tagore declares, though not in a very new or original sense, "Mine is not the deliverance achieved through mere renunciation. Mine rather the freedom that tastes itself in a thousand associations," Nolini Kanta Gupta asserts that his was an exploit similar to Socrates's who brought down Philosophy from Heaven to the market-place. It was on the path of the song, the epic of his joy, in search of the Infinite, that he really went very far. In that quest of soul he made the realities of the bare transcendental spirit somewhat tangible and visible to our eyes too. His perceptions have become immortally lyrical. In them it is the song that counts rather than the silence. Indeed, to quote from Radhakrishnan: "History bears witness to the power of the human spirit which endures longer than dynasties and creeds. The political world of Homer is dead while his song is living today. The splendour of Rome has vanished but the poetry of Virgil is yet vital. The dreams of Kalidasa will move us like the cry of a living voice with their poignant sense of tears in human relations, while Ujjain of which he was the ornament has left her memory to his keeping. The great mediaeval potentates are forgotten, but the song of Dante is still cherished; and the Elizabethan Age will be remembered as long as the English language lives on account of its Shakespeare. When our lords and leaders pass into oblivion Tagore will continue to enchant by his music and poetry..." but perhaps Nolini Kanta Gupta is more restrained and chaste in the assessment of Tagore as a poet: "... if we compare Tagore with those who stand on the peaks in world-literature, we find in their creation an utmost, flawless harmony between speech and substance, while in Tagore we find on the whole speech carrying more weight than substance and this is why his poetic genius, as it were, somewhat falls short of perfect perfection."

Naturally, therefore, we cannot put the two "Shining Ones" on a par. If one was a forerunner of the era of future poetry, the other was himself its initiator and creator. Tagore derived his shining light from the Past. But even there Homer and Virgil were Greek and Latin to him. It is from the tradition of the race that he essentially received his mysticism and in that whole process what he did was to give to it a new song and a new lilt. His "honey-laden felicity of expression" is more characteristic of mystico-lyrical than the full-orbed intensity of the world of joy towards which he yearned to take us. He had no access to the source of original sound and lived in its reflection only. No doubt, in Tagore's

poetry "there is an imponderable element, a flavour, a breath from elsewhere that suffuses the entire creation, something that can be characterised only as the soul-element. It is this presence that makes whatever the poet touches not only living and graceful but instinct with something that belongs to the world gods, something celestial and divine, something that meets and satisfies man's deepest longing and aspiration." But his is "a breath from elsewhere" and in the turquoise-blue depth of our heart's passion and in the calm upward-burning intensity of the spirit's diamond glow it thins and pales into a tenuity that cannot upbear the flight of the golden eagle. The deathless Rose and the deathless Flame remain unfulfilled in him.

Not the reflected light but the very sun can be the only shining star of our journey to the high-pinnacled Temple of the Muse. One has to be the denizen of the Sky of the Spirit to pour its splendours. Sri Aurobindo was the Surya-Savitri who established his sky in our earthliness, who brought down the home of Truth of the Vedic seers into our midst, so that the Spirit may speak to us in its native language. Take the following lines from *Savitri* and we have an altogether different perception of things and events.

A last high world was seen where all worlds meet;
In its summit gleam where Night is not nor Sleep,
The light began of the Trinity supreme.
All there discovered what it seeks for here.
It freed the finite into boundlessness
And rose into its own eternities.
The Inconscient found its heart of consciousness,
The idea and feeling groping in Ignorance
At last clutched passionately the body of Truth,
The music born in Matter's silences
Plucked nude out of the Ineffable's fathomlessness
The meaning it had held but could not voice;
The perfect rhythm now only sometimes dreamed
An answer brought to the torn earth's hungry need
Rending the night that had concealed the Unknown,
Giving to her her lost forgotten soul. (Ibid, pp.89-90)

Here we have at once the language and rhythm of some other infinity, thought-substance and massive luminosity of the wide-ranging Truth-existent, and the soul-vision in the consciousness of sheer delight which is the stuff of creation — we have the highest mantra. Or, to use CM Bowra's less exalted

description, given in a different context but quite appropriate to the Aurobindonian aesthesis, “the elements of sight and sound, and even the absence of them, have passed together into the poet’s consciousness, and the effect is complete and single.” Or what Nolini Kanta Gupta would have liked to call it, we have the Spirit’s own poetry in its own matter and manner — *svabhāva and svadharma*.

Savitri is of course Sri Aurobindo’s supreme revelation with the full force of his personality behind it. But then even his lyrical pieces move with the same God-breath. They too bring that power out of the Infinite’s depths and fulfil specific soul-need in soul-delights. In his *Mother of Dreams* what we hear is “a sweet felicity naturally pleasing to the ear; there is a sense of wideness as in a far-flung movement of modulated grace; and the whole is surcharged with a rich opulence.” In the *Bird of Fire* we perceive the quality of “strength or energy” and in the *Rose of God* it is the very embodiment of the Word with its power of calm clear vision.” Or listen to the prayer when the two ends of existence —

Earth-souls needing the touch of the heaven’s peace to recapture,
Heaven needing earth’s passion to quiver in peace to rapture —

Must come together that the divine progeny be born:

Marry, O lightning eternal, the passion of a moment-born fire!
Out of thy greatness draw close to the breast of our mortal desire!

Here is a full-throated voice, in quantitative metre, supplicating the Dawn of the Eternal to transform our darkness into her being of light and sweetness. In the greatness of immortality shall the Immortal in the mortal be born. This is the Word that Sri Aurobindo sees and creates. But it is “something which appears to the many poetically intractable, not amenable to aesthetic treatment, not usually, that is to say, not in the supreme manner. Sri Aurobindo has thrown such a material into his poetic fervour and created a sheer beauty, a stupendous reality out of it. Herein lies the greatness of his achievements.” Nolini Kanta Gupta reaches a high point of poetic appreciation when he concludes his essay *Ahana and other Poems* as follows: “And if there is something in the creative spirit of Sri Aurobindo which tends more towards the strenuous than the genial, the arduous than the mellifluous, and which has more of the austerity of Vyasa than the easy felicity of Valmiki, however it might have affected the ultimate value of his creation, according to certain standards, it has illustrated once more

that poetry is not merely beauty but power too, it is not merely sweet imagination but creative vision — it is even the Rik, the mantra that impels the gods to manifest upon earth, that fashions divinity in man.”

A remarkable perspicacity of thought and vision is what we note in Nolini Kanta Gupta’s writings. To seize immediately the truth of things is a rare faculty and given only to great souls. There is a catholicity of outlook, a way of seeing God’s world in its many moods of joy, an intimacy, even an identity, with the hidden divinity in the grain and the star, an appreciation leaping over all conventionality, of the bright as well as the obscure; but it is always with the lamp of the spirit that he moves around. And his is not a search that ends in the futility of a Diogenes! Nolini Kanta Gupta sees the unmistakable Presence everywhere. His consciousness is spiritual consciousness and therefore his perception of poetry too is charged with spiritual feeling association, sense, assonance and consonance, thought, knowledge, intuition. It responds and reverberates with the full dynamism of its calm; its certitude runs like the laughter of a God. But his intuition’s eye is not only located in the mind; even to heart and the very cells of the body it brings that vision of the Far. A heart that calls to the Heights, a mind that leaps to Silence, a body that quivers with the touch of the Beautiful are the shining instruments of his soul’s will to live in God and to let God live in it. Listen to the miracle of silence:

In silence move the stars,
In silence mounts the sap within the plant,
The secret energies of Nature work and create in the deeps of silence.
Out of the utmost stillness the whirling universe was born —
All the turmoil and the tumult, the roar and fry that meet the eye
Flourish upon an unfathomed quiet below.
In the tranquillity of death a new birth prepares itself,
The guarded calm of Night’s ending ushers in the rejuvenated Sun...
And were my wild senses to turn back, they would face the abysmal silence
of the soul.

The cry of the heart shoots up like a column of silence —
That voice alone reaches straight to the High throne and moves it to grace.
The gods descend along the path of luminous silence spread in the farthest
spaces of our inmost being.

A silence deepening into tranquillity that even death in it shall be the harbinger of new birth is a wonderful Aurobindonian insight we see not only here but also

throughout his *To the Heights*, a set of prose-poems written in the 1930s. Lucid and direct in expression and simple in free-verse style here are poems embodying in a low quiet rhythm the profound philosophico-spiritual knowledge. A plain statement like ‘It is the Eye of the eye’ and yet it is the object that the eye contemplates begins with an Upanishadic vision but immediately brings all the associations and suggestions extending from Pythagoras to Descartes about the reality of the objective world.

Sometimes the lyrical moments too get loaded with a mass of mysticism when

White — colour of the moon poised on high in an autumn night —
The soothing peace, the quiet heave of an in-gathered rapture

moves on to the

...colour of the lotus... that has taken body upon earth.

But always the voice rings clear and loud:

There is a breath that moves mountains,
There is a touch that makes the dead arise,
There is a voice that is the doom of Yesterday
And the radiant herald of Tomorrow.

It is in the last line of *Divina Commedia*

Love moved me...
Love that moves the sun and the other stars,
(*l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stele.*)

So dear to this mystic-poet, that he goes on to see the beatific vision which is at once “the culmination and denouement of an unrolling of God’s play of creation and world manifestation.” Then the poetic perception lifted to God-purpose becomes the grandest thing of the creative Word.

If you ask Nolini Kanta Gupta to explain a line from *Savitri* such as

In the griffin forefront of the Night and Day (Ibid, p.25)

he will tell you that Griffin is a Golden Hawk plus a Winged Lion, or the piercing

eye of soaring aspiration plus upsurging energy of the pure vital. “With these twin powers you cross safely the borderland between the lower and the upper hemispheres — the twilight world (Day and Night) — Griffin is the guardian of this passage.”

In the same way he will tell you that Narad was a *devarshi*, that by his spiritual *tapasya* he had developed into an immortal divine being. There is no doubt that Nolini Kanta Gupta too had become such a being in the light of God.

From the *Chhandogya Upanishad* we know how Narad as a young spiritual aspirant was initiated by Rishi Sanatkumar. Having mastered all the worldly lore, the traditional sixty-four *Vidyas*, he had qualified himself well to receive the higher or esoteric knowledge. It is in that knowledge that he then lived and helped humanity to grow in consciousness. No wonder, Sri Krishna calls him his *Vibhuti*. Nolini Kanta Gupta also lived largely and freely in the golden landscapes of Truth. He accepted Sri Aurobindo’s “*Invitation*”. The Mother once saw Narad standing far on the borderline between Overmind and Supermind. That too is the station of Nolini Kanta Gupta. He lived there, at least he had an access to that wondrous place. We can therefore well surmise that it is from some such high plane of consciousness that he saw true poetry as an utterance of the Spirit. To hearken to Sri Aurobindo’s mantra

To love, to love are signs of infinite things

is also to recognise the highest aesthesis of the creative Word given to us in God’s plenty for that living and loving, the Vedic plenitude of life. Nolini Kanta Gupta fully imbibed it; he was one of those poet-seers.

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(Includes names of those contributors whose writings
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