

ISSN 2278-2117

Śraddhā श्रद्धा



Śraddhā



श्रद्धा



(Vol.7 No.4)

24 April 2016

Courtesy : Nirmal Sethia Charitable Trust

24 April 2016



A Bliss, a Light, a Power, a flame-white Love
Caught all into a sole immense embrace

Savitri

Śraddhā

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

Vol.7 No.4

24 April, 2016



Sri Aurobindo Bhavan
8 Shakespeare Sarani • Kolkata 700 071

Publication Details

Frequency of publication : Quarterly. Published on 15 August, 24 November, 21 February, 24 April.

Annual Subscription : Rs 150.00 **Single copy** : Rs. 50.00 Those wishing to have the journal mailed to them may please send an additional Rs. 100.00

Annual Subscription for soft copy of the journal : Rs.150.00

For overseas readers : Annual subscription :US\$ 45 inclusive of postal and bank charges for hard copy;

US\$ 20 for soft copy

All payments to be made in favour of **Sri Aurobindo Centre for Research in Social Sciences**

All Rights Reserved

No matter appearing in this journal or part thereof may be reproduced or translated, in any form, without the written permission of the publishers except for short extracts as quotations. Views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the journal. Readers with different viewpoints are requested to write direct to the contributors. Editor, Śraddhā, will be pleased to provide the necessary contact details.

All correspondence may be addressed to

Śraddhā

Sri Aurobindo Bhavan
8 Shakespeare Sarani
Kolkata 700 071

Editor: Arup Basu

Phone: 98302 58723

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

Published by

Sri Aurobindo Centre for Research in Social Sciences

Sri Aurobindo Bhavan

8 Shakespeare Sarani

Kolkata 700071

Phone : 2282 3057, 2282 2162, 2282 1819

Printed by

Basab Chattopadhyaya

Shilalipi

16 A Tamer Lane

Kolkata 700 009

Phone 0336540 5390 / 98360 37601

Editorial

The Mother has said 'I am always with you'. Sri Aurobindo has further reiterated 'Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you because she is, indeed, always present'. Now what do these words really mean? Time and again, Mother has said that if we were to really seek the Divine and feel her Presence, we must turn our eyes inward and try to begin to live within. We must move our senses and gaze away from the outside world. There are two ways of doing this – to take our poise of consciousness and concentrate either in the head or in the heart, but not 'a quarter of an inch or two inside' as Sri Aurobindo wrote to one of his disciples but to look deep within ourselves and dive into our inner being and go down farther and farther, deeper and deeper till we reach the innermost core of our being, 'the welling core' as Sri Aurobindo so beautifully puts it in *Savitri*. On our journey into the inner countries, we shall pass through planes of black resistance, of encircling darkness and gloom, but we must go on and go farther with persistence and tenacity and intense aspiration till 'through a tunnel dug in the last rock', we reach the 'ebony gate' standing as sentinel to bar entry to the light, the power, peace and beatitude of the higher hemispheres. But we must knock and knock and press against the 'heavily reluctant' gate till its 'sullen hinges' groan and finally give way. Then all at once as the door opens we enter a chamber, a hall of clarity and light and come upon an altar crypt where silently burns an inextinguishable fire, the eternal flame of aspiration. Into that fire we cast all our past and our present, all that we have been and all that we possess, all our misgivings, our doubts, our failures and successes, our longings, even our hopes and faith and aspirations and as the tongue of flame mounts higher and higher, gradually there takes place the birth of the 'flame-child' and we are born anew; we begin to look at ourselves within and at the outside world with eyes of awe and feel the softness, the gentle touch and warmth of our inmost being, our soul, our psychic being, and beauty and wonder and love and joy disturb the fields of God.

We are grateful to

Editors, Mother India for permitting us to reprint the series of articles on Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* by C C Dutt

Editors, *NAMAH* for agreeing to let us reproduce the paper by James Anderson

Editor, *New Race*, for allowing us to feature the article on *Baji Prabhou* by Shruti Bidwaikar

Prof. Ananta Giri, Professor Madras Inst. of Development Studies, Chennai for kindly granting permission to carry transcript of the paper presented by Richard Hartz at an international conference entitled "*Pragmatism and Spirituality: New Horizons of Theory and Practice and the Calling of Planetary Conversations*" held at the Indus Business Academy, Bangalore, on 8-9 February, 2016)

Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for permitting us to reprint the extract *I am with you* taken from the *Collected Works of the Mother*, vol.13, pp.75-78, and the photo of the Mother from the Ashram digital photo catalogue with a few lines of *Savitri* appended to it.

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgement and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Managing Trust, Pondicherry.

Contents

I Am With You	Mother	7
Prusna Upanishad		
The Upanishad of the Six Questions - Part II	Alok Pandey	10
Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of the Gita	C C Dutt	20
The Supramental Manifestation – Interpretation	Debashish Banerji	38
Sri Aurobindo: The Ideal Teacher	Prema Nandakumar	55
Rishi Sri Aurobindo		
His Integral Philosophy and Yoga	V. Ananda Reddy	61
Spiritual Pragmatism : William James, Sri Aurobindo and Global Philosophy	Richard Hartz	82
Sri Aurobindo, Plotinus and the <i>Nous</i>	Wilfried Huchzermeyer	106
Psychological perfection – Part I	James Anderson	113
Sri Aurobindo and the Cultural Crisis in India	Kalidas Bhattacharya	126
The History of the Ashram School — Part II	Kittu Reddy	132
<i>Baji Prabhou</i> : Its Poetic Strength and Beauty	Shruti Bidwaikar	145
Notes On Authors		159

श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Cover : Painting by Giles Herdman

I Am With You

Mother

“I am with you.” What does it mean exactly?

When we pray or struggle with a problem within ourselves, are we really heard, always, in spite of our clumsiness and imperfection, in spite even of our bad will and our error? And who hears? You who are with us?

And is it you in your supreme consciousness, an impersonal divine force, the force of Yoga, or you, Mother in a body, with your physical consciousness? A personal presence that really knows each thought and each act and not some anonymous force? Can you tell us how, in what way you are present with us?

Sri Aurobindo and you, it is said, form one and the same consciousness, but is there a personal presence of Sri Aurobindo and your personal presence, two things distinct, each playing its own particular role?

I am with you because I am you or you are me.

I am with you, that signifies a world of things, because I am with you on all levels, on all planes, from the supreme consciousness down to my most physical consciousness. Here, in Pondicherry, you cannot breathe without breathing my consciousness. It saturates the atmosphere almost materially, in the subtle physical, and extends to the Lake, ten kilometres from here. Farther, my consciousness can be felt in the material vital, then on the mental plane and the other higher planes, everywhere. When I came here for the first time, I felt the atmosphere of Sri Aurobindo, felt it materially at a distance of ten miles, ten nautical miles, not kilometres. It was very sudden, very concrete, an atmosphere pure, luminous, light, light that lifts you up.

It is now long since Sri Aurobindo has put up everywhere in the Ashram this reminder that you all know: “Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you, because she is, indeed, always present.”

This is not a mere phrase, not simply words, it is a fact. I am with you in a very concrete manner and they who have a subtle vision can see me.

In a general way my Force is there constantly at work, constantly shifting the psychological elements of your being to put them in new relations and defining to yourself the different facets of your nature so that you may see what should be changed, developed, rejected.

But that apart, there is a special personal tie between you and me, between all who have turned to the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and myself, — and, it is well understood, distance does not count here, you may be in France, you may be at the other end of the world or in Pondicherry, this tie is always true and living. And each time there comes a call, each time there is a need for me to know so that I may send out a force, an inspiration, a protection or any other thing, a sort of message comes to me all of a sudden and I do the needful. These communications reach me evidently at any moment, and you must have seen me more than once stop suddenly in the middle of a sentence or work; it is because something comes to me, a communication and I concentrate.

With those whom I have accepted as disciples, to whom I have said Yes, there is more than a tie, there is an emanation of me. This emanation warns me whenever it is necessary and tells me what is happening. Indeed I receive intimations constantly, but not all are recorded in my active memory, I would be flooded; the physical consciousness acts like a filter. Things are recorded on a subtle plane, they are there in a latent state, something like a piece of music that is recorded without being played, and when I need to know with my physical consciousness, I make contact with this subtle physical plane and the disc begins to turn. Then I see how things are, their development in time, the actual result.

And if for some reason you write to me asking for my help and I answer “I am with you”, it means that the communication with you becomes active, you come into my active consciousness for a time, for the time necessary.

And this tie between you and me is never cut. There are people who have long ago left the Ashram, in a state of revolt, and yet I keep myself informed of them, I attend to them. You are never abandoned.

In truth, I hold myself responsible for everyone, even for those whom I have met only for one second in my life.

Now remember one thing. Sri Aurobindo and myself are one and the same consciousness, one and the same person. Only, when this force or this presence, which is the same, passes through your individual consciousness, it puts on a form, an appearance which differs according to your temperament, your aspiration, your need, the particular turn of your being. Your individual consciousness is like a filter, a pointer, if I may say so; it makes a choice and fixes one possibility out of the infinity of divine possibilities. In reality, the Divine gives to each individual exactly what he expects of Him. If you believe that the

Divine is far away and cruel, He will be far away and cruel, because it will be necessary for your ultimate good that you feel the wrath of God; He will be Kali for the worshippers of Kali and Beatitude for the Bhakta. And He will be the All-knowledge of the seeker of Knowledge, the transcendent Impersonal of the illusionist; He will be atheist with the atheist and the love of the lover. He will be brotherly and close, a friend always faithful, always ready to succour, for those who feel Him as the inner guide of each movement, at every moment. And if you believe that He can wipe away everything, He will wipe away all your faults, all your errors, tirelessly, and at every moment you can feel His infinite Grace. The Divine is indeed what you expect of Him in your deepest aspiration.

And when you enter into this consciousness where you see all things in a single look, the infinite multitude of relations between the Divine and men, you see how wonderful all that is, in all details. You can look at the history of mankind and see how much the Divine has evolved according to what men have understood, desired, hoped, dreamed and how He was materialist with the materialist and how He grows every day and becomes nearer, more luminous according as human consciousness widens itself. Each one is free to choose. The perfection of this endless variety of relations of man with God throughout the history of the world is an ineffable marvel. And all that together is only one second of the total manifestation of the Divine.

The Divine is with you according to your aspiration. Naturally that does not mean that He bends to the caprices of your outer nature, — I speak here of the truth of your being. And yet, sometimes he does fashion himself according to your outer aspirations, and if, like the devotees, you live alternately in separation and union, ecstasy and despair, the Divine also will separate from you and unite with you, according as you believe. The attitude is thus very important, even the outer attitude. People do not know how important is faith, how faith is miracle, creator of miracles. If you expect at every moment to be lifted up and pulled towards the Divine, He will come to lift you and He will be there, quite close, closer, ever closer.

(Reproduced from the Mother's CWM, Vol.13, pp.75-78,1957)

Prusna Upanishad

The Upanishad of the Six Questions - Part II

(Continued from the previous issue)

Alok Pandey

The mystery of Birth

Now the first question is indeed the very first question of life itself. Even as we come into birth, it is natural to inquire as to wherefrom have we come into existence. The first mystery indeed is the mystery of birth. It is the great mystery of Manifestation. Death, Fate and all the rest come later. Hence the first question rightly asked of the great seer is about the birth of all things. 'Whence are all these creatures born?' Asked one of the sages, Kalbandhi. The sage is no ordinary seeker. He has asked this question in a beautiful way, a universal way if we like. He could have asked about himself, 'where do I come from?' That would have elicited a different response, a very personal form of response. But the sages, it seems, have already become aware of their personal individual truths, that is why they have come seeking for the universal. For the knowledge of individual truths is incomplete unless we also discover the universal truths that underlie it. There is an interconnectedness and interdependence between us and the universe. To know fully our own truth we must also discover the corresponding universal principles. To know about our birth we must also discover what really is birth and how anything is born or rather comes into existence. Hence the question.

3. Then came Kalbandhi, son of Katya, to him and asked: "Lord, whence are all these creatures born?"

4. To him answered the Rishi Pippalada: "The Eternal Father desired children, therefore he put forth his energy and by the heat of his energy produced twin creatures, Prana the Life, who is Male, and Rayi the

Matter, who is Female. ‘These’ said he ‘shall make for me children of many natures.’

The answer of the great Seer proceeds along occult, spiritual as well as practical lines, all three approaches woven and intertwined into each other. Outwardly we know that an offspring is the result of union between a male and a female. But like all other acts and events in creation there is a deep symbol behind this union too. Male and female are not just differences of forms but principles in Nature. Creation proceeds through a union of these two principles, termed as Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is the static principle, Prakriti the dynamic. The Purusha stands behind creation as the sun does and yet it is He who extends into creation as its manifold creatures. Prakriti emerges from the Purusha, reaches far and wide creating the play of Space and Time and countless receptacles for the Purusha to extend ‘Himself’. The One sole Reality that is neither male or female willed to be many. This truth is revealed at several places in the Vedas and the Upanishads. But here we see the process. The One brooded within Itself on this ‘Idea-Will’, the *tapas* needed for all creation. Then suddenly out of It burst forth the two principles, — the Vision and the Will, Knowledge and Power, Matter and Energy, the breath of Life that flows as a current or sap within creation and the form that sustains and upholds it.

5. “The Sun verily is Life and the Moon is no more than Matter; yet truly all this Universe formed and formless is Matter; therefore Form and Matter are One.

Out of the One there emerged the eternal two, intertwined with each other as Iswara and Iswari, the Lord and His Shakti. Thus began the great and mysterious Play, the play of the twin duality forever the same who together try to replicate and express the infinity of the One. Together they try to build in tangible forms the many moods of infinity, together they seek to create the many degrees of self-expression of the One Infinite, together they cast into Name and Form the Formless essence and truth that is the Source and the Origin.

All that we see and experience in the visible and the invisible worlds are symbolic representations of this play. The Sun is at once the physical source of all Energy here or elsewhere, as well as, a symbol of the Supramental Consciousness from where multiplicity begins to have its free play in creation. Moon is symbolic of the spiritual worlds that are the first to receive the Light

and Power of the Supermind. From there the Light reflects and spreads out further. It is this spiritualised mind that begins to give birth to the first principle of Matter, it creates the conditions of the manifestation through formation of first forms which we know as the various Godheads. These first forms will pour their energies and combine various aspects to give birth to more and more concrete forms. But that comes at a later point in this Upanishad. Now only the chief principles are being enunciated.

6. Now when the sun rising enters the East, then absorbeth he the eastern breaths into his rays. But when he illumines the south and west and north, and below and above and all the angles of space, yea, all that is, then he takes all the breaths into his rays.

7. “Therefore is this fire that rises, this Universal Male, of whom all things are the bodies, Prana the breath of existence. This is that which was said in the Rigveda:-

8. ““Fire is this burning and radiant Sun, he is the One lustre and all-knowing Light, he is the highest heaven of spirits. With a thousand rays he burns and exists in a hundred existences; lo this Sun that rises, he is the Life of all his creatures.’

All has emerged from the Supramental Creator, the Sun of Truth and Power and Delight. It is the original Fire of which all things come into being and manifest the truth within them. There is a poise, a state when all its Rays are gathered within itself. It is the highest poise, the poise that exists at the very Origin of Creation. It is the same sun that sends its multiple Rays into the manifested creation. All creation is an extension and an empire of the Sun. It is the Sun that extends Its Light and Warmth and the life giving Energy into Space and therefore the Sun is the first masculine Principle. It is the giver of Light, the support and the base, the creative Fire and the sustaining Breath of all things.

Obviously, the Sun that is being spoken of here is not the physical Sun though the physical Sun is a symbol of that deeper Supramental Light of Truth that exists beyond the consciousness of Mind and yet extends itself into all things. So too this Fire is not the physical fire though the essence of physical fire, that is to say the energy concealed in atomic particles, indeed is the builder of form. But the impulsion and the Knowledge come from the Divine Will, which is the Fire burning in the depths of creation. The same truth reflects, reveals or shadows itself at different layers and levels of our being. The Fire that burns at the apex

of the worlds, the Supramental Sun of Truth and the Light of the Supreme that pervades the highest Heavens also finds expression in the other worlds including our own material sphere where it takes the material form of the physical sun.

9. “The year also is that Eternal Father and of the year there are two paths, the northern solstice and the southern. Now they who worship God with the well dug and the oblation offered, deeming these to be righteousness, conquer their heavens of the Moon; these return again to the world of birth. Therefore do the souls of sages who have not yet put from them the desire of offspring, take the way of the southern solstice which is the road of the Fathers. And this also is Matter, the Female.

10. “But by the way of the northern solstice go the souls that have sought the Spirit through holiness and knowledge and faith and askesis; for they conquer their heavens of the Sun. There is the resting place of the breaths, there immortality casts out fear, there is the highest heaven of spirits; thence no soul returns; therefore is the wall and barrier. Whereof this is the Scripture:-

Not only the Sun but all things here and elsewhere are manifestations of the One Truth. One is the Real, Original, the rest are replicas, symbols and shadows of That. It is the same original Plan that multiplies itself on several planes, in different degrees and in multiple ways. Thus seen, the experiences of our everyday life, the day and the night, the changing of seasons, the waxing and waning of the moon, the cycles of time are all symbols of a deeper Reality that is One and Infinite.

The ancients who knew this used it effectively for practical purposes. Thus, for example we have a northern and a southern Path which are essentially the paths of ascension and descent. The path of ascension of consciousness, the upliftment of our present state, the sublimation of our energies is the path that sets us free. Outwardly these two paths are represented in the northern and the southern solstice wherein the sun is in the ascension and vice versa. The Rishi describes these two paths, wherein human beings either ascend towards the Home of Truth or else continue to remain tied to the Subconscious habits (the well dug). At best they remain religious and lift their hands in worship towards the eternal. But their life is a seeking after desires and expansion of the ego-self. Therefore they come to birth again and again. Desiring children, they themselves return as a child after having enjoyed a term in some temporary

mid-way Heavens of the Ideal spiritual Kingdoms.

There are quite a few sub-thoughts that run through this profound mysterious utterance. One such thought is that mere righteousness and virtuosity do not grant us freedom from the cycles of time. We remain bound to birth (and therefore to death). Passing we return again since we have not yet dried the subconscious well where our past actions and their lost energies reside. To be really free, we have to follow the path of ascension towards that one poise wherein the Creator shines in His most luminous, shadowless Supramental splendour. There alone we can find immortality. But for that we must shun desire and nurture and follow the path of inner purity and askesis. Otherwise we remain hopelessly bound to the appearances of life that swing between dual poles of good and bad, right and wrong, pleasant and painful, happiness and grief, The feminine principle that draws the soul back to earth and ties it is matter.

Another sub-thought that arises from the phrase ‘desire for offspring’ may well refer to the fact well-known to the yogis that the sexual act binds us to the lower creation whereas *brahmacharya*, the practice of inner ‘holiness’ and true celibacy is liberating and paves the way towards immortality.

11. “‘Five-portioned, some say, is the Father and has twelve figures and he flows in the upper hemisphere beyond the heavens; but others speak of him as the Wisdom who stands in a chariot of six spokes and seven wheels.’

12. “The month also is that Eternal Father, whereof the dark fortnight is Matter, the Female and the bright fortnight is Life, the Male. Therefore do one manner of sages offer sacrifice in the bright fortnight and another in the dark.

13. “Day and night also are the Eternal Father, whereof the day is Life and the night is Matter. Therefore do they offend against their own life who take joy with woman by day; by night who take joy, enact holiness.

The five portioned are the five aspects of the supramental Creator, — Life, Light, Consciousness, Truth, Power. The twelve figures are the twelve zodiacs or the twelve Rays, the twelve powers, the twelve degrees of the revelation of that Wisdom that flows in the higher Sphere of existence. So too the six spokes are the six months but also the six types of creative splendour, the seasons so to say, the seven wheels being the seven layers that emerge out of the One Light

as the seven colours of the rainbow emerging from the parent white. So too the bright and dark periods through which our soul moves, together these alternating periods of Time nurture and nourish our souls and bring into birth the possibilities concealed within us. Therefore they too are like the masculine and the feminine side. We grow through both and the eternal *yajna* goes on ceaselessly through these waxing and waning moments of life. The wise know how to utilise these changing moods of nature (within and without) and thereby grow in consciousness by the night and by the day. Thus we see that the great cycles and divisions of Time through which the manifestation takes place are themselves the play of the Two-in-One.

What follows is a profound occult truth about the difference between having physical relation with a woman during the day and the night, while it applies at the most outward level as well as to inner movements. The human body is attuned in all its activities to rhythms of time which we need to respect for a healthy and wholesome life. This relates to everything from food and sleep to sexual activity, play and rest. Animals know it spontaneously but man's consciousness easily gets perverted by a mentalised vital and loses the attunement to the rhythms of nature. But when we remain attuned to nature and our activities follow the true nature then each thing is in its own place. When each activity is in accordance to its natural rhythm and flow of time, in tune with its true nature then there is a divinity in it. But when it is neither in tune with its own true nature nor in harmony with the spirit and rhythm of Time then suffering follows sooner or later. This applies not only to having a progeny but also to all new birth within us. Thus when the *sadhaka*, the aspirant to a higher life is going through periods of growing light and consciousness he should be vigilant and careful to stay away from all that incites and ignites the lower movements of lust and greed and possession and ambition. But since he has in him other parts too, there will be periods when he will confront these dark parts and suffer momentary lapses despite his best efforts. Yet these lapses will slowly shape his inner Godhead and exhaust his tendencies towards lower movements and dark propensities. Slowly the Light of Truth will enter even into these darker parts and put on them the pressure to change. But thrice woe to those who throw away the opportune moment of Grace when the going is beautiful and smooth, and the path is lit ahead, and the rhythms of Time favouring the inner aspiration. That seems to be the deeper sense of this cryptic verse put paradoxically in too straightforward a manner. Yet behind its seemingly bold and bald statement hides a whole world of truth that any seeker will realise as he walks the path of yoga. But for the others too there is something. Even the most practical man will learn to respect the rhythm of time and not allow his

mind's fancies and the lusts of the moment to corrupt the original script. To respect the rhythm of Time, to flow with the evolutionary cycle and its momentum is to follow dharma. To do otherwise is to invite suffering.

14. "Food is the Eternal Father; for of this came the seed and of the seed is the world of creatures born.

15. "They therefore who perform the vow of the Eternal Father produce the twin creature. But theirs is the heaven of the spirit in whom are established askesis and holiness and in whom Truth has her dwelling.

16. "Theirs is the heaven of the Spirit, the world all spotless, in whom there is neither crookedness nor lying nor any illusion."

All things here are born of matter. Matter is the secret base and support of all birth here. Tied to matter we remain ever tied to the dualities, the twins of light and darkness, good and evil, happiness and suffering, joy and sorrow. This duality presents itself at different levels and in different ways. Yet through it also we are nurtured and nourished (as we have seen) if we take the right attitude and respect its rhythms. But a time comes when we are ready for a greater journey and a higher becoming. A time comes when we are ready for a greater birth, a birth into the Spirit. Then we have to follow the path of askesis, purity and truth, shunning from our being all that is low and obscure, crooked and perverse, untruth, wrong attachment, and false views. Thus we go beyond our first material formula of life, using the material birth to transcend it and discover the realms of the Spirit. Thus our material birth can become a catalyst for higher births if we live rightly, respecting the law of Time which is also the law of a progressive manifestation of Truth termed as *Dharma*, next going beyond this framework into the Freedom of the Eternal.

Thus ends this section dealing with birth, not just the birth of the body but the birth of the universe, the birth of all things and eventually the birth into the Spirit, all packed and compressed into a few verses with significant symbolic imageries.

Sri Aurobindo reveals this manifold play of the One who becomes the Two in the magnificent and divinely mantric *Savitri*:

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

A playmate in the mighty Mother's game,
 One came upon the dubious whirling globe
 To hide from her pursuit in force and form.
 A secret spirit in the Inconscient's sleep,
 A shapeless Energy, a voiceless Word,
 He was here before the elements could emerge,
 Before there was light of mind or life could breathe.
 Accomplice of her cosmic huge pretence,
 His semblances he turns to real shapes
 And makes the symbol equal with the truth:
 He gives to his timeless thoughts a form in Time.
 He is the substance, he the self of things;
 She has forged from him her works of skill and might:
 She wraps him in the magic of her moods
 And makes of his myriad truths her countless dreams.
 The Master of being has come down to her,
 An immortal child born in the fugitive years.
 In objects wrought, in the persons she conceives,
 Dreaming she chases her idea of him,
 And catches here a look and there a gest:
 Ever he repeats in them his ceaseless births.
 He is the Maker and the world he made,
 He is the vision and he is the Seer;
 He is himself the actor and the act,
 He is himself the knower and the known,
 He is himself the dreamer and the dream.
 There are Two who are One and play in many worlds;
 In Knowledge and Ignorance they have spoken and met
 And light and darkness are their eyes' interchange;
 Our pleasure and pain are their wrestle and embrace,
 Our deeds, our hopes are intimate to their tale;
 They are married secretly in our thought and life.
 The universe is an endless masquerade:
 For nothing here is utterly what it seems;
 It is a dream-fact vision of a truth
 Which but for the dream would not be wholly true,
 A phenomenon stands out significant
 Against dim backgrounds of eternity;
 We accept its face and pass by all it means;

A part is seen, we take it for the whole.
 Thus have they made their play with us for roles:
 Author and actor with himself as scene,
 He moves there as the Soul, as Nature she.....

 He hopes in her to find himself anew,
 Incarnate, wedding his infinity's peace
 To her creative passion's ecstasy.
 Although possessor of the earth and heavens,
 He leaves to her the cosmic management
 And watches all, the Witness of her scene.
 A supernumerary on her stage,
 He speaks no words or hides behind the wings.
 He takes birth in her world, waits on her will,
 Divines her enigmatic gesture's sense,
 The fluctuating chance turns of her mood,
 Works out her meanings she seems not to know
 And serves her secret purpose in long Time.
 As one too great for him he worships her;
 He adores her as his regent of desire,
 He yields to her as the mover of his will,
 He burns the incense of his nights and days
 Offering his life, a splendour of sacrifice.
 A rapt solicitor for her love and grace,
 His bliss in her to him is his whole world:
 He grows through her in all his being's powers;
 He reads by her God's hidden aim in things.
 Or, a courtier in her countless retinue,
 Content to be with her and feel her near
 He makes the most of the little that she gives
 And all she does drapes with his own delight.
 A glance can make his whole day wonderful,
 A word from her lips with happiness wings the hours.
 He leans on her for all he does and is:
 He builds on her largesses his proud fortunate days
 And trails his peacock-plumaged joy of life
 And suns in the glory of her passing smile.
 In a thousand ways he serves her royal needs;
 He makes the hours pivot around her will,

Makes all reflect her whims; all is their play:
This whole wide world is only he and she.

This is the knot that ties together the stars:
The Two who are one are the secret of all power,
The Two who are one are the might and right in things.
His soul, silent, supports the world and her,
His acts are her commandment's registers.
Happy, inert, he lies beneath her feet:
His breast he offers for her cosmic dance
Of which our lives are the quivering theatre,
And none could bear but for his strength within,
Yet none would leave because of his delight.

(Book 1: Canto 4: *The Secret Knowledge*, pp. 60 – 63)

(To be continued)

Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of the Gita

(Continued from the Nov. 2015 issue)

C C Dutt

The remaining six chapters restate the teaching already imparted but throw a fuller light on it. We shall go over them very briefly, as Sri Aurobindo's exposition of the various aspects of the philosophy of the Gita has already been put before the reader.

In the next four essays, Chapters XIII, XIV and XV of the Gita have been considered. The titles of these essays give an indication of the subject matter of the three chapters. The Field and its Knower, Above the Gunas, the Three Purushas, The Fullness of Spiritual Action. In these essays the previous relations between the three Purushas and the Prakriti with her three Gunas have been brought out more definitely than before. Arjuna puts a question asking for a clearer elucidation of these still ill-lighted matters. He wants to know of the Purusha and the Prakriti, of the field of being and the knower of the field, of knowledge and the object of knowledge. The Gita's ideas in their essence, bearing on these matters, have already been set forth to some extent. All life, all works, says the Master, are a transaction between the soul and Nature. We have to see what this transaction becomes when the individual has risen to a state of spiritual liberation, to what perfection does it lead the soul? These questions are answered by the Gita on the basis of a broad synthesis of the Sankhya, Vedanta and Yoga systems of thought.

The embodied soul has a triple aspect of its own self-experience. First as an ego, a spiritual being apparently subject to the ignorance of the lower Nature. Second as the immutable Self behind the outward manifestation. Third as the eternal Truth transcending the opposition of the first two. The reader will recognise the *Kshara*, *Akshara* and *Uttama Purushas* already referred to several times. Nature too is twofold, the *Para* and the *Apara Prakritis*. The latter is the lower — the outward and mechanical Nature, subject to three Gunas. The former is the higher, the divine and spiritual Nature, in which the

soul is consciously one with the Supreme. The complete spiritual liberation that we seek is attainable by passing from the lower to the higher Nature and then by the latter to the Eternal through divine knowledge, works and love. All these points we have gone over already. They receive a fuller treatment in the concluding portion but, says Sri Aurobindo, "it is the last thought with which it closes that is of supreme interest, for in it we shall find the central idea of its teaching, its great word to the soul of man, its highest message."

The expression, the Field and its Knower, appears first in chapter XIII. This body, which is the field of the spirit, is called *Kshetra*, and in this field there is someone who is called the *Kshetrajna* — one who takes cognisance of the field. The field includes not only the physical body but, Sri Aurobindo explains, "all too that the body supports, the working of nature, the mentality, the natural action of the objectivity and subjectivity of our being." But even this is only the individual field; there is a universal field, a macrocosm, of the same knower. By the *Kshetra* is meant the whole working of the lower Prakriti. Dualities like pleasure and pain, liking and disliking constitute the character of our first transactions with the world of Nature. But there is something beyond which Arjuna seeks to know when he asks Krishna to elucidate the true knowledge and the something beyond that has to be known, — "the true knowledge of the field no less than of the knower." This is real wisdom and to acquire it one must turn inward. As the Master puts it, "One Brahman, one reality in Self and Nature is the object of all knowledge." In the following lines, Sri Aurobindo gives a clear image of the soul bound to the ignorance of the lower Prakriti, "The soul when it allows itself to be tyrannised over by the appearances of Nature misses itself and goes whirling about in the cycle of the births and deaths of its bodies. There passionately following without end the mutations of personality and its interests, it cannot draw back to the possession of its impersonal and unborn self-existence." Yet this is what the soul has got to do! It must find itself. "To enjoy the eternity to which birth and life are only outward circumstances, is the soul's true immortality." That Eternity is the Brahman. And the Soul and Nature are two aspects of this eternal principle. It has assumed these two forms for its universal *Lila*. It is definitely and clearly laid down in this chapter that both the Purusha and the Prakriti are without origin and without end. The distinctions between the two are rapidly drawn by a few decisive epithets and their powers and functions characterised pointedly, the difference between the embodied soul entangled in the coils of the lower Prakriti with its three Gunas and the liberated soul which has risen above the three gunas, which has put on the divine nature, *Sadharmya*. Sri Aurobindo says, "This supreme importance assigned to *Sadharmya* is a capital point in the teaching of the Gita."

Immortality in the sense of the personal survival after the death of the body was never held to be true immortality either by the Vedanta or by the Gita. As Sri Aurobindo notes, "All beings are immortal in that sense and it is only the forms that perish." Dissolution of the manifest form overtakes worlds as well as individuals. The Gita says — *Pralayam Yati dehabhvit* — the being bearing the body is liable to be disintegrated. The soul itself persists and after an interval assumes a new body and the cycle continues. To be immortal in the deeper sense is something different from the survival of death and this constant recurrence. Immortality is that supreme status in which the Spirit knows itself to be superior to death and birth, not conditioned by the nature of its manifestation, infinite, imperishable, immutably eternal, — immortal because never being born, it never dies. But to arrive at the truly immortal state, the individual soul must free itself from the burden of the gunas, it must grow into the likeness of the Divine — *Sadharmya*. This great thing we can do, says the Master, only by an effort of Godward knowledge, will and adoration. The knowledge on which so much stress was laid in the ancient scriptures is not, "an intellectual cognisance of things, but a growing of man the mental being into a greater spiritual consciousness." It is a new spiritual outlook on life and things and beings, a God-knowledge. It is this knowledge that leads to the *para siddhi* or highest spiritual status held forth in chapter XIV. It is the same as *sadharmya* and *nistraigunya* mentioned already and brings to the Yogi true immortality described in the book. But this state would be impossible to attain if the soul of man were not in its essence ever one with the Divine. Man does not belong to the lower Nature, he has descended into it from the height of the Supreme Spiritual Nature. The Gita makes this perfectly clear.

The Eternal puts forth the cosmic movement out of himself — "he is at once the Father and Mother of the universe; the substance of the infinite idea, *Vijnana*, the *Mahat Brahman* is the womb into which he casts the seed of his self-conception He receives into this (*Virat*) Vast of self-conception and develops there the divine embryo into mental and physical form of existence born from the original act of conceptive creation. All we see springs from that act of creation; but that which is born here is only finite idea and form of the unborn and infinite". The Spirit is eternal; so is the Nature; the Soul which takes on this or that form is equally eternal. What is it then that brings about the subjection of the soul to the apparent bondage of birth and death? For, the bondage is apparent without any doubt. Sri Aurobindo gives this reply, "It is a subordinate act or state of consciousness, it is a self-oblivious identification with the modes of Nature in the limited workings of this lower motivity and with this self-wrapped ego-bounded knot of action of the mind, life and body." To rise above the modes

of Prakriti is indispensable for the aspirant who seeks to become one in consciousness with the Supreme.

The three gunas — *Sattwa*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* — are described in the Gita only by their psychological action in man or incidentally in things like food which produce an effect on man's mind and life. But a more general definition is indicated in the conception of the Hindu trinity which ascribes a particular guna to each member thereof — *Sattwa* to Vishnu the Preserver, *Rajas* to Brahma the Creator and *Tamas* to Rudra the Destroyer. Sri Aurobindo says, "Looking behind this idea for the rationale of the triple ascription we might divide the three modes or qualities in terms of the motion of the universal energy as Nature's three concomitant and inseparable powers of equilibrium, kinesis and inertia." The corresponding psychological powers may be described thus — *Tamas* as power of Nescience, *Rajas* as Nature's Power of the active seeking of light by desire and *Sattwa* as her power of possessing and harmonising knowledge. In the world the three modes of nature are intertwined. There is, says Sri Aurobindo "the appearance of a world governed by the interlocked and mutually limited play of the three qualitative modes of nature." The Gita gives definitions of the three gunas. *Sattwa*, it tells us, "is by the purity of its quality a cause of light and illumination". *Rajas* again, we are told, "is a child of the attachment of the soul to the desire of objects; it is born from the nature's thirst for an unpossessed satisfaction". It can be described as a craving and a longing. *Tamas* is born of inertia and ignorance and its fruit too is inertia and ignorance. It is the darkness of *Tamas* which obscures the light of *Sattwa*. Darkness or Tamasic *aprakasha* is the opposite of Sattwic illumination or *prakasha*. As a force of inertia *Tamas* is the opposite of Rajasic kinesis. All three modes are together present in every human being. No man is purely Sattwic or Rajasic or Tamasic. The three qualities are always there and active in everyone. Now one preponderates, now another; each subjects the man to its own peculiar action. When one mode, say Sattwic, generally and ordinarily predominates in any man, we call him a Sattwic personality — and so on, with the other two modes.

The triple power is, however, a triple bondage. Even *Sattwa* can become a chain. It is attachment that constitutes the bondage. Says the Gita, "*Sattwa* binds by attachment to knowledge and attachment to happiness, *Rajas* binds the embodied spirit by attachment to works, *Tamas* binds by negligence and indolence and sleep." The soul has to rise above the attraction of all the three gunas, before it can liberate itself. But does this liberation mean cessation of all doing? Certainly not, according to the Gita; for it insists on the need of action along with freedom from attachment. The true solution of this apparent riddle is provided by the scripture — To give up the action itself to the Lord of works

and be only a desireless and equal-minded instrument of his will. On being asked by his disciple, Krishna describes the sign of the liberated man as the equality of the soul in the Brahmic Status.

This leads us to a detailed consideration of the three Purushas in the fifteenth essay of Sri Aurobindo. *Kshara* and *Akshara* are defined in the Gita — *Kshara* is the action of unliberated mutable Nature and *Akshara* is the immutable Self who watches that Nature. Dissolution into the *Akshara Brahman* is not put before us by the Gita as the highest aim of Yoga, for it reverts constantly to this note, "He who loves and strives after Me with an undeviating love and adoration, passes beyond the three gunas and he too is prepared for becoming the Brahman." This "Me" is, as we have seen before, the foundation of the silent Brahman and is above the immutability of the *Akshara* — a haven of absolute Ananda "untouched by rajasic suffering and beyond sattwic happiness". To rise into that bliss, the crown of bhakti, must be, says Sri Aurobindo, "the completion of spiritual perfection and the fulfilment of the eternal immortalising dharma." The goal of the Gita's Yoga is the realisation that Vasudeva is everything — *Vasudevah Sarvamiti*. He, *Purushottama*, is at the back of all that is divided and mutable as well as of all that is undivided and immutable. Without this knowledge, no liberation is possible for the individual. But He is neither the mutable nor the immutable exclusively. The apparent contradiction between the two baffles our mental understanding. But Krishna wants his disciple to know him in his entirety. "I shall tell you how you can do it," he says and proceeds to describe the method to Arjuna.

The Gita gives its own interpretation of Maya. It is not the all-powerful Illusion of the orthodox Monist, but a partial consciousness which one must transcend in order to know Brahman wholly — *samagram mam*. It is in the conception of the *Purushottama* that the Gita finds the principle of oneness exemplified — "He who having entered the three worlds upholds them." "As I transcend the mutable and stand higher than the immutable, I am well known in the Veda and in the world as the *Uttama Purusha*. He who knows me thus as the Supreme Purusha adores Me in every way". All this we find in the chapter of the Gita, but the keyword of reconciliation of the two conceptions of *Kshara* and *Akshara* is contained in the verse, "But other than these two is that highest spirit called the Supreme Self, who enters the three worlds and upbears them, the imperishable Lord."

The idea of the Supreme self has been referred to all along from the beginning, but it is only now that it has been expressly described and given a name. "The mystery of the Supreme Person," says the Master, "is the secret of love and devotion." It is this intimate personal contact with the Divine, this sweet bond of

bhakti, which is reconciled with both knowledge and works in the great synthesis of the Gita. "The spiritual person, the eternal soul in us offers itself and all it has and is to the eternal Divine, the Supreme Person and Godhead of whom it is a portion," says Sri Aurobindo. Knowledge and Works are completed and fulfilled in this self-offering. The *Kshara* is the *Purushottama* in his eternal multiplicity. Krishna says in the Gita, "It is an eternal portion of Me that becomes the Jiva or creature in a world of Jivas." Without this, the maintenance of cosmic existence and the dire struggle on the field of Kurukshetra would become meaningless and dissolution in the *Akshara* would be the end of life.

In this chapter the old comparison of the *Ashwattha* tree with worldly life is brought in — a tree without beginning and without end in time and space. Its original source is above, but it extends its other roots (roots of desire and attachment) into the world and men. The hymns of the Veda are likened to the leaves of the tree. Sri Aurobindo makes the meaning clear thus, "The branches of this cosmic tree extend both below and above, below in the material, above in the supraphysical planes; they grow by the gunas of Nature, for the triple guna is all the subject of the Vedas. The Vedic rhythms are the leaves and the sensible objects of desire supremely gained by a right doing of sacrifice are the constant budding of the foliage."

In order to get back to his supreme eternal status, man has to free himself from the toils of the modes of the lower Prakriti and follow the path of *Nivritti* — cessation from the original urge to action, *Pravritti*. But this is not an easy path to pursue. To do it man must, in the figurative language of the text, cut the long fixed roots of desire by the strong sword of detachment. The path takes him to the presence of the eternal Purusha — not of the immutable *Akshara* Purusha, but of him who is both *Kshara* and *Akshara*, who is both the manifest and the unmanifest, both the One and the Many. The Divine is neither wholly the *Kshara*, nor wholly the *Akshara* — he is greater than the immutable Self and he is much greater than the soul of mutable things — if he is capable of being both at once it is because he is other than they. And whoever knows the Supreme Person to be this surpasses the opposite of the mutable and the immutable; he becomes *Sarvavid*, whole-knowing. Sri Aurobindo describes the *Sarvavid* thus, "Divine in the equality of his imperturbable self-existence, one in it with all objects and creatures, he brings that boundless equality, that deep oneness down into his mind and heart and life and body and founds on it in an indivisible integrality the trinity of divine love, divine works and divine knowledge. This is the Gita's way of Salvation." The utmost monism, the most secret *shastra*, that Krishna teaches to Arjuna sees the one as the one even in the multiplicities of Nature, as much in the individual and the cosmic as in the

Reality of the Supracosmic.

In the next essay Sri Aurobindo goes on to set forth the Gita's solution of the question: How is our Nature, bound as it is, to effect its evolution from the lower to the higher being, from the law of its present action to the immortal *Dharma*? This solution has been hinted at before, but it is brought out more fully and clearly in the last four chapters of the text. A new sense and level for our action is set forth; Krishna's teaching does not now relate so much to freedom from action as to the action in the world of the spiritually liberated man. The compatibility of *Moksha* with *Karma* in the text is thus summed up by Sri Aurobindo: "To live inwardly calm, detached, silent in the silence of the impersonal and universal Self and yet do dynamically the works of dynamic Nature, and more largely to be one with the eternal within us and to do all the will of the Eternal in the world...the personal nature, made one with God-Nature, — this is the Gita's solution."

The bearing of this philosophy on Arjuna's initial difficulty is explained by his teacher. It is obvious that a simple appeal to the royal warrior's sense of duty is not enough, for there is a dire conflict. Arjuna must be made to realise that the terrible crisis before him has been brought about by a higher Will, to which he has to submit and as whose instrument he has to learn to act. But in order to be able to see all this, the disciple must rise above his ego; he must "shake the wings of the soul free from desire and passion". When a man attains the poise of impersonal wideness, ego and desire and passion cease to sway him, he attains the requisite spiritual freedom. The duality of the immobile Self and the active Nature affects him not, for he is poised in the *Purushottama*, in whom the Immutable and the mutable find a reconciliation. The *Purushottama* is the supreme mystery of the Gita. Seated in the heart of every creature, he guides by his presence the turnings of the great wheel of Nature. He is present in all and all dwell in him. Therefore, at the outset, man has to work impersonally and without desire, for the sake of the Divine. But, later, more is demanded of him; he must make a surrender, a loving surrender, of all action to the divinity within him. The motive power of his *Karma* will then be seen by him as something supra-personal and universal. It is knowledge — right knowledge of self, of God and of the world that would make him *Sarvavid*, all-knowing. But the *Sarvavid* does not abandon work. The perfected Yogi lives and acts, but he lives and acts in God. It is the secret of this perfection that the Gita proceeds to unravel.

How is the ignorant and shackled human nature going to be transmuted to the dynamic freedom of a divine nature? The transmutation is indispensable. Otherwise man would go round and round in the groove of ignorance and desire.

Whatever the appearances may be, the world is, in fact, moved by a divine spiritual Will and not by the modes of the lower Nature. But we must not forget that these modes are derived from the higher Will. Something there must be in the essential power of the spirit from which the sattwic light, the rajasic movement and the tamasic inertia are derived, — of which they are the lesser forms. In order to effect the necessary transformation and to rise above the gunas, we must get hold of some leverage in the action of the gunas themselves. The Gita finds this *point d'appui* in the full development of the sattwic guna, till that in its potent expansion reaches a point at which it can go beyond itself and disappear into its source. The rajasic guna cannot be changed into the Divine Will or the tamasic into the Divine repose and calm without the aid of the Sattwic power in Nature. The domination of this latter power is thus indispensable for the uplift of the lower nature into the higher. Without this domination the *Rajas* will remain a troubled restlessness and the *Tamas* an ignorant inertia. Therefore to develop the sattwic in us till it is full of light and calm is our first concern.

The distinction between the Deva and the Asura is an old one. The Gita makes use of it, develops it, in the sixteenth chapter for its own purpose. The God is a creature of Light, the Titan is a child of Darkness. The God is capable of a "high self-transforming sattwic action", the Titan is not. The teacher tells Arjuna that he is of Daivic nature, and assures him that by his acceptance of battle and slaughter he runs no risk of yielding to Asuric impulse; he has developed in himself the sattwic being and has arrived at a stage where he can go beyond the three modes and transcend the lower Prakriti. Obviously this cannot apply to other natures; it is applicable to Arjuna as there is a predominance of sattwic habits and qualities in him. Sri Aurobindo sums up the difference between the two natures, Daivic and Asuric, thus. In the former, "The whole being, the whole temperament is integrally pure; there is a seeking for Knowledge and a calm and fixed abiding in Knowledge. This is the wealth, the plenitude of the man born into the Deva Nature". On the contrary, the "Asuric nature has too its wealth, its plenitude of force, but it is of very different, a powerful and evil kind. Asuric men have no true knowledge of the way of action or the way of abstention, the fulfilling or the holding in of the nature. Truth is not in them, nor clean doing, nor faithful observance". The Gita's description of the Asuric men is vivid: bound by a hundred bonds devoured by wrath and lust, unweariedly occupied in amassing unjust gains for enjoyment and satisfaction they think, "Today I have gained this object of desire, tomorrow I shall have that other; today I have so much wealth, more I will get tomorrow. I have killed this my enemy, the rest too I will kill. I am a lord and king of men, I am perfect, accomplished, strong, happy, fortunate, a privileged enjoyer of the world; I am wealthy, I am of high

birth; who is there like unto me? I will sacrifice, I will give, I will enjoy."

But this description, brilliant as it is, must not be taken to mean more than it does. The Deva and the Asura have not been so created from the beginning by God. All souls, Daivic as well as Asuric, are eternal portions of the Divine; all can come to salvation, the grossest Asura can turn to the Divine. But the evolution of the individual soul in Nature is determined by its *Swabhava* and its action controlled by that *Swabhava*. During the play one or the other of the modes may become predominant and on this predominance depends the Daivic or Asuric nature of the individual. He may turn away from the path of; Light and Truth, and sink into the lowest and darkest state or he may turn towards the Law of Enlightenment and gradually rise to the highest development of the Divine Nature. Here comes the utility of the *Shastra* which is the embodiment of Law and *Dharma*. The highest *Shastra* is that which sets forth the service and art of spiritual living. But all *Shastra* seeks to regulate human life in its various phases.

By a question put at the commencement of Chapter XVII Arjuna seeks elucidation with regard to its binding authority. Krishna explains that human action is dictated either by desire or by Shastric injunction. The action of desire pertains to the unregenerate state of man's nature. As a first step towards transformation man has obviously to grow out of rajasic control to a condition where his conduct is guided by *Shastra* which is an outcome of intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, social and religious culture. The individual is called upon to give his assent or acceptance to the general law of human social development. The word used in the text for assent is *Sraddha* or faith. In fact, it is much safer to pursue the path laid down by the highest sattwic thinkers than to follow the dictates of our unregulated desire. Of course the injunctions of the *Shastra* change with the environment, but that relates to the outer trappings — the customs and manners, the rituals and ceremonies. The core of the Law, the higher Truth, the eternal *Dharma* endures. The change that comes about from time to time is preceded by the dissatisfaction of the individual who finds that certain injunctions of the *Shastra* are no longer consistent with "his idea and largest or intensest experience of himself and existence and therefore he can no longer bring to it the will to believe and practise." The individual then announces his deviation from certain existing practices observed by the majority. This departure may sometimes be prompted by a purely egoistic urge, as has often happened in the past. But it can also be prompted by a higher mandate inside — a mandate very largely sattwic at the core. The Gita clearly differentiates the three kinds of faith or *Sraddha* — sattwic, rajasic and tamasic — that lead a man to deviate from the path indicated by the Law. Man in his upward seeking

must shake off the guidance both of desire and of the normal law. He must go beyond the three modes, but his path lies through the highest of them.

Sri Aurobindo calls this a new movement and says that it is "of the nature of a powerful adventure into the unknown or partly known, a daring development and a new conquest.... This movement is man's appeal to himself or to something potent and compelling in himself or in universal existence for the discovery of his truth, his law of livings his way to fullness and perfection." Its guiding light is to be found in man's *Sraddha*. Every urge less than the highest faith is unsafe and may lure man back to the bondage of desire, into bypaths that may end in a tamasic morass or the edge of a sheer precipice. If, on the other hand, a man has the sattwic nature and a sattwic faith he will arrive within sight of an as yet unachieved ideal rule, which may even guide him towards a highest divine light. These are the various possibilities of man's spiritual advance. Arjuna's question is categorical — "When men abandon the guidance of the *Shastra* and with *Sraddha* (faith) perform sacrifices to the gods, what is their *Nistha* (concentrated will of devotion) which gives them the faith and action, sattwic, rajasic or tamasic?" The Gita states the principle to be this: "The faith in us is of a triple kind like all things in Nature and varies according to the dominating quality of our nature."

The faith of each man is in accordance with the stuff of his being. "The soul in man," says the text, "is made of *Sraddha* and whatever is that *Sraddha*, he is that and that is he." That is to say, we create our own actions, we are our own makers. But this is only one aspect of the truth, for the source of all action is the consciousness of the One and proceeds by a faith, a will to be, in the original conscious Force. What we are concerned with here is the relation of this will or "faith in our being to our possibility of growth into the perfection of the divine nature". In any case, true *Sraddha* is our basis. When we live and act according to our desire the *Sraddha* is of the two lower modes; when we try to live according to the divine nature, the faith is sattwic seeking to exceed itself. The work to be done by man, his *Kartavya Karma*, falls under three heads — sacrifice, giving and askesis or *Yajna*, *dana* and *tapas*. But each one of these, the Gita shows, can be either sattwic or rajasic or tamasic, according to the quality predominant in the individual. In fact, everything here, including physical things like food, partakes of a triple character. The text explains this at some length. Sri Aurobindo, after summing up what Krishna says about the three kinds of food, remarks: "All-pervading is the principle of the three gunas. The gunas apply at the other end in the same way to the things of the mind and spirit, to sacrifice, giving and askesis, and the Gita distinguishes under each of these three heads between the three kinds in the customary terms of these things as

they were formulated by the symbolism of the old Indian culture." Sri Aurobindo then proceeds to enlarge the surface meaning of the Gita's hints. There is no room here to go into the more elaborate exposition. The sattwic sacrifice comes very near to the ideal, it leads to the kind of action demanded by Krishna, but is distinctly short of the perfect divine action. We have already gone over the various grades of sacrifice leading up to the highest in a previous portion of our essay, and need not say anything more here. Likewise with giving and askesis, the sattwic form may lead towards the highest form that transcends the three modes but by itself it does not amount to the divine action demanded by the scripture.

Towards the close of this chapter, the Gita brings in the mystic formula, "*Om Tat Sat*" and connects it with its conception of divine action. *Om Tat Sat*, it says, is the triple definition of Brahman, by whom the Brahmanas, the Vedas and the sacrifices were created of old and in it resides all their significance. *Tat* means the Absolute, *Sat* indicates the principle of good and the principle of reality and *Om* signifies the triple Brahman. All good works are *Sat* — whether they be sacrifice or giving or askesis — for they prepare the individual soul for the higher truth of its being. The text also says that, since faith is the central principle of our existence, works of all the three kinds mentioned are a falsity without faith.

This brings us to the last great chapter of the scripture. Before proceeding to its grand finale, it analyses summarily the action of the mental powers as leading to works of the highest kind. Faith and the will to be are essential factors in the growth of the soul to its full height by works. But the part played, by the powers of the mind is no less important, as Sri Aurobindo shows in his elaborate exposition of the verses bearing on the subject. We shall not be able to attempt anything more than a cursory review of that exposition.

The chapter begins with Arjuna's question regarding the difference between the two principles of *Tyaga* and *Sannyasa*. He is told that the renunciation (*tyaga*) enjoined in the Gita is renunciation of desire, not of works. Action with a renunciation of desire is true *Tyaga* and that too is true *Sannyasa*. Sri Aurobindo's precise words are, "*Tyaga*...is the name given by the wise to a mental and spiritual renunciation, an entire abandonment of all attached clinging to the fruit of our works, to the action itself or to its personal initiation or rajasic impulse The spiritual transference of all our works to the Master and his Shakti is the real *sannyasa* in the teaching of the Gita." Sattwic renunciation is not withdrawal from action but from the personal demand, the ego element behind it. Abstention from works is branded as a tamasic attitude — there should be no attachment to inaction. Such expressions as *muktasya karma*,

acts of the liberated — *Swabhava niyatam karma*, action controlled by one's *Swabhava* — *Niyatasya tu sannyasah karmano nopapadyate*, abandonment of controlled action is not proper — show the whole trend of the Gita's teaching of *Karma*, the essence of true *tyaga* according to this scripture is a disinterested soul, a selfless mind. This spirit is the first mental condition of the highest sattwic discipline. The important thing to remember is what has been repeated often enough, that the liberated man does his appointed work as the living instrument, one in spirit with the Universal Divine. The real thing is the knowledge in which works are done. There are three things, says the Gita, which go to constitute the mental impulsion to works, and they are the knowledge in our will, the object of knowledge and the knower; and into the knowledge there comes always the working of the three gunas. The gunas determine the faith and the will with which the individual acts, and consequently the nature of his action.

Again, it should be noted that action is held together and made possible by three things — the doer, the instrument and the work done. And the nature of each of these elements is determined by the predominant guna. For instance, it makes all the difference whether the instrument is right harmony and right knowledge or it is an egoistic will of desire or an ignorant instinct. The highest instrument is spiritual Light and Power, higher than the sattwic intelligence. The three kinds of the doer are sketched in brilliant language by Sri Aurobindo. We give a few extracts here which will enable the reader to form an idea thereof.

"The tamasic doer of action is one who does not put himself really into the work but acts with the mechanical mind, or obeys the most vulgar thought of the herd...or is wedded to a blind error and prejudice. He is obstinate in stupidity, stubborn in error and takes a foolish pride in his ignorant doing; ...he has a stupid and insolent contempt for those with whom he has to deal, especially for wiser men and his betters. The rajasic doer on the other hand is urged by violent attachment, desire and passion, while the sattwic doer is characterised by "a calm rectitude of zeal or a high and pure and selfless enthusiasm in the work that has to be done"; he is free from all attachment, as much from violent strength as from passionate weakness. Intellectual understanding (*Buddhi*) and persistent will (*Dhriti*) are likewise different for the three kinds of doers. In any case, happiness is the one thing, Sri Aurobindo says, which is openly or indirectly the universal pursuit of our human nature. For the sattwic mind this happiness takes the form of a calm content and an inner peace. The rajasic mind drinks of a more fiery cup — the keen active pleasure of the senses and sense-entangled kinetic will and intelligence. Still, as the Gita warns, this joy is nectar to the lips at the first touch but there is secret poison in the bottom of the cup. The tamasic mind can remain quite happy in its inertia and stupor, its

ignorance and error. At the highest point of sattwic discipline a surpassing happiness descends on the individual and he exceeds the three gunas. Sri Aurobindo says, "Only then can it (*Ananda*) be possessed when the liberated man, free from ego and its desires, lives at last one with all beings and one with God in an absolute bliss of the spirit."

So far, it has been made abundantly clear that man in his ascent has first to attain a state of the highest sattwic quality and then to surpass the limitation of the three gunas and arrive at spiritual perfection and freedom. This work has, however, to be harmonised with man's individual rule of nature — his *swabhava* and *swadharma*. Krishna has already said in an earlier chapter that every man has his own dharma and that "death in one's own law of nature is better for a man than victory in an alien movement". To follow the law of another's nature is dangerous to the individual soul and contrary to the natural way of its evolution. A man's *swadharma* depends on his place in the system of four castes. Action, it is laid down in the Gita, must be rightly regulated, that is to say, regulated by a man's essential character, it must be *swabhava niyatam karma*.

But what does this scripture want to say about the caste system? Does it accept the hereditary basis thereof? It does not say so. The most important verse bearing on the point is, "The fourfold order was created by me according to the divisions of quality and active function". The ancient social ideal of the four *varnas* was quite a different thing from the cast-iron division of more recent times. Krishna found the old ideal in existence and in possession of the mind at the time, and gave it his recognition. He accepted the system and its religious sanction. The fourfold order had a triple aspect — social and economic, cultural and spiritual. Not only in India but in many other lands there was in the old days an attempt to found a stable society on the basis of a more or less stable system of four castes. Sri Aurobindo has in his *The Human Cycle* shown how the system developed from the Ideal into the Typal, from the Typal into the Conventional and lastly from the Conventional with the Rational. The Gita appears to have accepted the first two stages of evolution, but does not seem to have, gone so far as to recognise the third or the conventional stage; the reason is easy enough to follow; a watertight caste division did not exist in that age and Krishna was not called upon to make any strict pronouncement with regard to it. But with the setting in of a more rigid stratification a man's work and position in society came to be determined almost entirely by both. This development was inevitable, for "birth was the most handy and manageable in an increasingly mechanised, complex and conventional social order". The change however took time and in the transitional period, when inborn character still asserted itself successfully against the accident of birth, there were people like Junaka,

Parashuram, Vyasa, Dronaacharaya and Buddha along with a whole host of men, born Vaishyas and Sudras, who by their high spiritual qualities attained a position of pre-eminence even over Brahmins, The Gita when it speaks of *Sahajam karma* does not necessarily acknowledge a hereditary basis for the fourfold order of caste; it lays down definitely that Karma is determined by guna and indicates in phrases like *swabhajam karma* and *swabhava niyatam karma* that the word *Sahajam* in the phrase above quoted is equivalent to *Swabhavajam*. Krishna's injunction regarding the pursuit of *Swadharma* is based on the stress laid by him on the inner truth. In fact, this scripture attaches very little importance to the external rule. The following passage from Sri Aurobindo's essays is significant: "In fact, it lays very little stress on the external rule and a very great stress on the internal law which the *Varna* system attempted to put into regulated outward practice. And it is on the individual and spiritual value of this law and riot on the communal and economic or other social and cultural importance that, the eye of the thought is fixed." It is in this spirit that the Gita describes the work of the Brahmin or the Kshatriya, not in terms of external function, not defined as learning, priest-work and letters or government, war and politics, but entirely in terms of internal character. Qualities like calm self-control, askesis, purity, are cited to define the Brahmin, while in defining the Kshatriya it is laid down that "his real work is the development, the expression in conduct, the power to cast into form and dynamic rhythm of movement the law of the active battling royal or warrior spirit". This mode of approach is equally applicable to the wealth-producing Vaishya and the hardy toiling Sudra. Not only to them, but also "to the woman with her narrow, circumscribed and subject life, the very outcast born from a womb of sin can by this road rise at once towards the highest inner greatness and spiritual freedom, towards perfection, towards the liberation and fulfilment of the divine element in the human being".

The following words of Sri Aurobindo aptly sum up the Gita's teaching of action in consonance with *Swabhava* and *Swadharma*: "To worship him with our inner and outer activities, to make our whole life a sacrifice of works to the Highest is to prepare ourselves to become one with him in all our will and substance and nature. Our work should be according to the truth within us, it should not be an accommodation with outward and artificial standards; it must be a living and sincere expression of the soul and its inborn powers. Along with this passage we have to read the verse in the text: "All is a veiled manifestation of the Godhead." This leads us towards a correct understanding of the great mystery unfolded a little later: "A Godhead is seated in the heart of every man and is the Lord of this mysterious action of Nature." From his very first words,

"Look at the Kurus assembled before you," Krishna leads his disciple ward, step by step to the supreme realisation that he has to abandon all Dharmas and take shelter in the Lord alone. The verse says "Me alone." *Swadharma* is one thing in the lower nature, it is another in the higher. Arjuna has to rise from the former to the latter.

We now come to the next two essays of Sri Aurobindo entitled "Towards the Supreme Secret" and "The Supreme Secret". The first deals more particularly with verses 49-56 of the last chapter of the Gita, while the second expounds verses 57-66 and 73. In Sri Aurobindo's words, the text "summarises the whole outline and essence in the short space of fifteen verses, lines of a brief and concentrated expression and significance that misses nothing of the kernel of the matter, couched in phrases of the most lucid precision and clearness." It puts up before us a ladder of ascent, but at the same time indicates how we can exceed it; we are not to stop even on the topmost rung. A great *Dharma* firm and sure and wide is laid down before us and we are called upon to climb beyond all *Dharmas* into the infinite spaces, right up to the Supreme Secret.

Of course there is the remedy of the *sannyasi* — to discard the world of Maya and retire within the Immutable Brahman. Looked at superficially the first five verses (49-53) seem to recommend this solution of the ascetic. "An understanding without attachment in all things, a soul self-conquered and empty of desire, man attains by renunciation a Supreme Perfection of *Naishkarmya*" — this sounds like an invitation to cut the ego knot instead of loosening it with a steadfast effort. But examined more closely, these five verses are so worded that they are applicable both to inner and outer renunciation. The Teacher does not deny the utility of the withdrawal into the *Akshara*. It can certainly help man to get out of the lower ignorant nature, but cannot take him beyond the higher sattwic nature to the Supreme Prakriti. It cuts the ego knot forcibly, but, as has been made amply clear, man's inevitable destiny is to pass beyond both the mutable and immutable into blissful and loving union with the Supreme Purusha. The essential difference between outer renunciation and inner renunciation has been brought out by the use of two distinct words *Sannyasa* and *Tyaga* respectively, and *Tyaga* has been pronounced to be definitely superior to *Sannyasa*. The latter is enamoured of renunciation for its own sake. The former does not demand abstention from action; on the contrary Krishna, we have seen, already tells Arjuna that action is higher than inaction and that he should engage in controlled action; but *Tyaga* insists on an inner quietism. The Divine Teacher goes beyond this inner quietism. He asks, "How having attained this perfection, one thus attains to the Brahman, hear from Me, O Son of Kunti, — that which is the Supreme concentrated direction of the knowledge."

The Knowledge here referred to is the knowledge of the Sankhya follower of the exclusive path of Jnana, which has been considered already. For the moment, the Teacher keeps the Yoga of works in the background, he does not even mention it. He comes to the great secret of the Gita by a different way. To be one with all and with the Divine, man must, in the first instance, become the impersonal Brahman. This is the initial movement. The verses we are considering indicate how this is to be done. It is the yoga of the intelligence which will bring about a union of the purified intellect with the pure spiritual substance in man. The whole being will be controlled by the pure intelligence — *Vishuddha Buddhi*, and desire and attachment will completely cease. First rajasic desire, and eventually the highest sattwic desire will altogether vanish. This is the state of *Vairagya*; the text does not use the word in the usual sense of disgust of life, but in the sense of renunciation of both attraction and repulsion — of both *raga* and its opposite, *dwesha*. For this, no abandonment of life and its activities is called for but there must be a constant resort to meditation. This practice, this spirit of *tyaga*, will prepare the individual to turn his whole life and action into a oneness with the Divine, an ascent from the lower nature of egoism and division and desire to the supreme spiritual nature — *Para Prakrti*, of which the Teacher has spoken to his disciple already. A significant verse gives a definite clue to the meaning of becoming one with the immutable Brahman, "When one has become the Brahman, when one neither grieves nor desires, when one is equal to all beings, then one gets the supreme love and devotion to Me." In the narrow path of the Yoga of knowledge devotion to a personal Divine can only be a preliminary and lesser movement. According to the Gita, true knowledge — knowledge of "the One who eternally becomes the Many, the Many who in their apparent division are still eternally one, the Highest who displays in us this secret and mystery of existence" — comes only by a highest bhakti. The words of the text are — "*bhaktya mam abhijanati*", "knows Me by devotion." "He comes to know Me, who and how much I am, and in all the reality and principles of my being."

This is the whole experience of the divine mystery in the heart of man — the consciousness of the Supreme Person secretly present everywhere and doing all action. It is thus that the highest devotion and the highest knowledge become one. The Gita's statement is positive in this matter. Through supreme *bhakti* and supreme *jnana*, *Karma* gets its highest significance. The words of the text are, "And by doing also all actions always lodged in Me he attains by my grace the eternal and imperishable status." All that we do thereafter is done for the Lord seated in the heart of all. About the first eight verses 49-56, Sri Aurobindo says, "These verses carefully read in the light of knowledge already

given by the Teacher are a brief, but still a comprehensive indication of the whole essential idea, the entire central method, all the kernel of the complete Yoga of the Gita". Hereafter the divine Teacher proceeds to apply the essence of the teaching already given to the task before his disciple, but in a manner that makes it applicable to all action. This is how Krishna's admonition runs in the text: — Therefore, devoting all thyself to Me, giving up in thy conscious mind all thy actions into Me, resorting to Yoga of the will and intelligence be always one in heart and consciousness with Me.... Vain is this thy resolve that in thy egoism thou thinkest saying 'I will not fight,' thy nature shall appoint thee to thy work. What from delusion thou desirest not to do, that helplessly thou shalt do, bound by thy own work born of thy *swabhava*. The Lord is stationed in the heart of all existence, O Arjuna, and turns them all round and round mounted on a machine by his Maya. In him take refuge in every way of thy being and by his grace thou shalt come to the Supreme peace and the eternal status. "These words", says Sri Aurobindo, "carry in them the innermost heart of this Yoga and lead to its crowning experience ... they express the most complete, intimate and living relation possible between God and man". The individual person (*Jiva*) surrenders himself to the Supreme Person, and delivered from his ego-sense realises that he is one with the Supreme Eternal. It is the Lord himself who receives the surrender and pronounces the final mandate, "Abandon all *dharmas*, give thyself to Me alone. I will free thee from all sin and evil, grieve not". Again, "Become my-minded, my lover and adorer, sacrifice 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". In a few words, Krishna tells his disciple how, by following his directions, he would get even in this world a life of peace, freedom and the eternal status.

The response of the disciple is explicit. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "The *Vibhuti* is ready for the divine life in the human..... Destroyed is the illusion of the mind; the soul's memory of its self and its truth concealed so long by the misleading shows and forms of our life has returned to it...all doubt and perplexity gone, it can turn to the execution of the command and do faithfully whatever work for God and the world may be appointed and' apportioned to it by the Master of our being." This is verse 73 of the last chapter of the Gita. The Supreme surrender has been made and the disciple has arrived at the door of the Supramental realisation. The Lord of the Yoga will now himself take up the Yoga and lift it to its utmost possible perfection. The special feature of the Gita's teaching is that it does not reject life and action, does not taboo man's duty towards his family in society or country. All these things it admits in their proper places, accepts non-violence as a lofty ideal, recognises the place of asceticism in the pursuit of spiritual salvation, and yet it goes boldly beyond

these high ideals and asserts that they are to be pursued only to be transcended ultimately. Sri Aurobindo's words are explicit, "The vital and material man must accept for his government a religious and social and ideal *dharmā* by which, while satisfying desire and interest under right restrictions, he can train and subdue his lower personality and scrupulously attune it to a higher law both of the personal and the communal life.

The Gita has likewise a message to the intellectual and ethical mind, as also a message to the absolute seeker of the Infinite. The highest message is for "the master men, the great spirits, the God-knowers, God-doers, God-lovers who can live in God and for God and do their work joyfully for him in the world, a divine work uplifted above the restless darkness of the human mind and the false limitations of the ego." This is where the divine Teacher takes Arjuna in the last chapter of the scripture — the great Archer agrees joyfully to the bidding of the Lord of the Sacrifice. Henceforth the battle will be the Lord's, his the victory, his the empire.

Sri Aurobindo's last chapter is "The Message of the Gita". Within the narrow limits that we have set to this essay we can give no adequate idea of that brilliant synopsis. We have to be satisfied with a short extract from it.

"This then is the Supreme movement, this complete surrender of your whole self and nature, this abandonment of all dharmas to the Divine who is your highest self, this absolute aspiration of all your members to the supreme spiritual nature. If you can once achieve it, whether at the outset or much later on the way, then whatever you are or were in your outward nature, your way is sure and your perfection inevitable. A supreme presence within you will take up your Yoga and carry it swiftly along the lines of your *swabhava* to its consummate completion. And afterwards whatever your way of life and mode of action, you will be consciously living, acting and moving in him and the Divine Power will act through you in your every inner and outer motion. This is the supreme way because it is the highest secret and mystery and yet an inner movement progressively realisable by all. This is the deepest and most intimate truth of your real, your spiritual existence."

(Concluded)

(Reproduced with thanks and acknowledgement to *Mother India*, where the article was serialised between July 1953 and March 1955)

The Supramental Manifestation – Interpretation

(Continued from the previous issue)

Debashish Banerji

Savitri – Book III, Canto III, - The House of the Spirit and the New Creation

This canto describes Aswapati's experience of the supramental plane of consciousness. Aswapati in his journeys as 'The Traveller of the Worlds' seeks a plane of consciousness that can bridge the gulf between the One and the Many, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, Being and subjection to Non-Being or Death. He arrives at this plane after climbing through the Cosmic Mind planes. As he enters the margins of the Unknowable, that lie beyond the borders of the Ignorance (*Avidya*), he encounters a profound and original Silence in which all seems to be swallowed. This power is an action of *nivritti*, the tendency towards cessation that co-exists in the manifestation with its inverse tendency, *pravritti*, the tendency towards action. As mentioned earlier, the epic *Savitri* proceeds through a variety of successions of Days and Nights, Being and Non-Being, of new existences interspersed with transitional and preparatory voids. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have pointed to these progressions as intrinsic to the evolution of the Infinite in Time. This paradox of the appearance and disappearance of Consciousness is the form by which the Image of the discrete self-exploration of the Infinite in eternity manifests in/as time. Aswapati in his journey reaches one of these transitional points, where he is swallowed into what seems a Black Hole, an original Silence.

As one who sets his sail towards mystic shores
Driven through huge oceans by the breath of God,
The fathomless below, the unknown around,
His soul abandoned the blind star-field, Space. (Ibid, p.320)

This 'blind star-field' is the expression of Non-Being in and as the Ignorance. Aswapati's consciousness has reached the borders of that manifestation and abandons its gravitation like a spacecraft, going beyond.

Afar from all that makes the measured world,
Plunging to hidden eternities it withdrew
Back from mind's foaming surface to the Vasts
Voiceless within us in omniscient sleep. (Ibid)

This 'omniscient sleep' is a reference to the *sushupti*. The Upanishads refer to three conditions of consciousness pertaining to cosmic existence – *jagrat* or the waking condition, *swapna* or the dream condition and *sushupti*, the condition of a plunge into a superconscious sleep, transcending the objective and subjective states. The objective and subjective realities of the cosmic field are thus overpassed and Aswapati enters an extra-cosmic dimension, which the Upanishads call *kaarana* or Causal Consciousness, supramental origin of the Ignorance.

Above the imperfect reach of word and thought,
Beyond the sight that seeks support of form,
Lost in deep tracts of superconscious Light,
Or voyaging in blank featureless Nothingness,
Sole in the trackless Incommensurable,
Or past not-self and self and selflessness,
Transgressing the dream-shores of conscious mind
He reached at last his sempiternal base. (Ibid)

All the mental categories and opposites are experienced and transcended here, Knowledge and the Void, the varieties of self and non-self. Aswapati reaches his "sempiternal base." The word 'sempiternal' bridges eternity and time; it is eternal and it is the fount of the perennial. Reaching here, Aswapati finds that everything comes to a halt, swallowed in a shoreless trance.

There Nature on her dumb spiritual couch
Immutably transcendent knows her source
And to the stir of multitudinous worlds
Assents unmoved in a perpetual calm. (Ibid, pp.321-22)

This is the apex of all manifestation. Every possibility of manifestation comes

self-projected from this Source.

All-causing, all-sustaining and aloof,
The Witness looks from his unshaken poise,
An Eye immense regarding all things done. (Ibid, p.322)

We find Sri Aurobindo imaging this consciousness as the spiritual eye of the Divine Being, transcending Space-Time, yet the origin of spatiality and temporality. This 'Eye' is also hymned in the *Rig Veda* as the supreme fount of Vishnu, and forms an oft-repeated line in later invocations: "*Om tad vishnoḥ paramam padam sadā paśyanti surayah divīva cakṣuratatam* (Om that Vishnu, whose supreme station of Consciousness [alt. supreme Feet] the gods behold at all times, like an Eye wide-extended in heaven)" (*Rig Veda* I.22.20). Aswapati experiences the subjective ontology of this extra-cosmic domain of Freedom and radical Infinity,

A Mind too mighty to be bound by Thought,
A Life too boundless for the play in Space,
A Soul without borders unconvinced of Time,
He felt the extinction of the world's long pain,
He became the unborn Self that never dies,
He joined the sessions of Infinity. (Ibid)

Immersed in this consciousness for what seems "a cyclic hour," he knows the cessation of the Divine Rest, *yoga-nidra*.

The world was silent for a cyclic hour. (Ibid)

Out of this silent consciousness Aswapati witnesses the eternal process of the divine manifestation. This is an example of what Sri Aurobindo has called "an eternal event." It is a Real-Idea outside of cosmic Time, that manifests itself as a representation in Space-Time. Here, Aswapati's consciousness becomes identified with the movement of consciousness forming this Idea.

Then suddenly there came a downward look.
As if a sea exploring its own depths,
A living Oneness widened at its core
And joined him to unnumbered multitudes. (Ibid)

The One is the Many. This movement of Consciousness is pure reflexivity, “a sea exploring its own depths” Unity taking stock of its Infinity.

A Bliss, a Light, a Power, a flame-white Love
Caught all into a sole immense embrace;
Existence found its truth on Oneness’ breast
And each became the self and space of all. (Ibid, pp.322-23)

The primary Powers of Consciousness by which this self-dispersion and inter-relation of the Infinity of the One is subjectively upheld and manifested are the four Mahashaktis that Sri Aurobindo describes in his book *The Mother* — Maheshwari or Light, Mahakali or Power, Mahalakshmi or Bliss and Mahasaraswati or flame-white Love. Yet these four are the One Divine Consciousness and the manifestation it finds in its infinite self-exploration is that of the supramental Integrality. The state of being or ontology of this self-exploration is at once a fundamental Oneness-in-itself; a Oneness embracing All; and a unique self-presentation of the One in each instance within the All. Each being there is a different self-expression of the All and the One. The self-experience of these beings is at once one of separate individuals for the delight of relationship, of the Universal Being in whom all beings have their existence, and of the One who has become the All and Each. This triple poise of the Supermind is an individual experience or realisation of every being in a supramental manifestation. That is the ground of its integrality, experienced by Aswapati here.

The great world-rhythms were heart-beats of one Soul,
To feel was a flame-discovery of God,
All mind was a single harp of many strings,
All life a song of many meeting lives;
For worlds were many, but the Self was one.
This knowledge now was made a cosmos’ seed: (ibid, p.323)

There are many universes with many poises of consciousness, poises of remembering and forgetting, and of self-limitation and relation, but this is a master-universe in which Integrality is the poise of consciousness. That is the seed which Aswapati now experiences as the matrix of a new creation. This is the house of new creation, Aswapati’s (and Sri Aurobindo’s) description and prophecy of the conditions of consciousness in a manifestation of Supermind.

This seed was cased in the safety of the Light,
It needed not a sheath of Ignorance. (Ibid, p.323)

In our universe, which proceeds from Ignorance to self-discovery, this seed of integral knowledge is immanent but veiled, acting like an instinctive memory, fuelling and guiding the evolution through trial and error. But in a supramental universe, there is no need to proceed from Ignorance to Knowledge, the principle of Consciousness is one which moves from dimension to dimension of Knowledge and needs no veil of Ignorance to “sheath” it.

Then from the trance of that tremendous clasp
And from the throbbings of that single Heart
And from the naked Spirit’s victory
A new and marvellous creation rose. (Ibid)

Aswapati experiences this future as an “event in eternity,” that is, the image of the outflowing of a divine manifestation in the originary time of a supramental creation.

Incalculable outflowing infinitudes
Laughing out an unmeasured happiness
Lived their innumerable unity; (Ibid)

In this wonderful way, Sri Aurobindo gives voice to the reality of the One who knows Himself in many bodies or unique self-explorations, and the bliss of their play of relations, the *lila* of the supramental Delight.

In these new worlds projected he became
A portion of the universal gaze,
A station of the all-inhabiting light,
A ripple on a single sea of peace.
His mind answered to countless communing minds,
His words were syllables of the cosmos’ speech,
His life a field of the vast cosmic stir.
He felt the footsteps of a million wills
Moving in unison to a single goal. (Ibid, p.325)

Aswapati becomes identified in consciousness with this Integral and Cosmic Consciousness and thereby understands the meaning of all evolution, that this

one Real-Idea is the essence of all the movements, struggle and attraction, felt by Time in its journey towards the One. This Knowledge is self-conscious in the transcendent Supermind. He, as an individual, experiences his infinite expansion in capacity and relationality, feeling the universe think and feel and act through him in relation to countless other coordinated self-explorations of the universe.

A stream ever new-born that never dies,
Caught in its thousandfold current's ravishing flow,
With eddies of immortal sweetness thrilled,
He bore coiling through his members as they passed
Calm movements of interminable delight,
The bliss of a myriad myriads who are one. (Ibid)

Universal currents of Bliss carrying many lives in orchestrated union express themselves through his actions. Such a manifestation is present eternally in the transcendent Supermind. Aswapati experiences the consciousness of that creation and the worlds in which they manifest.

In this vast outbreak of perfection's law
Imposing its fixity on the flux of things
He saw a hierarchy of lucent planes
Enfeoffed to this highest kingdom of God-state.
Attuning to one Truth their own right rule
Each housed the gladness of a bright degree,
Alone in beauty, perfect in self-kind,
An image cast by one deep truth's absolute,
Married to all in happy difference.
Each gave its powers to help its neighbours' parts,
But suffered no diminution by the gift; (Ibid, pp.325-26)

Aswapati further becomes aware of an organisation of the supramental manifestation in terms of its primary properties. These are related worlds where different aspects or gradations of supramental consciousness manifest, but the One is present in the Many and Each is conscious of itself as an embodiment of the One in the universal consciousness of all these worlds.

Even in the poise where Oneness draws apart
To feel the rapture of its separate selves,

The Sole in its solitude yearned towards the All
And the Many turned to look back at the One. (Ibid, p.326)

The conditions of knowledge where the “oneness draws apart to feel the rapture of its separate selves” are known as *prajnana* and *samjnana*, apprehensive or reflexive cognition and sense-experience in Sri Aurobindo's analysis of these terms found in the *Aiteraya Upanishad*. This is its own kind of unveiled play, *lila*, no less divine than the unaccompanied unity of the One.

A vast Truth-Consciousness took up these signs
To pass them on to some divine child Heart
That looked on them with laughter and delight
And joyed in these transcendent images
Living and real as the truths they house. (Ibid)

All these forms and possibilities manifest symbols of Reality for the wonder of the Divine Child in the playground of the Infinite. The reference here is also to the relation between the Supramental (*Vijanana*) and Bliss (*Ananda*) planes of the Divine or *Parabrahman* Consciousness. The Supramental plane is a delegate and agent of the Bliss Consciousness, just as the Mind plane is a delegate and agent for the Supramental Consciousness. The Supermind provides the systematicity of the Real-Idea to the play of *Ananda*, and refers back to the *Anandamaya Purusha* (“some divine child Heart”, *bala mukunda*) the marvels of its symbolic self-presentations at play.

The Spirit's white neutrality became
A playground of miracles, a rendezvous
For the secret powers of a mystic Timelessness:
It made of Space a marvel house of God,
It poured through Time its works of ageless might,
Unveiled seen as a luring rapturous face
The wonder and beauty of its Love and Force. (Ibid, pp.326-27)

Thus a Space-Time mansion existed for multiplied relational Bliss of the Unity and Infinity of the Divine at play in eternal Supermind. And at the centre of this mansion is present Bliss (*Ananda*) as a Child-God at play with his many own forms as his infinite toys. The Power responsible for this Play is the *Shakti*, the Consciousness-Force that is both the spouse of this Divine Being of Self-Knowledge and Bliss, and the Mother of all its infinite manifestations and, hence

also, the Mother of the One. In one of the Mother's recorded conversations, a young disciple asked the Mother what the relationship is between Shiva and the Divine Mother. The Mother answered, "Why, of course, Shiva is the child of the Divine Mother." This is one way in which the complex and multi-dimensional topology of the relationship between the *Iswara* and the *Shakti* is figured.

The eternal Goddess moved in her cosmic house
Sporting with God as a Mother with her child:
To him the universe was her bosom of love,
His toys were the immortal verities.
All here self-lost had there its divine place.
The Powers that here betray our hearts and err,
Were there sovereign in truth, perfect in joy,
Masters in a creation without flaw,
Possessors of their own infinitude. (Ibid, p.327)

In this ontological strain of the supramental manifestation, the Divine Mother is at play with the Supreme Being as if her own child; and the love that is manifest in that relation is the essence of the Bliss (*ananda*) of that play.

There Mind, a splendid sun of vision's rays,
Shaped substance by the glory of its thoughts
And moved amidst the grandeur of its dreams. (Ibid)

All the faculties that are ignorant here on earth, have there their divine counterparts. Mind is not a faculty of Ignorance groping for Knowledge, but a transformed organ of Divine Knowledge deploying its self-revealed Order. Therefore, this "Mind" is nothing other than Supermind or Divine Mind. The powers of Mind, which in the Ignorance, assume their higher cosmic properties as the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind and the Intuition, are also present there in their divine counterparts.

Imagination's great ensorcelling rod
Summoned the unknown and gave to it a home,
Outspread luxuriantly in golden air
Truth's iris-coloured wings of fantasy,
Or sang to the intuitive heart of joy
Wonder's dream-notes that bring the Real close. (Ibid)
Imagination in this plane is the power of the Divine for creation of new

Truth-symbols from the Unknown; but these symbols are not mind-born shadows, as in our experience, but self-forms of the Real-Idea, presented through direct revelation/illumination ("Truth's iris-coloured wings) and intuition ("intuitive heart of joy").

Even the youngest child-thought of the mind
Incarnated some touch of highest things.
There substance was a resonant harp of self,
A net for the constant lightnings of the spirit,
A magnet power of love's intensity
Whose yearning throb and adoration's cry
Drew God's approaches close, sweet, wonderful. (Ibid, p.328)

Everything here, even thoughts are manifestations in individualised forms of the All-Knowledge and All-Delight, playing with the Divine in many forms. Aswapati experiences this transcendental supramental manifestation, but he also experiences from this vantage, our ignorant creation as an evolving supramental possibility, manifesting gradually in time.

Against this glory of spiritual states,
Their parallels and yet their opposites,
Floated and swayed, eclipsed and shadowlike
As if a doubt made substance, flickering, pale,
This other scheme two vast negations found.
A world that knows not its inhabiting Self
Labours to find its cause and need to be;
A spirit ignorant of the world it made,
Obscured by Matter, travestied by Life,
Struggles to emerge, to be free, to know and reign; (Ibid, p.329)

This spectral-alternative of the supramental state is our cosmos of evolving Ignorance, marked by a polarising mentality which splits every range of truth into a contradictory duality. Here we find the two great negations that Sri Aurobindo refers to in *The Life Divine* — 'The Refusal of the Ascetic' and 'The Denial of the Materialist.' These are characteristic of our world, a Spirit which has lost its control over Life and struggles to emerge from its entrapment in blind Inconscience; and a Matter that denies any spirituality by remaining Inconscient.

These were close-tied in one disharmony, (Ibid)

These two discords are co-existent here.

Yet the divergent lines met not at all.
Three Powers governed its irrational course,
In the beginning an unknowing Force,
In the middle an embodied striving soul,
In its end a silent spirit denying life. (Ibid, pp.329-30)

This is an Ignorance that ever seeks but can never find, because at the root of this world is the division between Spirit and the material creation. In the end, we find the Spirit's freedom only by denying life. But this is not the goal of this struggling Ignorance, the goal is a transformation into a world where Spirit and Matter unite in a divine manifestation, evolving the powers of Knowledge as in the Supermind. Sri Aurobindo ends this passage with the prophetic view of what Aswapati sees as the future of this ignorant and struggling world.

This darkness hides our nobler destiny.
A chrysalis of a great and glorious truth, (Ibid,p.330)

A 'chrysalis' is a cocoon, a metamorphosing life-form that holds within its sleep, the possibility of a transformed existence.

It stifles the winged marvel in its sheath
Lest from the prison of Matter it escape
And, wasting its beauty on the formless Vast,
Merged into the Unknowable's mystery,
Leave unfulfilled the world's miraculous fate. (ibid)

This denial of the Spirit by Matter, its "stifling" of the spiritual soul is a deliberate ploy of the Consciousness-Force at work in this ignorant world. It is a ploy because by that stifling, the soul is forced to accept the forms of Matter and manifest itself in them rather than escape into its original spiritual transcendence. Because it does not want the world to be left unfulfilled, it retards the flight of the Spirit so that through rebirths over aeons of earth-time it may evolve the powers of consciousness in a graded form leading to the establishment of Supermind. This is the very drift of conscious evolution as Sri Aurobindo has brought it out.

As yet thought only some high spirit's dream

Or a vexed illusion in man's toiling mind,
A new creation from the old shall rise, (Ibid)

Sri Aurobindo voice grows prophetic once more, with his expression of Aswapati's seeing of the future destiny of our ignorant world in terms of its transformation into a supramental creation.

A Knowledge inarticulate find speech,
Beauty suppressed burst into paradise bloom,
Pleasure and pain dive into absolute bliss.
A tongueless oracle shall speak at last,
The Superconscious grow on earth,
The Eternal's wonders join the dance of Time. (Ibid)

This is the destiny of the earth and Aswapati sees this destiny as inevitable, because the supramental manifestation is immanent at the root or origin of this ignorant world, and must inevitably flower here. This is the meaning of the earth life and Aswapati, experiencing this, feels an enormous aspiration within him to accelerate the process through the power of a supramental intervention. This is also the drift of Sri Aurobindo's own aspiration, his own yogic work and the destiny which he has left the world with, as a result of his life as expressed here in *Savitri*.

Book III, Canto IV

In several places in *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo, takes on a prophetic note and presents his vision of the supramental manifestation. These lines express a very high inspiration, which can kindle in us an attraction for a future of perfect harmony and a relation with the supramental consciousness. In Book 3, Canto 4 we find Aswapati communicating with the Supramental Shakti, the Divine Mother. He has experienced the promise held by the supramental consciousness and knows why it is the solution to the problems of suffering and division in this evolving Ignorance. He seeks to invoke this power as an active principle guiding an accelerated evolution towards its own integrality in individual consciousness and world expression. As he stands at the threshold of the Unknowable, the Shakti of the Supermind, the Divine Mother appears to him and he invokes her to descend.

One is reminded here of another such mythological tale, that of the descent of Ganga. Ganga is an extra-terrestrial Shakti who is invoked by the yogi

Bhagiratha to activate her superior energy and set right the temporal errors of the Ignorance, the “sins of the forefathers.” Ganga refuses at first to descend, since the earth is unprepared to receive the power of her divine consciousness. In this case, Shiva provides a solution, a divine dam effected by his coiled hair, to reduce the intensity to fruitful limits for the earth consciousness.

Ashwapati faces a similar reluctance from the Divine Mother when he invokes her to descend. She refuses, hiding behind the reluctance of earth beings to meet the demands and conditions of consciousness for a more perfect life; and the wisdom of slow time, her power within Nature that will eventually and inevitably work out the manifestation of supermind. But Aswapati persists, desiring an intervention. He lets her know of his experience of the supramental manifestation as a promise of the future. He voices himself in the moved utterance of an ideal that finds the integrated and harmonised fulfilment of all levels and forms of consciousness, attracted by the Divine Mother and embodied by her. He starts his appeal to her with the words:

In the beginning is prepared the close. (*Savitri*, 4th ed, 1993, p.343)

By these words, he draws attention to the paradoxical and spiral nature of time, the fact that whatever is evolving in time is ever involved in time. The image of this eternal and infinite involvement of the Divine Consciousness in the matrix of an infinite evolution within the appearance of Non-Being is the basis of the sacrifice of Purusha in the *Rig Veda*. The Purusha representing the Integral Unity of the Divine dismembers Himself into four psychological soul-qualities and further fragments these into infinite combinatorial instances of these qualities. Yet the image of this Integral Unity continues to impel the divided multiplicity towards its recovery and reconstitution in a new way – the Harmony of the knowledge of Unity in the multiplicity.

This strange irrational product of the mire,
This compromise between the beast and god,
Is not the crown of thy miraculous world. (Ibid)

The human being is a hapless creature, caught between two stools. He is a being in transition, lacking stability. He is part beast and part god, a compromise; this struggling consciousness has to open itself to an ideal of Stability or Integrality beyond its present capacities, exceeding its present heights.

I know there shall inform the inconscient cells,

At one with Nature and at height with heaven,
A spirit vast as the containing sky
And swept with ecstasy from invisible founts,
A god come down and greater by the fall. (Ibid)

In these powerful lines, Sri Aurobindo draws attention to the fact that the human being, so ignorant, so helpless and hapless, is in fact, divine, God who has chosen the self-oblivion of Ignorance to experience the joy of the struggle for Knowledge. This choice makes him even greater than his immune status of supreme transcendence. These lines are also reminiscent of Sri Aurobindo’s famous quote from *The Life Divine*: “The animal is satisfied with a modicum of necessity; the gods are content with their splendours. But man cannot rest permanently until he reaches some highest good. He is the greatest of living beings because he is the most discontented, because he feels most the pressure of limitations. He alone, perhaps, is capable of being seized by the divine frenzy for a remote ideal.” Aswapati then tells of his prophetic experience:

A Power arose out of my slumber’s cell.
Abandoning the tardy limp of the hours
And the inconstant blink of mortal sight,
There where the Thinker sleeps in too much light
And intolerant flames the lone all-witnessing Eye
Hearing the word of Fate from Silence’ heart
In the endless moment of Eternity,
It saw from timelessness the works of Time. (Ibid)

Thus Aswapati gives voice to his experience of the supramental consciousness. He ascended beyond the borders of the manifestation and entered the state of consciousness (*avastha*) known in the Upanishads as *sushupti*. As we saw in Canto 3, *sushupti* translates literally to “sleeping in sleep.” It is a reflexive sleep of Superconscience, a deep trance transcending the subjective and objective worlds. Sri Aurobindo refers to this here as “There where the Thinker sleeps in too much light.” This Light is the reflexive blaze of Self-Knowledge, *Vijnana* or Supermind. This knowledge is a folding of Self in Self, and thus of Light in Light, producing a radiance so bright that it seems to sleep in itself, a self-involvement of Light. In Tantric traditions, this condition has been seen as the highest form of Kali, her station of intense golden light so dazzling, we are blinded and see black. For Sri Aurobindo, this is the Mother’s supramental form as Mahakali. If we learn to bear her solar intensity, the

blindness disappears and we experience her “most auspicious form,” the *varam rupam* of the solar goddess, Savitri. Indeed, it is the same Divine Mother who faces Aswapati now, and his description targets her intimate familiarity. The Thinker, *manishi*, the Overmind Creator, works out the ideational sequences in Space-Time, at a lower rung of the progression of manifestation. Instead, here there is the *tapas*, force of concentration, of the Seer-Poet, *kaviḥ*, bringing into objective reality the cosmic forms of the Real-Idea of Supermind. The optic key of this projective power is amplified through the powerful image of the solar Eye – “And intolerant flames the lone all-witnessing Eye.”

In a parallel passage in Canto 3, this Divine Eye was also invoked. This is because the gods take their reality and their ordered positions within the Space-Time of the evolving cosmos according to the vision of the Real-Idea. Sri Aurobindo has referred to the two primary faculties of supramental reflexivity as Revelation and Inspiration, powers or shaktis of Divine Consciousness represented by the goddesses Ila and Saraswati, respectively. Aswapati here has risen to this height of Divine self-presentation and encounters the power of Revelation through the Eye and the Power of Inspiration through “the word of Fate from Silence’ heart.” Yet, these are not events in Space-Time but eternal Events of the Real-Idea of Creation which are causative of Space and Time. In this Consciousness there is the “endless moment” of infinite Time-dilation, the triple-time consciousness (*trikaldrishti*) where timelessness and time co-exist. Hence he sees “from timelessness the works of time.”

From here he sees the coming of an apocalyptic transition, a mutation of consciousness or quantum leap to a consciousness beyond mind, resulting from a great Destruction (*pralaya*).

Overpassed were the leaden formulas of the Mind,
Overpowered the obstacle of mortal Space:
The unfolding Image showed the things to come.
A giant dance of Shiva tore the past;
There was a thunder as of worlds that fall;
Earth was o’errun with fire and the roar of Death
Clamouring to slay a world his hunger had made;
There was a clangour of Destruction’s wings:
The Titan’s battle-cry was in my ears,
Alarm and rumour shook the armoured Night. (Ibid)

In the Indian tradition a new age is often heralded by a cosmic destruction, *pralaya*. Often we find that earth goes through such tremendous crisis points

in its evolutionary journey. The *Mahabharata* presents us with such a crisis point at the battlefield of Kurukshetra, particularly encapsulated in the first part of Krishna’s Self-Revelation to Arjuna, in which he is manifest as the Great Destroyer, Time (*kalosmi’ham*). Sri Aurobindo presents a similar vision here of the Destroyer, in the guise of Shiva. Such appearances by the Dancer of Death at the end of an era are necessary to clear the grounds for a new manifestation. We have gone through the throes of two World Wars in the 20th c. These are examples or instances of the archetypal destruction that Sri Aurobindo envisions in modern times preparing the ground for the supramental manifestation. In response there descend beings of a higher consciousness viewed by Aswapati:

I saw the Omnipotent’s flaming pioneers
Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
Forerunners of a divine multitude,
Out of the paths of the morning star they came
Into the little room of mortal life.
I saw them cross the twilight of an age. (Ibid)

The Sanskrit word for “the twilight of an age” is *yugasandhya*. It is the magical hour when the law of one age (*yuga-dharma*) is replaced by a new law. As a prophetic vision of Sri Aurobindo, in our own time, the law of the *Kaliyuga* is being replaced by that of a new *Satyayuga*, a *Kritayuga* or age of Fulfilment. Between these, there is a twilight, a no-man’s land, a period when time is unpredictable and reversible. The process leading to the new age has not yet become irreversible. The consciousness of the earth may slide into the past or be precipitated into the future. Into this no-man’s land, there enter the divine agents of change. Here ‘the morning star’ is the star of Dawn, the star that will send the rays of promise heralding the supramental age.

The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
The great creators with wide brows of calm,
The massive barrier-breakers of the world
And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
The messengers of the Incommunicable,
The architects of immortality. (Ibid, pp.343-44)

All these hero-souls who represent the four great powers of the Divine Mother — Maheshwari, originating consciousness of “the great creators with wide brows of calm,” Mahakali, mother of the pioneers of passion and force, “the massive barrier-breakers of the world/And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,” Mahasaraswati, whose children are “the labourers in the quarries of the gods” and Mahalakshmi, whose emanations come with the message of harmony, unity and divine love, “the messengers of the Incommunicable,/The architects of immortality.” These are the children of the Supreme Mother that Aswapati sees in his vision, descending to prepare the supramental change.

Into the fallen human sphere they came,
Faces that wore the Immortal’s glory still,
Voices that communed still with the thoughts of God,
Bodies made beautiful by the spirit’s light,
Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,
Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy,
Approaching eyes of a diviner man,
Lips chanting an unknown anthem of the soul,
Feet echoing in the corridors of Time. (Ibid, p.344)

These beings form interventions of Divine Consciousness that Aswapati has foreseen in his highest state of spiritual vision. This is what gives him the daring to invoke the Divine Mother, telling her that She, as the Integral Shakti, origin of all these manifestations, must descend and be embodied in human form to create the conditions for the most propitious and quick transition.

All shall be done for which our pain was borne.
Even as of old man came behind the beast
This high divine successor surely shall come (Ibid)

The superman will replace humanity as the next stage of the evolution, the power of self-conscious knowledge, universality and oneness replace the divided consciousness of this ignorant world and being.

Behind man’s inefficient mortal pace,
Behind his vain labour, sweat and blood and tears:
He shall know what mortal mind barely durst think,
He shall do what the heart of the mortal could not dare.
Inheritor of the toil of human time,

He shall take on him the burden of the gods; (Ibid)

Humankind has laboured through the centuries. Since its beginning, all life has been full of struggle and strife. This is the true meaning of “work.” All the arduous struggle that has gone into history grappling with the insuperable problems of humanity is the true measure of work. The inheritor of that work is not the human, it is the higher being that will succeed the human, the superman. He will not only inherit ‘the toil of human time’, he will equate himself with the consciousness and universality of the gods, take on their responsibility and their burden’.

All heavenly light shall visit the earth’s thoughts,
The might of heaven shall fortify earthly hearts;
Earth’s deeds shall touch the superhuman’s height,
Earth’s seeing widen into the infinite. (Ibid)

It is this promise of the supramental manifestation held by Aswapati in his prophetic vision, that Sri Aurobindo presents to us poetically and vicariously as a glimpse of the future of our times.

(Series concluded)

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

Sri Aurobindo: The Ideal Teacher

Prema Nandakumar

2.The Priest of the Sacrifice

There was a time when I was a little girl growing up in a remote village in South India and watched with fascination the priest arrange a few bricks in the central hall, pour some sand, draw some lines with rice flour, place some sticks that he had brought with him and ask my grandmother to light it. That was the only connexion she had with the ritual. My grandfather would then repeat the Vedic hymns as the fire was tended by the priest, and a few more Brahmins sat around watching it and joining the recitation.

Once I asked my grandmother: “What are they saying?” “Hush, they are reciting Vedas. You go out and play.” At some stage I remember asking her why she did not sit with grandfather and recite the poem. “Oh, women should not recite those Vedas.” I took this for granted and then came far away from that tiny village on the banks of the Tamraparni river, a settlement that did not have even electricity. The Vedas got distanced from me though it was an oft-repeated word in the Tamil poet, Subramania Bharati’s songs. Then came 1957 when I took up Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* for my doctoral research. I discovered the volume, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* and the Vedas became an exciting discovery. I never had the rebel-streak in me so I did not fight for reciting the Vedas. But I could read and write and speak about it, and I have been content.

Nor was there any need to rebel. With the kind of inspirations that poured in from Sri Aurobindo in the *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, a lifetime was not enough to know the Vedas. There was first the Vedic hymn. With all the recitations going around me in childhood, a Vedic hymn came to have a mystique about it. What exactly do these hymns say, I wondered. But I wondered no more when I began reading the Foreword. There is an immense fascination about Sri Aurobindo’s opening sentences in his great books. They have a way of riveting one’s attention with a ‘complete’ message, as if warning us: “You have opened

this page, now inspite of yourself you will be going forward to know more.” It is so with *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

“In ancient times the Veda was revered as a sacred book of wisdom, a great mass of inspired poetry, the work of Rishis, seers and sages, who received in their illumined minds rather than mentally constructed a great universal, eternal and impersonal Truth which they embodied in Mantras, revealed verses of power, not of an ordinary but of a divine inspiration and source.”ⁱ

“Revealed verses of power”? So the eye goes to the next sentence and the next, and after that the next. At each step a world of knowledge and the spring in one’s heart: “I am a child of all this!” The *kavi* in the Vedas is not a mere poet, but one who has seen and heard Truth. If one holds on to this original meaning of the poet as a seer of truth, *kavayah satyasrutah*, “seers who are hearers of the Truth”, then the *satyanveshana*, the search for Truth begins. The proper recitation of the hymns could give certain promised gifts, said one branch of Veda-lovers. We may agree with them or not; but certainly we have to thank them for a great service to the Vedas. As the people who thought of the correct recitation of the hymns conferred various gifts, gave fantastic importance to the actual recitation, the hymns were preserved for prosperity. No other ancient literature of the world can boast of such faithful adherence to the original words and articulation which has been achieved without the help of the printed word or a gramophone or a tape recorder.

Meanwhile there were persons who wished to go beyond the mere gifts-for-proper-recitation stage. The Upanishads came to their help. Considered the crown of the Vedas, they turned the spotlight away from *karmakanda* (ritualism) to *jnanakanda* (knowledge). It must be remembered that this was a natural movement to help differentiate the various strands in the Vedas and was not against the world of the Vedas. Sri Aurobindo has made this quite clear saying how both the Upanishads and the Gita look upon the Vedas as the Book of Knowledge. Unfortunately modern European scholarship think Vedas to be mere ritualism and “has persuaded the mind of modern India” to follow it. Fortunately this was a century ago. Then came Swami Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Now we are able to study the Vedas as an integral scripture of life and mind, and both tuned to spirituality.

As the years passed by, things have become clearer, and a study of some of the Vedic sukthas has benefitted me greatly. Here is no mere nature worship, though the glory of nature is brought to us in innumerable hymns. I was so fascinated by Sri Aurobindo’s translation of the hymns to Usha in the *Rig Veda*

that I used one of them as the epigraph to the first part of my doctoral dissertation:

“Beholding
the higher Light
beyond the darkness
we came
to the divine Sun
in the Godhead,
to the highest
Light of all.”

Later I would be reading works allied to Sri Aurobindo’s Vedic studies. When he was working on the series for the *Arya* (1914 onwards) one of the friends who joined him in studying the Vedas was the renowned Tamil patriot-poet, Subramania Bharati (1882-1921). In one of his essays, Bharati recorded his astonishment at the easy manner in which Sri Aurobindo unravelled the significances of the Vedic hymns.ⁱⁱ

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

This is the reaction of a contemporary who sat near the Master and followed him very closely. Bharati’s own book in Tamil, *Veda Rishikalin Kavithai* that incorporates many of Sri Aurobindo’s interpretations is now a famous classic. So is T.V.Kapali Sastriar’s Sanskrit commentary on the first *Ashtaka* of the *Rig Veda*, titled *Siddhanjana*. Thanks to the inspirations from Sri Aurobindo’s books, *On the Veda* and *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, I sought to widen my Vedic studies in a humble way; and this was of great help when I was invited to write the biography of Sastriar. Sastriar studies one hundred and twenty-one hymns of the *Rig Veda*. He follows the Aurobindonian lead, but his exegetical style followed the traditional pattern. This is understandable as he was writing in the time-tested commentatorial tradition in Sanskrit. Thus it became possible for me to learn more and more about our great culture with self-confidence and a sense of fulfilment.

Indeed, Sri Aurobindo never closes the doors of individual perception and always allows plentiful breathing-space for us to start on our own adventures in the subject. Why do we need to interpret the Vedic hymns? But then, these are no primary school formulae like “This is a cat”. The hymns have a surface meaning linking us to the nature around us. But they also have a deeper meaning

which we should meditate upon to gain self-knowledge. That is the knowledge that saves us, and so the hymns are known as mantra (*mananaat traayate*). Why did the Vedic rishis take the trouble of veiling their thoughts? Sri Aurobindo has an explanation:

“Under pressure of the necessity to mask their meaning with symbols and symbolic words – for secrecy must be observed – the Rishis resorted to fix double meanings, a device easily manageable in the Sanskrit language where one word often bears several different meanings; but not easy to render in an English translation and very often impossible.”ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

They were mystics who saw visions in their meditation and the physical universe revealed its inner meaning to them with ease.^{iv} When Sri Aurobindo revealed some of the inner significances of Vedic images, having gained the knowledge through intuition, the interpretation was welcomed by the discerning few. One could now sense what had been hidden from profane gaze. Sri Aurobindo says:

“As the Vedic ‘cow’ is the symbol of light, so the Vedic ‘horse’ is a symbol of power, spiritual strength, force of tapasya. When the Rishi asks Agni for a “horse-form cow-in-front gift” he is not asking really for a number of horses forming a body of the gift with some cows walking in front, he is asking for a great body of spiritual power led by the light or, as we may translate it, ‘with the Ray-Cow walking in its front.’”^v

When the scholar sees the Vedic images intently and as a whole, then the truth becomes clear to his gaze. This intense absorption is meditation, it is *tapasya*. In one sense, the entire Vedic literature is an intense *tapasya* to achieve a direct vision of Truth:

“The thought around which all is centred is the seeking after Truth, Light, Immortality. There is a Truth deeper and higher than the truth of outward existence, a Light greater and higher than the light of human understanding which comes by revelation and inspiration, an immortality towards which the soul has to rise. We have to find our way to that, to get into touch with this Truth and Immortality, *sapanta ṛtam amṛtam*, to be born into the Truth, to grow in it, to ascend in spirit into the world of Truth and to live in it.”^{vi}

With this assurance that removed the cobwebs of pantheism, primitive worship

and expendable mumbo-jumbo that had been poured into an Indian's mind that had always revered Vedic studies, it became easier for us to approach the body of Vedas as meaningful recordations of our ancestors. The opening *Anuvaka* of the *Rig Veda* is most precious and contains hymns addressed to Agni. Sri Aurobindo has translated all the hymns in this section, given a minimum number of notes for detailed commentary is not needed for the aspirant. He has to walk the path on his own, with the translation helping him to keep steadily to the Way. It is very much like a teacher coming to our graduate classes for a couple of years to teach us Shakespeare. But if we stop there for the rest of our lives, ours is the loss. We have got the road map when the teacher has taught us a *Hamlet* or the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. It is for us to read the rest of Shakespeare all our life!

Like a helpful class teacher, Sri Aurobindo has analysed the first rik of the *Rig Veda*. Certainly a model that we ought to study with profit. The hymn in the *Gayatri* metre is Madhuchandas Vaishwamitra's address to Agni:

*agnimile purohitam yajñasya devam ṛtvijam,
hotāram ratnadhātaman.*

Sri Aurobindo's simple, literal translation: "Agni I adore, who stands before the Lord, the god who sees Truth, the warrior, strong dispeller of delight." Is it simply a praise, an adoration of Fire which is indispensable for human life? On the material plane, the answer could be yes. But from Yoga's view point Agni stands as the Seer-Will in our front. When we will to do something, we make a *sankalpa*, that will, that *sankalpa* is Agni. I could be sitting in a classroom and the eminent Professor could be lecturing, standing near the black board, for Sri Aurobindo swoops down to our mental level and explains the complicated subject in simple words:

"The material sense sees neither God nor gods, neither Yajna nor Agni; it sees only the elements and the formations of the elements, material appearances and the movements in or of those appearances. It does not see Agni, it sees a fire; it does not see God, it sees the earth green and the sun flaming in heaven and is aware of the wind that blows and the waters that roll. So too it sees the body or appearance of a man, not the man himself; it sees the look or the gesture, but of the thought behind look or gesture it is not aware. Yet the man exists in the body and thought exists in the look or the gesture. So too Agni exists in the fire and God exists in the world. They also live outside of as well as in the fire and outside of as well as in the world."^{vii}

We get to know about the significance of the Vedic Sacrifice, the process of creation from what is a "non-manifest Being" by *Chit* that is Power. After manifestation, there has been a tremendous evolution. It is to help him develop further his intelligent mind that the Vedas were recorded says, Sri Aurobindo. The language in which the hymns were recorded is "the *devabhasha* or original language spoken by men in *Uttara Meru* at the beginning of the *Manwantara*." Here words are mantric because "every one of its vowels and consonants has a particular and inalienable force which exists by the nature of things and not by development or human choice; these are the fundamental sounds which lie at the basis of the Tantric *bijamantras* and constitute the efficacy of the mantra itself."

This was when I realised that the little Sanskrit I knew was no help in understanding the Vedas. What I knew was the language of Bhasa and Kalidasa. Corruption and purification happened by turns to this language of the Vedic rishis and so we do have a connective link, however thin, with the language of the gods. Each word in this *rik* is analysed thoroughly, including the last. '*Ratnadhātām*' appears to be a simple word, giver of jewels! Sri Aurobindo takes us to the root of the term and we learn that "Agni is most joy-giving, a great disposer of delight."

This is how we have to unravel the coiled significances in the Vedic hymns. But we can leave the high scholarship to specialists, researchers and editors. For us the sheer joy of the Vedic hymns read in Sri Aurobindo's inviting translation is enough. And how they have been written not only for personal enlightenment but also for social amity, and the sheer thrill that strikes us when we realise that the English language itself has been transformed into another *devabhasha* by Sri Aurobindo's sublime style, sublime yet simple, true.

References:

- i. *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* (1985 edn.), p.1
- ii. *Essays and Other Prose Fragments* (1977 edition), p.57
- iii. SABCL, vol.11, p.11
- iv. Like the Vedic rishis, the Siddhas of Tamil Nadu also use a twy-fold language which is known as "*Rettai Bhashai*" (the Double language).
- v. SABCL, vol.11., pp.16-17
- vi. Ibid.
- vii. Ibid., p.440

Rishi Sri Aurobindo

His Integral Philosophy and Yoga

V. Ananda Reddy

Before delving deep into the integral philosophy and yoga of Sri Aurobindo, it would perhaps be necessary to clarify the concept of 'Rishi' as understood by Sufism and by Hinduism.

It is a known factor in the Kashmir valley's religio-cultural history that while the Sufi orders in Kashmir like Suharwadi, Kubravi, Naqshbandi and Qadri had their origin in Persia, it was the Rishi order that was native to the valley. It was perhaps an offshoot of the philosophy of Hindu asceticism and Buddhist philosophy of negativism.

Although it is now an accepted factor by the Kashmir scholars that the word 'Rishi' is derived from the original Sanskrit and Hindu traditions, the meanings given to it are vastly different. An important chronicler of Kashmir holds the view,

"The most respected class of people in this country (Kashmir) are the Rishis. Although they have not abandoned the traditional and customary forms of worship (*taqlid*), but they are true in their worship. They do not denounce men belonging to different faiths. They do not have the tongue of desire, and do not seek to obtain worldly objects. They plant fruit-bearing trees in order that people may obtain benefit from these. They abstain from meat and do not marry."

This account is corroborated by Emperor Jahangir. He writes:

"Although they have not acquired learning and *marifa*, they live a frank and unostentatious life. They criticise nobody and ask for nothing from anyone. They neither eat meat nor marry. They always plant fruit-bearing trees in uninhabited parts, so that people may be benefited by them. But they

themselves do not hope to reap any advantages from these trees." (web-search on 'Rishi')

To quote Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, from his book *Sufism in Kashmir*:

"According to Bahau'd-Din Mattu, the Rishis of Kashmir are famous for their devotion to Divine unity, and for killing their carnal desires. Although they retire to caves, they illuminate them with the light of their spiritual attainment. Having abandoned the society of mankind, they do not even bother about food or sleep. They eat bitter greens (*Upalhak*) and when others sleep they busy themselves with meditation upon God....

"Even in the nineteenth century the Rishi way of life appeared to people peculiar in many ways and caught their imagination. Thus Baba Khalil, the author of *Rauzatu'l-Riyaz*, says: "Rishi is one who is not tied to his family, wife and children. He is not bound to his near and dear ones. He is indifferent to and contemptuous of worldly wealth and pelf. He takes abode in deserted places and mountains and is averse to the company of worldly people. He does not store worldly objects; whatever he receives in the evening he does not keep it with himself for the morning and distributes all to the needy. He does not cause injury to any living things; and does not destroy the greenery. He lives in seclusion. He abstains from flesh-eating and forbidden things and also from cohabitation....

"The thought that essentially underlies the Rishi's philosophy is the control of *nafs*, carnal desire. They believed the carnal-self is rebellious and ignorant. It is wholly evil and should be the object of the greatest vigilance. They in fact considered carnal desires as their greatest enemy and maintained that they should be controlled and crushed at all costs. In pursuit of this goal every kind of physical hardship was imposed and accepted." (Abdul Qaiyum Rafiqi, *Sufism in Kashmir*, Good word Media, Sydney, Australia, 2003, pp.239-40.)

When we come to Hinduism, the concept of a Rishi is vastly different. While the Rishi of Sufism is more an ascetic, pious person in pursuit of his soul and the purification of his carnal self, having a somewhat indirect influence on the society, the Hindu Rishi exercised an immense influence not only on the people in general but also on the kings and rulers of the time. Because of the high esteem he was held in, his word carried great authority in the religious as well as the mundane and the political, economic life of the people. His word was often a greater law unto itself than that of the king's!

He was primarily a seeker of truth, both within and without. Such a pursuit gave him not only inner revelations of the soul but also gave him wisdom, the leadership qualities, warrior's courage, the scholar's depth of knowledge. He was a master of *swarajya* and *samrajya*!

All these aspects of the Rishi are powerfully described by Sri Aurobindo in this passage:

“The Rishi was in that age the head of the human world. He was at once sage, poet, priest, scientist, prophet, educator, scholar and legislator. He composed a song, and it became one of the sacred hymns of the people; he emerged from rapt communion with God to utter some puissant sentence, which in after ages became the germ of mighty philosophies; he conducted a sacrifice, and kings and peoples rose on its seven flaming tongues to wealth and greatness; he formulated an observant aphorism, and it was made the foundation of some future science, ethical, practical or physical; he gave a decision in a dispute and his verdict was seed of a great code or legislative theory. In Himalayan forests or by the confluence of great rivers he lived as the centre of a patriarchal family whose link was thought-interchange and not blood-relationship, bright-eyed children of sages, heroic striplings, earnest pursuers of knowledge, destined to become themselves great Rishies or renowned leaders of thought and action. He himself was the master of all learning and all arts and all sciences. The Rishies won their knowledge by mediation working through inspiration to intuition. Austere concentration of the faculties stilled the waywardness of the reason and set free for its work the inner, unerring vision which is above reason, as reason is itself above sight; this again worked by intuitive flashes, one inspired stroke of insight quivering out close upon the other, till the whole formed a logical chain; yet a logic not coldly thought out nor the logic of argument but the logic of continuous and consistent inspiration. Those who sought the Eternal through physical austerities, such as the dwelling between five fires (one fire on each side and the noonday sun overhead) or lying for days on a bed of swordpoints, or Yoga processes based on an advanced physical science, belonged to a later day. The Rishies were inspired thinkers, not working through deductive reason or any physical process of sense-subdual. The energy of their personalities was colossal; wrestling in fierce meditation with God, they had become masters of incalculable spiritual energies, so that their anger could blast peoples and even the world was in danger when they opened their lips to utter a curse. This energy was by the principle of heredity transmitted, at least in the form of a latent and educable force, to their offspring. Afterwards as the vigour of the race exhausted itself, the

inner fire dwindled and waned.” (Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* Vol. 27, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972, pp.156-7)

It is, however, important to emphasise that the tradition of Rishi still continues to exert its spiritual pressure in Hinduism. He is still considered to be the spiritual guide of both the individual and collective life. And what we are now going to discuss in some detail is the integral philosophy and yoga of one of the great, if not the greatest, contemporary Rishis — Sri Aurobindo whose ideas have begun to percolate the thought-world across continents, and, as a scientist-yogi, P.B. Saint Hillaire writes in a prophetic tone: “one day the whole world will talk of them and they will be most natural.” (*Mother India*, October 2011, p. 859)

“And philosophy!” exclaimed Sri Aurobindo, “Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher – although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the yoga and came to Pondicherry – I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher. How I managed to do it and why? First, because X proposed to me to co-operate in a philosophical review – and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything I could not very well refuse... Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!”¹

That was what Sri Aurobindo had written to a disciple on 4-9-1934. Interestingly, after six months, on 1-4-1935, he wrote to another disciple, “The ‘latent philosopher’ failed to come out at the first shot (when I was in Calcutta) – after some years of incubation (?) it burst out like a volcano as soon as I started writing the *Arya*.”²

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In order to understand how the impossible has been made possible, we must try to grasp the fundamental philosophy of the Eternal and Real on which Sri Aurobindo bases his ideal of a divine life, for as seen earlier, the truth and permanent value of any ideal depends "on the closeness of its fundamental idea to the ultimate truth of the Eternal."³

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

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

“If then the world is a dream or an illusion or a mistake, it is a dream originated and willed by the self in its totality and not only originated and willed, but supported and perpetually entertained. Moreover, it is a dream existing in a Reality and the stuff of which it is made is that Reality, for Brahman must be the material of the world as well as its base and continent. If the gold of which the vessel is made is real, how shall we suppose that the vessel itself is a mirage?”⁴

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

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

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

Sat is Pure Being, Absolute Existence. He is without cause or object of His Existence. He cannot change because He is unconditioned by Time, Space and Causality. He is alone and alone is He in the One Existence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But this is an illusion only; the opposite is not a zero, devoid of consciousness. The Highest and the Lowest, the positive and the negative are only apparent

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

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

An unshaped consciousness desired light
And a blank prescience yearned towards distant change.
.....
Arrived from the other side of boundlessness
An eye of deity pierced through dumb deeps;
.....
Intervening in a mindless universe,
Its message crept through the reluctant hush
Calling the adventure of consciousness and joy...⁵

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

This being the principle of evolution, two basic characters of this movement become obvious and unchallengeable: a) only that which is involved in Matter can evolve, for otherwise there would not be an evolution but a random and

haphazard creation of new things, arbitrarily willed or conceived by an inexplicable Force; b) all that is involved in Matter is bound to evolve in the ascending order until the final unfolding when the Consciousness which had lost itself finds itself again 'divinely self-conscious, free, infinite and immortal'.

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

Then something in the inscrutable darkness stirred;
A nameless movement, an unthought Idea
Insistent, dissatisfied, without an aim,
Something that wished but knew not how to be,
Teased the Inconscient to wake Ignorance.⁶

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

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

If we follow this evolutionary trend, we see that Man is not the final rung of evolution. He is only a stage of transition. Just as Nature worked out Life in Matter and Mind in Life, so too Man is only a living laboratory of Nature 'in whom and with whose conscious cooperation' she will work out by the same

method and process the next higher principle of Supermind. To an extent, Man's eternal aspiration for God, Light, Bliss, Freedom and Immortality is 'simply the imperative impulse by which Nature is seeking to evolve beyond Mind...' says Sri Aurobindo. Beyond this 'imperative impulse', the mental consciousness too has to be widened deepened, purified, made supple and receptive before the supramental principle can descend. And this process of Mind's preparation is taking place at the present through a kind of catharsis of human consciousness. Mind was a helper in the past, but now it is a bar. With the guiding lights of religion, occultism and religious thought it did lead Man on his destiny. But now it has brought Man to the brink of self-destruction. Unless humanity opens itself to the higher principle beyond Mind, there is no hope for it.

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

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

it got sufficiently organised and ready enough to become the receptacle of the psychic element of consciousness, it had to await the conjunction of the Mind principle embedded in itself and the Mind principle from above, for the new mental consciousness to shape itself into Man.

Likewise, Man the representative of the Mind principle, has been preparing himself, though mostly unconsciously, for a higher life. Sages and saints, poets and idealists, scientists and reformers have, through the ages, prepared the Mind to open itself to higher levels than itself, have purified life with the godward emotion, and made Matter receptive, plastic and supple, responding readily to the deeper needs of Life and Mind. There has been on the whole a kind of preparation for a higher life. Yet, the malady of Man has not been cured, for, the powers and resources in his hand are insufficient to cure himself.

“Man has been striving through his lesser powers, through the grace of the lower gods since his advent upon earth to arrive at a reconstruction of his life and surroundings. That is why he has never attained the full measure of success. Indeed a period of success or progress was always followed by a decline and retrogression, a so-called golden age by an age of iron. As a matter of fact, today humanity finds itself terribly enclosed in a cage of iron, as it were. The earth has become too small for his soaring capacities and multitudinous necessities – he is already thinking of a place on the moon! That is only the sign and symbol of an inner impasse to which he has arrived. The anguish of the human soul has reached its acme: the problems, social, political, educational, moral it is facing have proved themselves to be totally insolvable. Yes, he has run into a cul-de-sac, where he is caught as in a death trap. No ordinary rational methods, halfway nostrums can deliver him any more. All the outer doors and issues are now closed for him; the only way is to turn inward; there lies the open road to freedom and fulfilment. That is the way to transcendence and self-surpassing.”⁷

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

Fortunately, for us, both the evolutionary processes of ascent and descent have been accomplished. Although Nature and Man have been labouring for

aeons to prepare themselves for the New Consciousness, it is the advent of divine beings, as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which has hastened this process of Mind's sublimation. They, the Supramental harbingers, have not only brought down the Supramental Truth that is to be established as the next evolutionary step, but they have acted here below, struggled and suffered to carry forward the terrestrial movement towards its fulfilment. Their coming has been the assurance of the grand finale envisaged and aspired by Matter: to reveal and manifest the Spirit. The ascent of the Mind and the descent of the Supermind, have both been accomplished by them. On 5th December 1950, Sri Aurobindo sacrificed his body in order to bring the supramental into the earth-consciousness and later, on 29th February 1956, the Mother brought down the golden flood of the Supramental Force on earth and fulfilled the promise they had given to mankind, fulfilling at the same time man's immemorial aspiration for Truth, Light, Freedom and Immortality.

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

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

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

To know ‘the mystery of the journeying years’ of the future, to try to understand what awaits our destiny is itself a help on the way of fulfilling our

ideal. However faintly we may understand the Vision, we at least become humble, and the more consciously we surrender ourselves to this Vision and Force, the greater are our chances of collaboration in the ideal.

February 29, 1956, was the day when the New World was born. The New Consciousness is amidst us, recasting, unobtrusively, the old consciousness. It is there, spreading in every walk of life – the political, the economic, the spiritual, the artistic, urging man to cast off old habits old institutions, old values, old ways of thinking and beliefs – the old consciousness based on falsehood, hypocrisy, ignorance. Quietly, the New World is gliding into the old one, replacing it inch-by-inch, minute-by-minute. New foundations are being laid, ‘not below, but above’, in the inner being, the psychic being of man. The New Man will be therefore not a slave to his outer nature, limited and obscure, but a monarch of himself and all around him – *Swarat* and *Samrat*. Living in his soul-status, he will be in conscious harmony and communion with other individuals. There will thus be neither strife nor competition, neither rivals nor opponents, for all would be one in the cosmic soul and therefore radiating the Divine Will. His mind would be a channel of profound, creative and true knowledge. His heart will overflow not with the base human egoistic emotions, but with a ‘wide and intense *rasa* that lies in the divine identity of souls’. His body will be beautiful, transparent and supple ‘a tabernacle of God’.

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

Thus shall the earth open to divinity
And common natures feel the wide uplift,
Illumine common acts with the Spirit's ray
And meet the deity in common things.
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine.⁸

Considering the apparent state of human consciousness at present, this lofty ideal, this vision of “A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world” seems a far-off cry, something impossible and chimerical. Even if it is to take place, it

may take place in a ‘far-flung futurity’, millions of years from now.

To this sceptical view Sri Aurobindo answers,

“I have already spoken about the bad conditions of the world; the usual idea of the occultists about it is that the worse they are, the more is probable the coming of an intervention or a new revelation from above. The ordinary mind cannot know – it has either to believe or disbelieve or wait and see.

“As to whether the Divine seriously means something to happen I believe it is intended. I know with absolute certitude that the supramental is a truth and that its advent is in the very nature of things inevitable. The question is as to the when and how. That also is decided and predestined from somewhere above; but it is here being fought out amid a rather grim clash of conflicting forces. For in the terrestrial world the predetermined result is hidden and what we see is a whirl of possibilities and forces attempting to achieve something with the destiny of it all concealed from the human eyes. This is, however, certain that a number of souls have been sent to see that it shall be now. That is the situation. My faith and will are for the now.”⁹ In another letter, Sri Aurobindo writes, “But I have not been discouraged by what is happening, because I know and have experienced hundreds of times that beyond the blackest darkness there lies for one who is a divine instrument the light of God's victory. I have never had a strong and persistent will for anything to happen in the world – I am not speaking of personal things – which did not eventually happen even after delay, defeat or even disaster.”¹⁰

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

“This change might happen not only in the few, but extend and generalise itself in the race. This possibility, if fulfilled, would mean that the human dream of perfection, perfection of itself, of its purified and enlightened nature, of all its action and living would be no longer a dream but a truth that could be made real and humanity lifted out of the hold on it of inconscience and ignorance.”¹¹

When asked by a disciple, “What will be the effect of the Supermind on the earth?” the Mother replied, “I told you immediately that before the effects of the Supramental manifestation become visible and tangible, perceptible to everybody, perhaps thousands of years may go by.”¹²

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

“All those who strive to overcome their ordinary nature,” explains the Mother, “all those who try to realise materially the deeper experience which has brought them into contact with the divine Truth, all those who, instead of turning to the Beyond or the Highest, try to realise physically, externally – the change of consciousness they have realised within themselves – all are apprentice-supermen.”¹³

Apart from those “number of souls” who “have been sent down to see that it [the Work] shall be now,” – what is asked of us is, “to overcome the ordinary nature”, to realise materially the deeper experience, and “the change of consciousness.” In one word, a transformation, or to become an apprentice-superman.

The starting-point of the integral transformation is aspiration, aspiration coupled with a will to realise it.

“But if in addition to the aspiration there is an inner opening, a kind of receptivity, then one can enter into this transformed consciousness at a single stroke and maintain oneself there. This change of consciousness is abrupt, so to say; when it occurs, it occurs all of a sudden, although the preparation for it may have been long and slow... It is a complete and absolute change, a revolution in the basic poise; the movement is like turning a ball inside out. To the transformed consciousness everything appears not only new and

different, but almost the reverse of what it seemed to the ordinary consciousness. In the ordinary consciousness you advance slowly, by successive experiences, from ignorance to a very distant and often doubtful knowledge. In the transformed consciousness your starting-point is knowledge and you proceed from knowledge to knowledge. However, this is only a beginning; for the outer consciousness, the various planes and parts of the outer active being are transformed only slowly and gradually as a result of the inner transformation.”¹⁴

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

A change or reversal of consciousness is of primary importance because,

“In the inner reality of things a change of consciousness was always the major fact, the evolution has always had a spiritual significance and the physical change was only instrumental; but this relation was concealed by the first abnormal balance of the two factors, the body of the external Inconscience, outweighing and obscuring in importance the spiritual element, the conscious being. But once the balance has been righted, it is no longer the change of body that must precede the change of consciousness; the consciousness itself by its mutation will necessitate and operate whatever mutation is needed for the body.”¹⁵

Thus, after the first change of consciousness or the awakening of the psychic being, if the sadhak makes his outer nature of body, life and mind move in the light and guidance of his psychic, then, the higher consciousness purifies and regenerates his ordinary human nature. “Finally, when the psychic being is in full self-possession and power, it can be the vehicle of the direct supramental consciousness – which will then be able to act freely and absolutely for the entire transformation of the external nature, its transfiguration into a perfect body of the Truth-consciousness – in a word, its divinisation.”¹⁶ Thus a psychicisation, leading to a spiritualisation and culminating in a supramentalisation can alone fulfil the ideal of total transformation of which “a transformation of the body must be an indispensable part of it; without that no full divine life on earth is possible.”¹⁷

It is essentially for the work of the transformation in the body that the Sri Aurobindo Ashram was created by the Mother. Apart from being a symbolic centre, a laboratory where, “Each one of you”, says the Mother, “represents one of the difficulties which must be conquered for the transformation,” the Ashram was essentially meant to build the body that is receptive to the Supramental’s working. “The golden light must come into the feet,” writes Nolini Kanta Gupta, while describing the nature of the Mother’s work on earth, “and that was the work she was doing here and it is for that that she created the Ashram. You all know the special emphasis she laid on physical education in order to prepare the body and senses to receive the golden light. She always said, physical education gives you the basis for the new consciousness, the new light, we must have a strong body, a beautiful body, a body that endures: for the new light is powerful, it is not merely light, it is the force, one must be able to bear it and carry out its commands.”¹⁸

In truth, the great emphasis on the physical transformation is because, “It is only when the circle will be completed, when the two extremes will touch, when the highest will manifest on the most material that the experience will be truly decisive. It would seem that one never truly understands until one understands with one’s body.” Until the supramental is realised here, in the body, nothing is realised permanently. So, the new consciousness is working itself out in the body and not on the mental or vital levels, because they cannot support it. A new body alone can stand the pressure of the new consciousness. “Only the body can understand,” says the Mother. And for it to understand, means the capacity to be able to do, she explained. And this capacity and understanding is contagious. That is why the Mother gave her own body for experimenting with the principles of physical transformation, which in their essence had been realised by Sri Aurobindo in his own body. For, She believed that “It is there the transformation must be achieved; it is on earth that you progress, it is on earth that you realise. It is in the body that the Victory is won”. And if this victory is won in one single glorious body, then it will be a victory for all men and Matter. “Once it is done (Sri Aurobindo has said this), once one body has done it, it has the capacity to pass it on to others,”¹⁹ confirmed the Mother.

Once the Supramental Force hooks itself to a single body, then it will open itself around the cells of the body and refashion and remould its new body. And, “the moment a body, which was of course formed by the old animal method, is capable of living this consciousness (the New Consciousness) naturally, and spontaneously, without effort, without going out of itself, it proves that this is not

one single exceptional case but simply the forerunner of a realisation which, even if it is not altogether general, can at last be shared by a certain number of individuals who, besides, as soon as they share it, will lose perception of being separate individuals and become a living collectivity.”²⁰

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

One day I shall return, His hands in mine,
And thou shalt see the face of the Absolute,
Then shall the holy marriage be achieved,
Then shall the divine family be born.
There shall be light and peace in all the worlds.²¹

References :

(All references from Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s quotes are drawn from *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* and *Collected Works of the Mother*, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry in 1972 and 1978 respectively.)

1. Sri Aurobindo, Vol.26, p.374.
2. Ibid., p.226.
3. Sri Aurobindo, Vol.27, p.201.
4. Sri Aurobindo, Vol.18, p.32.
5. Sri Aurobindo, Vol.28, p.2.
6. Ibid., pp.1-2.
7. Nolini Kanta Gupta, *A Century's Salutation to Sri Aurobindo*, p.11
8. Sri Aurobindo, Vol.29, pp.710-711.
9. Sri Aurobindo, Vol.26, p.167.
10. Ibid., p.169.
11. Sri Aurobindo, Vol.16, pp.48-49
12. The Mother, Vol.8, p.292.
13. The Mother, Vol.11.
14. The Mother, Vol.12, p.80.
15. Sri Aurobindo, Vol.19, p.844.
16. Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol.3, p.14.

17. Sri Aurobindo, Vol.16, p.24.
18. Nolini Kanta Gupta, Vol.6, p.6.
19. The Mother, Vol.II, p.100.
20. The Mother, Vol.9, p.140.
21. Sri Aurobindo, Vol.29, p.521.

(Based on a paper presented at a seminar organised by Iqbal Institute of Culture and Philosophy, University of Kashmir in 2007)

Spiritual Pragmatism : William James, Sri Aurobindo and Global Philosophy

Richard Hartz

A Larger Pragmatism?

In an age of professional specialisation, philosophy risks being reduced to arguments about verbal technicalities that make no practical difference to anyone. Yet there are philosophers who still insist on dealing with questions that matter. Some of them call their approach pragmatism. The word's everyday associations have caused confusion ever since it was first attached to a philosophical outlook in the late nineteenth century. The original pragmatists themselves disagreed about what they meant by the name. But it has stuck, while proposed alternatives have been all but forgotten.¹

Among the versions of Western philosophical pragmatism on offer, I will focus on William James's classic exposition of this "oddly-named thing."² The pragmatic method in philosophy, James tells us, "is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences."³ Much depends, then, on the meaning of "practical." Taking it in the broadest sense, James understands "practical consequences" to include the psychological effects of holding a belief. This leads him to conclude: "The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one."⁴ As a way of evaluating philosophical alternatives, pragmatism has thus a metaphilosophical aspect transcending any one thought-system or even, as we will see, any one culture.

The pragmatist movement in philosophy seemed to be in decline a few decades ago.⁵ Lately it has been reviving. Some of its champions have dreamed of reshaping philosophy as an activity more relevant to life. In a recent book, Philip Kitcher writes: "Classical pragmatism is, I believe, not only America's most important contribution to philosophy but also one of the most significant developments in the history of the subject, comparable in its potential for

intellectual change to the celebrated turning points in the seventeenth century and in the wake of Kant.” Referring to the “reconstruction of philosophy” envisaged by John Dewey early in the last century, Kitcher speaks of his own essays “as investigations in the spirit of the would-be pragmatist revolution.” His hope is “to renew the James-Dewey project for our own times.”⁶ Likewise John Lachs, in his *Stoic Pragmatism*, ends a chapter entitled “What Can Philosophy Do to Make Life Better?” with the optimistic prospect: “The future lies in regaining for philosophy the power it once enjoyed and making it again a central player in the drama of gradual human self-improvement.”⁷

In the present paper I will suggest an even larger framework for understanding the history and potential of pragmatism. As a distinct but diverse philosophical current, pragmatism began in America. More recently a number of European thinkers have acknowledged its influence. What is generally overlooked is that it has also found echoes in Asia. Its association with pluralism is no accident. As has been pointed out in an introduction to the subject, pragmatism with all its variant forms “is best viewed not as a set of doctrines but rather as a tradition of thought.”⁸ Part of my aim is to show that this tradition has long overflowed the boundaries of Euro-American philosophy. When William James published a series of lectures in 1907 under the title *Pragmatism*, he subtitled his seminal work *A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. He might have added that these ways of thinking were never confined to the West. Nor has the modern interest in renewing some kind of philosophical or spiritual pragmatism been restricted to thinkers in America and Europe. Perhaps George Santayana had an inkling of this when he said of James, “He had a prophetic sympathy with the dawning sentiments of the age.... His scattered words caught fire in many parts of the world.”⁹

Similarities between Western pragmatism and aspects of non-Western traditions such as Buddhism and Confucianism have not gone unexplored.¹⁰ But attempts at detailed comparison have yielded mixed results. This was to be expected. Whatever the common features of the human condition, systems of thought arising in widely separated civilisations are likely to reflect such varying cultural assumptions and commitments that a productive dialogue between them may be hard to initiate. In such cases, comparative philosophy is in danger of being dismissed as a comparison of apples and oranges. Yet comparison has to be attempted, because in today’s globalised world we cannot afford the insularity of ignoring cultures other than our own. Differences must be appreciated and can be celebrated as a source of invigorating diversity. But the complementary search for commonalities as a basis for mutual understanding on our increasingly interconnected planet is an equally pressing need.

The Professor and the Mystic

The comparison I propose to undertake is in many ways easier than directly comparing a modern Western philosophy with an ancient Eastern tradition. Even so, it will involve bridging a gap between civilisations with vastly different histories and contrasting value systems. But in this case, much of the work of overcoming the cultural distance between the so-called East and West has already been done for us by the thinkers in question, who in certain respects were early exemplars of the practice of what is coming to be called global philosophy.¹¹

Sri Aurobindo (1872 – 1950), regarded by many as the most important Indian philosopher of recent times, can be taken as a spokesman of an Eastern civilisation responding creatively to the impact of the modern world. We will look specifically at his engagement with the theory of pragmatism as formulated by William James (1842 – 1910). James was not only among the most original philosophers that America has produced and a significant contributor to the development of psychology in the nineteenth century, but a pioneer in the study of mysticism and religious experience. While investigating these domains he encountered a slightly earlier form of the religio-philosophical movement of neo-Vedanta in which Sri Aurobindo was to become a major figure.

The lives of these two thinkers overlapped. William James and Sri Aurobindo both lived partly during what has been called the *belle époque* of globalisation.¹² This was the time when, among other things, transcontinental communications had begun to be instantaneous, enabling newspapers to publish reports of daily events from all over the world. An event such as the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 had become possible for the first time in history, bringing representatives of religions and cultures from around the globe into face-to-face contact on a scale never before imaginable. For better or worse, European colonialism was imposing forms of Westernised education and culture on much of the world. As a result, James and Sri Aurobindo thought, spoke and wrote in the same language, English.¹³ We may therefore juxtapose their ideas without confronting the linguistic obstacles that can hamper attempts to compare philosophy written in European languages with texts in languages such as Sanskrit, Pali or Chinese.

For all their differences in culture, temperament, career and achievements, James and Sri Aurobindo were in some ways surprisingly similar individuals. Take their educational backgrounds. Though Harvard and Cambridge Universities, respectively, played some role in their intellectual development, neither these nor any other institutions received much credit from them for the manner in which their minds were formed. James’s schooling was so frequently interrupted that he used to say of his education that he “never had any.”¹⁴ But

this apparent deficiency may have turned out to be an asset; as Dewey later observed, it may have “protected his mind against academic deadening.”¹⁵ Much the same thing can be seen in the case of Sri Aurobindo. He lived in England from the age of seven until he was twenty, but later remarked, “My education in England was badly neglected.”¹⁶ He attributed the growth of his intelligence not to any systematic training but to “a wide haphazard activity developing ideas from all things read, seen or experienced.”¹⁷

What education James received was in science, not philosophy. When in his later years a friend called him “the greatest philosopher of our country,” he quipped, “God help the country.”¹⁸ Nor was his lack of philosophical training compensated by a strong passion for the subject driving him to read voraciously and master it on his own. He could read with enthusiasm the works of a thinker such as Bergson; but from most of the books of philosophy being produced by his contemporaries, he confessed, he got “nothing but a sort of marking time, champing of the jaws, pawing the ground, and resettling into the same attitude like a weary horse in his stall, turning over the same few threadbare categories.”¹⁹ When James distinguishes the philosopher from “the rest of us non-philosophers,”²⁰ he seems to be enjoying the sense of belonging to the latter group.

As for Sri Aurobindo, he grew up lacking any pronounced inclination toward philosophy or aptitude for it. He was far more interested in literature and history. Though he read some of Plato’s dialogues in Greek, it seems to have been the style that attracted him at least as much as the content, for he later commented, “Plato was a great writer as well as a philosopher – no more perfect prose has been written by any man.”²¹ The writings of Epictetus and other Stoics and Epicureans also appealed to him and he often referred to Stoicism in his writings on spiritual practice. But most of Western philosophy after the Greeks, especially German metaphysics, seemed to him “a mass of abstractions with nothing concrete or real that could be firmly grasped and written in a metaphysical jargon to which I had not the key.” He added that he “tried once a translation of Kant but dropped it after the first two pages and never tried again.... In sum, my interest in metaphysics was almost null, and in general philosophy sporadic.... As to Indian Philosophy, it was a little better, but not much.”²²

The Legacy of Hegel

Both William James and Sri Aurobindo became philosophers almost in spite of themselves. Neither could be called a philosopher’s philosopher. This is reflected in their respective relationships to G.W.F. Hegel and the tradition of metaphysical idealism he represents. James was a declared anti-Hegelian. Sri

Aurobindo’s philosophy, in contrast, is often said to have important resemblances to Hegel’s. However, we will see that its affinities with Jamesian pragmatism are at least equally significant and offset its apparently Hegelian aspect. But let us look first at James’s side of this complex triangular relationship.

At the height of Hegel’s influence in America, James’s first public expression of his views on the great German philosopher caused something of a scandal. In “*On Some Hegelisms*” he virtually thumbed his nose at this iconic figure, writing irreverently:

His system resembles a mouse-trap, in which if you once pass the door you may be lost forever. Safety lies in not entering. Hegelians have anointed, so to speak, the entrance with various considerations which, stated in an abstract form, are so plausible as to slide us unresistingly and almost unwittingly through the fatal arch.²³

Whatever James’s opinion of Hegel, this was hardly the tone that an aspiring philosopher – if he thought of himself as such at the age of forty – was expected to adopt toward one of the giants in the history of thought. More soberly, he struggled with Hegelian “absolutism” throughout much of his intellectual life, defining his version of pragmatism largely in opposition to Hegel and the neo-Hegelians.

Yet in the first chapter on mysticism in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, we come across a passage where James reveals an unexpected insight into what may have lain behind the abstractions of Hegel’s philosophy. It begins with an often-quoted remark about consciousness in general, based on a type of psychological or parapsychological observation and speculation in which James was keenly interested:

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation.

James then speaks of the philosophical implications of such an enlargement of our understanding of consciousness. This leads to a more personal reflection:

No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded.... At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality. Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance.

Reflecting on this insight and its significance, James is reminded of Hegel. For a moment he suspends his usual critical attitude toward this thinker:

The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity.... I feel as if it must mean something, something like what the Hegelian philosophy means, if one could only lay hold of it more clearly.

When James published his lectures, he added a footnote to this passage elaborating on the suggestion of a mystical element behind Hegel's thought:

What reader of Hegel can doubt that that sense of a perfected Being with all its otherness soaked up into itself, which dominates his whole philosophy, must have come from the prominence in his consciousness of mystical moods like this, in most persons kept subliminal?²⁴

It may be partly some such mystical undercurrent in Hegel that seems to make most philosophers think of him when they read Sri Aurobindo. Steve Odin, for example, writes in a comparative study:

The twentieth-century Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo, who has framed his own full-scale metaphysical synthesis, appropriated Hegel's notion of an Absolute Spirit and employed it to radically restructure the architectonic framework of the ancient Hindu Vedanta system in contemporary terms.

Odin goes so far as to conclude:

In evaluating the significance of Sri Aurobindo's work from a Western standpoint, it must be said that he has accomplished a landmark speculative synthesis of transcultural categories in his bold reconstruction of Vedantic thought in terms of Hegel's dynamic model of reality.... Due to the comprehensiveness of Sri Aurobindo's world hypothesis as an interpretive

and explanatory speculative scheme, it has performed the great service of reinstating Absolute Idealism as a plausible philosophical alternative in the contemporary world.²⁵

But striking as are some of the parallels pointed out by Odin and others,²⁶ there is no evidence to support the common assumption that Sri Aurobindo was directly influenced by Hegel. More than once he explicitly denied having read Hegel, as when he wrote: "I made in fact no study of metaphysics in my school and College days. What little I knew about philosophy I picked up desultorily in my general reading. I once read, not Hegel, but a small book on Hegel, but it left no impression on me."²⁷ Twenty years or so after the serial publication of *The Life Divine* in its original form in the monthly review *Arya*, he commented on the paradox: "How was it that I who was unable to understand and follow a metaphysical argument and whom a page of Kant or Hegel or Hume or even Berkeley left either dazed and uncomprehending and fatigued or totally uninterested because I could not fathom or follow, suddenly began writing pages of the stuff as soon as I started the *Arya* and am now reputed to be a great philosopher?"²⁸

Sri Aurobindo explained that the eruption of the "volcano" of philosophy in his writings was due not to extensive reading or any stimulation by others' ideas, but to his spiritual development through the practice of Yoga.²⁹ Be that as it may, the impression of Hegelianism made by *The Life Divine* on most philosophical minds is undeniable. We need not concern ourselves too much with where this perceived element in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy came from. If we require an external source, we can suppose that he had picked up Hegelian ideas in England at a time when they were very much in the air, or absorbed them in his general reading after returning to India. Either way, the influence would have come half-consciously in the unmethodical process of his self-education, to be combined later with other materials and transmuted into a philosophy of his own.

From the point of view of Sri Aurobindo's relation to pragmatism it is pertinent to ask, therefore, whether his thought has as much in common with Hegel's as it is often said to have. William James, after all, presented pragmatism as almost the antithesis of Hegelianism and the neo-Hegelians reacted accordingly. To the extent that Sri Aurobindo has affinities with Hegel, however they came about, those affinities might be thought to make his philosophy incompatible with pragmatism. So before comparing his ideas directly with pragmatic thinking, it will be useful to clarify their relation to those of Hegel and his followers.

Logic and the Absolute

Sri Aurobindo said next to nothing about Hegel himself, but commented briefly on some British neo-Hegelians who also happen to have been involved in debates with William James. A few passages from the writings of F.H. Bradley, H.H. Joachim and J.M.E. McTaggart were sent to Sri Aurobindo by correspondents who apparently expected him to find in them similarities to his own thought and especially to his account of a suprarational consciousness. In reply he emphasised, instead, the differences. “In the extracts you have sent me from Bradley and Joachim,” he wrote in one letter, “it is still the intellect thinking about what is beyond itself and coming to an intellectual, a reasoned speculative conclusion about it. It is not dynamic for the change which it attempts to describe.” Elaborating on what he found missing in these extracts, he continued:

If these writers were expressing in mental terms some realisation, even mental, some intuitive experience of this “Other than Thought”, then one ready for it might feel it through the veil of the language they use and himself draw near to the same experience. Or if, having reached the intellectual conclusion, they had passed on to the spiritual realisation, finding the way or following one already found, then in pursuing their thought, one might be preparing oneself for the same transition. But there is nothing of the kind in all this strenuous thinking. It remains in the domain of the intellect and in that domain it is no doubt admirable; but it does not become dynamic for spiritual experience.³⁰

Sri Aurobindo had no objection to “strenuous thinking” as such. He once apologised to readers of his own writings for the “strenuous intellectual labour” to which he was subjecting them.³¹ At the same time, he insisted that he had founded his philosophy “not on ideas by themselves,” but on experience. “I owed nothing in my philosophy,” he wrote, “to intellectual abstractions, ratiocination or dialectics; when I have used these means it was simply to explain my philosophy and justify it to the intellect of others.”³²

The method of thinking that Sri Aurobindo noted in the work of the neo-Hegelians and contrasted with his own is what William James called “the logical machinery and technical apparatus of absolutism.”³³ James scoffed at “the thin, abstract, indigent, and threadbare appearance, the starving, school-room aspect, which the speculations of most of our absolutist philosophers present.”³⁴ His antipathy toward this style of reasoning often makes him sound hostile to the very idea of the Absolute. He dismisses F.H. Bradley’s conception of it as

a “metaphysical monster”³⁵ and likens T.H. Green’s to “a sort of timeless soap-bubble large enough to mirror the whole universe.”³⁶ On the other hand, he clarifies that it is “only the extravagant claims of coercive necessity on the absolute’s part that have to be denied by *a priori* logic. As an hypothesis trying to make itself probable on analogical and inductive grounds, the absolute is entitled to a patient hearing.”³⁷ He admits its emotional appeal – no negligible consideration in a pragmatic view:

This admirable faculty of transcending, whilst inwardly preserving, every contrariety, is the absolute’s characteristic form of rationality. We are but syllables in the mouth of the Lord; if the whole sentence is divine, each syllable is absolutely what it should be, in spite of all appearances. In making up the balance for or against absolutism, this emotional value weights heavily the credit side of the account.³⁸

Even more telling are James’s comments on the monistic mysticism of India, especially as embodied for him in Swami Vivekananda, whom he met after the Parliament of Religions. “To interpret absolute monism worthily,” James advises, “be a mystic.” In general, he goes on to point out, “Mystical states of mind in every degree are shown by history, usually though not always, to make for the monistic view.” By way of illustration, he then treats his audience to a glowing account of the impression Vivekananda made on him:

The paragon of all monistic systems is the Vedanta philosophy of Hindostan, and the paragon of Vedantist missionaries was the late Swami Vivekananda who visited our shores some years ago. The method of Vedantism is the mystical method. You do not reason, but after going through a certain discipline you see, and having seen, you can report the truth. Vivekananda thus reports the truth in one of his lectures here:

“Where is any more misery for him who sees this Oneness in the Universe ... this Oneness of life, Oneness of everything?... If you go inside you find that unity between man and man, women and children, races and races, high and low, rich and poor, the gods and men: all are One, and animals too, if you go deep enough, and he who has attained to that has no more delusion.... He knows the reality of everything, the secret of everything.... Neither death nor disease, nor sorrow nor misery, nor discontent is there....”³⁹

“Observe how radical the character of the monism here is,” James comments.

“Separation is not simply overcome by the One, it is denied to exist. There is no many. We are not parts of the One; It has no parts; and since in a sense we undeniably *are*, it must be that each of us *is* the One, indivisibly and totally. *An absolute One, and I that One*, – surely we have here a religion which, emotionally considered, has a high pragmatic value.”

After a further quotation from Vivekananda about the psychological consequences of living in a state of consciousness where “all separateness has ceased” and “the whole universe has been melted into that oneness,” James sums up his own thoughts on this mystical monism and its relation to the intellectual philosophies of the Absolute:

We all have some ear for this monistic music: it elevates and reassures. We all have at least the germ of mysticism in us. And when our idealists recite their arguments for the Absolute, saying that the slightest union admitted anywhere carries logically absolute Oneness with it, and that the slightest separation admitted anywhere logically carries disunion remediless and complete, I cannot help suspecting that the palpable weak places in the intellectual reasonings they use are protected from their own criticism by a mystical feeling that, logic or no logic, absolute Oneness must somehow at any cost be true.⁴⁰

As for the “germ of mysticism” that James believes each of us to have somewhere in our being, he once wrote candidly about himself:

My personal position is simple. I have no living sense of commerce with a God. I envy those who have, for I know that the addition of such a sense would help me greatly.... Now, although I am so devoid of *Gottesbewusstsein* [consciousness of God] in the directer and stronger sense, yet there is something in me which makes response when I hear utterances from that quarter made by others. I recognise the deeper voice. Something tells me – ‘thither lies the truth’ – and I am sure it is not old theistic prejudices of infancy. Those in my case were Christian, but I have grown so out of Christianity that entanglement therewith on the part of a mystical utterance has to be abstracted from and overcome, before I can listen. Call this, if you like, my mystical germ.⁴¹

A Shift of Perspective

Western philosophers from Plato onwards have tended to pride themselves

on the rational pursuit of truth for its own sake. The Greeks, as the Indologist Wilhelm Halbfass points out, “had claimed that they possessed a capacity for *theoria* that distinguished them from other cultures, a unique freedom to ask questions about themselves and the world that were motivated by wonder and curiosity alone.” The modern pragmatists, by redefining truth as what works, broke with this long-standing tradition of theoretical knowledge treated as an end in itself without reference to its value for life. In so doing, they could be interpreted as bringing Western philosophy closer to non-Western modes of thought including Indian philosophy which, Halbfass observes, “does not advocate knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but instead proclaims its commitment to a spiritual and soteriological purpose.”⁴²

A few years after the death of William James, we find Sri Aurobindo noting “that the gulf between East and West, India and Europe is much less profound and unbridgeable now than it was thirty or forty years ago.”⁴³ He commented particularly on the rise in the West of “new philosophies ... not indeed directly spiritual, vitalistic rather and pragmatic, but yet by their greater subjectivity already nearer to Indian ways of thinking.”⁴⁴ Occasionally he mentioned names in this connection. He referred, especially, to “the thought of Nietzsche, of Bergson and of James.”⁴⁵ Speaking of the interest of Bergson, James and others in intuition and mysticism, he emphasised that the writers in question could by no means be dismissed as “incompetent dupes of the imagination,” but were “psychologists of the first rank and the most original contemporary thinkers in the philosophic field.”⁴⁶

Sri Aurobindo clearly had a favourable impression of William James, but we have few clues to what he might have read of his philosophical writings. He recalled in the 1930s that “a long time ago” he had read a book on psychology by James (perhaps *The Principles of Psychology*, unless he meant the abridged version, *Psychology: Briefer Course*). He had found it “not at all an ordinary book in its kind,”⁴⁷ a rare compliment from the Indian Yogi to a Western psychologist. Otherwise on the few occasions when he mentioned James by name it was in connection with his philosophy. These passing references provide little specific information. But they do suggest that he regarded James as a key figure in a trend of modern thought that was of great importance for the future.

James himself had a sense that his own ideas were part of something larger. He described it as a “ferment” and a “slow shifting in the philosophic perspective”⁴⁸ comparable in scope to “the changes from aristocracy to democracy, from classic to romantic taste, from theistic to pantheistic feeling, from static to evolutionary ways of understanding.”⁴⁹ In Sri Aurobindo’s scheme

of social psychology, this shift of perspective was a stage in “the transition from the rationalistic and utilitarian period of human development ... to a greater subjective age of society.” That transition had begun with “a rapid turning of the current of thought into large and profound movements contradictory of the old intellectual standards, a swift breaking of the old tables.” One of these movements, Sri Aurobindo wrote, was the “new pluralistic and pragmatic philosophy” – evidently, an allusion to James, who was not only the best-known exponent of pragmatism, but the author of *A Pluralistic Universe*. Although this and other recent tendencies of thought sought “to interpret being in the terms of force and action rather than of light and knowledge,” Sri Aurobindo clarified, they “were not a mere superficial recoil from intellectualism to life and action.” Writing at the time of the First World War, which temporarily disrupted these developments, he saw that in spirit they had been “an attempt to read profoundly and live by the Life-Soul of the universe and tended to be deeply psychological and subjective in their method.”⁵⁰

When Sri Aurobindo adopted the term “pragmatism” in his philosophical vocabulary, he was responding to some of the work of these contemporaries and immediate predecessors of his. In a number of passages in his writings the reference to American pragmatism is transparent. Elsewhere no deliberate allusion seems intended, but the employment of the words “pragmatic” and “pragmatism” is obviously influenced by the recently established philosophical usage. At other times these words are more ambiguous or occur in their ordinary meanings.

Since he rarely mentioned names and for the most part we have no way of knowing exactly what he read, Sri Aurobindo’s occasional allusions to William James do not by themselves prove that when he referred to pragmatism he was thinking specifically of James’s version of it. Certain structural parallels between his system and that of the original pragmatist Charles Peirce have been pointed out,⁵¹ but these do not relate to pragmatism as such and no influence need be assumed to explain them. Peirce, for all his brilliance, lived and died in relative obscurity despite James’s efforts to publicise his contribution. Sri Aurobindo is unlikely to have come to know of him unless it was through James’s writings. He could more easily have become acquainted with the thought of John Dewey, but there is no evidence that he actually did so. Dewey, as Richard Gale has shown, tried (with the best of intentions) to naturalise James, to “despookify” him, downplay his mystical proclivities and make him more acceptable to the scientific and rationalistic mind in the early twentieth century.⁵² In so doing, he moved pragmatism in a direction that Sri Aurobindo would have found less interesting than James’s real views, which he knew of and commented on. In

speaking of pragmatism as an element in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, therefore, we need not hesitate to relate it mainly to the thought of William James.

Ideas and Their Consequences

James gave credit for conceiving pragmatism to his friend Charles Peirce, whose contribution might otherwise have gone unrecognised. He accepted Peirce’s principle of judging the meaning of an idea by its practical consequences. But he thought this principle “should be expressed more broadly than Mr. Peirce expresses it.” What counts as a practical consequence need not, according to James, be confined to conduct as Peirce seemed to suggest. For the idea “inspires that conduct because it first foretells some particular turn to our experience which shall call for just that conduct from us.”⁵³

By taking into account experience as well as conduct in a deeper interpretation of pragmatism, James introduced the psychological and subjective dimension which struck Sri Aurobindo as significant in this philosophy. As we saw at the outset, James suggests applying the pragmatic method to clarify the choice between “world-formulas.”⁵⁴ Calling such an abstract question a practical matter may look like an idiosyncratic move on James’s part. But we find Sri Aurobindo thinking along the same lines when he explains how a choice between philosophical standpoints can have practical implications of the most far-reaching kind. Comparing opposite views of the nature of consciousness, he points out: “The difference, so metaphysical in appearance, is yet of the utmost practical import, for it determines the whole outlook of man upon life, the goal that he shall assign for his efforts and the field in which he shall circumscribe his energies.”⁵⁵

The metaphysical distinction James considered most “intensely practical,”⁵⁶ in view of the likely outcomes of the alternatives, was the one underlying the debate between science and religion. The justification of religious faith, on the grounds that it “works” for people and gives meaning to their lives, preoccupied him in his later years and was part of his reason for developing pragmatism. He used the word religion, he explained frankly, in a “supernaturalist sense, as declaring that the so-called order of nature, which constitutes this world’s experience, is only one portion of the total universe, and that there stretches beyond visible world an unseen world of which we now know nothing positive, but in its relation to which the true significance of our present mundane life consists.” During James’s lifetime, this view of things had come under concerted attack in the name of science. In its defence, he argued that “we have a right to believe the physical order to be only a partial order; that we have a right to supplement it by an unseen spiritual order which we assume on trust, if only

thereby life may seem to us better worth living again.”⁵⁷

James knew that some of his audience would find such trust in invisible realities “sadly mystical and execrably unscientific.”⁵⁸ But he was far more keenly aware of the limitations of science than most scientific minds of his time. He went on in the same talk, published in 1895, to portray the belief in science itself as a kind of religion capable of inspiring blind faith among many of its devotees:

Science has made such glorious leaps in the last three hundred years, and extended our knowledge of nature so enormously ... that it is no wonder if the worshippers of science lose their head. In this very University [Harvard], accordingly, I have heard more than one teacher say that all the fundamental conceptions of truth have already been found by science, and that the future has only the details of the picture to fill in. But ... it is hard to see how one who is actively advancing any part of science can make a mistake so crude.... Whatever else be certain, this at least is certain – that the world of our present natural knowledge is enveloped in a larger world of some sort of whose residual properties we at present can frame no positive idea.⁵⁹

These words were spoken a few years before Max Planck made the breakthrough in understanding radiation that would lead to the collapse of the overconfident rationalism of classical physics and its eventual replacement by the quasi-mystical paradoxes of quantum theory.

As for religious beliefs, whatever may be claimed on behalf of science, their truth can neither be proved nor disproved. But even if there is no disproof, do we have a right to believe in things for whose truth there is no evidence? Agnostic positivists denied that we do. James proposed a bold solution. We need to redefine truth. The notion of truth, understood as ideas “copying” objective reality, was problematic enough even apart from the religious question. “But please observe, now,” James wrote in “*The Will to Believe*,” “that when as empiricists we give up the doctrine of objective certitude,” – whose “most striking practical application to life,” he noted in passing, “has been the conscientious labours of the Holy Office of the Inquisition” – “we do not thereby give up the quest or hope of truth itself.... Not where it comes from but what it leads to is to decide.”⁶⁰

The Truth We Create

“*The Will to Believe*” and the other essays published with it in 1897 are among the writings of William James that Sri Aurobindo is most likely to have read. Pragmatism was published ten years later. By that time, Sri Aurobindo’s

absorption in the Indian freedom struggle cannot have left him much time for reading. When after a year in jail and a few months of renewed political activism he disappeared from the Calcutta scene and reappeared in Pondicherry, it was under circumstances that at first gave him little access to books. But James’s earlier philosophical writings came out during a period when Sri Aurobindo was reading extensively.⁶¹ Despite his lukewarm interest in philosophy at the time, the latest writings of an American thinker whose psychological work had already impressed him could easily have attracted his attention. The writings he may have come across might be assumed to include James’s 1898 address “*Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results*,” where he explicitly unveiled the theory of pragmatism already implied in earlier essays. In this way it would be possible to account for almost everything Sri Aurobindo can be shown to have known about this philosophy from his references to it, which occur mainly in works originally written and published in the later part of the second decade of the twentieth century.

One of the clearest expressions of Sri Aurobindo’s understanding of pragmatism is found in a passage in his essays on the *Bhagavad Gita* where he comments on a verse in the seventeenth chapter:

And then there comes a remarkable line in which the Gita tells us that this Purusha, this soul in man, is, as it were, made of *śraddhā*, a faith, a will to be, a belief in itself and existence, and whatever is that will, faith or constituting belief in him, he is that and that is he. *Śraddhāmayo ’yam puruṣo yo yac-chraddhāḥ sa eva sa?* If we look into this pregnant saying a little closely, we shall find that this single line contains implied in its few forceful words almost the whole theory of the modern gospel of pragmatism.

If it seems far-fetched to see concepts of a modern Western philosophy prefigured in a Sanskrit scripture, let us recall James’s insistence that the central ideas of pragmatism are nothing really new; nor would he have been likely to object to finding them outside of the Western tradition. Sri Aurobindo goes on to explain his interpretation of the pragmatist concept of truth:

For if a man or the soul in a man consists of the faith which is in him, taken in this deeper sense, then it follows that the truth which he sees and wills to live is for him the truth of his being, the truth of himself that he has created or is creating and there can be for him no other real truth. This truth is a thing of his inner and outer action, a thing of his becoming, of the soul’s dynamics, not of that in him which never changes.⁶²

In this explication of an ancient text in the language of modern thought, Sri Aurobindo does not follow closely any particular enunciation of pragmatist principles by his Western contemporaries or predecessors. He is evidently summing up the impression that had remained with him from whatever he had read on the subject, probably years earlier. However, in contrast to the largely hostile misconceptions of pragmatism prevalent among James's American and British colleagues, he had caught the gist of it accurately enough before reinterpreting and adapting it to his own purpose. Sri Aurobindo's formulation can be compared with James's own statement:

Reality, we naturally think, stands ready-made and complete, and our intellects supervene with the one simple duty of describing it as it is already. But ... may not previous reality itself be there, far less for the purpose of reappearing unaltered in our knowledge, than for the very purpose of stimulating our minds to such additions as shall enhance the universe's total value.... In our cognitive as well as in our active life we are creative.... The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands.... Man engenders truths upon it....

The import of the difference between pragmatism and rationalism is now in sight throughout its whole extent. The essential contrast is that *for rationalism reality is ready-made and complete from all eternity, while for pragmatism it is still in the making, and awaits part of its complexion from the future.*⁶³

Faith plays a crucial role, as James says elsewhere, in this enhancement of the universe and making of the future.

The rest of Sri Aurobindo's passage on *śraddhā* elaborates on the notion of truth as not something self-existent and immutable, but created in our process of becoming. James's phrase "the will to believe" is almost quoted:

[A man] is what he is today by some past will of his nature sustained and continued by a present will to know, to believe and to be in his intelligence and vital force, and whatever new turn is taken by this will and faith active in his very substance, that he will tend to become in the future. We create our own truth of existence in our own action of mind and life, which is another way of saying that we create our own selves, are our own makers.⁶⁴

Making the World Better

Sri Aurobindo proceeds in the same chapter of *Essays on the Gita* to qualify

his endorsement of the pragmatic position by saying that "this is only one aspect of the truth"; the other aspect is "the eternal Being out of which all becoming derives."⁶⁵ His philosophy as a whole, with its Vedantic roots, cannot be reduced to what it shares with any Western version of pragmatism. Yet the pragmatic rejection of theoretical knowledge divorced from practical application is central to Sri Aurobindo's outlook. Spiritual realisation itself was insufficient for him unless it leads to a transformation of life. This pragmatic orientation pervades his writings. At times the connection with pragmatism is made explicit, as in *The Human Cycle*; here the context is social psychology, for even the spiritualisation of the individual consciousness is incomplete without a corresponding change in the society:

A spiritual idea is a power, but only when it is both inwardly and outwardly creative. Here we have to enlarge and to deepen the pragmatic principle that truth is what we create, and in this sense first, that it is what we create within us, in other words, what we become. Undoubtedly, spiritual truth exists eternally beyond independent of us in the heavens of the spirit; but it is of no avail for humanity here, it does not become truth of earth, truth of life until it is lived.⁶⁶

William James was no less preoccupied with this "truth of earth." He directed his arguments on the one hand against a materialism that would deprive human beings of the faith most of us need, on the other against a type of philosophising whose theories were "answers to enigmas, in which we can rest," but not instruments by which "existing realities may be changed."⁶⁷ James summarised his position when he said:

The really vital question for us all is, What is this world going to be? What is life eventually to make of itself? The centre of gravity of philosophy must therefore alter its place. The earth of things, long thrown into shadow by the glories of the upper ether, must resume its rights.⁶⁸

James was arguing against the metaphysical abstractionism of Hegel and the neo-Hegelians, which seemed to him to undermine the will to change the world by reducing its evils to insignificant details in the ideal perfection of the whole. Sri Aurobindo opposed for analogous reasons the Mayavada or Illusionism attributed to the eighth-century philosopher Shankara. Respecting him as "one of the mightiest of metaphysical intellects," Sri Aurobindo nevertheless decried Shankara's system for its practical effect of sapping the vitality of Indian

civilisation during the long period when his quietistic vision exerted a powerful influence:

By denying God in life, by withdrawing the best souls from life, by discouraging ... the *śraddhā* of life,... he has enlarged the original Vedantic seed of ascetic tendency into a gigantic growth of stillness and world-disgust which has overshadowed for centuries the lives and souls of hundreds of millions of human beings.⁶⁹

Whatever may have been the justification for these otherworldly tendencies in the past, Sri Aurobindo felt, they are not what we need today.

We who live in the present age can no longer turn away from the challenges of earthly life, we the modern humanity more and more conscious ... that there is a work for the race, a divine purpose in its creation which exceeds the salvation of the individual soul,... we who feel more and more, in the language of the Koran, that the Lord did not create heaven and earth in a jest, that Brahman did not begin dreaming this world-dream in a moment of aberration and delirium.⁷⁰

History and the East

Any purpose human life may have can only be worked out through history. Like Hegel, Sri Aurobindo developed not only a system of metaphysics, but a philosophy of history in which his metaphysics is applied, as it were, to interpreting the course of humanity's collective existence. Like Hegel, he took history to be directional and meaningful. Both of these philosophers considered the growth of freedom and rationality to be of central importance to the unfolding of the Spirit in history. But on the crucial issue of the role of the East in this process, their views diverge to opposite ends of the spectrum.

For Hegel, "*World history travels from East to West*";⁷¹ it begins in Asia and ends in Europe. Hegel accepted the orientalist stereotype of the unchanging East as opposed to the dynamic West and erected the edifice of his philosophy of history on this questionable foundation. Nor did he find anything redeeming in Asia's vaunted spirituality. "What we call God has not yet in the East been realised in consciousness," he maintained, "for our idea of God involves the elevation to the suprasensorial."⁷² As regards India, unlike some of his contemporaries such as Schopenhauer, he was unimpressed even by the Upanishads with their exalted philosophical vision and their conception of the Absolute which seems far closer to Hegel's own than anything to be found in

the Protestant Christianity he preferred. As for the present and future of Asian civilisations, he was an apologist for colonialism, writing in his section on India: "The English, or rather the East India Company, are the lords of the land; for it is the necessary fate of Asiatic empires to be subjected to Europeans; and China will, some day or other, be obliged to submit to this fate."⁷³

It goes without saying that Sri Aurobindo was far better informed than Hegel about Asian, and especially Indian, history and culture. His essay "*The Conservative Mind and Eastern Progress*" explodes the myth that the East has been static and ahistorical. In the East, however, the great revolutions have been spiritual and cultural; the political and social changes, although they have been real and striking, if less profound than in Europe, fall into the shade and are apt to be overlooked; besides, this unobtrusiveness is increased by their want of relief, the slow subtlety of their process and the instinctive persistence and reverence with which old names and formulas have been preserved while the thing itself was profoundly modified until its original sense remained only as a pious fiction.⁷⁴

Sri Aurobindo recognised that a relative decline in the vitality of ancient Asian cultures had occurred, facilitating the westward displacement of world leadership to the previously backward countries of Europe in the last few centuries. In India he attributed this decline partly to the effect of world-negating philosophies, particularly "the later ascetic and anti-pragmatic Vedanta" that culminated in Shankara's *Advaita*, as distinct from the "spiritual pragmatism" of the earlier Upanishads.⁷⁵ But Sri Aurobindo's main concern was with the future. From a global perspective, he saw the revival of some kind of spiritually enlightened pragmatism to be precisely what is needed:

For the most vital issue of the age is whether the future progress of humanity is to be governed by the modern economic and materialistic mind of the West or by a nobler pragmatism guided, uplifted and enlightened by spiritual culture and knowledge.... Therefore the hope of the world lies in the re-awakening in the East of the old spiritual practicality and large and profound vision and power of organisation under the insistent contact of the West and in the flooding out of the light of Asia on the Occident, no longer in forms that are now static, effete, unadaptive, but in new forms stirred, dynamic and effective.⁷⁶

The European triumphalism that mars Hegel's historical thinking contrasts sharply with William James's spontaneous sympathies with respect to Asia. When the Russo-Japanese War broke out, biographer Robert Richardson relates,

“James took the Japanese side, telling one friend, ‘The insolence of the white race in Asia ought to receive a check.’”⁷⁷ His “anti-imperial activism was not incidental,” Richardson remarks; “it grew naturally from his advocacy of pluralism and individual self-determination and from his conviction that we are mostly blind to the vital centres of the lives of others.”⁷⁸ On the pragmatic principle of tracing ideas to their practical consequences, the stark difference between Hegel and James in their attitudes toward colonialism says something about their respective philosophies that cannot be ignored. In this light, a closer alignment of Sri Aurobindo with Jamesian pragmatism and a certain distancing of him from Hegelian absolutism is only natural.

Pragmatism and the Future

William James was the most open-minded of the major figures in the history of Western pragmatism. In his hands this philosophical approach took a form that can easily be harmonised with Eastern thought. We have seen this in Sri Aurobindo’s incorporation of his understanding of the “pragmatic principle” in a philosophy built on largely Vedantic foundations. A recognition of this element in Sri Aurobindo’s writings might help to extend the relevance of pragmatism beyond the West. It might also contribute to a fuller appreciation of an original, important and many-sided thinker whose work has already taken too long to enter the main stream of philosophy.

Whatever the future of pragmatism will be, it is not as an exclusively Euro-American tradition of thought that we can expect to see it develop. The commingling of cultures can only increase. The insularity that once made it acceptable to speak of philosophy as if it were a uniquely Western invention is rapidly becoming impossible. Unlike much of Western philosophy from the time of the Greeks onwards, Indian philosophy has tended to pursue truth not only in the spirit of a theoretical quest for knowledge as an end in itself, but for the sake of the inwardly liberating effects of the realisations to which the seeking for truth is meant to lead. Indian and other Asian philosophies have generally inclined toward pragmatism at least in this sense. During much of their history they may have often been too willing to let the outer life take its course. Sri Aurobindo tried to rectify this imbalance by insisting on the outwardly as well as inwardly creative power of the spiritual idea. From this point of view he considered Eastern and Western contributions to be equally necessary for the fulfilment of humanity’s collective potential.

Philosophy in India and China has in the past, as Sri Aurobindo points out, “seized hold on life, has had an enormous practical effect on the civilisation and got into the very bones of current thought and action.” In the Greco-Roman

world also, the Stoic and Epicurean philosophies “got a grip,” if “only among the highly cultured.” Sri Aurobindo noted in his own day “some renewed tendency of the kind,” mentioning Nietzsche, James and Bergson among those whose philosophies “have attracted some amount of public interest.”⁷⁹ James himself observed: “Fortunately, our age seems to be growing philosophical again.”⁸⁰

We tend to think of ourselves as living in the most unphilosophical of times. But something in human nature always returns to the type of questions philosophy asks. The mental capacity required for philosophical thinking is far more widespread than ever before. Under present conditions a revitalisation of philosophy might well be global in scope and much more democratic in its reach than would have been possible at any time in the past. Among modern philosophical options, pragmatism is well attuned to the temperament of our age and suited to stimulate such a development. Its prophets may yet prove to have been more prescient than we think.

Notes

1. William James sometimes used “practicalism” interchangeably with “pragmatism,” but preferred F.C.S. Schiller’s term “humanism.” When Charles Peirce saw that he and James were talking about different things, he began calling his version “pragmaticism.” John Dewey eventually* switched to “instrumentalism.”
2. William James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), p.20. Though James himself was initially responsible for popularising Peirce’s name for this way of thinking, he evidently had second thoughts about it and his *Pragmatism* opens with the disclaimer: “The pragmatic movement, so-called – I do not like the name, but apparently it is too late to change it – seems to have rather suddenly precipitated itself out of the air” (ibid., p.5).
3. Ibid., p.25.
4. Ibid., p.27.
5. It is commonly said that pragmatism, after dominating American intellectual life for half a century through such figures as James and Dewey, was eclipsed in the mid-twentieth century. However, this has been disputed. “Though it is the dominant understanding of the career of pragmatism,” Talisse and Aikin write, “the eclipse narrative is highly dubious.... Hence, it seems more accurate to say that in the years following World War II, pragmatism was in crisis, not eclipse... What was clear at that time was that if pragmatism was to survive, it needed to be reworked, revised in light of new challenges from rival philosophical approaches” (Robert B. Talisse and Scott F. Aikin, eds., *The Pragmatism Reader: From Peirce through the Present* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011], pp. 6,8).
6. Philip Kitcher, *Preludes to Pragmatism: Toward a Reconstruction of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.xi,xiii.
7. John Lachs, *Stoic Pragmatism* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press,

- 2012), p.27.
8. Michael Bacon, *Pragmatism: An Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012), p.2.
 9. Robert D. Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), p.495.
 10. See, for example, Yong Huang, ed., Rorty, *Pragmatism, and Confucianism: With Responses by Richard Rorty* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009).
 11. Tim Connolly, *Doing Philosophy Comparatively* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).
 12. The phrase “*belle époque* of globalisation” has been used for the period from about 1890 to 1914; see David Held and Anthony McGrew, eds., *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalisation Debate*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), p.4.
 13. Correcting a statement which implied that he had learned English as a foreign language, Sri Aurobindo clarified (writing about himself in the third person): “Sri Aurobindo in his father’s house already spoke only English and Hindustani, he thought in English from his childhood and did not even know his native language, Bengali. At the age of seven he was taken to England and remained there consecutively for fourteen years, speaking English and thinking in English and no other tongue” (Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest* [Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2006], p.25).
 14. Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), p.94.
 15. Richardson, *William James*, p.51.
 16. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Himself and the Ashram* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2011), p.10.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
 18. Richardson, *William James*, p.419.
 19. *Ibid.*, p.427.
 20. William James, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” in *Writings 1878–1899* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1992), p.614.
 21. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Poetry and Art* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2004), p.522.
 22. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes*, p.112.
 23. William James, “On Some Hegelisms,” in *Writings 1878–1899*, pp.661–62.
 24. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002), pp.388–89. James’s speculation about Hegel’s “mystical moods” can be compared to a more general remark by Sri Aurobindo regarding “the intellectual thinker who (sometimes or partly) mysticises.” Giving his impression of the neo-Hegelian J.M.E. McTaggart, Sri Aurobindo observes that such a thinker usually “stops short at a mental abstraction,” but “if he has the true mystic somewhere in him, he will sometimes get beyond to at least flashes and glimpses” (*Letters on Yoga – I* [Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2012], p.368).
 25. Steve Odin, “Sri Aurobindo and Hegel on the Involution – Evolution of Absolute Spirit,” in *Situating Sri Aurobindo: A Reader*, ed. Peter Heehs (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.182,194–95.
 26. Odin speaks of a “functional resemblance” between Sri Aurobindo’s and Hegel’s concepts of the Absolute, but also draws attention to important differences (*ibid.*).
 27. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes*, p.112.
 28. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Poetry and Art*, p.216.
 29. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, pp. 63,70.
 30. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga – I*, p.354.
 31. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1998), p.101.
 32. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes*, p.113.
 33. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Sioux Falls, SD: NuVision, 2009), p.120.
 34. *Ibid.*, p.59.
 35. *Ibid.*, p.22.
 36. *Ibid.*, p.56.
 37. *Ibid.*, p.113.
 38. *Ibid.*, p.48.
 39. James, *Pragmatism*, pp.68–69. Italics in original.
 40. *Ibid.*, pp.69–70. Italics in original.
 41. G. William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.19.
 42. Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), p.243.
 43. Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2004), p.69.
 44. *Ibid.*, p.70.
 45. *Ibid.*, p.27.
 46. Sri Aurobindo, *Early Cultural Writings* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2003), p.631.
 47. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Poetry and Art*, p.526.
 48. William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), p.190.
 49. *Ibid.*, p.245.
 50. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1998), pp.29–30.
 51. Odin, “Sri Aurobindo and Hegel on the Involution – Evolution of Absolute Spirit,” p.183.
 52. Richard M. Gale, “John Dewey’s naturalisation of William James,” in Ruth Anna Putnam, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to William James* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.49–68.
 53. William James, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results,” in *Writings 1878–1899*, p. 1080. Parts of this address delivered in 1898 were reproduced almost verbatim several years later in *Pragmatism*.

54. Ibid, p.1081.
55. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2005), p.23.
56. James, “*Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results*,” p.1084.
57. William James, “Is Life Worth Living?” in *Writings 1878–1899*, p.495.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid, p.496. Italics in original.
60. William James, “The Will to Believe,” in *Writings 1878–1899*, p.468.
61. The period when Sri Aurobindo would have had ample opportunities for reading extended up to the beginning of 1906, but ended abruptly with his departure from Baroda for Calcutta.
62. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997), p.482.
63. James, *Pragmatism*, pp.112–13. Italics in original. The quotation begins with a paraphrase of the nineteenth-century German philosopher Hermann Lotze, but James takes Lotze’s idea to be “identically our pragmatist conception.”
64. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, p.482.
65. Ibid.
66. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p.262.
67. James, *Pragmatism*, p.28. Italics in original.
68. Ibid, p.57.
69. Sri Aurobindo, *Isha Upanishad* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2003), pp.497,499.
70. Sri Aurobindo, *Kena and Other Upanishads* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001), p.95.
71. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. Ruben Alvarado (Aalten: WordBridge, 2011), p. 95.
72. Ibid, p.101.
73. Ibid, p.129.
74. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p.134.
75. Sri Aurobindo, *Isha Upanishad*, p.83.
76. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, pp.137–38.
77. Richardson, *William James*, p.444.
78. Ibid, p.385.
79. Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India*, p.112.
80. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, p.7.

(Text of the paper presented at an international conference entitled “*Pragmatism and Spirituality: New Horizons of Theory and Practice and the Calling of Planetary Conversations*” held at the Indus Business Academy, Bangalore, on 8-9 February, 2016, organised by Prof. Ananta Giri, Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai)

Sri Aurobindo, Plotinus and the *Nous*

Wilfried Huchzermeyer

The Neo-Platonic philosopher Plotinus (205-270 A.D.) is much less well-known than Plato, but Sri Aurobindo and some of his disciples were familiar with his name and thought. Plotinus created a highly developed philosophy of emanation centreing around the Greek term *Nous*, which is to be pronounced as *Nus* and might be rendered as spirit, world-spirit, intellect or intelligence. Teilhard de Chardin’s term Noosphere has been derived from it and English words such as noetic are related to it. There are some letters and talks of Sri Aurobindo in which he refers to this subject. In the following, we will at first present and analyse his various statements made in different contexts, before exploring Plotinus’s philosophy as such.

In October 1933 he was corresponding on Plotinus with a disciple and made an appreciative remark: “Plotinus was not a mere philosopher, – his philosophy was founded on yogic experience and realisation.”ⁱ In the course of this correspondence the disciple quotes a short text of the philosopher in order to get Sri Aurobindo’s opinion regarding its meaning. It is to be noted that in the following quotation the term *Nous* does not occur as such, but it is actually present in the word intelligence, which has been chosen here as its English equivalent:

Intelligence is the first divine emanation... Creation is a fall, a progressive degeneration of the divine. In the intelligence, the absolute unity of God splits up into intelligence proper... and the intelligible world.ⁱⁱ

After having presented this quotation, the disciple proceeds to ask Sri Aurobindo whether Plotinus might be referring to the plane of overmind here – that plane in which (in Sri Aurobindo’s system) the pure unity of supermind is split up into separate aspects and forces.

Sri Aurobindo responds that Plotinus probably speaks of the “cosmic mind”. The latter term is not very common in Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, it occurs a

few times in *The Life Divine* and is closely related to overmind. It is a plane in which division and partition already exist, but with the memory of the original unity still active. There is a passage in which Sri Aurobindo explains that the cosmic mind is “in direct contact with the Supramental Truth-consciousness”, it is...

an Overmind that covers as with the wide wings of some creative Oversoul this whole lower hemisphere of Knowledge-Ignorance, links it with that greater Truth-Consciousness while yet at the same time with its brilliant golden Lid it veils the face of the greater Truth from our sight...ⁱⁱⁱ

Subsequent to this commentary on Plotinus’ text Sri Aurobindo points out that in these philosophies no distinction is made between different grades of mind or between intellect and the consciousness beyond the intellectual. Finally, after another question of the disciple he adds that Plotinus may have meant by “intelligence” that which is called *buddhi* in Sanskrit, “but endows the *buddhi* with the qualities proper to the Intuition and Overmind.” These are significant statements, no doubt, but they are somewhat complicated and not easy to follow. However, we can resume that Sri Aurobindo does see in the above quotation a connection between the “intelligence” (which is actually *Nous*) and his overmind.

Sri Aurobindo was not aware of the Greek term at this stage, but seven years later he chanced upon it in his readings and asked his disciple Purani: “Do you know anything about the *Nous*, the Divine Mind, of Plotinus? Krishnaprem^{iv} appears to make the Supermind and the *Nous* the same. *Nous* seems to be Intelligence.”^v So we find Sri Aurobindo using here as a translation the term divine Mind, which he explains in *The Life Divine* as “a subordinate and not really a separate working of the Real-Idea, of the Supermind.”^{vi} He compares it with the consciousness of a poet looking at his own creations which for the purpose of the vision appear separate from him, even though they are and remain part of himself.

A few months later Purani presents Sri Aurobindo a book on Plotinus of the English author Dean Inge.^{vii} After having looked at a few pages, Sri Aurobindo comments: “Inge takes *Nous* as Spirit. As far as I can make out, *Nous* is spiritual consciousness, not Supermind, but I will see about it again.”^{viii} So after the cosmic and the divine mind a third term is given here, which Sri Aurobindo explains at another place as follows:

The spiritual consciousness is that in which we enter into the awareness of Self, the Spirit, the Divine and are able to see in all things their essential

reality and the play of forces and phenomena as proceeding from that essential Reality.^{ix}

In December 1940 Sri Aurobindo mentions Inge’s book once more, without however giving his final view on the term *Nous*. His various statements show that the exact attribution of a term in comparative studies is often very difficult because there are different systems of thought behind the respective philosophies with only a partial overlapping of terms and their meaning. However, it has to be mentioned that Sri Aurobindo’s designation of *Nous* as “Divine Mind” or “spiritual consciousness” cannot be regarded as absolutely certain, as the text was taken from the *Talks with Sri Aurobindo* and Nirodbaran himself has said that the records, based on his notes and memory, are faithful, but not necessarily precise literal renderings. Therefore, the greatest weight should be given to Sri Aurobindo’s statements given in the letters.

We will try now to shed some more light on the question of similarities in the concepts of *Nous* and overmind or supermind and will begin with a brief look at the life and philosophy of Plotinus, who was the most important Neo-Platonic thinker of the 3rd century A.D.

Plotinus’ life and philosophy

Plotinus grew up in Alexandria, Egypt, and had some contact there with a philosopher who introduced him into Plato’s teachings. Later on he moved on to Rome where he founded a philosophical school. Until the end of his life he was a highly reputed person, which was also due to his noble and sincere conduct of life. For some time he had plans to study the local philosophy in Persia and India, but these plans failed due to certain political circumstances.

There are reports that he had some supernatural gifts, what is called “*siddhis*” in yoga literature. Thus he is said to have been able to recognise thieves at first sight and to be able to know intuitively the state of consciousness of humans whom he met, or even to have a foreknowledge of their future. His biographer Prophyrios reports that he experienced four times the highest ecstatic states, with visions of the supreme Divine beyond all forms.

But as many mystics in the past, he had a strong aversion against his physical body – he even considered it a shame to dwell with his soul in a body and did not allow portraits being made of his face. His birthday he kept secret as he did not believe it to be a great event to have become a human being. Plotinus’ last words before his death have been reported to be: “Strive to give back the Divine in yourselves to the Divine in the All.”^x

In his philosophy Plotinus posits a divine Being which is One and All, infinite,

indivisible beyond time and space. But basically it is ineffable and beyond the reach of human language. Here we feel reminded of the “speechlessness” of the Upanishadic seers who ultimately arrived at the statement, *neti, neti*, “it is not this, it is not that”. But how is the world of multiplicity created? This is a difficult question for Plotinus, because from his viewpoint the One is perfect in itself, it does not seek anything, does not require anything, it is the absolute fullness.

He finds a kind of answer in the image of the overflowing of the fullness which creates something out of itself without becoming more or less in itself, comparable to the sun emitting its rays or to humans generating their image in a mirror. Here too we feel reminded of a mantra of the Upanishads, *om pūrṇam adaḥ...*, “Fullness there, fullness here. From fullness flows fullness. Taking fullness from fullness away, fullness remains nonetheless fulfilled.”^{xi}

According to Plotinus’ system of emanation, *Nous*, the world-spirit, is the first element to arise from the Transcendent One. Johannes Hirschberger, author of a standard history of philosophy, describes *Nous* as follows: “It is the epitome of all ideas, norms, laws and structures of being, it is the *kosmos noetos* [the world of pure forms] and at the same time the platonic demiurge. It is still very close to the Primeval One, its image, the glimpse as it were with which the One looks at itself.”^{xii} Similarly, Sri Aurobindo had used the image of “the poet looking at his own creations”, when defining the divine Mind.

Thus *Nous* is the highest stage of the Existent; being and thinking are united in it, here we find the Beautiful and the Good in their purest form. On this plane “thought is not discursive deducting, but the direct grasping of that which is thought”^{xiii} – a description similar to that of Sri Aurobindo’s supermind which is marked by its direct knowledge of Truth without the need of reasoning and inference. Furthermore it is said that *Nous* is an objective reality, a world of thought which exists independent of the individual beings. The individual that turns towards this realm, does not produce his own thoughts but rather grasps its content by partaking in the world of the spirit. As pure Spirit, *Nous* is essentially one, but at the same time manifold because it contains a multiplicity of ideas.

At a further stage, the world-soul (*psyche*) emerges from the *Nous* and is then divided into individual souls. And finally, at the lowest stage, the material world of sense objects emerges from it. Matter as such is considered by Plotinus as not perceivable, “non-existent”, although visible forms are created out of it through the soul. Thus, matter is as it were the most distant and most darkened horizon in the unfolding of the One which extends into multiplicity with different degrees of perfection, without losing its oneness.

This would be the description of one aspect of the world process, the way

“downward” into multiplicity. But there is, from the perspective of the individual, also the way “upward”, which involves detachment from the physical world, self-purification and connecting with the *Nous* and finally through it a re-unification with the Primeval One. At this point we understand what Sri Aurobindo meant when once he noted in the *Evening Talks*: “Plotinus takes up a position, in which the true world is not here but above.”^{xiv}

Thus we may resume: although Plotinus’ *Nous* (in connection with what he calls “soul”) as an epitome of all ideas and as creative world-organising force does have some affinity with Sri Aurobindo’s supermind, his philosophy totally lacks that positive vision of the world and evolution which is so distinctive of Sri Aurobindo’s thought. Supermind is meant to bring the full force of the Spirit into life and matter for the sake of their fulfilment. There is a purpose in all manifestation, namely the joyful self-experience of the Divine through a progressive illumination of an initially unenlightened world.

By way of contrast creation with Plotinus arises – as mentioned above – from a kind of overflowing from the fullness, and consequently we could almost say that it is literally “superfluous” – the whole inspiration of the path lies in leaving the world behind and returning to the One who is All. Plotinus is here in agreement with certain world-negative traditions of Hinduism, though not with Sri Aurobindo who sought to overcome them. For Sri Aurobindo it is in no way a contradiction or philosophical problem that a divine being which is already perfect and fulfilled, seeks to manifest itself in order to experience itself in Matter, which is at first darkened and later fully “enlightened”. Here pertains the “logic of the infinite”, as he once called it; “but if we insist on applying a finite logic to the Infinite, the omnipresent Reality will escape us...”^{xv}

In concluding we may note that Sri Aurobindo had good reasons to doubt Krishnaprem’s equation of *Nous* and supermind, although there might be at least a spark of truth in it due to some remarkable affinity in a few aspects.

The *Nous* with Anaxagoras

Plotinus has written his texts in Greek, all of them have been preserved. The term *Nous* was already established in pre-Socratic times, it had some great importance especially in the thought of Anaxagoras (499-428 B.C.). The latter is well known for having brought Greek philosophy from Asia Minor (where it had its origins) to Athens. He was in the tradition of the Ionic natural philosophers and tried to fathom the question of the primal ground of the world and of an ordering principle in the universe.

It was his conviction that Something can impossibly become out of Nothing or pass into Nothing. He rather believed that all Becoming and Vanishing are

the mixing together or separating of some primal material in the form of an infinite number of small particles of various kinds, the *homoeomeries*, which are in themselves eternal and unchanging. The individual object originates from a specific mixture, and those elements that are predominantly represented, determine its character.

Sovereign above it as an ordering power is the *Nous* which gave the impulse for movement and separation in an originally immobile mass. In fragment B 12 Anaxagoras describes the *Nous* as follows:

... *Nous* is infinite and self-ruled, and is mixed with nothing, but is alone, itself by itself... For it is the thinnest of all things and the purest, and it has all knowledge about everything and the greatest strength... And *Nous* had power over the whole revolution so that it began to revolve in the beginning... And *Nous* set in order all things that were to be, and all things that were and are not now and that are..^{xvi}

In connection with the supermind Sri Aurobindo often speaks of Consciousness-Force. This term does not only imply perfect knowledge, but also force of realisation in the world of becoming. Therefore, Anaxagoras' statements are remarkable as a similar approach in this important aspect. In contrast to other natural philosophers as Democritus, who reduces all occurrence to a mere mechanism of atoms, Anaxagoras for the first time seeks to achieve a holistic vision, describing the universe from the viewpoint of a higher order. Johannes Hirschberger concludes that this specific vision could only be possible due to "a principle which is something logical as well dynamical... Anaxagoras discovers this principle in Spirit [*Nous*] which is force of thinking as well as of will."^{xvii}

Significant in this analysis is Hirschberger's describing the principle as "something dynamical", because Sri Aurobindo often uses the latter term in connection with his definition of supermind, as for instance in the following quotation: "There is an eternal dynamic Truth-consciousness beyond mind. This is what we call supermind or gnosis."^{xviii} Furthermore, we read in *The Synthesis of Yoga*: "But the gnosis is not only light, it is force; it is creative knowledge, it is the self-effective truth of the divine Idea."^{xix} At this point we may note that Sri Aurobindo often uses the Greek term *Gnosis* as a synonym for supermind, in the same way as Sanskrit *Vijnana*. Both words mean "deep knowledge" and are etymologically related via the Sanskrit root *jñā*, to know. He favours these two words very much, but, as has been shown in this article, the term *Nous* too is very significant and should be especially considered in comparative

studies regarding his concept of overmind.

References :

- i. *Letters on Poetry and Art*, p.522. (All references are, if not otherwise mentioned, to the CWSA.)
- ii. *Ibid.*, pp.522-523
- iii. *The Life Divine*, p.292
- iv. Ronald Nixon, an American spiritual author who greatly appreciated Sri Aurobindo's writings.
- v. *Nirodbaran, Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 9 June 1940
- vi. *The Life Divine*, p.175
- vii. William Ralph Inge, Dean of St. Paul's. His book is titled *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, London 1929.
- viii. *Nirodbaran, Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 23 October 1940
- ix. *SABCL*, vol. 22, p.316
- x. *The Six Enneads*, translated by S. MacKenna and B.S. Page.
- xi. *Brihadaryanka Upanishad* 5.1.1
- xii. *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. I, p.307
- xiii. *German Wikipedia*, „Plotin“.
- xiv. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* (1995), p.116
- xv. *The Life Divine*, p.337
- xvi. Trl. J. Burnet
- xvii. *Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. I, p.49
- xviii. *Essays Divine and Human*, p.363
- xix. *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p.484

Psychological perfection – Part I

James Anderson

“There is no greater victory than that of controlling oneself.” ¹

[Editor's note: Can a vision and understanding of Integral Health ever be complete without the inclusion of our psychology and inmost soul? However much we may try to shy away from this little spark that lies embedded within that atomic mass that constitutes our material body, it is always the secret ‘chip’ that directs the drama of life. It is as if we are divinely ‘programmed’ to discover it. All our life is either a conscious or subconscious seeking for this luminous element within us, which the ancient seers knew as the immortal within mortals. To find this divine element in us is of paramount importance to all who are striving for integral health in the deepest sense. It alone can give us the wholeness we seek and the harmony that accompanies it. Here, the author explores this inner journey and shares with us the route he has taken, a way that is as interesting as it is exciting. This is the journey of a soul that strives towards a greater conquest of its bodily state and the psychological conditions that hold us tied to certain fixed and limited possibilities. These fixed grooves of Nature are the habits that keep us tied down to our present limitations. We find here some of the key processes of this great and wonderful journey through the personal experiences of a fellow-traveller, assisted constantly by the divine Grace whose luminous words and hands of Love carry us on the path towards true wholeness.]

One doesn't need to be in medical practice to know that ‘psychological perfection’ is a colossal aim. Man has searched for it throughout the centuries and, I suppose, only a few have come close to attaining it. A science has painstakingly evolved to locate the key to its secrets. Many of us though, if we're honest, prefer to hide away in our ‘comfort zones’, “afraid of being lost in that light and freedom ⁽¹⁾.”

But I do believe that the search is very necessary. I don't think one can move even an inch forward on the path of yoga before some sort of internal harmony is installed. Even outside it, some sort of psychological equilibrium is certainly imperative. For me, it has become very clear that the inside must always be addressed first. If one aspires for wholeness one must indeed look at

the whole: I feel that it is futile trying to address the surface first. The inner state clearly determines the frontal form. Indeed, in my case now, my body's well-being seems to be entirely reliant on the condition inside.

Perhaps there is no great secret after all. I have found that this shift to inner health can only happen as soon as I stand in my truth. That is easier said than done and, to date, I don't think I've ever managed to *settle* on that threshold. And what, after all, is it that induces this state? Experience has brought me precious glimpses and, at such moments, everything seems to fall magically into place. As I enquire and probe a little more inside, I am able to see that I am comprised of many segments. It is a complex and fascinating world. There is quite a mixture but these parts, in the end, definitely comprise some sort of whole. But what is it that creates this whole? Looking from another angle, I then realise too that I am nothing but a speck amidst an immense backdrop of Oneness. But, at the same time, I also see that this speck can somehow spread itself over the entire universe! This sort of process is so alien to our usual nature. I don't think our instruments are prepared or equipped to naturally embrace such truths. So something *new* has to take over. Something new has to help us expand and become vast.

To find it, I believe, points the way to wisdom and true fulfilment. Inside all of us, I believe, is a hidden yearning to discover this truth. For some of us, it may take centuries to unfold but something very persistent in all of us aspires to make this prodigious discovery.

The five psychological perfections

The Mother² gave the champak³ flower the name of *Psychological perfection*. It is very beautiful and fragrant; the shrub is very common in these parts but seems to grow all over the world. The flower has five petals and the Mother, in giving its significance, also describes the five attributes that we need to move forward on this path. In concluding a talk, She summarised these perfections as follows:

“So here's my proposal: we put surrender first, at the top of the list, that is, we accept what Sri Aurobindo has said — that to do the integral yoga one must first resolve to surrender entirely to the Divine, there is no other way, this is *the* way. But after that one must have the five psychological virtues, five psychological perfections, and we say that these perfections are:

Sincerity or Transparency

Faith or Trust (Trust in the Divine, naturally)

Devotion or Gratitude
Courage or Aspiration
Endurance or Perseverance.

One form of endurance is *faithfulness*, faithfulness to one's resolution — being faithful. One has taken a resolution, one is faithful to one's resolution. This is endurance ⁽²⁾."

Armed with these perfections, She says, one can march confidently forward. Clearly, these kinds of virtues will admirably equip man in whatever context he finds himself. We have the Mother to thank for removing the distinctions between yoga and life: there is only consciousness after all. These perfections were, moreover, never intended to be rigid. The Mother said that "every time I give it to someone, they are not always the same psychological perfections. That depends on people's needs. Even to the same person I may give at different times different psychological perfections; so it's not fixed ⁽³⁾."

So I truly believe that the Mother gives each one of us the necessary materials to nourish our own individual growth. I feel that She provides us with the necessary attributes to create our own unique psychological perfection. This perfection is clearly much more than an amalgamation of individual virtues. For me, a psychological perfection will only come when I am able to live in my truth. For me, this perfection is our individual truth and it provides the key to our inner wholeness and health. When we live in our truth we simply become whole and being 'whole' obviously implies that *nothing* is missing.

As we begin to live in our truth, we take the stage in this wonderful play of divine multiplicity. Each individual truth is like a perfect crystal, unique in shape but identical in essence. Each one of us has our individual truth. I look upon it as a universal law. So to live in your truth means you are acting in consonance with the rhythm of the universe.

Preparation

However lofty the aim, I believe that this perfection can be always more than a mere ideal. I'd like it to become my living reality. This is clearly a work of preparation: every detail of our inner nature has to be observed and yet, at the same time, a vision of the whole must be maintained. I've had to proceed from very rudimentary beginnings. Indeed, I find I am so often obliged to retreat and start all over again. Certain negative patterns have the habit of continually re-emerging and sometimes appear to wipe out any work done beforehand.

But in truth, as Sri Aurobindo says, no progress is entirely wasted and there is always a valuable lesson to emerge from our most glaring defeat. There even seems to be a purpose and a plan behind every lapse and fall. If we allow it and if we truly surrender, the work unfolds before us and I believe that a secret hand will give us the necessary experience to progress and grow. A new way has to be found to foster this growth and without growth, our inner psychology will simply wither and die.

Control

The Mother's choice of words often fascinates me. Initially, looking at it first almost made me freeze, but as I went deeper into the significance behind, something truly shifted inside. In common usage, the term implies an element of coercion and enforcement. That, I guess, is why the word is often used in reference to the mind. The ordinary mind seems to understand a lot about coercion and enforcement. In fact, that's how it usually gets its bidding done. But here, authentic control, according to the Mother, implies mastery and this mastery is both free and spontaneous. That is clearly not the province of the ordinary mind: it is the domain of the soul.

To me, the transfer invariably comes in an atmosphere of peace. It often arrives unexpectedly and the change can be very subtle. I need to be attentive to be conscious of this transition. So often the changeover catches me unawares. It would be true to say that I find it generally coming in brief visits. When such a shift does come forward, I find it is helpful to make good use of it because it can disappear as quietly as it entered in the first place.

The nature of the soul is to harmonise. When it does step forward, everything seems to find its true function and place. The soul has the ability to cement all internal divisions. Without our secret master life would be chaos. We may not always appreciate this, but I believe it is true. Indeed, on several occasions, his quiet voice has pulled me back from the brink of collapse and ruin.

The soul helps us expand and grow; to live in it brings a vastness and to stay there can bring an eternal Delight. So I know of no better panacea for psychological health. That is why I believe that the future psychology lies not in the mind but in the soul. What is the sense in probing into something so obviously flawed when the source of all perfection is there, sitting inside us? This sort of knowledge can't really be learnt from laboratories or books; it can only come from experience. We have to learn to dive down into our own laboratory to find the truth. That is the only way. We can't be told who or what we are. We have to search our inner cave to find the key to Her Delight.

Looking at oneself

The Mother often says that to find the soul we must, above all, truly want it. It must become the overriding aim of our life, the reason for our existence. Every conceivable moment can be consecrated to this search. Sooner or later, that necessitates a complete shift in orientation. Gradually, I feel, as we withdraw from the surface we begin to access a much richer life inside. I feel that involves a change of poise and is a matter of practice.

“In order to find the soul you must go in this way (*gesture of going deep within*), like this, draw back from the surface, withdraw deep within and enter, enter, enter, go down, down, down into a very deep hole, silent immobile, and there. There’s a kind of... something warm, quiet, rich in substance and very still, and very full, like a sweetness — that is the soul.

“And if one is insistent and is conscious oneself, then there comes a kind of plenitude which gives the feeling of something complete that contains unfathomable depths in which, should one enter, one feels that many secrets would be revealed... like the reflection in very peaceful waters of something that is eternal. And one no longer feels limited by time.

“One has the feeling of having always been and of being for eternity.

“That is when one has touched the core of the soul ⁽⁴⁾.”

We all know that this search requires a very persistent will. By dedication and patience, we can unravel what Sri Aurobindo terms the ‘teguments of the soul’ so that the truth of our being can step forward. I guess that it is never an instantaneous process; it can take many years. But living and growing are made of many shades and as the psychic being slowly emerges, a greater light starts to radiate throughout the being. It is my impression that only this light can truly sustain us; only this light that can ultimately fulfil the secret yearning that hides away in each one of us. So at first it holds itself back and gradually, through persistent practice, it becomes more evident to our whole nature.

The psychic clearly provides the key to a new harmony inside. Gradually, I begin to find that those warring factions below start to reach some sort of reconciliation. I also start to appreciate that there is something *new* that induces this change. The discovery provides a totally novel perspective of my identity. I can now start to look at the mind, life and body as mere instruments but not ‘myself’ as my true essence comes to light. This brings a sense of liberation as my individuality becomes less enslaved to the lower nature.

“And if the contact has been conscious and complete enough, it liberates

you from the bondage of outer form; you no longer feel that you live only because you have a body. That is usually the ordinary sensation of the being, to be so tied to this outer form that when one thinks of ‘myself’ one thinks of the body. That is the usual thing. The personal reality is the body’s reality. It is only when one has made an effort for inner development and tried to find something that is a little more stable in one’s being, that one can begin to feel that this ‘something’ which is permanently conscious throughout all ages and all change, this something must be ‘myself’. But that already requires a study that is rather deep. Otherwise if you think ‘I am going to do this’, ‘I need that’, it is always your body, a small kind of will which is a mixture of sensations, of more or less confused sentimental reactions, and still more confused thoughts which form a mixture and are animated by an impulse, an attraction, a desire, some sort of a will; and all that momentarily becomes ‘myself’ — but not directly, for one does not conceive this ‘myself’ as independent of the head, the trunk, the arms and legs and all that moves — it is very closely linked.

“It is only after having thought much, seen much, studied much, observed much that you begin to realise that the one is more or less independent of the other and that the will behind can make it either act or not act, and you begin not to be completely identified with the movement, the action, the realisation — that something is floating. But you have to observe much to see that.

“And then you must observe much more to see that this, the second thing that is there, this kind of active conscious will, is set in motion by ‘something else’ which watches, judges, decides and tries to found its decisions on knowledge — that happens even much later. And so, when you begin to see this ‘something else’, you begin to see that it has the power to set in motion the second thing, which is an active will; and not only that, but that it has a very direct and very important action on the reactions, the feelings, the sensations, and that finally it can have control over all the movements of the being — this part which watches, observes, judges and decides.

“That is the beginning of control.

“When one becomes conscious of that, one has seized the thread, and when one speaks of control, one can know, ‘Ah! yes, this is what has the power of control.’

“This is how one learns to look at oneself ⁽⁵⁾.”

The surface nature

It would be true to say that it has taken a while for these kinds of distinctions to consolidate in my understanding. Even now, when the surface consciousness

wrests control, I can see it trying to reinstate itself as the only reality. It can still be a major cause of disruption. The realisation that we are, in essence, entirely intact and independent of the outer form is, I guess, a first move forward in inner health. To be a slave to the body is not a life. Indeed, to be a slave to the ordinary mind or vital is not a great deal better. This misplaced sense of identity, however, still occasionally intervenes and at such times I have to carefully recover my steps. In those instances, I simply have to re-align myself. Many patterns from outside reinforce this distorted thinking. This sort of surface thinking adheres to past grooves that obstinately refuse to be effaced. So I must be persistent.

That is why, I suggest, we need to be so awake and conscious. We have to see ourselves as we truly are. But perhaps seeing what we are *not* can be the first knowledge. It is a little like untying a huge knot. Sometimes this knot can get so entangled we have to call for help. But the Mother is never far away. If we look closely enough we can see that She has established residence in our soul. So to merely witness and observe, if it comes from this true base, is usually sufficient and the arising knowledge produces the necessary shift.

And if we dwell on the surface, we also become more prone to those impacts that continually come to us from outside: it is like a magnet. We lose our protection and shield. The more we live on the surface the more clutter we accumulate: one is liable to become a walking neurosis.

Yoga and change

Life for me got a great deal more intense as soon as I embarked on this yoga. I have found that yoga brings a much greater richness to living; at times every incident seems to be pregnant with significance and meaning. Every action creates a kind of ripple in my being.

Initially at least, I saw myself passing through massive extremes. Outside those precious moments of concentration, installing a state of peace into everyday living proved so problematic. Embracing the surface existence can present many obstacles, particularly when one has concluded that only the inner life has any true substance.

Initially, at least, it seemed there were two worlds. But the ordinary world will never go away! The only solution is for these two worlds to become one: that is, I guess, a fundamental challenge of this path. It would be true to say that the world we see and inhabit is our reflection and creation. We create our own world. Our world can even burst its boundaries through the entire cosmos if we are able to will it! In yoga, we learn to radiate our truth in whichever world we walk. Once this lesson is absorbed, it will just come down to scenery, admittedly

a little pleasant or unpleasant, but not really of much consequence.

But getting there is full of trials and torments. If I had been unable to access some hidden reserves of strength, I probably would have been crushed to pulp. I have found that my sensitivity to shocks from outside has at times reached fever pitch. Added to this, my sense of dualities initially increased: those states of joy and sorrow somehow became so much more pronounced. One minute I might have found myself climbing a peak of joy, the next I might have been wallowing in a mire of self-pity and depreciation.

Our friend

All this may sound like a very potent recipe for mental imbalance but a friend has emerged. We call him the ‘witness’. To me, he is just another guise of the soul. This witness has held me back from a state of full immersion; without him, I would have simply drowned. During the passage of time, he has slowly stepped forward and now he has, in many ways, become my best friend and safeguard. In short, he has taught me to truly observe, not least myself. He points me towards a greater equality.

In yoga, we learn to follow a new master. Instead of being slaves to our nature, I feel that we need to learn to listen to the whispers of what Sri Aurobindo calls our ‘Inner Teacher’. One needs to be very attentive to follow his instructions; he rarely insists. The Inner Teacher teaches me the *true* way to live. It is a path of boundless delight and I hope and pray that this will be a contract for life.

Through the practice of yoga, I’ve noticed my consciousness gradually becoming more transparent: the many defects of my nature have become more visible. This is not pleasant, as anything not in its true place tends to severely jar and dislocate the being. At times, it can even produce an ugly sensation in the body. So it is always better to give yourself as much as possible to the Mother and stay on the path. And it is a path which has been minutely mapped out for us. We only need to take the trouble to find out.

Surrender

Lastly, this yoga is one of surrender. It is simply the only way and this demands an offering of the very nature itself. The Mother says:

“The most important surrender is the surrender of your character, your way of being, so that it may change. If you do not surrender your very own nature, never will this nature change. It is this that is most important. You have certain ways of understanding, certain ways of reacting, certain ways

of feeling, almost certain ways of progressing, and above all, a special way of looking at life and expecting from it certain things — well, it is this you must surrender. That is, if you truly want to receive the divine Light and transform yourself, it is your whole way of being you must offer — offer by opening it, making it as receptive as possible so that the divine Consciousness which sees how you ought to be, may act directly and change all these movements into movements more true, more in keeping with your real truth. This is infinitely more important than surrendering what one does. It is not what one does (what one does is very important, that's evident) that is the most important thing but what one is. Whatever the activity, it is not quite the way of doing it but the state of consciousness in which it is done that is important ⁽⁶⁾.”

Purification

In yoga, I feel that we go through an accelerated process of purification. New hands are now on the tiller. Every twist and distortion is churned around by the swell of the *sādhana* and gradually, given time, every single one comes to the surface. There is clearly a reason for this. At the surface, they become more visible to our awareness and when they appear, we are then given the opportunity to extinguish them. If we are watchful, by invoking the light of the Mother, I believe that they can vanish into thin air.

But the stress of the practice can sometimes present great difficulties. As I proceed along the path, deeper, more adhesive patterns come to light and I go down into the darker caverns of my nature. Painful buried memories start surfacing and below that still, a whole wasteland of obscurity lies before me. In *The Inconscient Foundation* ⁽⁷⁾, Sri Aurobindo, as usual, captures the essence:

“My soul regards its veiled subconscious base,
All the dead obstinate symbols of the past,
The hereditary moulds, the stamps of race
Are upheld to sight, the old imprints effaced.”

I don't really invite it; it just happens. These are cryptic domains and the picture I see is not always very pleasant. Some detachment is essential, otherwise I might just get buried in that darkness.

When one is trying to grow, there are also forces outside that always seem to know which button to press to veer us off-course. They can invade even the slightest crack in our armour if we are not awake. One has to learn to stay aligned or there is a danger of going to pieces.

May be the stress of yoga creates a greater potential for psychological disruption. I wouldn't like to say. If our fabric is not resilient enough to face the inevitable impacts, I would say so. Certainly too, any upheaval is likely to be more severe. One has to be ready for this path. Overall, the journey can be very bumpy at times. But the *sādhana* is not really in my hands; I sometimes think I have to hang on tight because a deep abyss lies far below. But I return to the same point: there is a clear track and clear way. Gradually too, with surrender, a deeper trust intervenes. There is always the Grace of Her love and protection. The child is *always* safe if it rests inside its mother's arms.

As the work unfolds, inevitably, new difficulties are traded for old, but I find it so bewildering that the *same* patterns keep on reappearing, albeit in a different guise. So it is my understanding that a positive poise is so important. Otherwise one might simply sink.

The sunlit path

There is a path that is full of trust and a joyful surrender and there is one of gloom and self-denial. It may sound a little trite but taking the 'sunlit path' prevents a considerable amount of difficulty. This attitude has to be protected; it is really our salvation. I know that looking back is not generally recommended but there comes a time when, very much later, we can see that things have truly shifted inside. At that point, we might hardly recognise what we once used to be — that can surely be looked upon as meaningful progress.

So I believe that how we embrace change can make such a difference. Change is inevitable; we can't avoid it. It is an ineluctable law of Nature. But I feel that her ways and twists have made it almost into an edict of decay. That, I guess, is why most people shy away from it. In fact, I've known people who were terrified of change *per se*. Perhaps there is something written in the stars that change must invariably follow the eternal course of gravity, I don't know. But perhaps the law *itself* can be changed. This, for me, is truly the Mother's work.

I do believe that it is possible for the mind itself to cultivate an opposite point of view. Our mental approach to change is clearly very important. I know that a positive mindset can be a real help. Some people even seem to be born with it. Our upbringing and conditioning can also have a very strong influence. So I also feel that it is something that can be nurtured. But the complete solution, I suggest, lies right inside us and that is to change our consciousness.

If we are able to align ourselves to the rhythm of the soul, we move to an entirely new realm. Depending on how we look at it, we can even move into a world of miracles. Even our circumstances can start to change but perhaps the

greatest of all miracles is to change nature herself. Part of the overall picture is *our own* nature and our soul just *knows* that it can be changed. That is our field of action and place of work. Nature *must* change and I believe that true inner health lies in that certainty. I believe that this certitude will come when the mind is completely transformed by the candid trust of the soul.

Disorder

There are so many ways we can lose balance. I guess that most disorders arise when something inside us loses its true place. The vital, for instance, may submerge into a state of depression and imbalance the rest of the nature. The surface mind may cramp the being and cast a shadow of depreciation and judgment. I've even sometimes noticed a little 'critic' who sometimes sneers on the sidelines and scoffs at my every move.

These, I believe, are clearly examples where elements are not in their correct place. Equilibrium is temporarily lost and, in such instances, for me at least, there is really only one solution. I have to realign myself once more around the centre of my being. I feel that it is a matter of bringing out the 'search-light' of the soul and simply observing, without judgment, what is there. The consciousness holds an enormous power. By invoking the Mother's help and guidance, to begin with, invariably unties the knots created in our lower nature.

I notice that my slate can rarely be wiped clean overnight. Some patterns can often return as quickly as they had disappeared. They seem to travel through me along well-worn channels. If harmony is the aim, these pathways, built and reinforced by our nature, need to be effaced. Only true consciousness, I believe, can do that. So it is my understanding that if we want to always live in this truth, our awareness can never rest. However, I do find it *not* an impossible task. Once we make the effort to turn inside and truly give ourselves to Her, something new starts to take over: it's like a new engine being installed. This, for me, is the key to the *sādhana* so thankfully we don't have to fight our battles single-handed.

Gardening

We all know that a garden needs tending. If the work gets neglected, weeds start appearing and before we know it, in a couple of years, we are facing a veritable jungle. Not surprisingly, our inner world needs tending too. If this work is overlooked, disorder can become more chronic and more severe. I also feel that disruption can expand inside us through contagion. Perhaps it can even proliferate in the same way that cancer spreads throughout the body.

If we cling to disorder too, I fear that difficulty will inevitably increase. In certain instances, a part of our being simply does not want to let it go. One obvious example is desire. Most people in society try to reach some sort of compromise with this state. It is just a part of existence as life without it would be considered very dull indeed. At the same time, there is a sense of moderation and restraint that tries to achieve some sort of balance and so the urge generally gets bottled into manageable proportions. But when we decide on a path of growth, we discern that any desire always causes some degree of imbalance. Nevertheless, a part of us still stubbornly clings onto it. That can sometimes create an unbearable friction. The mind will try to sit on it but the lower vital might now and then break loose and create havoc. The mind and vital reach a state of loggerheads and any semblance of harmony is gone. The mind might retaliate by casting a blanket of censure and guilt. So the end-result is far worse.

Whenever I face an inner difficulty, I always try to remember the body. The body is my anchor; if I lose touch with that, all equilibrium will be lost. Now and then, when I rise in the morning, I can observe a cloud hover over my head. It is depression trying to enter. I then reconnect with my body and, in doing my morning exercise, the haze just drifts away. It is obviously not a definitive solution but I always find that an actual presence in the body helps me to align the nature to a significant extent. Indeed I find my moments of greatest joy invariably arise when I am present in the body. It is like a celebration of wholeness.

The spectrum of psychological disorder is so vast. There is falsehood and, indeed, at the one extreme, I understand that there is full-scale possession. Many of these states are quite outside my experience, so I find it better not to comment. However, I believe that the overriding feature of every disorder is invariably some sort of rupture with the soul. Sometimes indeed, the dislocation might deteriorate into a massive schism. The soul, after all, is our sanctuary where everything is entire and intact. If we turn our back on it, we have to meet the consequences. Not surprisingly too, the psychic represents our best means back to truth and wholeness.

I realise that physical symptoms can very often intervene. The correlation between material causation and the soul may perhaps offer some fertile ground for research. However it is my impression that the soul provides the single thread that can link such knowledge. It is an enormous realm and man seems to have scarcely touched the surface.

References :

1. The Mother. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Volume 9. Pondicherry; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1977, p.432.

2. Op. cit. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Volume 8. Pondicherry; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1977, p.42.
3. Ibid.p.36.
4. Op. cit. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Volume 9. Pondicherry; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1977, p. 310.
5. Op. cit. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Volume 9. Pondicherry; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1977, pp. 310-
6. Op. cit. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Volume 4. Pondicherry; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972, p. 373.
7. Sri Aurobindo. *Collected Poems*, SABCL, Volume 5. Pondicherry; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972, p. 153.

(Reproduced from *NAMAH*, vol.18, Issue 4, 15 Jan, 2011 with due thanks and acknowledgement)

(To be continued)

Sri Aurobindo and the Cultural Crisis in India

Kalidas Bhattacharya

Modern Western culture is basically materialistic. That the ultimate source of human values is the Spirit in man has been clean forgotten. As a result, it has subordinated these values — and along with them the Spirit itself — to matter, life and unreflective mind, which last Sri Aurobindo calls 'surface mind'. The natural logical culmination of this modern Western attitude is dialectical materialism practised in the Communist countries.

When this modern Western culture was first introduced in India it clashed as violently with the then existing culture as it did four hundred years ago with the medieval culture in Europe. In Europe, however, some sort of a compromise was effected in the form of naturalistic humanism which, unfortunately, being after all a compromise, has in recent days developed a fiercer conflict with what claims to be the rightful successor there, viz. dialectical materialism.

Before we proceed further, a word on what this basic Western attitude really means. The unreflective mind of man has below its surface show, but not entirely different from it, another dimension called reflection or understanding which deals with matter, life and the surface mind in a new fashion: it organises them into systems called science, society, body politic, body economic, etc. It appears as though this reflective understanding belongs to a higher level, having some sort of autonomy of its own wherewith it reviews and reorganises things of the lower level. As a matter of fact, however, its whole efficacy is exhausted in this organisation of the material-vital-and-surface-mind things, leaving nothing to claim specifically as its own. There is no sense of a transcendent spiritual source and no sense of elevating or transforming the lower world. The story of evolution, on the other hand, is quite different. Up till now, at every higher stage of evolution whatever was below has, as a matter of fact, been so elevated or transformed, and this could not have happened if the higher had not an autonomy of its own. For elevation or transformation is not possible without some new

principle which, however much it might have remained submerged till then, comes at an appropriate time to assert itself, in the form of that act of elevation or transformation. The Spirit, therefore, is a new principle that way.

To come back to what happened in India when the existing Indian culture first confronted this modern West. There was either total confusion or a too swift turn to materialism. So far as this attachment to materialism has continued till today it has, as in Europe, and on the same logic of events, developed naturalistic humanism and, only in recent days, in some quarters, dialectical materialism in some form or other.

The conflict, as much in India as in Europe, was unprecedentedly revolutionary, because till then, in both the places, the erstwhile culture had been a form of EXCLUSIVE spiritualism, a type of adherence to the Spirit which amounted to a virtual denial of the world with all its riches of the surface mind, life and matter. Europe, however, managed the conflict in some way, because the whole population there was somehow converted to the new cult, and according to Sri Aurobindo this could happen only because Western people are constitutionally at the vital, material and surface-mind level with, of course, the inner dimension of the latter very richly developed — and all this till today. In India, on the other hand, seventy five per cent of the population belongs, even today, to the old exclusive spiritual cult. The net result of this ponderous inertia is that the cultural confusion that started two hundred years ago is continuing almost unresolved even to this date. This soul-killing confusion is evident in all fields of Indian life. All the reforms done during these two hundred years, and particularly after Independence, have only accentuated the confusion, no matter whatever other benefits we have gathered. Unscientific grafting of Western culture on the Indian mind is the prime source of this all-round confusion. Cutting into the depths of Indian life it has in very recent days reached the very base of all culture — I mean education. If people are conscious today that our educational system is rotten to the core, this means that recovery from cultural confusion is not far ahead.

Here comes in the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's teachings. He holds that this confusion is a necessary step for man's evolution into Superman — the new humanity that WILL evolve in the truest sense of the term, the Superman, in other words, who will get the lower levels elevated and transformed. The West could not evolve it, because with the total conversion of people at the level of surface mind to that of organisational mentality it left no room for the further emergence of the spirit. The only scope it left was for the rise of the Nietzschean Superman — a race of men with superabundant vital energy and superabundant intellect and control over matter, the type that is not improminent

in the present-day West. We have already seen why such total conversion was possible in Europe, i.e. the West. According to Sri Aurobindo, people there had always belonged, and belong even today, to the vital-cum-mind level. Even when they were passing through the medieval age of religion they were votaries of ecclesiastical power and whatever was necessary for it — the colossal organisation, called Church, and its institutions, that wielded almost despotic power.

India, on the other hand, had always sworn by the spiritual, and that out of her basic constitution, even though the Indian attitude to the Spirit has varied from age to age. In the Vedic ages *ṛsis* and priests had zealously guarded the Spirit and given it out to the people only in the form of symbols. In the Puranic and Tantric age the whole life — individual and social — was as much materially and vitally rich as reverberating also with Spirit. Later on both in social and individual life there was a decline. The Spirit was institutionalised and, not only that, the entire spiritual attention was concentrated on the scrupulous observance of institutional formalities to the almost total neglect of the lower mind, life and matter. Individually too, *mokṣa* was understood as involving denial of these lower levels. This was an unnatural state of affairs, even though it continued very long. But it could continue so long — and that in spite of repeated onslaughts — only because the undercurrent of the spiritual was still there.

Confrontation with the West has dealt a death-blow at this institutionalised Spirit, and the true Spirit is managing to gush out. And it is gushing out with the full consciousness of its erstwhile blunder which was to have ignored the mind, life and matter. We have now in India the last evolution in making — the birth of the concrete Spirit in the form of Superman.

The Supermind descending transforms all that is mind (in all its dimensions), life and matter. Indeed it transforms everything that is lower. Such has always been the story of evolution. The higher descends and the lower prepares itself for that. Just another way of putting the two processes together is to say that the higher that was dormant in the lower emerges after the lower that is said to give birth to it had been in labour and all preparatory changes. Only, there is something novel about man's evolutionary transformation into Superman. Whereas at each of the lower levels the lower's preparation for the higher to emerge and the actual emergence of the higher were all automatic — because there was no consciousness as such, i.e. no reflection operating — here at this last stage of evolution where the mind, both unreflective and reflective, is evolving into the Supermind it is all a matter of consciousness — and reflective consciousness at that. Hence it is that there is a clear awareness of the mind preparing itself for the descent of the Supermind and of the actual descent of the latter.

Sri Aurobindo holds that evolution at the higher level is always speedier than at lower levels and the acceleration at each higher level is inconceivably disproportionate to what it was at any of the lower levels. In spite of this, however, it might take millions of years to pass from man to Superman, although according to him the descent of the Supermind has already started. Our duty is just to expedite the descent. And this is possible in two ways:

(a) By the combined effort of all human beings, particularly of the Indians, to understand the proper role of the Spirit in the world of mind, life and matter, to allow its free play there, to get prepared for and accelerate the descent, all these meaning roughly the same thing. The role of the Spirit is never to shun anything but always to connect all that there is in the world into a grand unity where everything that is higher is accorded its proper place of right but with unrestricted scope for exercising its duties to everything that is lower, the duty in question being just to raise the lower to itself and itself to descend to the lower in the spirit of a friend and guide. The duty of the lower, similarly, is never to fight with the higher but, with all the rightful assistance of the higher, to come up to the standard it prescribes. This is, may be, what Sri Aurobindo means by 'transformation' or 'elevation'. The result is the grand system, the unity-in-diversity, where the Supermind, mind, life and matter are in proper comradeship for the all-round development of all. Conscious participation in the total life of the world and contributing whatever we can to its total welfare — a welfare not confined to the surface mind, life and matter — would thus constitute our preparation for the final evolution;

(b) But something else is also required and that is more metaphysical. Just as in the case of an individual, for all realisation of the inner dimension of mind and for the progressive rise from there to the higher and higher strata of the Spirit one has to practise sadhana individually, and just as without this sadhana such realisation and rise can never be expedited, similarly in the case of cosmic evolution. The only difference is that while in the case of the individual one starts from a level — I mean that of mind — which is already high up in the scale and has been attained without any conscious effort on his part, in the case of cosmic evolution the Cosmic Purusa that has undertaken this sadhana had to start from the very beginning. Starting from the lowest, viz. matter, and through step-by-step realisation, he rises up to the highest by following in the reverse direction exactly the steps through which the highest spirit — Siva-Sakti — had created this world. Till the realisation of the mind level this Cosmic Purusa had no need of others' assistance. But since mind in its inner dimension, called self, is reflective he has to seek its co-operation. One cannot do any good to a self-conscious self-asserting being without the latter, or any of his deputies, agreeing

to cooperate, the type of cooperation varying from conscious assistance to silent consent. There must, therefore, be at least one form among these minds who, abundantly gifted with spiritual urge, will act as a representative of other minds and, in unison with the Cosmic Purusa, realise all the subtle grades of the Spirit up to the highest, another way of putting which is that he will assist the Cosmic Purusa or, better, work in unison with him in effectively inviting the Supermind to descend to the world of mind and through that to the world of life and matter and sublimate each one of these. Sri Aurobindo's own sadhana was of this kind. He was at least one of the few representatives of the people to have done that. This sadhana of Sri Aurobindo need not be mystified unnecessarily. It is exactly what an ideal teacher does when he leads his student creatively on the way to truth. To every serious reflective student truth unfolds itself, but the process can be accelerated — often in an inconceivably high measure — by the ideal teacher who has already got it through his extraordinary efforts.

In the West through frustration, and in India through different sorts of revivalism, man has already got a scent of this comprehending Spirit wherewith to transform the whole world of mind, life and matter and make it a kingdom of heaven. This is Sri Aurobindo's Life Divine which, he says, is already in people's view. Only, through concerted sadhana we have to expedite its realisation. Life Divine centres neither round matter nor round life or mind. In plain language, it does not centre round nature and is, therefore, neither the present-day naturalistic humanism, nor Teutonic Fascism nor economism nor materialism of any sort. It centres round Spirit and yet covers in its effective sweep the whole world of mind, life and matter, self-consciously penetrating every aspect of these and thereby rendering them into the sublimest unity-in-diversity without disposessing any of them of any of their rich details. It is a life as rich in mentality, vitality and material wealth as also divine throughout. According to Sri Aurobindo, this was the original Indian attitude, though in later ages the spiritual in India came to assert itself exclusively — i.e. by denying the world of mind, life and matter. The original idea has never been defunct, and through many vicissitudes, and particularly in modern times through its confrontation with the present-day Western culture, it has succeeded in reverting to itself, but this time in a wiser mood, with all the flowers of mind, life and matter garnered — flowers with everything that supports them, stalks, plants, soil, water, atmosphere and what not?

It is because of this history of India that she is privileged to attain to Life Divine first and then propagate it to other peoples of the world. India had this mission at least thrice before, and now has fallen to her enviable lot another,

and the last, turn to do it. We must take care that we do not stray from this appointed path. In all our self-conscious plannings and reforms we must not forget this basic Indian outlook. We need neither copy what other so-called developed countries have done nor lay inordinate stress on mere economy and physical power nor make everything move round these. Indian education, Indian economy, Indian politics and Indian social life will prove truly Indian only when they and their details are linked together in the basic Grand Unity — the Life Divine. And this is no parochialism, for this Life Divine, though primarily Indian, is truly the ideal life for all — a life where the animal and material sides of man have attained their proper fruition through balanced sharing of total life without any the least detriment to any of them — no jar, no clash, no alienation, no undue subordination, no exploitation, no bossing, no compromise, but all comradeship for the upliftment of all and attainment of a perfect living totality.

(Reproduced with thanks and acknowledgement from *Visva Bharati Quarterly*, pp.308-315)

The History of the Ashram School - Part II

Kittu Reddy

We shall first review the developments in the School from the year 1959.

As already stated earlier, the Free Progress System was introduced on an experimental basis in 1959 at the Secondary level; from there it evolved to a surer and larger base in 1961; a small group of students were trying out this method and the Mother named it *Vers la Perfection*. However the whole of the secondary level was not following the Free System. One section – in fact, the larger section – was still continuing with the old method. The school at the secondary level was thus divided into two sections.

In 1963, as already mentioned in the previous issues, the whole secondary section was united and was brought under the purview of the Free Progress System.

In August 1963, some teachers wrote a letter to the Mother regarding the Free System. This letter has been published in one of the previous issues. As a consequence of this letter the secondary section was again divided into two. One of them was following the Free progress method and was named *Vers la Perfection* and the other was following a modified form of the Free Progress System. This pattern continued from 1964 to 1967. It may be noted that the students of the Free Progress System did not have to sit for the quarterly Tests; for the other students it was compulsory.

As already mentioned, in July 1967, many letters were written to the Mother regarding quarterly tests and, as a consequence, these tests were abolished.

In November 1967, two teachers, Amita and myself, wrote a letter to Mother making some suggestions regarding the reorganisation of the secondary section. This letter is reproduced below.

6 NOVEMBRE 1967

Cher Père,

Pendant les six derniers mois, nous avons reçu de toi plusieurs lettres ou messages sur l'éducation; et beaucoup d'entre nous veulent changer le système actuel en quelque chose qui sera plus conforme à notre idéal. Les professeurs des classes primaires ont déjà commencé à travailler dans ce sens, nous de notre côté voulons proposer une réorganisation des classes 1 à 10 et nous te prions de nous dire si (c'est même cela que tu vois les choses) nous devons le faire. Voici ce que nous proposons :

A présent toutes les classes sont fixes, c'est-à-dire, les élèves doivent assister à une classe d'un sujet à des heures fixes, sans autre choix. Nous voulons diminuer le nombre des heures fixes sans les éliminer totalement. Toutes ces classes fixes, dirigées par les professeurs, auront lieu l'après-midi. Le matin, les professeurs — à tour de rôle, mais deux ou trois de différentes spécialités ensemble — seront à la disposition des élèves qui pourront travailler individuellement sur le sujet de leur choix.

Ainsi, chaque professeur rencontrera tous ses élèves ensemble l'après-midi (deux ou trois fois par semaine) et aura la possibilité de les aider et les aider individuellement, le matin. Nous voulons donner à chaque professeur le droit d'appeler tous ses élèves ensemble le matin (à une heure fixe par lui avec ses élèves) quand il le juge nécessaire. Ce cadre

sera tout suffisamment souple pour permettre à chaque professeur de développer sa propre méthode d'enseignement.

Les classes de secondaire seront divisées en deux groupes — celui des classes 1, 2 et 3 et celui des classes 4, 5 et 6. Chaque groupe aura une ou deux 'salles de silence' et une salle de consultation.

En plus du contact personnel de chaque professeur avec ses élèves, il nous semble qu'il serait bon d'avoir dans ce cadre professeurs réunis dans chaque groupe qui suivront le progrès et les aptitudes des élèves dans tous les domaines. Ils seront alors capables de conseiller correctement et aussi de présenter un problème, s'il y en a, en soulignant tous les aspects.

Ceci ne serait qu'un premier pas et un commencement, et tu approuves le projet. Il y a beaucoup de problèmes de mise en pratique et de travail que nous aurons à résoudre au fur et à mesure qu'ils se présenteront

Beaucoup de professeurs veulent que la division qui existe entre les classes de l'après-midi et ce qui est appelé 'Old System' n'est pas éliminée. Avec la réorganisation proposée, les différences entre les deux disparaîtront de beaucoup. Est-ce que tu penses que cette division doit continuer ? Faut-il attendre encore pour qu'elle disparaisse ?

*Les enfants
Le travail est important
période qui la suivra
immédiatement. L'efficacité de ce que
nous proposons ne sera visible qu'à la
longue - d'ici, il ne semble, que le
moyen est d'essayer, tout pour nous*

*avec l'entente de la faculté
sont lents à se réaliser, soit
pour 3 mois si, après ce temps,
les résistances sont clairement
visibles.*

*Avec de la sincérité et
de la simplicité nous
serons venus à bout du
problème*

Benedictus

The letter suggested reorganising the curriculum of the students of a certain age-group. It advised reducing the number of scheduled classes; teachers would give individual assistance to their students in the mornings and meet them as a class only in the afternoons. The letter ended:

Many teachers feel that the division between X's classes and what is called the "Old System" is not desirable. With the reorganisation we suggest, the differences between the two will be greatly diminished. Do you think that this division should continue? Must we go on waiting for it to disappear?

The Mother's answer:

It would be infinitely preferable that the division should disappear immediately. The effectiveness of what you suggest will become apparent only in practice. Therefore it seems to me that the best thing is to try, either for a full year if the results are slow to show themselves, or for three months if the results are clearly apparent by then. With sincerity and flexibility you should be able to solve the problem. 6 November 1967 (CWM, Volume 12, pp. 175-76)

On the 11th November, Mother gave an interview to three teachers, namely, Tanmaya, Arati and Kittu. In this interview the details of the new proposals were discussed. The Mother also gave the name *En Avant* to the new section.

However in 1968, the two sections did not unite. It happened only in 1969. Thus there were two sections at the Secondary level, one named *Vers la Perfection* and the other named *En Avant*. Both these sections were following the Free Progress system with minor differences.

In 1969, the two sections got united, and it was given the name of *En Avant Vers la Perfection* or EAVP.

During the interview of 11th November, the Mother made some important remarks on the importance of Sanskrit. We are reproducing some extracts from the interview. This is what the Mother said:

The ideal would be, in a few years, to have a rejuvenated Sanskrit as the representative language of India, that is, a Sanskrit spoken in such a way that — Sanskrit is behind all the languages of India and it should be that. This was Sri Aurobindo's idea, when we spoke about it. Because now English is the language of the whole country, but that is abnormal. It is very helpful for relations with the rest of the world, but just as each country has its own language, there should... And so here, as soon as one begins to want a

national language, everyone starts quarrelling. Each one wants it to be his own, and that is foolish. But no one could object to Sanskrit. It is a more ancient language than the others and it contains the sounds, the root-sounds of many words.

This is something I studied with Sri Aurobindo and it is obviously very interesting. Some of these roots can even be found in all the languages of the world — sounds, root-sounds which are found in all those languages. Well, this, this thing, this is what ought to be learnt and this is what the national language should be. Every child born in India should know it, just as every child born in France has to know French. He does not speak properly, he does not know it thoroughly, but he has to know French a little; and in all the countries of the world it is the same thing. He has to know the national language. And then, when he learns, he learns as many languages as he likes. At the moment, we are still embroiled in quarrels, and this is a very bad atmosphere in which to build anything. But I hope that a day will come when it will be possible.

So I would like to have a simple Sanskrit taught here, as simple as possible, but not "simplified" — simple by going back to its origin... all these sounds, the sounds that are the roots of the words which were formed afterwards. 11 November 1967 (CWM, Volume 12, pp 414-15)

We shall now take up the period from 1968 to November 1973 when the Mother left Her body.

As already mentioned *En Avant* was started in December 1967. We still had the two separate sections *En Avant* and *Vers La Perfection*, functioning separately. However in December 1968, the two sections got united and we had one section called *En Avant Vers La Perfection*. In the first two years, the responsibility of running these sections were given to Tanmay, Amita and Kittu. Despite the two sections being united, they were still sitting in two separate blocks in the Eastern and Western parts respectively. One revealing incident happened at that time. I asked Mother through Pavitra-da whether we could start the classes in our part of the section also at 7.45 am with Mother's music. She replied to Pavitra-da that She wanted to know why I wanted to start with Mother's music. Do the students want it? Besides it should not become a ritual that we should start with Mother's music wherever there is a Sri Aurobindo School. So I checked with the students and the majority wanted it. I then wrote a letter to Mother and She replied as follows:

7.12.68

Donnette,
 L'année prochaine, nous voulons commencer le
 nettoyage de nos salles de "En Avant" le travail sera
 fait chaque matin par quelques professeurs et élèves;
 nous commencerons à 6 h le matin et on doit finir avant
 6 h 45.
 Plusieurs de nos professeurs ont demandé si
 nous pouvons commencer nos classes chaque jour avec la
 musique de la Mère.
 Mère, nous te prions pour ta permission.
 Ton enfant
 Kireet - Kireetbhai

Here is the English translation:

Sweet Mother,

Next year we would like to start cleaning the rooms of En Avant.

This work will be done each morning by some teachers and students. We shall start at 6 in the morning and the work should be over by 6.45.

Many students and teachers have asked me if we could start the classes daily with Mother's music. We are praying for Thy permission.

Thy child Kittu

Mother's answer:

That is good. Blessings

Mother

In 1970 it was decided to divide EAVP into six sections and give the charge of each section to a group of teachers. That system is still continuing today.

It will not be out of place to relate one interesting development that took place in 1967. Many teachers felt that during the last few years there was a marked lack of interest among the students to become more conscious of why they are here; one of the reasons could be that the Mother had stopped taking classes since 1958; after that the students had very little direct contact with Her. The teachers were concerned as to how to remedy this state of affairs. Therefore after a great deal of discussion among the teachers and Kireet-bhai, a proposal was made that a study project named "The Spiritual History of India" should be taken up; it was decided that all the teachers and students of the Secondary classes would get involved in it. An outline was prepared and was sent to the Mother for Her approval. After reading it, this is what She commented:

"No! It won't do. It is not to be done that way. You should begin with a big

BANG! You were trying to show the continuity of history, with Sri Aurobindo as the outcome, the culmination. It is false entirely. Sri Aurobindo does not belong to history; he is outside and beyond history. Till the birth of Sri Aurobindo, religions and spiritualities were always centred on past figures, and they were showing as "the goal" the negation of life upon earth. So, you had a choice between two alternatives: either — a life in this world with its round of petty pleasures and pains, joys and sufferings, threatened by hell if you were not behaving properly, or — an escape into another world, heaven, *nirvana*, *moksha*.... Between these two there is nothing much to choose, they are equally bad.

Sri Aurobindo has told us that this was a fundamental mistake which accounts for the weakness and degradation of India. Buddhism, Jainism, Illusionism were sufficient to sap all energy out of the country. True, India is the only place in the world which is still aware that something else than Matter exists. The other countries have quite forgotten it: Europe, America and elsewhere.... That is why she still has a message to preserve and deliver to the world. But at present she is splashing and floundering in the muddle. Sri Aurobindo has shown that the truth does not lie in running away from earthly life but in remaining in it, to transform it, divinise it, so that the Divine can manifest HERE, in this PHYSICAL WORLD. You should say all this at the first sitting. You should be square and frank... like that! (With her hands Mother makes a big square sign on the table.) Then, when this is told, strongly, squarely, and there is no doubt about it — and then only — you can go on and amuse them with the history of religions and religious or spiritual leaders. Then — and then only — you will be able to show the seed of weakness and falsehood that they have harboured and proclaimed. Then — and then only — you will be able to discern, from time to time, from place to place, an "intuition" that something else is possible; in the Vedas, for instance (the injunction to descend deep into the cave of the Panis); in the Tantras also... a little light is burning." 31 March 1967 (CWM, Volume 12, *On Education*, pp 210-11)

After receiving Mother's comments there was a discussion among the teachers in Kireet-bhai's office; there were many differences of opinion as to what should be done. I wrote a letter to the Mother. The letter is reproduced below. I am giving first the English translation:

Sweet Mother

This Sunday Kireet read to us what you had said on the project "The Spiritual

History of India". Among the teachers there are differences of opinion as to what should be done now.

There are those who believe that we should abandon the project and that we should concentrate solely on Sri Aurobindo.

The others say that we should not abandon the project but we should insist first on Sri Aurobindo as you had wanted and then gradually introduce the other parts like the Vedas, Buddhism etc by stressing on what Sri Aurobindo had said on these topics.

We pray to you in this situation to tell us what you would like us to do.

Thy child

Kittu

The Mother picked out the second suggestion and wrote:

This is good.

Blessings

Mother

5.4.67

Bonamère,
à Bernanès, Kireet nous a lu
ce que Tu as dit sur le projet, "The Spiritual
History of India". Parmi les professeurs il y a
des différences d'opinion sur ce que l'on doit faire.
Il y en a une qui pense que l'on
doit abandonner le projet et se concentrer uniquement
sur Sri Aurobindo.
Les autres disent que l'on ne doit pas
abandonner le projet, mais que l'on doit insister
sur d'abord sur Sri Aurobindo, comme Tu l'as
voulu et puis graduellement introduire les autres
parties tel que les Vedas, Bouddhisme, etc en
appuyant sur ce que Sri Aurobindo a dit sur ces
sujets.
Nous Te prions, dans cette situation, de nous
dire définitivement ce que nous Te semble que nous
faisons.
Ton enfant
Kittu
Ça c'est bien
Benedictions

It was early in 1967 that I was approached by Sisir-da and Sanat-da to take charge of the History Board. I told them to refer the matter to Kireet-bhai who would refer it to the Mother. The Mother warmly approved of it and let me know this through Pavitra-da.

It was later in the year that the concept of Spiritual History of India was mooted. Regarding the project, The Spiritual History of India, I wrote another letter to the Mother; this letter was concerning the part that I was entrusted with two other teachers. I was to take up Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. One of the students in the group wrote a letter to Mother which prompted me to write to Mother a question.

Here is the letter to the Mother which I wrote and Her reply.

Kittu's letter to Mother:

We have started the project "The Spiritual History of India". Priti, Ratna and myself are doing the part related to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. There are 16 children who have joined the project and most of them are between the ages of 11 and 14. One of the students showed me a letter written by you to him, which says: "There is no harm in studying but their teachings have been surpassed; and to know the Truth it is safer to understand Sri Aurobindo's teaching."

After reading this, the question that comes in front of me is: Is it really useful to speak to such young children about Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and is there not a risk in doing this? Will they be able to understand all this in the proper perspective even after it is explained to them? Personally, I have my hesitations, but we would like to know what you have to say on this.

19.9.67

Bonamère,
Nous avons commencé le projet, "The Spiritual
History of India". Priti, Ratna et moi, nous faisons la
partie - Ramakrishna et Vivekananda. 16 élèves ont donc
jointe - nous nous pour le projet et le plus âgé ont 11 à 14 ans.
L'un d'eux, Sukanta m'a montré une lettre où Tu lui
dis d'écouter. L'écriture m'a montré une lettre où Tu lui
as écrit: There is no harm in studying, but their
teachings have been surpassed; and to know the
Truth it is safer to understand Sri Aurobindo's
teaching. Après avoir vu ceci, la question qui se
pose était moi-même: Est-il vraiment utile de
parler aux enfants de la façon de Ramakrishna et Vivekananda
et s'il y a un risque de leur parler de
toute cela? Pourquoi il n'est pas enseigné dans le
propre perspective même si on leur explique que?
Parallèlement j'ai écrit beaucoup, mais nous voudrions
savoir ce que Tu a à nous dire sur ce sujet.
Ton enfant
Kittu

Mother's Answer

All studies or at least the greater part of studies consists in studying the past with the hope that this would make one understand better the present. But if one wants to avoid the danger that the students would get stuck to the past and refuse to see the future, one must take great care to explain to them that all that has happened in the past had the aim of preparing all that is happening now and all that is happening now is preparing the road to the future which is really the most important thing for which we have to prepare ourselves. It is by cultivating intuition that one prepares to live for the future.

Toutes les études
en ont tout cas la plus grande
partie des études consiste
à apprendre le passé, dans
l'espoir que cela nous fera
mieux comprendre le présent.

2) Mais si l'on veut
éviter le danger que
les études restent accrochées
au passé et empêchant de
regarder l'avenir, il
faut prendre grand
soin de leur expliquer
que tout ce qui est

3) arrivé dans le passé
avait pour but de
préparer ce qui se passe
maintenant et que
tout ce qui se passe
maintenant ne fait
que préparer la route

3/ pour l'avenir on
est vraiment la
chose la plus importante
pour laquelle nous
devons nous préparer.
C'est en cultivant
4/ l'intuition que
l'on se prépare à
vivre pour l'avenir.

In 1972 I organised an exhibition on Sri Aurobindo. Mother gave me her fullest support and the exhibition which was held from August 12 to 20 was a tremendous success; in fact Mother told Satprem that Sri Aurobindo was present in the hall during the Exhibition. I requested Mother to grant me permission to meet her to express my gratitude. She fixed 31 August at 10 am to meet her with André. After some initial talk about the exhibition, I told Mother that after coming in contact with the manuscripts of Sri Aurobindo which we had exhibited, I had fallen in love with them and would like to help in preserving them in the new department of the Archives. Mother asked me if I knew anything about the preservation of manuscripts and as I was preparing to answer, André intervened and said that I was very much needed in the school. Mother paused for a while and then said: "Kittu, my dear child, Kireet is often outside travelling and Tanmaya has gone to France; I count on you to do something for the school". I replied: "Mother, I am already working in the administration of the school and also taking classes, what else do you want me to do?" Mother replied that André would tell me.

After a few days, André called me and told me that after a detailed discussion with Mother the following points were decided.

1. I was to take immediate charge of the *Avenir* section in the Flower Room. This section consisted of children from the age of 6 to 9. She wanted me to observe the classes and see whether even at that age there were some children who could be given some freedom. In fact, after Tanmay's return from France in November, he was requested to go and pick out children who were ready to use the freedom. More about that later.

2. I was also told that after a year or so, I should do the same thing for the next higher group of classes from the age of 10-12. Mother was very clear in her mind that we should start choosing children right from the early stages who were to be the future leaders.

I started my work in dead earnest and many teachers of that section wrote letters to Mother and sent them through me; Mother sent the replies generally written by André and these were communicated to the teachers by me. Mother was not writing much at that time. André also met many of the teachers to get a first hand report of their views which he then conveyed to Mother.

I was also assigned an unpleasant task by Mother. Mother expressed her wish that a few teachers needed to be weeded out of the school and She asked André to find out how it could be done. When André stated the problem to me, I told André quite clearly that it was beyond me to do it, but since Mother wanted it to be done, I can make a suggestion. I proposed that I could meet the section heads and ask them to give a written report on the teachers they felt should be removed with the reasons. I also told the section heads that these reports should be shown to the teachers concerned. After that they would give them to me and then I would show them to André; this was followed by a detailed discussion with the section heads. After he was fully satisfied, he would present them to Mother. Mother rapidly went through the reports and then took her decision. She decided that some teachers would be given a warning and a few others were asked to work in some other department. What is very clear is that Mother was taking a lot of interest in the School and trying to bring it on line to fulfil the ideals set before us.

In November André left for France and Tanmay returned from France; Kireet-bhai was also back in Pondicherry. Mother started meeting them for discussing matters relating to the School. This started in the end of November. In the first week of December I joined them in the meetings. The meetings were held with the Mother every alternate evening between 7 and 7.30. These meetings lasted till March 29th after which they were stopped as Mother started meeting very few persons. Tanmay recorded most of the talks with a small

tape recorder and transcribed many of them which he passed on to Kireet-bhai and myself. I still have them with me. In all there were about 60 meetings with the Mother in four months. Evidently many areas of great importance regarding the School were covered, besides some other topics connected with the Ashram and even her physical transformation. Another point that needs to be noted was that Mother clearly indicated to Tanmay that all the tapes should be given to Satprem who would then decide what to publish.

I shall not give all the details of the talks that took place, but I shall highlight some of the points that emerged which are very relevant to the Centre of Education.

(To be continued)

Baji Prabhou: Its Poetic Strength and Beauty

Shruti Bidwaikar

Baji Prabhou was “conceived and written in Bengal during the period of political activity” wrote Sri Aurobindo. (*Collected Poems*, CWSA 2: 704) It is “granite in its suggestion of strength and at the same time as brightly flexible and resonant as a Damascus blade. It is founded on the historical incident of the tremendous self-sacrifice of Baji Prabhou Deshpande, who to cover Shivaji’s retreat held the fort of Rangana for over two hours with a small company of men against twelve thousand Moguls” (*Sri Aurobindo the Poet*, p.19) writes K.D. Sethna in his introductory remarks in his analysis of the long poem. This granite strength in the poem is not all that easy to achieve by. It is only the deft hand of the seer-poet who could translate the intensity of the patriotic fervour into rhythm. For Sri Aurobindo himself observes the difficulty:

...patriotic poetry, war poetry or poetry of the occasion and the moment are so difficult to write greatly and, although it would seem that these things are among the most dynamic and should move most easily to powerful utterance, are oftenest poor in poetic substance and inferior in value. For life they may be dynamic, but they are not so readily dynamic for art and poetry, and precisely because the vital interest, the life attraction is so strong that it is difficult to draw back from the external to the spiritual delight and the spiritual significance. (CWSA 26:261)

This patriotic narrative has not only been able to capture the vitality of a valiant soldier but has transcended it and assimilated a deeper spiritual philosophy and ideal. It is this ideal, this “spirit” added to “life” that gives the desired intensity to the poem. In fact, there are two main streams running parallel – one the war, chivalry, gallantry of Baji Prabhou which is intensified with images and description of the harsh nature. Second is the ideal that Shivaji, the king has

set before his countrymen: the ideal to fight for the nation with the strength of God. In its spirit it is a war poetry, vividly describing each and every move of the Moghuls to defeat Shivaji. The Rajputs, Pathans etc, with their might launch successive attacks on the Maratha soldiers and the latter defend their land with equal strength. This picture is portrayed so dramatically that the reader gets arrested in its description. One is led to think of the craftsmanship and command of Sri Aurobindo not only in the imagination of the war scene but also of the usage of the war vocabulary. However, the ideal is what lingers on the minds after the reading of the poem. The practice of *Bhagvad Gita* which was taught to Shivaji by his spiritual mentors also seems to have influenced a few of his warriors; it is amply reflected in Baji’s attitude towards life and war. The poem also seizes us with the warrior’s faith in Bhavani and the conviction that the Divine Mother will make them Her instruments in the war. Therefore *Baji Prabhou* is not only the story of Baji alone. It speaks of Shivaji, his ideal, Baji, his patriotism and Sri Aurobindo who like his characters in the poem, has himself lived them.

The description of the weather in the opening lines of the poem would at once affect the readers for its horrendous and uninhabitable condition.

A noon of Deccan with its tyrant glare
Oppressed the earth; the hills stood deep in haze,
And sweltering athirst the fields glared up
Longing for water in the courses parched
Of streams long dead. Nature and man alike,
Imprisoned by a bronze and brilliant sky,
Sought an escape from that wide trance of heat.

It is in this torturous state that the war would take place. The time when this battle at the Ghodkind pass was fought is said to be July 1660. During this period of the year the Sahyadri Mountains are barren. They radiate heat as they are rocky and dry. Raigad (where the Shivaji’s fort is located) being on the leeward side receives rains much later than the seaward side. Therefore, even in July the mountain range is still dry and hot. Sri Aurobindo had lived and travelled through Maharashtra many a time. He was aware of the weather conditions of this area and would have experienced the heat of those barren mountains many times. It is with his experience that he describes the parched land, the “brilliant sun” and its “tyrant glare”.

Experientially, it is a horrifying but poetically it befits the demand of the poem. In one of his letters, addressing the use of the horrendous and ugly as the

material of poem Sri Aurobindo wrote, “a thing that is ugly becomes beautiful by its fitness for expressing the significance, the *guna*, the *rasa* which it was meant to embody” (CWSA 27: 702). This poem too successfully uses the horrors of war and weather to create the *bhayanaka* (horror) *rasa*. In fact there are a few *rasas* that mark the poem – *bhayanak*, *raudra* (chivalrous), *adbhuta* (surprise/ wonder), *karuna* (compassion) and *shanta* (peace). The *bhayanak* and *adbhuta* are almost interwoven, whereas *veer* and *raudra* strike us wherever Baji comes into the scene. *Karuna* and *shanta rasas* are evoked when Shivaji’s unsaid feelings for his Motherland and Baji Prabhou call for a silent tribute.

Bhayanaka and Adbhuta

Usually *adbhuta* by its very use in poetry is likely to arouse a pleasant surprise but if we go just by larger connotation of the word, we realise that all that is unknown, unexpected and makes our brows rise or hearts sink is indeed *adbhuta*, is surprising from the poetic viewpoint. In this poem a horrifying description is always coupled with a surprising imagery. Therefore, we may cite examples which present both these *rasas* quite effectively and they are almost always mutually inclusive. Phrases like “noon of Deccan”, “tyrant glare”, “longing for water”, “Imprisoned by a bronze and brilliant sky” “slaying heat” immediately bring to us the horrors of the weather that we have already discussed above. Here “brilliant” may have been used to give the effect of both the torturous and the marvellous. The term “bronze” at once reminds of the “copper sky” described by Coleridge in “*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*” which describes the terrifying conditions of the still sea. Both the terms “brilliant” and “bronze” heighten the impact of the heat which makes it unbearable and unimaginable.

At last they reached a tiger-throated gorge
Upon the way to Raigurh. Narrowing there
The hills draw close, and their forbidding cliffs
Threaten the prone incline. The Bhonsle paused,
His fiery glance travelled in one swift gyre
Hill, gorge and valley and with speed returned
Mightily like an eagle on the wing
To a dark youth beside him, Malsure
The younger, with his bright and burning eyes,
Who wordless rode quivering, as on the leash;
His fierce heart hungered for the rear, where Death

Was singing mid the laughter of the swords.

These lines again call our attention to the horror of the terrain and make us wonder at the faculties of war of Shivaji and Baji. Shivaji himself explains the horror of this “tiger-throated gorge”

...Thou seest this gorge
Narrow and fell and gleaming like the throat
Of some huge tiger, with its rocky fangs
Agrin for food: and though the lower slope
Descends too gently, yet with roots and stones
It is hampered, and the higher prone descent
Impregably forbids assault; too steep
The sides for any to ascend and shoot
From vantage....

The horrors of a jungle are synonymous with the roar of the tiger. A tiger invokes mortal fear and at the same time an awe for this ferocious but beautiful animal. The description of the gorge as being “tiger-throated” speaks much more than just the geographical make-up of the place. The poet has used it purposely to arouse fear and wonder.

To describe the immensity of destructive force of Baji’s wrath in the war, Sri Aurobindo uses the image of the destructive waves.

Ever foremost where men fought,
Was Baji Prabhou seen, like a wild wave
Of onset or a cliff against the surge.

Then

Towards him singling out the lofty crest,
The princely form: and, as the waves divide
Before a driving keel, the battle so
Before him parted, till he neared, he slew.

The tidal waves are again those wonderful phenomena of nature which invoke beauty and terror at once. It is always beautiful to see a rising wave but its rise is directly proportional to its destructive capacity. It almost appears like the beauty that destroys. The sight to watch a warrior like Baji Prabhou fight

would be instantly awe-inspiring but it is as horrifying as a wave as he was like a “wild-wave” engulfing his enemies. Interestingly, Sri Aurobindo has used waves, sea, river and clouds in different forms to create an atmosphere and magnify the intensity of war. These images quite prominently recur throughout the poem. For instance, “still the sea/ Of men bore onward” and “till like a bank/ Of some wild river the assault collapsed”, and yet again the nature of Baji’s slaying “as a knife cuts instantly its way/Through water”, with such an ease the men were put to death.

Active they thronged
Humming like bees and stung strong lives to death
Making a holiday of carnage.

Here is another image; the attack of the humming bees which one cannot escape. Such was the attack by the Maratha Battalion. They swarmed like the bees whose combs are struck by a stone and their house endangered. Another phrase “holiday of carnage” evokes horror to the marrow. It is intriguing and poetically pleasing to read this phrase, for it is paradoxical. Paradox however, evokes the widest imagination possible and that is the reason *Isha Upanishad* is so very intriguing, interesting and yet gripping. For it is through paradoxes that the idea is suggested. The idea of holiday is suggestive of something more relaxing, soothing and a day when one follows one’s hobbies at which one is interested; but a hobby of slaughter! It also suggests the deftness of the warriors. Like the bees skilled at protecting their home and following one’s hobbies on a holiday, the soldiers are trained in protecting their land. Therefore, this slaughter has the deftness as well the interest of the warriors to save their motherland.

It is not only through the help of nature that Sri Aurobindo evokes horror and wonder but also by the live description of death in the war. Here is the example,

They came, they died; still on the previous dead
New dead fell thickening. Yet by paces slow
The lines advanced with labour infinite
And merciless expense of valiant men.
For even as the slopes were filled and held,
Still the velocity and lethal range
Increased of the Mahratta bullets; dead
Rather than living held the conquered slope,—
The living who, half-broken, paused.

And

...there for a while
A slaughter grim went on and all the verge
Was heaped and walled and thickly fortified
With splendid bodies.
Similarly, when Baji is wounded,
By his side fell fast
Mahratta and Mogul and on his limbs
The swords drank blood, a single redness grew
His body, yet he fought. Then at his side
Ghastly with wounds and in his fiery eyes
Death...

These lines speak for themselves, the chivalry of Baji and his battalion and the death scenes of the war. A close reading of the poem gives instances of many more lines of such horrific description but for the paucity of space it is not possible to cite them all here.

Sri Aurobindo’s poetry itself is a source of amazement and joy. It was indeed a pleasant discovery to read in the poem how Sri Aurobindo gives us the sense of time. The time from when Shivaji realises the necessity of the war in the gorge because of the Moghul advances and the time at which the war starts and ends are all wonderfully suggested just by the position of sun.

Dawn,

At morning when the sun
Was yet below the verge, the Bhonsle sprang
At a high mountain fortress...

Afternoon,

...then where the sun in fire
Descending stooped

Dusk,

And from time to time the gaze
Of Baji sought the ever-sinking sun.

Evening,

But when the sun dipped very low, a stir
Was felt far off

Night,

Bright in the glory of the sinking sun
A jewelled aigrette blazed.

It is the great craftsmanship of the poet who suggests the time by the position of the sun and not by the setting darkness. Similarly, the rapidity and speed of lines and the placement of words which K.D. Sethna has discussed in detail arouse the wonder of the poet that Sri Aurobindo is.

Shanta and Karuna

There are many instances in the poem that speak of the expectant silence before the lethal storms rage in. It surely creates peace, but peace which is rather disturbing than soothing. However, here are a few examples in which the silence is expansive and deepening. It does not make one restless but speaks volumes about Shivaji's character. In fact this character is also reflected by the Nature.

And the Chief

With a high calmness in his shining look,
"We part, O friend, but meet again we must,
When from our tasks released we both shall run
Like children to our Mother's clasp."

.....
Baji and his Mahrattas sole remained
Watched by the mountains in the silent gorge.

In these lines the silent strength of Shivaji is as if transferred to the Mountains and they remain the silent witness of the sacrifice and strength of Baji and his men. In the end, when Baji lay dead, Shivaji is once again quiet, his heart full of gratitude and compassion and pride for his great friend and child of the motherland. Baji whose corpse speaks the story of his bravery and the dead bodies in the gorge narrate his efforts to save his motherland.

But Shivaji beside the dead beheld
A dim and mighty cloud that held a sword
And in its other hand, where once the head
Depended bleeding, raised the turban bright
From Baji's brows, still glittering with its gems,
And placed it on the chief's. But as it rose
Blood-stained with the heroic sacrifice,
Round the aigrette he saw a golden crown.

This sight surely evokes compassion. It makes one feel sorry to see all the menace there. But at the same time as is given in the lines the peace of having saved the motherland is effectively evoked in them. Also, when Tanaji Malsure sees the condition of his warriors he too is full of compassion and is filled with aspiration that he too like Baji lay his life protecting the motherland. Baji's death therefore creates peace, compassion and a sense of chivalry for the witnesses. This takes us to the next *rasa* – the *raudra rasa*.

Veer and Raudra

The very image of Baji Prabhou evokes *veer rasa* which indicates bravery, the warrior spirit the kshatriya-hood of the fighter. In this poem it is not only the chivalry of Baji that gives rise to this *rasa* but the mood of chivalry is also invoked by the presence of the goddess who represents *raudra rasa* – Bhavani (Durga), the slayer of evil. Again and again in the poem, Baji refers to the goddess or the poet describes Baji being overpowered by the force of Bhavani with which he fights the battle. *Raudra rasa* is also created when the strength of Baji is compared with an ever powerful object of Nature. In fact, read one after the other, they create all the four *veer, raudra, bhayanaka* and *adbhuta rasas* for the reader.

So fought they for a while; then suddenly
Upon the Prabhou all the Goddess came.
Loud like a lion hungry on the hills
He shouted, and his stature seemed to increase
Striding upon the foe.

Next,

Stood visible, Titanic, scarlet-clad,
Dark as a thunder-cloud, with streaming hair
Obscuring heaven, and in her sovran grasp

The sword, the flower, the boon, the bleeding head, —
Bhavani.

And then,

Groaning, once more the grim Mahratta turned
And like a bull with lowered horns that runs,
Charged the exultant foe behind.

In these lines hungry lion, “thunder-cloud” and in the end “bull with lowered horns” are successively horrifying. Each image succeeds the other in its intensity of causing damage and its penetrating and painful impact. If we try to alter the one with the other the effect will not be as horrifying. For when read one after the other they raise the tempo of the poem and reach its peak before the climax when Baji finally falls dead.

The lines quoted above appear almost towards the end of the poem. They surely portray Baji with a great physical power charged with Bhavani’s strength. But the strength of his mind and soul has already been presented in the poem in the beginning.

“Tanaji Malsure, not in this living net
Of flesh and nerve, nor in the flickering mind
Is a man’s manhood seated. God within
Rules us, who in the Brahmin and the dog
Can, if He will, show equal godhead. Not
By men is mightiness achieved; Baji
Or Malsure is but a name, a robe,
And covers One alone. We but employ
Bhavani’s strength, who in an arm of flesh
Is mighty as in the thunder and the storm.
I ask for fifty swords.”

Yet again, when they had to face the enemy right in their face Baji encourages his men thus,

Then Baji first broke silence, “Lo, the surge!
That was but spray of death we first repelled.
Chosen of Shivaji, Bhavani’s swords,
For you the gods prepare. We die indeed,
But let us die with the high-voiced assent

Of Heaven to our country’s claim enforced
To freedom.”

This was then the strength of his soul that Sri Aurobindo has portrayed so wonderfully. Even through his writings in *Bande Mataram* Sri Aurobindo hailed his people to implore the shakti of Bhavani and for the nation. It is exactly what Baji does.

Ideologically, Baji Prabhou presents the spiritual vision of Shivaji and Sri Aurobindo. Both have been the great patriots of the country and have fought for delivering their Motherland from foreign clutches. While one fought with the sword, the other with his pen and in their case both the sword and pen proved to be powerful because they were infused with the spiritual strength of their masters. According to Swami Vivekananda, “Shivaji was the greatest Hindu king that India had produced within the last thousand years; one who was the very incarnation of lord Siva, about whom prophecies were given out long before he was born; and his advent was eagerly expected by all the great souls and saints of Maharashtra as the deliverer of the Hindus from the hands of the *Mlecchas*, and as one who succeeded in the reestablishment of Dharma which had been trampled underfoot by the depredations of the devastating hordes of the Moghals” (Internet). It is interesting to relate to this comment of Swamiji for he was himself an incarnation of lord Shiva (God Lives with Them). Sri Aurobindo has spoken eloquently about both Shivaji and Swami Vivekananda. About Shivaji he says, “Shivaji with his vivid and interesting life and character,... not only founded a kingdom but organised a nation” (CWSA 20: p.251). Swami Vivekananda too worked towards awakening the country out of *tamas*, about which Sri Aurobindo remarks,

Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men, but the definite work he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India and we say, “Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children.” So it is with all. Not only are the men greater than their definite works, but their influence is so wide and formless that it has little relation to any formal work that they have left behind them. (CWSA 1: p.662)

These were the lion-hearted men who went forth to deliver India. Sri

Aurobindo too came forward to fight for the country not only because of his patriotism but also because he had in him assimilated, evoked and inculcated the spiritual strength like his two predecessors. It was only because of the spiritual strength that Shivaji, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo contributed much towards Indian freedom struggle. Rather, it was their spiritual strength that gave the push to the freedom movement which was then carried forward by other people. They breathed great force into it.

With reference to *Baji Prabhou* it would be interesting to see the similarity of spiritual ideology of Shivaji and Sri Aurobindo. This poem, through the depiction of Baji Prabhou Deshpande, sets forth the capability and impact of Shivaji on his pupil and connects it to the practice of yoga as envisaged in the *Bhagvad Gita* which was practised by both Shivaji and Sri Aurobindo. Shivaji perhaps had created an impact of his spiritual ideology on some of his pupil of which Baji Prabhou was one. It may be noted that historical records tell us that Baji Prabhou was at loggerheads with Shivaji. He was also 15-20 years elder to him. But when Baji got defeated in a battle and was generously treated by Shivaji, Baji's heart melted down and he understood the great vision of Shivaji who was fighting for the whole nation and not for the small provinces. He then remained a faithful chieftain in the service of Shivaji. It was the vision of Shivaji which makes him the great king and it is because of this quality that he was able to win the hearts of some of his enemies. Therefore, in the poem Baji Prabhou was not only a mouth-piece of Shivaji but also perhaps one who followed the ideal of his visionary king and practised detachment as suggested in the *Gita*.

It is significant that Shivaji, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo all implored the shakti of Bhavani to shake the country out of *tamas*. In the poem we read "We but employ/ Bhavani's strength, who in an arm of flesh..." We hear an echo of this in the message that Sri Aurobindo gave in "*Bhavani Mandir*". Like Baji who calls upon the Bhavani within to take over and fight, Sri Aurobindo too asks all countrymen to realise the Bhavani within.

Come then, hearken to the call of the Mother. She is already in our hearts waiting to manifest Herself, waiting to be worshipped, — inactive because the God in us is concealed by *tamas*, troubled by Her inactivity, sorrowful because Her children will not call on Her to help them. (CWSA 6:p.89)

There is a striking similarity between Shivaji and Sri Aurobindo and that is the practice of *Gita's* yoga. N.S. Takhakav in his book *Life of Shivaji Maharaja* records many evidences when Shivaji was guided by two of his mentors Sant

Tukaram and Swami Ramdas to practise *Gita's* yoga. Most essential teaching they gave him was to act without attachment, the act of inner renunciation. It is said that Shivaji had offered his entire kingdom to Swami Ramdas and was commanded by the latter to rule over it as its custodian without any attachment for fruit of his actions. Shivaji Maharaj seems to have practised it. That is why Sri Aurobindo says,

Not until Shivaji was ready to offer his head at the feet of the Mother, did Bhavani in visible form stay his hand and give him the command to free his people. Those who have freed nations, have first passed through the agony of utter renunciation before their efforts were crowned with success, and those who aspire to free India, will first have to pay the price which the Mother demands. (CWSA 7: p.1032)

Sri Aurobindo's speech given at Uttarpara reveals to us how although he was working for the freedom struggle he was not detached from the act. It was only when he was taken to prison in 1908 that he got the message from Sri Krishna and he practised the inner renunciation of the *Gita*. He says,

Then He placed the *Gita* in my hands. His strength entered into me and I was able to do the sadhan of the *Gita*. I was not only to understand intellectually but to realise what Sri Krishna demanded of Arjuna and what He demands of those who aspire to do His work, to be free from repulsion and desire, to do work for Him without the demand for fruit, to renounce self-will and become a passive and faithful instrument in His hands, to have an equal heart for high and low, friend and opponent, success and failure, yet not to do His work negligently. (CWSA 8:pp.5-6)

This is the philosophy of inner renunciation pronounced by Baji Prabhou almost in the beginning of the poem.

"Me thou shalt not burn.
For this five feet or more of bone and flesh,
Whether pure flame or jackals of the hills
Be fattened with its rags, may well concern
Others, not Baji Prabhou."

These words resonate with the words of *Bhagvad Gita* chapter two:

It is uncleavable, it is incombustible, it can neither be drenched nor dried. Eternally stable, immobile, all-pervading, it is forever and forever. (II: 24)

Baji Prabhou was dauntless, fearless, enduring and courageous only because he was not attached to the phenomenal world. He realised Bhavani who was the “all-pervading” divine in him. He did not bother about the last rites of the body about which most of the ordinary men are concerned. Neither Baji nor Shivaji was attached to each other just emotionally. Their relation was strong and had a meaning only as the children of their Mother. Therefore Shivaji tells Baji,

“We part, O friend, but meet again we must,
When from our tasks released we both shall run
Like children to our Mother’s clasp.”

He does not say we shall embrace each other, but would run to their Mother’s clasp. This is a solidarity, conviction and love they had for their Motherland. No wonder it was with the same conviction that Sri Aurobindo set out to deliver his Motherland from the “demon” (British).

This poem truly is a marvellous example of patriotism that is based on spirituality and practice of Gita: to work for the nation without any demands from it; to lay one’s life without any grudge and to realise that it is the Mother who will act and give the strength to act, that we are mere instruments in Her hands. Although written before independence, *Baji Prabhou* still has the power to move the readers to remind us of our duties toward our nation and the Lord. It certainly reminds us of our *rashtra dharma* and *sanatana dharma*.

Works Cited:

- Sri Aurobindo, *Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), Vol. 2 Collected Poems. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2009
- CWSA, Vol.26 *The Future Poetry*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1997.
- CWSA, Vol. 27 *Letters on Poetry And Art*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2004.
- CWSA, Vol. 6 *Bande Mataram*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2002.
- CWSA, Vol. 7 *Bande Mataram*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2002.
- CWSA, Vol. 8 *Karmayogin*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1997.
- CWSA, Vol. 20 *The Renaissance in India*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1997.

- Anil Baran Roy, Ed. *The Message of the Gita*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972.
- Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them*. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1997.
- K.D. Sethna, *Sri Aurobindo the Poet*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 1970.

(Reproduced with acknowledgement and thanks from the journal, *New Race*, vol.1, Issue 2, August 2015)

Notes On Authors

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

James Anderson, of Anglo-Irish parentage, was raised in England. When travelling in Australia after his studies, he experienced life-threatening illness. Having recovered, much of his working life was then spent as a Lloyd's broker at JLT where he served as a director. After 16 years, he resigned and took a ship to India, eventually arriving at Pondicherry and into the arms of the Mother. By and large, he has stayed there ever since. He now teaches adults at the Ashram school, is a core member of SAIHR (Sri Aurobindo international Institute for Integral Health and Research) and is Coordinating Editor at NAMA, the Journal of Integral Health.

Kalidas Bhattacharya (1911-1984), son of the illustrious philosopher, Prof. KC Bhattacharya, was born on 17 August, 1911 at Barisal of the present day Bangladesh. He was educated at Serampore and Kolkata and was the recipient of Premchand Raichand scholarship. He began his career as a lecturer at Vidyasagar College, Kolkata. During the long span of nearly 50 years of his career, he held several positions of eminence – as Professor of Indian Philosophy at Sanskrit College, Kolkata, Professor heading the Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy at Viswabharati during 1957-71. Later during 1967-71, he also became the Vice-Chancellor of the Viswabharati University. At the time of his death, he was occupying the National Fellowship of the newly established Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR). He was the first to be honoured with the award of this fellowship. He also delivered special lectures at various universities all over India. He had visited universities of Hawai and Vienna and had been invited by the Oxford University to deliver the Radhakrishnan Memorial Lectures in 1984-85, which he unfortunately could not keep as he passed away in 1984.