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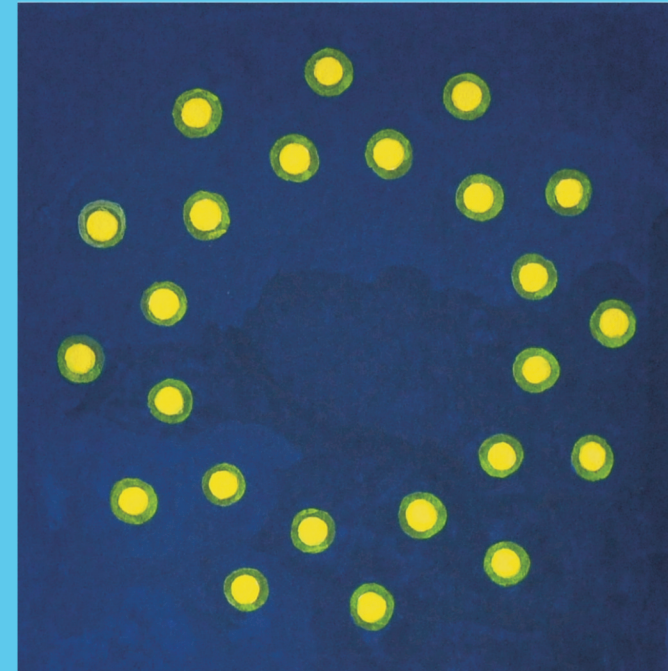
Śraddhā



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(Vol. 8 No.1)



15 August 2016

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One man's perfection still can save the world.
-Savitri, BkVII, CantoV, p.531

Śraddhā

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The Mother and Sri Aurobindo*

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Editorial

Today we celebrate the birth anniversary of one who sought the supreme Truth, the Supramental that would lay ‘the foundation of a new consciousness on earth – a consciousness with infinite possibilities of manifestation’. ‘The Supramental’, he says ‘by its very definition is the Truth-Consciousness’, the Divine’s own Truth ‘in possession of itself and fulfilling itself by its own power’. He further said that this truth of experience, by itself, was of no value unless it could be **lived** and his sole mission in life was to **live** this Truth, not for any personal gain, not even for the sake of humanity but for the entire earth-consciousness, to bring it down from the empyrean and let the transforming power and light of the veilless sun of the supreme Truth-Consciousness be active on this earth. For this, he had first to make it descend into his body, and when it had been firmly rooted in his own body consciousness, that is in the material, the earth consciousness, he suddenly made a u-turn and in an act of utmost self-sacrifice voluntarily withdrew from the body and chose to remain behind the veil exerting his force and will with greater potency to make matter ready to receive the light and power of the supramental Truth-Consciousness.

His is the knowledge and wisdom and consciousness that shall lead us through the dark night of ignorance and falsehood and usher in a realm of Truth and the light of an unsetting sun, his the infallible Might that shall overcome all obstacles and hurdles in the path and fix firmly in our lives the wideness, the freedom, the peace that we all seek after but never find, inundate us with seas of bliss and ananda that shall forever change the face of this earth.

He is the vast Impersonal Person who shall look upon us wide-eyed and compassionate like a mother who draws to her breast her child in a warm and loving embrace. It is he who in his infinite love has taken the plunge into this world of sorrow and pain and suffering, of his own free will has scattered his Infinite Being into the million-bodied finite selves and put on himself the mantle

of darkness, falsehood and despair so that he can turn upon it the diamond light of the everlasting Truth-Consciousness. It is his presence and sovereign Majesty that shall hold this world together and signal the death of ignorance, the root cause of all evil, sorrow and pain and suffering, of hatred, jealousy and pettiness, of discord and despair. The rule of inconscience will end forever and in its place will reign endless joy and light, utter harmony, beauty, and oceanic peace. Earthly progress would henceforth be from light to greater light and eternal progression would be in the manifestation.

Readers will be pleased to know and we hope will welcome the two new series of articles that we have started from this issue, one by Debashish Banerji on *Indian Wisdom Literature in the light of Sri Aurobindo* and the other by Supriyo Bhattacharya on *The Foundations of Indian Culture*. We appreciate the cooperation extended by the Principal, Bhatler College, Dantan, Paschim Medinipur, for granting permission to reproduce the paper by Rudrashis Datta in our publication. Our grateful thanks as always to our friend Anurag Banerjee, Founder-Chairman of Overman Foundation, for permitting us to reprint the articles by CC Dutt and K M Munshi from its archives. Last but not the least our gratitude and thanks to Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for allowing us to reproduce the extract by Sri Aurobindo from his work *The Renaissance in India*, the photograph of Sri Aurobindo taken from the Ashram digital catalogue of photos with a line from *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.

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श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं

Śraddhāvāṁl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

The Renaissance in India

Sri Aurobindo

India can best develop herself and serve humanity by being herself and following the law of her own nature. This does not mean, as some narrowly and blindly suppose, the rejection of everything new that comes to us in the stream of Time or happens to have been first developed or powerfully expressed by the West. Such an attitude would be intellectually absurd, physically impossible, and above all unspiritual; true spirituality rejects no new light, no added means or materials of our human self-development. It means simply to keep our centre, our essential way of being, our inborn nature and assimilate to it all we receive, and evolve out of it all we do and create. Religion has been a central preoccupation of the Indian mind; some have told us that too much religion ruined India, precisely because we made the whole of life religion or religion the whole of life, we have failed in life and gone under..... If the majority of Indians had indeed made the whole of their lives religion in the true sense of the word, we should not be where we are now; it was because their public life became most irreligious, egoistic, self-seeking, materialistic that they fell. It is possible, that on one side we deviated too much into an excessive religiosity, that is to say, an excessive externalism of ceremony, rule, routine, mechanical worship, on the other into a too world-shunning asceticism which drew away the best minds who were thus lost to society instead of standing like the ancient Rishis as its spiritual support and its illuminating life-givers. But the root of the matter was the dwindling of the spiritual impulse in its generality and broadness, the decline of intellectual activity and freedom, the waning of great ideals, the loss of the gust of life.

Perhaps there was too much of religion in one sense; the word is English, smacks too much of things external such as creeds, rites, an external piety; there is no one Indian equivalent. But if we give rather to religion the sense of

the following of the spiritual impulse in its fullness and define spirituality as the attempt to know and live in the highest self, the divine, the all-embracing unity and to raise life in all its parts to the divinest possible values, then it is evident that there was not too much of religion, but rather too little of it — and in what there was, a too one-sided and therefore an insufficiently ample tendency. The right remedy is, not to belittle still farther the agelong ideal of India, but to return to its old amplitude and give it a still wider scope, to make in very truth all the life of the nation a religion in this high spiritual sense. This is the direction in which the philosophy, poetry, art of the West is, still more or less obscurely, but with an increasing light, beginning to turn, and even some faint glints of the truth are beginning now to fall across political and sociological ideals. India has the key to the knowledge and conscious application of the ideal; what was dark to her before in its application, she can now, with a new light, illumine; what was wrong and wry in her old methods she can now rectify; the fences which she created to protect the outer growth of the spiritual ideal and which afterwards became barriers to its expansion and farther application, she can now break down and give her spirit a freer field and an ampler flight: she can, if she will, give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solutions is there in her ancient knowledge. Whether she will rise or not to the height of her opportunity in the renaissance which is coming upon her, is the question of her destiny.

(This is a slightly edited version of an extract reproduced from CWSA: *The Renaissance in India*, vol.20, pp.38-40 with due acknowledgement and thanks to Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry)

Prusna Upanishad - 3

Chapter 2 (The Second Question)

The Greatest Godhead

Alok Pandey

We have been told now that all birth comes into being through the union of the dual principles, Masculine and Feminine. In their deepest essence these are One but in the manifestation and for the sake of Creation they ‘become’ two. Together they play and create in countless worlds; together they play in numberless fields created for their delight. Though in our Ignorance they appear as opposites, in truth they are complementary states. In their union lies the delight of all things born. When nature is in perfect harmony with the Soul, when prakriti follows with perfect mastery and ease the steps of the Purusha, then there is harmony and delight. But when the two are not in sync then there is internal friction and unease and suffering of various kinds. Prakriti prepares and holds the vessel into which the Purusha enters with his light. Prakriti becomes the womb and the Purusha the seed, the Real Idea or the Divine conception behind creation. At first it is a womb of darkness through which the divine seed grows. Even here, in the dark state it is eventually nourished by the Divine Mother but he knows Her not. He is aware only of the darkness with which he is identified. But a time comes when the soul is born into the Light. It begins to vaguely feel and recognise the Divine Mother even as it discovers itself as the seed and prototype of the Ishwara. This is the spiritual birth of a human being where the same process of physical birth is repeated figuratively.

But then the next logical question is as to who maintains the creature who has thus come to birth. In other words what is the secret of life? What is that central key, the power that moves us? Of course there are many players and

actors in creation but who is the greatest of them all? Such is the question intelligently put to his Master by the able disciple Bhargava:

And afterwards

The Chapter of the Second Question.

1. Then the Bhargava, the Vidarbhan, asked him: “Lord, how many Gods maintain this creature, and how many illumine it, and which of these again is the mightiest?”

2. To him answered the Rishi Pippalada: “These are the Gods, even Ether and Wind and Fire and Water and Earth and Speech and Mind and Sight and Hearing. These nine illumine the creature; therefore they vaunted themselves, — we, even we support this harp of God and we are the preservers.

The Master starts naming rather than describing the gods that activate various functioning in the creature. Surely the disciples are not ordinary men and know the generally shared knowledge of the function of the gods. These gods build the creation and hold it in a state of balance and harmony. They are active within the heart of creation veiled by their works. They are also hidden in man and motivate the various functioning of our physical organs and psychological states. Psychologically they counter the action of the titans who fill us with lust and greed and pomp and ambition or else throw us into states of despair, revolt and anger.

The five elements, *panchmahabhutas*, are the gods who weave the warp and woof of all things born. Once again the imagery works at several levels. The gods of the Vedas are not merely material forces as the modern mind may hastily assume given the names. Yet they are present even behind corresponding material phenomenon. They are not even merely psychological forces though they preside over and motivate various psychological functions and corresponding activities of the mind. They are at once occult and spiritual realities born of the One and they function universally in all creation so that it remains in a certain state of balance and order. They are in fact aspects of the One Divine. Thus we see that the One becomes the Two and the two become the many (gods). It is this that gives birth to multiplicity. For each god creates its own world while at the same time it contributes to the creation, preservation and destruction of all things in creation. They are part of the play of nature that shapes the human vessel and the body so to say. We see here the five elements

as well as the four corresponding senses. However what is described here are only two main senses, the hearing and sight since it is these two that predominate in giving rise to any form. All perception of forms is in fact woven by the sense of sight and hearing. The mind integrates these different elements and the corresponding senses to give rise to a coherent figure and not a formless extension of etheric space. The speech or the word fixes this form with a specific sense. If these were not, then creation would drift into the formless state. At the end the seer adds that we too have a role to play in supporting this body and form which is beautifully compared to a harp of God. 'We' here refers to something fundamental, essential, that which we call as I and Myself. In ignorance this would be the ego-self but when knowledge dawns we discover that the ego-self is but a shadow of the real self, the inmost soul, the secret psychic entity within us.

But then the question arises as to who among the gods is the most important of all. The relevance of this question is that which element if mastered can help us in mastery of the others since it is so difficult to master all of them in one life. And yet without a mastery of these elements that constitute creation, is the very stuff of creation, we shall remain helpless slaves at the mercy of nature, hence this question.

3. "Then answered Breath, their mightiest: 'Yield not unto delusion; I dividing myself into this fivefold support this harp of God, I am its preserver.' But they believed him not.

4. "Therefore offended he rose up, he was issuing out from the body. But when the Breath goes out, then go all the others with him, and when the Breath abides all the others abide; therefore as bees with the king bee: when he goes out all go out with him, and when he abides all abide, even so was it with Speech and Mind and Sight and Hearing; then were they well-pleased and hymned the Breath to adore him.

The great Seer answered this through a parable wherein all the gods once want to prove who is the greatest among them. Each describes his work as the most important and feels he is the greatest among all. Listening to them, the Breath, the god of Wind, the vital energy, demonstrates his power by simply showing that if he were to leave, a man dies and none of the gods can then function anymore. Neither sight nor hearing nor mind and speech can function

if the breath of life leaves a man. Hence it is the Breath, the life giving Energy, the Power, Shakti that is most important of them all for without the Breath none other can function. It is breath that gives energy to lower as well as higher faculties; so also it is breath that balances the various types of functioning in man. This is the fivefold movement of breath.

The great Upanishad hints at the well-known occult truth of the fivefold movement of prana on which the ancient yogas and the tantra insist so much. The fivefold movement includes two upward movements, two downward movement and one that balances these, the mid-movement.

Spiritually it indicates that the same Energy feeds the motions of thought and speech in its upward flight as also it feeds passions, emotions and the impulsions of the body. There is however an equalising movement of the Breath, *samana*, that keeps these two movements into balance and harmony for otherwise it will lead to disease and disorder. The same holds true of the Universal planes wherein the Breath or the Energy supports the higher worlds of the mind and the Spirit as well as the lower worlds of life and matter. If this were to withdraw then these order of the worlds will collapse due to want of Energy, the force of impulsion and power. All creatures follow the path of the Breath. Wherever the Breath wanders there the rest of the gods follow. She is the prime mover of all things, therefore Breath is the greatest of all the gods.

We see here the great importance the ancient seers ascribed to the life-force and the need of mastering and harnessing it, since without the mastery of the breath and the life-force nothing worthwhile can ever be achieved.

5. "Lo this is he that is Fire and the Sun that burns, Rain and Indra and Earth and Air, Matter and Deity, Form and Formless, and Immortality.

Clearly, the Breath being spoken of here is not simply the physical act of breathing or the physical air (that is a symbol of the prana or the vehicle and means of prana in some of the creatures, though not necessarily in all). It is the 'Energy', the 'Conscious Force' that moves all things, from the infinitesimal quasar to the gigantic galaxies. It is this Source Energy that burns in the Fire and the Sun without which these celestial beings and deities will be cold and lifeless and soon die out.

In this grand vision of things everything comes alive, not just the bird and beast and plant and man but also the sun and the moon and the stars, the earth

and the rivers and the mountains. Everything is set in motion by this life-giving Energy. It animates all things and the distinction that we draw between living and non-living, inanimate and animate is merely a question of degree and not an absolute truth. Formless in its essence this Energy assumes different forms and when the form is destroyed it returns to its immortal essence.

6. “As the spokes meet in the nave of a wheel, so are all things in the Breath established, the *Rigveda* and the *Yajur* and the *Sama*, and Sacrifice and Brahminhood and Kshatriyahood.

This is the central hub where all else emerges, the Power around which and by which all move and revolve. The Vedas or the power of Knowledge, the Law of Sacrifice or the power of Works and the Will that acts in the spirit of Oneness (since it is One Energy that animates all different types of things), and the various types of humanity. It is the central Power, call it Conscious-Force if we like, out of which emerges Knowledge and Action and Askesis and Works, It is this Power that drives the seekers after Knowledge (the Brahmin) and the doers of mighty deeds (The Kshatriya). It is the power of knowledge in the Brahman even as it is the force of strength in the Kshatriya. Thus this is the greatest Godhead.

7. “As the Eternal Father thou movest in the womb and art born in the likeness of the parents. To thee, O Life, the world of creatures offer the burnt offering, who by the breaths abide.

It is this Prana, this subtle Energy that surrounds and permeates us while we are in the womb, nay while all things are in their nascent stage. It is this subtle Prana that fills them and moulds itself into the likeness of the parent energy and assumes the form of the creature as determined by its origin or rather the originating impulsion. In the Titan it becomes the titanic energy that devours and destroys; in the gods it becomes the godly energy that creates and helps and saves and succours. In the animal it becomes the energy of darkness and obscurity busy with small things; in man it becomes the energy of self-reflection, of thought and discrimination, the energy of progress. In higher beings and the sages and seers, it becomes the energy of aspiration and Godward growth, the energy of askesis and self-mastery. It takes countless forms according to the nature of the parentage. Yet without it nothing could move or express or grow or discover itself and the world. Therefore this is the greatest of Godheads. All

that we give and offer, to whomsoever it may be, it ultimately and eventually goes to this Primal Energy, the One Infinite Power since this is the secret womb and origin of all things.

8. “Of all the Gods thou art the strongest and fiercest and to the fathers thou art the first oblation; thou art the truth and virtue of the sages and thou art Atharvan among the sons of Angirus.

9. “Thou art Indra, O Breath, by thy splendour and energy art Rudra because thou preservest; thou walkest in the welkin as the Sun, that imperial lustre.

Since it is the Prana that sets all things in motion, it is this that receives the first oblation. In fact without the Prana there would be no will and no action. The various forms and powers of tapasya, even the power of the other Godheads is this Prana, indeed the greatest among all.

10. “When thou, O Breath, rainest, thy creatures stand all joy because there shall be grain to the heart’s desire.

11. “Thou art, O Breath, the unpurified and thou art Fire, the only purity, the devourer of all and the lord of existences. We are the givers to thee of thy eating; for thou, O Matarishwan, art our Father.

It is Prana, the energy of life that brings joy and the fulfilment of the heart’s desires. Without this energy, we will not feel joy and the creative outbursts of life nor have the strength to pursue anything whatsoever. Therefore is this energy both impure as well as the purifier, depending upon how it is used and what mixtures are added to it by the intrusion of various desires. But in its purest form, it is the Power that resides within the sacred Fire, the Divine Will within man that devours all that is impure and leads us ever higher and higher. Therefore all must be offered to the Lord Matriswan, the universal Prana, the cosmic Energy who has given life to all creatures.

It may be noted that Sri Aurobindo in his commentary on the Isha Upanishad describes Matriswan thus,

‘Matarisvan seems to mean “he who extends himself in the Mother or the container” whether that be the containing mother element, Ether, or the material energy called Earth in the Veda and spoken of there as the Mother. It is a Vedic epithet of the God Vayu, who, representing the divine principle in the Life-energy, Prana, extends himself in Matter and vivifies its forms. Here, it signifies the divine Life-power that presides in all forms of cosmic activity.’

12. “‘That body of thine which is established in the speech, sight and hearing, and in the mind is extended, that make propitious; O Life, go not out from our midst!

Though the Breath permeates all things, it’s seat in the human being is in the throat from where it extends upwards as the Maruts that quicken the sight and hearing, flows in the Speech giving it power and force, extends in the mind and brain as the energy of thought and all upward endeavour. Therefore the great Seer invokes this Energy, the Breath of all things to be in their midst and never leave them. In doing so he invokes the Shakti, the Power of God to be always with him.

13. “‘For all this Universe, yea, all that is established in the heavens to the Breath is subject; guard us as a mother watches over her little children; give us fortune and beauty, give us Wisdom.’ ”

The empire of this Godhead extends everywhere; it is vast and high. Therefore the great Seer invokes the Vedic Deity Matriswan, the Breath of existence, the Mother of all things or the great Creatrix, the Divine Shakti, to guard their life even as a mother watches over her children. She is the giver of all boons, inner and outer and hence the Seer invokes Her to grant good fortune and beauty and wisdom, both inner and outer wealth and abundance.

It is interesting to note that the seer of this Upanishad refers to Matriswan as ‘a mother’. In the first part he had revealed that creation is a dual phenomenon. It comes into birth and being through the union of masculine and feminine principles that emerge from the One Infinite Reality. But then, once born, creation is sustained and supported by the feminine principle, the Force and Energy, the Shakti that animates all things. Though its most obvious aspect is the power of Life or the Life Force, yet it is everywhere and in all things. It is all-pervading, all-moving omniscience and omnipotence of the One in its intrinsic reality. All other godheads derive their power from Its Power.

Thus ends this question revealing to us the Oneness behind existence and the Power that moves all creation. The seer prays to this Power, the Divine Shakti to be always with him and to guard and protect him and to grant him all that is needed for the fullness of life, both spiritual and material gifts and boons. Here the artificial distinctions between the material and the spiritual breakdown since all is the play of this One Energy, One Power, One Infinite Force.

Sri Aurobindo reveals to us this secret power of Life:
The protean images of the World-Force
Have drawn the strength to be, the will to last
From a deep ocean of dynamic peace.
Inverting the spirit’s apex towards life,
She spends the plastic liberties of the One
To cast in acts the dreams of her caprice,
His wisdom’s call steadies her careless feet,
He props her dance upon a rigid base,
His timeless still immutability
Must standardise her creation’s miracle.
Out of the Void’s unseeing energies
Inventing the scene of a concrete universe,
By his thought she has fixed its paces, in its blind acts
She sees by flashes of his all-knowing Light.
At her will the inscrutable Supermind leans down
To guide her force that feels but cannot know,
Its breath of power controls her restless seas
And life obeys the governing Idea.
At her will, led by a luminous Immanence
The hazardous experimenting Mind
Pushes its way through obscure possibles
Mid chance formations of an unknowing world.
Our human ignorance moves towards the Truth
That Nescience may become omniscient,
Transmuted instincts shape to divine thoughts,
Thoughts house infallible immortal sight
And Nature climb towards God’s identity.
The Master of the worlds self-made her slave
Is the executor of her fantasies:
She has canalised the seas of omnipotence;
She has limited by her laws the Illimitable.
The Immortal bound himself to do her works;
He labours at the tasks her Ignorance sets,

Hidden in the cape of our mortality.
The worlds, the forms her goddess fancy makes
Have lost their origin on unseen heights:
Even severed, straying from their timeless source,
Even deformed, obscure, accursed and fallen, —
Since even fall has its perverted joy
And nothing she leaves out that serves delight, —
These too can to the peaks revert or here
Cut out the sentence of the spirit's fall,
Recover their forfeited divinity.
(Savitri, 4th rev ed, 1993, Book 2, Canto 3, pp.121-22)

Gitanuvachan

(Chapters XV & XVI)

Srimat Anirvan

Question:

‘The Banyan Tree with its upward roots and downward branches has been called imperishable’(15/1). What is the mystic significance of the first five slokas uttered by the Lord starting with this? What theory does he want to expound after *Kshetra* and *Kshetrajna*’?

Answer:

In the Thirteenth Chapter it has been said that the universe has evolved from the unification of *Kshetra* and *Kshetrajna* — *Kshetrajna* being the Purusha and *Kshetra* the Prakriti. The three gunas remain as the heart of Prakriti. These three gunas as well as how the Purusha remains beyond them has been described in detail in the Fourteenth Chapter. There the *Kshetrajna* is *Akshar Brahman* — the sire casting the seeds — and *Kshetra* is *Mahad Brahman* — the Mother in the form of Womb. But the two are Inseparable or ‘ever-attached couple’ described in the Veda as the Bull and Cow or in Tantra as *Ardhnareeshwar*. Here we get the glimpse of the Reality of *Purushottama*. The Fifteenth Chapter expounds that. Here *Purushottama* or the *Kshetrajna*, and the *Kshetra* is verily His Self-Maya or his own Prakriti, described at the very beginning as the ‘Imperishable Banyan Tree’.

This is a complex picture which has accepted the combination of a few Vedic Symbols. In the *Apri Sukta* of the Veda we find reference of a godhead named ‘*Vanapati*’. Actually, from a spiritual point of view he is to be considered as Agni — the upsurging flame of *prana*, or the ‘*pranagni*’ of Upanishad. Again in the Veda itself *Vanapati* is considered as *soma* too. Therefore, together, *Agni* as aspiration is climbing towards the celestial consciousness in man and *soma* is the showering of immortal *ananda* of the Supreme Purusha

in him. It is a unique combination of both in our beings. As if simultaneously the stream of fire is moving upwards and the flow of *soma* is showered down in abundance.

The need to explain the imagery of *Vanaspati* for the simultaneous twofold purpose can be explained as follows; any common *Vanaspati* or a large tree can be considered as the symbol of Agni — like fire it is raising its head towards the sun from below the earth; but as an imagery for *soma*, the same tree has to be upturned so that the branches face downwards and the root upwards. Human body is also like an upturned tree; the head is the root, torso the trunk and limbs are the branches. We get a similar type of description of Purusha in the Veda as well as the *Charyapada* of the *Siddhas*. In order to converge Agni with Soma we have to unite a straight with an upturned tree. Actually there is a kind of *Vanaspati* similar to this — a banyan tree with aerial roots, named ‘*Naichashakha*’ in the Veda and ‘*Nyagrodha*’ in Buddhist literature, meaning a tree with branches going downwards.

In the Upanishad an upturned fig tree has been called ‘*Brahma Vriksha*’ (*Katha*, 2/3/1). Here too we find the same imagery. But according to the *Govilgrihya Sukta* of *Sama Veda*, the *Brahma Vriksha* is a banyan tree. It seems there is a combination of the two imageries of a fig and a banyan tree in the Gita. Immediately after describing the *Aswathwa* (fig) as with ‘root upwards and ‘branch downwards’ in the first sloka, the tree has been described as with ‘branches upwards and ‘root downwards’ in the following. At that point it is a banyan tree and its aerial roots appear like branches. Moreover, this also can be said that its branches grow both up and downwards.

The reference of upward branches of the *Brahma Vriksha* mentioned in the Gita belongs to the *Aswathwa*. They are the flames of Agni. And the downward branches belong to *Nyagrodha*. They are the streams of *soma*. Again, the streams of *soma*, according to the Veda flow down to the nether region as ‘*Andhah*’ or darkness. Similarly, a banyan tree has two kinds of roots; the aerial, visible above earth and the other coming out of these and the original tree which have entered deep below the earth. These have been called the ‘fettors of Karma of mankind’, the cause of the cycle of Karma or existence in the *samsara*.

The *Brahma Vriksha*, then, has three sections. One is its bushy head, an

assimilation of foliage; the second is the trunk not one but innumerable trunks transforming the tree to a forest of many trees and the third part is the forest of roots below the ground. We get a picture of this tree in the *Varuna Mantra* of Rishi Sunahshepa in the *Rik Samhita* (1/24/7). There the top of the tree (*Vanasya* — tree like a forest) has been depicted like a ‘high mound’, meaning the orb of the sun.

From a spiritual point of view that is our ‘head’ which has been called elsewhere as ‘surging upwards’ and the trunk is the network of the rays of the sun. The rays have come down from *Aditya* and have entered deep within us. According to the version of Gita, their roots go ‘deep down and bind us with Karma in the human world’.

The foliage of the *Brahma Vriksha* is simmering in the light of the Sun. They are ‘*Chhandangsi*’ in the language of the Gita. These are the expressions of harmonious truth or grand plan of creation. This is verily the Veda. The sap of earth as well as the light of the sun — both are giving life to the tree. The cluster of foliage is born out of both. One, who knows this singular *Brahma Vriksha*, is the real Knower of the Veda (15/1). (I am verily the Knower of Veda -15/15). This *Brahma Vriksha* is the tree of *samsara* or the ‘*kshetra*’ of the supreme Purusha, the *Mahad Brahman* as the Womb, his own Maya or own Prakriti. It is his own ‘*gunas*’ that are supplying the sap to the Prakriti and expressing itself as bunches after bunches of enjoyable ‘sense objects’ (15/2).

This ‘own Prakriti’ of Purusha is verily called the Maya. Maya is his Power of supreme knowledge and Prakriti is the power of supreme action. There is neither the beginning nor the end of Maya. Again, because she is ever changing, Prakriti does not have any steadfast existence either. She is Inexplicable. Hence this aspect of her is beyond the understanding of ordinary consciousness (15/3).

Based on its quality of existence, the *Brahma Vriksha* is called *Aswathwa*. Another form of that word is *Aswathwama*. In the Veda *aswa* or horse symbolises life and vigour and ‘*sthama*’ denotes the power of steadfast existence.

Prana or life is ever-quivering yet eternal. Hence it is *Aswathwama* or *Aswathwa* and the Gita has called it ‘strongly rooted’ (15/3).

As Agni, the *Brahma Vriksha* is the *aswathwa* and as *soma* it is *Nyagrodha*.

The whole universe is essentially a combination of Agni and soma. The Upanishad has termed that as the cycle of Brahman too. It is eternally rotating and so are we, along with it.

But the rotation of wheel is noticed only at the circumference, not at the centre. The primordial Purusha is beyond the rotation and stays at the centre of the universe. Remaining Immovable at the centre, He is eternally controlling its speed (15/4).

We have to transcend from movements to immobility — to the highest abode of the supreme Purusha. In order to do that, we have to cut asunder the root of the *Brahma Vriksha* — the cause of all movements with the weapon of detachment. In the words of *Samkhya*, the Purusha has to be completely separated from Prakriti (15/3-4).

The most effective way to develop the sense discrimination is to overcome illusion. Illusion comes from indiscrimination — from getting entangled in the mesh of Prakriti and becoming a slave to all the allurements she presents and getting attached to all sense objects. Desire is at the root of all. Desire is a natural outgoing propensity that leads us to crave for things we have not got and attachment to things we have. As indulgence takes the mind outward similarly control brings it inward. By vigilant practice, once the mind is within, it sees Atman. Then a man becomes ‘eternally attached to Atman’. Always he remains there; neither does he want anything else nor does he have attachment to anything else.

This way, once a man becomes ‘without illusion’ and ‘established in Self’, he establishes himself at the centre of the Brahman Cycle, where all movements are still. Once established there, no dualities disturb him any more though he remains in the midst of the clamouring world (15/5)

Question:

Is there no solar or lunar light in the highest abode? Yet that is not a dark place. How is the abode lighted, then (15/6)? Is there no coming back from there? Is that place meant for the chosen souls only?

Answer:

There is the echo of one of the mantras of *Kathopanishad* here. The Veda has said, ‘The Aryans are led by effulgence’. Light is their guide. There is a reference too of going from light to higher and from there to the highest light.

Kathopanishad has mentioned five stages of ascension — fire, lightning, the sun, the moon and the star. Agni or fire is the radiance of terrestrial consciousness, lightning of intermediary state and the sun of the celestial region. After the sun or beyond the solar domain we get the eternal One — the sixteenth part of the moon. And even beyond that is the twinkling of the star in the darkness of new moon. This is the ultimate state of consciousness of light. There is neither light nor vision after that. But the Upanishad says that there remains the ‘self-effulgence’ or realisation of Self. But that is the ‘realisation of only Existence’ or the consciousness of purest Existence. The concept of light or darkness that is tinted with the sense of duality is not applicable there. Yet all the five stages of effulgence mentioned before get their light from this ‘lightless state’, or as per the Veda, from the ‘supreme and absolute abode of Vishnu’, which is not illumined by any but itself is the source of all illumination.

There is a controversy among the commentators of Veda regarding the concept of the highest abode. Shakapuni says that it is the celestial abode of Vishnu or of the sun at noon. Whereas, Aurnanava says it is beyond that — a lightless place on the vertex of Gaya — beyond the abode of Vishnu. And *Chhandogya* has said that both are true. There is white effulgence in the front of the supreme Purusha and the deep blue of absolute darkness at the back.

Here, this dark blue has been hinted at. That is *Akshara Brahman* — and the white effulgence is the *Mahad Brahman*. According to the terminology of the Upanishad, one is Non-becoming, meaning there is no possibility of anything and the other is Becoming — where everything is possible. From the aspect of our spiritual practice, one is the place of non-repetition, from where there is no coming back and in the other is going on the play of repetition or recurrence of coming and going. The state of non-repetition is the supreme state; the lower state is the one where there is the recurrence of birth and death.

The ultimate goal of *jiva* is to reach that state beyond birth and death. But once there, there remains no consciousness of individuality for the *jiva* for taking decision regarding its own position. When we go to sleep, our purpose is not to stay awake but to be submerged in slumber. Here, too, we plunge into the endless void with the idea of ‘never to return’. But if he wills, he might send one back from there with some kind of responsibility. And such souls are chosen ones, who know both Non-becoming and Becoming aspects of the supreme

Purusha. Hence as is with the supreme Purusha, so is with the chosen one. Recurrence happens while he remains stationed in Immortality.

Question:

‘My segments have eternally been manifested as *jivas* in the universe’ (15/7). Please explain the mystery behind each word. What is the deep significance of ‘*jiva* is the eternal portion of the Lord?’ Does that mean that the essence of *jiva* is eternal the same way as the Divinity? What is the difference between that and individual being? Is a being a specific expression of the source?

Answer:

It has already been mentioned earlier that Purusha is *kshetrajna* and has two aspects — the Lord and the *jiva*. The topic so far was limited to *kshetrajna* Lord and his *kshetra* or Prakriti (the imperishable *Aswathwa* -15/1). Now the topic has changed to *kshetrajna jiva* and his Prakriti. The eternal ‘segment’ (*amsha*) of *Parameswar* has been manifested as *jiva* in the universe. The word ‘*amsha*’ here is not denoting part or fraction; it means ‘ray or beam of light’. There is reference of seven Adityas in the Veda (*Rig* 2/27/1, 9/14/2, 10/72/8-9). ‘*Amsha*’ is one of them. Among the Adityas, Varun, Mitra and Aryama (*Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda* of the Upanishad and Vedanta) form the higher half and Bhaga, *Amsha* and Daksha form the lower. *Tubijata Indra* is the bridge in-between. From this aspect, *Amsha* corresponds with Mitra and Mitra symbolises the infinity of manifested effulgence as Varuna stands for the infinite unmanifest effulgence. In other words, ‘*Amsha*’ is the ‘ray of light’ of Surya in the form of Mitra. In *Yajurveda*, ‘*Amsha*’ has been called the ‘ray of Sun in the *sushumna*’. The Varun mantra of *Sunahshepa* has called him the ‘downward beam’ which is deeply embedded in us with its head upward. The Upanishad has referred to the ‘*Amsha*’ or ray or beam to enter deep within by coming through the top of the head.

Both Surya and the rays of Surya are eternal. Similarly, the Lord as well as *jiva* is ‘*sanatan*’ of ever-existent. Out of the two, the Lord is eternally *sattwa* and *Jiva* is mixed *sattwa*, though in essence it is pure *sattwa*. Again, adulterating *sattwa* with the mixture of *rajas* and *tamas* is an ‘independent action’ of the Lord while He is eternally stationed in the pure *sattwa*. *Jiva* is ‘dependent under the subjugation of Prakriti’, but the Lord is the controller (*Rig* 10/190/2; *Gita* 9/8), the Sustainer, Enjoyer and the Supreme Master of Prakriti (13/22)

and ever untouched by the impure state.

After this, the three states of *jiva* have been described. First, he is serving the sense objects or enjoying them through *gunas* after accepting the body. Second, he is gradually pushing upwards to his source even through all oppositions and third is when he remains eternally there in his true reality (15/8-10).

A perfected yogi can see all these with open eyes (15/11). This yogi is a *kshetrajna* or knower of the field too. But the Lord is the *kshetrapati* or master of the field. Lord is One and only One but *jivas* are many, just as there is one sun but many beams of light. But these are nothing but hollow words. Basically all rays are the same. Illumination and expansion are their fundamental qualities and they are ever intertwined with one another. Here multitudinous is just an attribution. This is just an analogy for the essence of *jiva*.

Again, though essentially colourless, these rays can be tinted with variegated hues. That is like the difference in individuality amidst the same essentiality. *Jiva* is his eternal ‘*amsha*’ or just a ray. If we accept this ancient meaning, we get a harmonious picture. But to interpret ‘*amsha*’ as a part brings only dispute and disharmony.

Question:

What is the difference between vigour and lustre? Is *soma* the same as the moon, the giver of sap? Is the moon at the root of all our nourishment (15/13)? How does the moon fill out all decay? Who is the source of the lustre of the sun, fire and the moon? Can we identify him with the ‘great effulgence’ or the ‘cluster of effulgence’ of the Upanishad?

Answer:

Here we come back to the topic of God — the origin and source of *jiva*. God is essentially all-pervading effulgence. The Veda has called him the great effulgence, which is the same as Brahmic effulgence. Effulgence radiates as rays or *amsha* and contracts as lustre (*Isha* 16). The Veda speaks of three spiritual lustres — Agni or fire on earth, Aditya or the sun in the sky and beyond Aditya is the moon. Again, there is a reference of the moon below Aditya, as *soma*, in the intermediary region. The intermediary world is the vital world, the abode of serene consciousness-power which works as sap and supplies nourishment to all creatures. Vaiswanar Agni is the presiding deity of digestion to enhance nourishment. Verily, the Lord himself is Vaiswanar (15/14).

We get two worlds — one with vigour and the other with lustre. The innate and expressed conscious power lying within all animate and inanimate objects is lustre. What is particularly deep in animate is called the vigour. The Veda says that it comes from Indra the Lord of Mind and has been symbolised by a horse. The supreme Purusha as Vigour or vital Power has entered the earth and supports the whole creation (15/13).

The world of *prajnana* or supreme knowledge is higher than the worlds of lustre and vigour. Heart is its chief conductor. Once *sraddha* or faith awakens, there starts the spiritual urge or vigilant practice to know him. This urge, in each heart, is nothing but his Grace which has been expressed in the forms of Veda and Vedanta that have one single aim— to know him and be him.

This way all three worlds of material, vital and world of consciousness are illumined by and absorbed in him. He is all and everything.

Question:

Could you please analyse the aspects *Kshara*, *Akshara* and *Purushottama*? The Lord has said that he is renowned in the world and in the Veda as *Purushottama*. To know the Divine as *Purushottama* is to know him in totality and such knower is known as ‘one who knows all’ (15/16-19). There is a deep desire to know the real meaning of these terms.

Answer:

He is everything. ‘The Purusha is verily all this’ (*Rig*.10/90/2). Purusha is a whole global epithet in the Veda. There is difference between the concept of Purusha in *Samkhya* and that of in the Vedanta. The Purusha in *Samkhya* is separate from the Prakriti, but Purusha in the Veda is ever united with her. Prakriti is his very own Nature. According to *Samkhya*, Prakriti is ever-changing having the nature of *kshara* and Purusha has no connection with the Prakriti. This is an experience faced while one is on the ascending path, when my aim is to separate myself from the ‘lower’ nature. At that point I am only the seer, neither the enjoyer nor the lord. But from the comprehensive perspective, all actions of Prakriti are taking place under the urge and law of Purusha. At that point it makes no sense to call the ever-changing world, *kshara* nature, Prakriti and the immovable existence in *akshara* as Purusha. As *akshara* is Purusha so is *kshara*. ‘The Purusha is verily all this’— he is both *akshara* and *kshara*.

These two terms — *kshara* and *akshara* have been used in the Gita once

more. It has been said ‘*akshara* is the supreme Brahman’ and ‘*Adhibhuta* is the nature of *kshara*’ (8/3-4). At that point *kshara* and *akshara* have been described in their essentialities, not with a vision of divisibility. That vision is needed while ascending on the path in order to reach the state of immovable transcendence. We say, ‘This is not it, this is not that’ ‘he is not this, he is not that’. But once we reach the top of the mountain, we find him flowing down in hundreds of streams from the ever-sprouting spring. The formless has universal forms. Everything is he. Then only we realise and say, ‘As the Purusha is *akshara* so also is he *kshara*’.

Actually, *kshara* and *akshara* are two self-contradictory terms. Intelligence cannot solve the conflict but *bodhi* or intuition can. The oneness (*adawita*) of intelligence discards many but the *adwaita* of *bodhi* includes many.

Therefore, the Purusha, in whom there is the unification of all contradictions, should have another identity. And that is the identity of *Purushottama*. Actually, Arjuna, being the chosen one, had a glimpse of understanding this unification. When the topic of *kshara* and *akshara* was first introduced, we find him addressing Sri Krishna as *Purushottama* (8/1). This was the first time this epithet was used in the Gita.

In the course of explaining the term *Purushottama*, it has been said here that one beyond *kshara* and better than *akshara* is known as *Purushottama*. The other two epithets to define him are *Paramatman* and *Iswara*. He is ‘unchangeable’ meaning *akshar* but has entered deep into the three worlds and is the sustainer of the whole universe (15/17-18)

In short, he has become all. ‘The Purusha is verily all this’. But he has not been exhausted by becoming. He is simultaneously beyond everything as *akshar*. Yet being beyond does not mean that he is separated; he is rather deeply engrossed in all. Apart from that he can be felt even in this body as the *Adhiyajna Purusha* or *Paramatman* (8/4,13/22,31). One can become knower of all by ‘knowing him in every aspect’. This is the knowledge of ‘one who is not illusioned’, of one who has neither the attachment for form nor for formless because he knows the reality of both. (15/19)

Sri Krishna has said, ‘I am renowned among men and the Veda as *Purushottama*’ (15/18). Among men who are beyond illusion and are his intimate ones, he is *Purushottama*. But we do not get the term *Purushottama* in the

Veda. Instead there is the reference of ‘*Uttama Purusha*’ in *Chhandogya* (8/12/3). When used in a general way, the characteristics there match very well with those of Sri Krishna. Remember, there is a very close relation of *Chhandogya* with *Bhagavata*. It is also to be noted that like the *Raja Guhya* of ninth chapter, *Purushottama Yoga* has also been called the ‘most hidden scripture’. A sadhaka of higher intelligence can achieve his goal by understanding this (15/20)

Question:

‘There are two kinds of creatures in this world — *daiva* (with divine qualities) and *asura* (with demonic qualities)’ (16/6). Who is the creator of the dual aspects? Would you please analyse the divine qualities in detail?

Answer:

The topic of *kshetra* and *kshetrajna* or Prakriti and Purusha has been extended till chapter fifteen. There is a gradual exposure of the principle of Purusha which has culminated in the reality of *Purushottama*. Incidentally, we have come to know of Prakriti as well.

Creation is the result of continuous evolution of Prakriti. There is an aim behind this evolution. In Vedic terms that is gradual unfolding of *prajna* or higher intelligence. From plants to animals and from animals to humans we see the steady advancement of *prajna* (*Aitareya Aranyaka*).

But the advancement does not come easily. The Vedic rishis say that *prana* and *prajna* are, as if, hidden behind the stone wall of opposite forces named ‘*vritra*’ or ‘covering power’. In the Veda that power has been described as an *asura*. As *vritra* is the king of *asuras* so is Indra the king of *devas*. Indra is the slayer of *Vritra*. The fight between the *devas* and the *asuras* is going on all over the world. The Gita has given a lucid description of that fight by analysing the allegory from the psychological point of view.

The Upanishad says that the *devas* and the *asuras* are both children of the original sire. Therefore, the concept of divine as well as demonic qualities had always been at the root of creation and they will remain so for ever. Light is coming out piercing darkness — this is the eternally evident truth of the universal play. But creation would not be possible with only light or only darkness. Creation is a vibration of Shakti and Shakti needs an opposition to be vibrated against. Eventually it is divine power that would be victorious but the victory is to be

achieved by crushing the demonic forces by releasing the innate divine power.

When we talk about freedom, we accept some kind of fetters to be free from. Yet, though bondage is almost universal, not everyone is aware of it. Those who do not have the awareness accept them as natural. As a matter of fact, if anybody tries to help them loosen the fetters, they get irritated. The Gita has called them the ‘*asuric* creatures’ (16/5-6). They remain ‘merged in illusion life after life’ (15/20). But a time comes when the smoke of illusion gradually starts to dispel and the *jiva* cannot stand it any longer. He wants freedom. Such souls are ‘divine creatures’.

The rule of evolution is to bring forth light across darkness. Of course, there are examples of uninterrupted darkness and/or light. The Upanishad has called them ‘*ambhas*’ and ‘*apah*’ respectively. But they belong to the inexpressible state and we belong to the middle state of manifestation that is in-between those two states of unmanifest (2/28). For us, the fight between light and darkness is a universal truth and our highest goal is to transcend to eternal light beyond darkness or be liberated from all bondages.

Bondages are formed by the *gunas*. The three qualities of Prakriti bind Purusha. In chapter fourteen that has been discussed in detail. Though all three lead to bondage yet we are specifically bound by the illusion of *tamas* and the restlessness of *rajas*. The essential qualities of *sattwa* are expansion and happiness, pursuit of which leads us towards salvation. By and large, it can be said that the *asuric* creatures are under the power of *rajas* and *tamas* and the divine creatures are mainly guided by the *sattwa*. Persons with *asuric* propensities also might get some *sattwic* light and perform sacrifice and rituals but they do that with extreme ego without following the rules set by the scriptures (16/17).

There are two predominant lower qualities among the people with *asuric* temperament — ego and desire. They have been vividly described in the Gita. These are mentioned elsewhere as cravings for enjoyment and wealth and are found even among the followers of the Veda (2/42-43). As he is the source of all our propensities (*yatah pravrittir bhutanam*. 18/46), the divine expression of these two traits can be found in the *Parameswar* or *Purushottama* as the ‘supreme master and enjoyer of Prakriti’ (13/22,15/17). But the *asuric* creatures are completely under the thumb of *kshara* — not even crossed over to *akshara*,

to be able to reach the highest state is a far-away cry. No way is an *asuric jiva* the Lord but he announces himself to be so (16/14). This is his worst illusion. On the other hand, when he pretends to be 'the Knower of all', he proclaims the universe to be 'godless'. According to him, God is not the root cause or reason behind the creation. He does not accept the philosophy of the rishis of the Upanishad that the truth of the universe depends upon the divine truth or it has been established in him and him alone. According to him, there is only play of individuals or chain of actions (Panini 6/1/144) behind all the happenings of the world. There is no incentive other than the procession of actions one after another led by blind cravings or desire (Buddhist *Tanha*). Had this philosophy been true, there would have been no other object in life other than the satisfaction of ego by an uninterrupted fulfilment of desire.

The fulfilment born out of this concept could also be a 'wealth' or cause for prosperity. The Gita has called that '*asuric wealth*'. We get a detailed description of *asuric* people from seventh to eighteenth sloka of this chapter. Duryodhana and Duhshashana were the living examples of *asuric* people during the time of Sri Krishna. The violent egoism of Duryodhana and the heinous crime against Draupadi by Duhshashana were the examples of 'conceit-jealousy-arrogance' and 'desire hard to satisfy' (16/16) respectively. Unfortunately, nowadays the shadow of *asuric* temperament has cast a formidable influence on the western and the oriental civilisation as well.

The opposite of *asuric* qualities are the divine ones. These are not really outward characteristics but belong to the inner part of the being and ultimately results in acquiring a spiritual aristocracy (16/3), which would never allow a person to go astray in the path of lower attachment. On the other hand that would invoke truth, purity and propriety (6/7) in him.

Sri Krishna has given us a long list of the traits that show up in a being acquiring divine qualities. For a perfected one (*siddha*), they are natural; for a sadhaka they are to be practised and mastered. According to the *samskara* and inclination of each, the qualities can be classified in different ways. For example one could be as follows:

One who wants to be born in the divine life accepts reaching Truth as the main goal of life. One of the principal means of that is the verbal *tapas* of always speaking the truth (17/15). The Lord is the source, all creation is

established in him and he is the highest truth (16/8). To reach him is to be established in truth (14/27). For that the initial necessity is to check the reins of outgoing propensities and restrain the mind (this is something absent among *asruic* people). Control is the chief means to attain that. Control of the outer senses is known as restraint and of the inner senses is known as equality (1&2) which result in an undisturbed peace of mind (16/1,2). With practice both restraint and equality become parts of nature. The power that helps them to be so is known as *dhriti* (3) or the power to hold. Here the *sattwic dhriti* has been referred to, which has been discussed in detail later (18/33). *Dhriti* is also known as *dharana* or retention and denotes the ability to hold the results of sadhana. The radiation of the accumulated power in *dhriti* is known as *tapas* and has been discussed later as well (17/14-19). To inflict suffering to the body and along with it to the residing supreme in the heart by various physical tortures has been termed as '*asuric tapas*' (17/6) in the Gita. The ultimate results of the proper *tapas* are the bliss, serenity and purification of thoughts (17/16). According to the Veda the ideal performers of *tapas* are Agni and Surya, and their natural propensities are to radiate effulgence.

This way by practising physical and mental restraint and with the exercise of *dhriti* the being acquires the ability to realise truth. Our predecessors in the sadhana of truth have left for us their experiences in realisations of truth in words known as the Veda. The Veda also points out that a powerful injunction given by an able guru that can transmit power to a disciple is also Veda. The words of Veda are called 'mantras'. Mantra could be in a contracted form of a one-word seed or an extended form of more than one word. A study of the mantra with repetition is called '*swaddhyaya*'. With *swaddhyaya* one gets united with one's chosen deity (*Yogasutra* 2/64). Unification does not happen in a day or two. Initially comes *sraddha* or deep reverence, and then comes attachment or the heart's desire for him. At that point I feel like offering to him all I have. Rabindranath has most aptly described that in these lines; 'The vision of my eyes and the hearing of my ears, the ingenious service with my limbs and all my doings — I have to offer all and everything to Thee.' Offering all to him is called *yajna*. *Yajna* is of two kinds — the material *yajna* and the *yajna* of Knowledge. The material *yajna* is with outer objects and depends on various rituals and activities. That will be discussed later (17/11-13). The *yajna* of

knowledge is the inner *yajna* — the divine *yajna* of the yogis. That too has already been discussed in detail in the fourth chapter.(4/24-33).The basic rule of all sacrifices is to offer everything to him, saying, ‘All this is Yours, nothing is mine,’ (9/27 — there it has been said to offer everything to Him — action, enjoyment, sacrifice , giving or askesis). To transform the whole life to a *yajna* like this has been termed as *Purusha Yajna* by the Upanishad. Sri Krishna received this doctrine from Ghora Angirasa.

The oblation of material *yajna* is to be offered to the regular fire and the oblation of *yajna* of knowledge or of life is to be offered to the Brahmic fire (4/24). The Veda says that all oblations are basically offering of self. All my good and bad I am pouring into his fire to burn away all the dross and I become pure. This *purity* is a divine quality.

Of mental impurities, three are predominant — desire, anger and greed. In a little while the Lord has called them gateways to hell; they mislead and ruin the soul (16/21). In a reference to *karma yoga*, He had mentioned another impurity, namely egoism (3/27). Out of all these, the worst enemy of mankind is desire, which is at the root of all his wrong-doings and uproots all possibilities of acquiring the higher knowledge. Not only the senses fall under its spell of desire, it extends over and influences even mind and intellect. As a result man cannot conceive of the absolute reality that is beyond intellect. The Lord has warned a yogi about desire (3/36-43). Anger and desire are very closely tied. Whenever there is any hindrance in the path desire expresses itself as anger (2/62).

Desire and its partner anger are the cause of all mental disturbances and they present the strongest obstacle in the path of yoga (3/36-37). The third impurity, greed, is just another variety of desire. Desire is the finer *asuric* propensity and greed is the gross *rakshasi* characteristic. Like desire and anger, greed belongs to the *rajasic* quality too (3/37, 14/12,17). The fourth impurity, egoism, though a *rajasic* quality has illusion at its root which covers *atman* with darkness and ignorance. The Lord has given a detailed description of how frightfully intense the *rajasic* side of egoism can be in this very chapter itself (sl.9-18). When the continuous thought of *yajna* establishes, all impurities vanish, there is purity in and out and the divine qualities emerge in a human being.

Once avarice disappears, one is not greedy for anything anymore. The most prominent sign of this state is contentment with whatever one has (4/22). One

who is ‘ever content’ (12/14), never depends on any object of desire for happiness. Happiness comes out from the depth of oneself. The yogis call it the ‘highest happiness’ (*Yogasutra* 2/42). When there is nothing to ask for, there is no question of any clash of desire. Hence mind becomes free of anger. But what about the possibility of becoming a victim of anger, when hurt by someone else? There are jealousy and malice too to be dealt with. Absence of anger, when it becomes natural, expresses itself in the form of forgiveness, which in turn gives birth to non-violence and compassion. But forbearance does not mean acceptance of injustice. Hence along with forbearance there should be mettle or the strength to stand against wrong-doings. Forgiveness shown by a strong and powerful man is the real forgiveness and not cowardice. The strength of such a person teaches him to fight ‘without involvement’ (3/30), which is the injunction given by Sri Krishna.

The gross expression of egoism is in vanity, coercion or high-handedness and in self-conceit (16/ 17,18).These are all *asuric* propensities. The last one has been termed in the Gita as ‘excessive pride’ which expresses itself in insolent utterings like, ‘I am the Lord ; I am the liberated one; I am wealthy; I am from the high and noble family; who else is there like me’, etc. (16/14-15). Of course, it is always better to have a sense of self-respect born out of awareness of self and it is in no way desirable to bring oneself down to impotency but at the same time too much of self-conceit is always to be shunned. The divine transformation of egoism has been called by Sri Krishna as ‘controlled pride’(16/3).

Desire, the worst of all impurities, has been mentioned in a number of ways while introducing the *asuric* temperament (16/8-13,16,18). Desire expresses itself in the cravings for enjoyment. The opposite of enjoyment is renunciation and charity. There are detailed discussions about these two in later chapters (18/2-10, 17/20-25). By and large these two are the natural expressions of goodwill to all creatures. Kindness to all can also be added here.

One of the chief supports of spiritual practice is purity in behaviour. If there is a harmonious expression in our speech and action of whatever we have received inside, then only we would know that we are on the right track. The divine qualities that show the purification of nature are being polite or never to be impertinent in words or deeds (but not to become mute with hardness); courteous; having leniency or soft and humble behaviour; being bashful or not

to give publicity to oneself and lastly to give up the habit of finding fault with others. And the way to reach the climax of purity of behaviour is to attain simplicity or exuding an outward expression of a natural and easy harmony in life.

The divine qualities are *sattwic* and the demonic qualities are *rajasic*. *Sattwa* is of two kinds — mixed or diffused *sattwa* that is adulterated with *rajas* and *tamas* and the pure *sattwa*, which has been called in Gita as eternal *sattwa* (2/45). One of the fundamental propensities of *tamas* is fear which eventually culminates in fear of death. The basic sign of all fear is to hold tight onto anything I have; not to let go of anything and always being in fear of losing anything I have.

As we have to give up the *asuric* qualities of *rajas* in order to be established in heavenly qualities, so also we have to give up the *tamasic* fear and acquire fearlessness. And this is the hardest of all, because the root of fear has gone deep into the core of all propensities. Apparently it might seem that the *asuras* are fearless but actually that is not so. They are the victims of ‘limitless worries’ (16/11), which are nothing but basic causes of fear.

Being established in fearlessness means being free from all the impurities of *rajas* and *tamas*. Once that happens, one gets firmly established in both *jnana* and *yoga*. In other words, when the *jiva* is reborn in heavenly qualities, he is properly established in *Samkhya* and *yoga* of which Sri Krishna had spoken at the very onset (2/39).

Question:

‘I throw them, such evil ones, in *asuric* births’ (16/19-20). Who does it? Can *jiva* resist that? Why does the Lord take such steps?

Answer:

Obviously the Lord only determines the *asuric* births. As he is the ‘rescuer from the ocean of birth and death’ of the *bhakta* (12/7), protector of the virtuous ones (4/8) so also is he the destroyer of the evil ones (ibid).

But he is absolutely unbiased. First of all, everywhere he is the doer yet the non-doer (8/13-14, 5/14,15). Both divine and *asuric* births are initiated by the *Prakriti* and their natural journey is towards salvation and shackles respectively (16/4-5). This is going on from the beginning of creation. He is just the seer, sanction- giver, supporter and the supreme master. But as *Prakriti* is nothing but

his own *Prakriti*, her doership is also his. Yet he remains a non-doer.

The path of *asuric* birth is ever-sloping. Once in that path, man loses all consciousness and automatically rolls downward from birth to birth (16/2) through the gates of desire, anger and greed (16/21). This completely covers his soul and he does not understand that. He rather loves the path towards the hell.

But he is still there in his heart even when the *jiva* is rolling down the path towards inferno. And sitting in his heart, he keeps on saying, ‘don’t go that way.’ He says that through the voice of seers and the versions of scriptures. But the *jiva* keeps on going down and down till he gets a formidable shock. As the downward journey is arranged by him so is the impact of shock, which turns the consciousness of *jiva* and he takes a complete turn towards the divine birth.

Thus upward and downward journeys are characteristics of creation. It is there. It is meaningless to ask why. Without the conflict between the *devas* and *asuras*, there would be no upward movement, no expression of *Shakti* and creation would have stood at a standstill. To get a beautiful picture, you need both light and darkness; either of them cannot create by itself. It needs the spectrum of light and shade, though eventually light comes out victorious as we see at the advent of dawn.

Once you apprehend the end result, there remains no complaint against the Lord as to why he created the conflict between light and darkness. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that *Jatila* and *Kutila* supply the sap of divine play. No matter how strong or how many obstacles there are in the middle, the end of the play is ever blissful. There is the end of all doubts, all frustration and all suffering.

Question:

Why are desire, anger and greed termed as gates of hell? What is the way to get rid of this threefold gate of *tamas* that was created by the Lord himself? What are the rules set by the scriptures? Is it possible for the general mass to work according to the scriptures (16/22-24)?

Answer:

Out of the two streams in universal creation, one has risen up towards light, towards salvation. This is divine stream; whereas the *asuric* stream has gone downwards towards the darkness of inconscience, towards the shackles that

bind mankind (16/5,20). Desire, anger and greed, particularly desire, are at the root of that downward movement. These three have been discussed earlier. Study and practice of the divine qualities are the only way to be free from these. That also has been discussed in detail. Various references have been made in the Gita regarding the rejection of desire or anger (2/55,56,71;3/34,37-43; 5/23,26,28; 6/24; 18/53, etc). Giving up the fruits of work, taking refuge in *Buddhi Yoga* by following and practising the path of knowledge and having one-pointed unflinching devotion to the Lord — with these three desire can be got rid of. And when desire vanishes, anger and greed follow too.

The realisation of a perfected one and the rules to be followed to achieve realisation are at the basis of all scriptures, this is the way towards divine birth. The opposite is for the *asuric* birth. An *asura* does not like the rule of light, he prefers the smoke of desire. Forget about any perfection or reaching the supreme end, he does not even receive any material happiness (16/23).

Scripture is not limited within the pages of a book. It resides in the words and actions of the seers. There is no dearth of such people in any age. If will is there, anybody can get the directions of the scriptures from them by surrendering, questioning and by servitude (4/34).

In the absence of that if one works with *sattwic sraddha*, he can be reborn with divine qualities too. What that *sraddha* is has been described in the following chapter.

The real scripture is the direction from the pure heart. That can be received from the seers of Truth as well as by ‘listening to the voice that comes from depth of one’s own mind’.

(This brings to an end the Q/A on Chapter XV (*Purushottama Yoga*) and Chapter XVI (*Daivasura Sampad Bibhag Yoga*) in the *Gitanuvachan*)

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

Sri Aurobindo

K. M. Munshi

The life and work of Sri Aurobindo are encyclopaedic; his personality and achievements have different facets; at least five different facets: the man, the man of action, the man of letters, the seer and the Yogi.

Gifted with a vast intellect, great and noble emotions and unbounded aspirations, his ambition was to measure the immeasurable. Unflinching in his devotion to duty on the threshold of life, he made a plan of life and pursued it steadfastly. Later, the sense of duty grew and he embraced man, in all his aspects, with a parent’s ceaseless solicitude.

He was an artist of life. As a professor, as I knew him, perfect; as a patriot, he was a passionate devotee of the Motherland in 1907 quivering with passionate longing for her freedom and greatness. On 9th July 1950, when I last saw him, he was a thing of living beauty in his voice, manner and dress. His personality had assumed a beauty far surpassing that which we associate with human beings.

Was Aurobindo a man of action? It is a superficial view which identifies a man of action necessarily with restless hours, ceaseless jostling with men, with public meetings, and newspaper headlines. If action implies power to move men, Aurobindo was a great Karmayogi. He left the coveted career of a Civil Servant to work for the country. As an obscure professor, he, in his *New Lamps for Old* first raised the unequivocal battle-cry of “Freedom”. During the Partition of Bengal days he actually joined the National Movement, gave up service and prospects, started *Bande Mataram*, established a Technological Institute, made men dance to the tune of his powerful pen and voice driving them to action. He moved thousands to take to boycotting British goods, singing the *Vande Mataram*. He went to jail, and in view of his connection — distant though not intimate with the first terrorist movement — he risked his life.

Then he retired. 'Retired' is not the proper word, for, by his sudden withdrawal from direct contact, he made his pen and personality the media of galvanising men's mind and action. Did Aurobindo inspire men to action? His personality became integrated; the spark of action was communicated not by physical contact, but by words, by the imponderable power of an integrated personality, a medium of action more powerful than word or pen or social contact. In distant parts of the world, his words echoed in devoted hearts impelling them to make experiments with life itself.

As a man of letters, Sri Aurobindo was one of the greatest literary men of any time. He has written on almost all subjects of intellectual and emotional interest. His poems have a boldness of imagination almost unequalled in modern literature. Imbued with the best traditions of Greek and Sanskrit literature, he was the master of the living phrase of beauty. Few now know the scathing sarcasm, the passionate denunciation, the biting incisiveness of the leaders of the *Bande Mataram* when he slashed the Moderate Politicians of India in 1905 and 1907. In those days, his words were power-winged shafts, with envenomed tips. In his letter to his disciples later, we find a rare affection, a light touch, an endearing solicitude. In some of his early speeches like that of Uttarpara, the heart-going directness and simplicity overwhelm the soul with the inspiring, far-visioned compelling power of a Master; he often spoke and wrote, as was said of Jesus, 'with authority'.

For the ordinary reader, his philosophic works are too difficult. Even a student of philosophy finds Aurobindo's thoughts moving in a sphere of distinctive ideas and it becomes difficult to follow their line unless one is familiar with the world in which he lived and had his being.

As a Seer, he was one of the greatest in the world. He tried to sense the beautiful in word and phrase and life and personality. He was the first in India to squarely see the conflict between India and Britain. He was again the first to envisage a vast struggle to drive out the British. After the Russo-Japanese War, he first gave us the slogan — "Asia for Asiatics". During the Partition of Bengal Movement, he made of the drawing room nationalism of the day, a militant and powerful all-embracing emotion. He invested the boycott of British goods with a new political significance. With vivid passion he made *Vande Mataram* a 'Mantra' of undying martyrdom to secure the freedom and glory of India. He

was the first again to emphasise that Indian freedom can only come by non-violent action, though in principle, at appropriate places, he declined to abjure violence. He prophesied that after him will come someone who will achieve which he could not. [1]

He brought the whole range of Indian culture under his transvaluing gaze. He found a new meaning in our art, our poetry, our classics, our religious and social movements. He has been the Prophet of Indian Renaissance.

More, he drank deep at the fountain source of Indian thought and religion and helped in the secularisation of the Hindu religious sentiment. In the Motherland, he found the deity of his heart. In being ready to invite martyrdom for Her freedom and glory, he discovered Karma Yoga; and when in the Uttarpara speech, he said 'Nationalism is *Sanatana Dharma* and *Sanatana Dharma* is Nationalism', he restored to India the universal creed for the uplift of man for which she had lived during the ages. *Sanatana Dharma* to him was not the castes, the creeds, the temples and the rituals. It was the one and the universal law embracing humanity in one elevating and sweeping movement of the Spirit.

He gave a new value to the Vedas. He saw beyond the philosophies of all ages and produced a system more comprehensive than what had been formulated by Shankar or Kant or Spencer. And like a true Prophet, he replanted philosophy in the realities of life, and uplifted the reality of crude existence into a continuum of matter and life and mind seeking to evolve Overmind and ready to bring forth a new race of beings working to realise the Supermind to replace the present inferior race. He saw into the hearts of things. In July, 1950, for over twenty minutes he spoke to me on contemporary affairs with a thorough grasp of what was happening in the world. His perception of the political situation in India was always unerring. When the World War came in 1939 and when the whole country wanted to maintain neutrality, it was he of the unerring eye who said that the triumph of England and France was the triumph of the divine forces over the demonic forces. We were very angry, but it was a fact. If the Allies had not won, the darkness of Fascism would have descended upon mankind.

He spoke again when Sir Stafford Cripps came with his first proposal. He said: 'India should accept it'. We rejected the advice. We who rejected it had

some reasons for it, but today we realise that if the first proposal had been accepted, there would have been no partition, no refugees and no Kashmir problem.

Last year he expressed himself in favour of supporting the United Nations in the Korean War. He was again right. In the United Nation's action in Korea, the civilised world, for the first time, combined to fight an unjustified aggression. For the first time, a composite world action became a reality and, but for United Nation's action, it would have been a different world today.

Last year he talked to me of India and Pakistan. In a prophetic vein he said 'they will be united'. I respectfully demurred. He added 'Pakistan must be brought within the ambit'. Yes, of cooperation and allied strength. But when?

I come to the last facet of Sri Aurobindo — that of a Yogi. I saw from 1904 to 1906, how the Europeanised Professor took to Yoga. We took to finding out what Yoga was, because our professor, under whose influence we were, had taken to Yoga. Few can speak of a Yogi, without having studied and practised in Yoga. But I knew the gentleman under whom he began to study; and he was an adept. At the first effort, 45 years ago, Sri Aurobindo attained a stage higher than most students in Yoga. In 1909 he communed with God and that led him to change in life. For 40 years he ceaselessly reached towards progressive realisation. His letters to his pupils are the only practical hints on Yoga in our voluminous literature on Yoga, showing a mastery over the whole range of transformation both of the mind and the spirit into Divine Consciousness. All his writings indicate that complete universality of outlook, that active movement of the spirit, that freedom from fear, wrath and attachment — which are the high privilege of the Emancipated. The descent of the Divine Consciousness which he teaches is itself the result of an experience achieved in a bold endeavour to reach unexplored regions of the Spirit. A Yogi is the one who attempts an ascent to Divine Consciousness. An Avatar is the one who is born in Divine Consciousness. Perhaps Aurobindo is the only Yogi who individually achieved an ascent to Divine Consciousness and attempted to bring it down for collective good. Heir to Ramakrishna he has given to Indian culture a fresh vigour and a new validity and, to the world, a message of hope.

And here we are in a region where the ordinary faculties of man stand dumbfounded, in all humility.

[1] **A Note:** What Sri Aurobindo actually said was that he “was compelled to recognise that the nation was not yet sufficiently trained to carry out his policy and programme... he saw that the hour of these movements had not come and that he himself was not their destined leader.”

(Above is the text of a speech titled “Sri Aurobindo” which Dr. K. M. Munshi had delivered at Sri Aurobindo Niketan Meeting at the Constitution Club (New Delhi) on 16 August 1951 uploaded in the online forum of Overman Foundation.)

Sri Aurobindo: The Ideal Teacher

Prema Nandakumar

3. A Treasury of Gems

The Rig Veda opens with a prayer to Agni and hails him as the giver of gems (*ratna-dhatamam*), for this is how we understand the word, ‘*ratna*’ today. We have been made aware of its original significance by Sri Aurobindo as “disposer of delight.” It so happens that as we take up the first *Anuvaka* of the *Rig Veda* with the help of Sri Aurobindo’s translation, we receive a constant shower of joy. So many *Sukthas* (hymns); so many Rishis, inspired poets gathering riches from the worlds of spirituality. Here as they sing of Agni, they think of “the Flame, the summoner, the Seer-Will” and this would definitely motivate them, fill them up with “*utsaha shakti*” to go ahead with their work on hand, full of determination to succeed.

Once this adoration of Agni and faith in one’s will-power are strong, the rest fall in place. As light destroys the forces of darkness, evil withdraws from the vicinity of one who has sterling will-power to achieve. It is the will in us that makes us act, go forward and posit victories. Nodhas Gautama sings (Sukta 39):

“O universal godhead, O knower of all things born, thy excess of greatness overflows even the Great Heaven. Thou art the king of the toiling human peoples and by battle madest the supreme good for the gods.

This is the universal godhead who by his greatness labours in all the peoples, the lustrous master of sacrifice, the Flame with his hundred treasures. This is he who has the word of the Truth.”

So we carry Agni (will power) all the time. As long as Agni burns in us, we act. When it flames up, our works quicken. When it becomes a concentrated blaze, Baji Prabhou holds the mountain pass of Pavan Khind close to the Vishalgad Fort in the battle for Panhala Fort and saves Shivaji from being captured

by the forces of Adil Shah. When the Agni in man radiates with intensity, a Savitri is created. We take for granted the warmth of the human body, little realising that the physical frame is alive because of the god within, the primal god, the priest who teaches us what to do and conducts our life which is truly a yajna, a sacrifice.

Agni then is the power within us, burning quietly. Sri Aurobindo has given the significance of Agni as Seer Will, “the seven-tongued power of the Will, a Force of God instinct with knowledge.” So apt. Have we not heard often in our years of growing up the voice of encouragement from a mother, a father or a teacher to help us in our studies and avoid diffidence: “Where there is a will, there is a way”!

The elders have noted that to achieve success in life one needs three major powers as a backing. *Dravya Shakti*, the power of wealth is very much needed to take up any work to fruition. We need *Prabhu Shakti* also, the power of leadership, the presence of a guide to teach us how to go about to achieve success. But most important of the three powers is *Utsaha Shakti*, the power of the will, enthusiasm, the push from within to work and not give in either to laziness or self-pity or even hopelessness because of creeping old age. A point brilliantly personified by Lord Tennyson at the conclusion of his poem, ‘*Ulysses*’:

“We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

“To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.” These are the words of a leader, an ideal teacher. For Sri Aurobindo it was a constant seeking for the meaning of life to help the upward growth of humankind. It is not surprising that he sought the clue in the Vedas, in Agni. Each verse translated (and sometimes explained) for *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* has a way of opening new casements in our understanding of the world and ourselves.

When we read the *Aranya Kanda* in the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, we find Rama, Sita and Lakshmana walking in the forest for days and months together. They manage to reach an ashrama by the nightfall, are welcomed by the inmates and spend the night there. The next morning Valmiki never forgets to mention

how Rama and Lakshmana perform the fire-sacrifice before setting out on their journey with Sita. What was this ritual with the consecrated fire, the *homa*? Definitely offerings were made to the gods through Agni as prayers to guard them from life-threatening obstacles and accidents, for they would be moving in unfamiliar and unknown forest spaces. Perhaps they recited the hymns of Budha and Gavisthira:

“Fire is awake by the kindling of the peoples, he fronts the dawn that comes to him like a fostering milch-cow; like the mighty ones casting upward their branching his lustres spread towards heaven.

The Priest of the call is awake for sacrifice to the gods, Fire with his right thinking has stood up high ablaze. The red glowing mass of him is seen: a great god has been delivered out of the darkness.” (SABCL, Hymns to the Mystic Fire, vol.11, Mandala Five, Sukta,1, p.201)

Sri Aurobindo considers this more as a poetic visualisation of the entire activity and the fruits that are expected to be gained by the sacrificer. At this distance of time, we may not be able to recognise the nuances of human desire and divine response. But the poetic imagination continues to enthrall us. Touching upon this aspect, Sri Aurobindo says:

“The Sukta is purely lyric in its character, *vaco vandaru*, an expression of delight and adoration, a *stoma*, or stabilising Mantra intended to fix in the soul the sevenfold delight of Agni, *damedame sapta ratna* (Rik 5), and assure that state of perfected and happy mentality, pure in perception, light and calm in the emotional parts, *bhandisthasya*, the summation of the truth which the divine force dwelling in us abidingly assures to our conscious being. The image of the physical morning sacrifice is maintained throughout the first two Riks, but from its closing phrase, *mahan devastamaso niramoci* the Rishi departs from the ritualistic symbol and confines himself to the purely psychological substance of his thought, returning occasionally to the physical aspects of Agni but only as a loose poetical imagery.”

From now on the Sukta proceeds to speak more about the psychological plane of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo says the immortal is covered by the mortal body. At the right time there is a great uprush of activity in us for the immortal within is revealing itself. The same power (the immortal God within the mortal body) that had been working *sub rosa*, now stands revealed. The

revelation comes as a solid force to reckon with and has been described in awesome imagery by Sri Aurobindo in the opening canto of *Savitri*.

“Then through the pallid rift that seemed at first
Hardly enough for a trickle from the suns,
Outpoured the revelation and the flame.
The brief perpetual sign recurred above.
A glamour from unreach'd transcendences
Iridescent with the glory of the Unseen,
A message from the unknown immortal Light
Ablaze upon creation's quivering edge,
Dawn built her aura of magnificent hues
And buried its seed of grandeur in the hours.” (4th ed,1993, pp.3-4)

When the Divine's power rushes down, the immortal within us meets it in no uncertain terms and together the new power acts on earth for creating a new world, new rules and new arenas. Such is the conclusion of Savitri's yoga as brought to us by Sri Aurobindo. The Agni within flares up into an all-consuming torch with the Agni without. Such is ‘the finding of the Soul’ by Savitri:

“Here in this chamber of flame and light they met;
They looked upon each other, knew themselves,
The secret deity and its human part,
The calm immortal and the struggling soul.
Then with a magic transformation's speed
They rushed into each other and grew one.” (4th ed,1993, p.527)

It is not surprising then, that Sri Aurobindo found in the Agni Sukthas important guidelines for the psychological aspects to be strengthened in the pursuit of yoga. Each attempt to gain knowledge is a dawn which is chasing away the darkness. This aspiration to remove the darkness of ignorance that surrounds our mind is never in vain for the answering grace is never far off. In fact it is on the alert and once the human being aspires even before turning towards illumination, grace is already in action.

“Divine knowledge, revealing, inspiring, suggesting, discerning, calls up the godlike ideal activity in us which exceeds man's ordinary motions, - wakes it even before it actually occupies this mortal system by its far-off touch and glimmer on the horizon; so too divine, inspired and faultless activity in us

risers heavenward and calls down God's dawn on His creature.”

Thus we are given to understand that the act of invoking Agni is of tremendous significance. Sri Aurobindo has utilised to the full the mythological descriptions of Agni. The same Suktha says further on in the fifth hymn:

“He was born victorious in front of the days, established in established things, ruddy-bright in the woodlands of our pleasure; in house and house founding the seven ecstasies the Fire took up his session as a Priest of the call strong for sacrifice”. (SABCL, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, vol.11, p.202)

Agni is referred to as founding “seven ecstasies” for us, *sapta ratna*. Mythology also draws our attention to Agni as *sapta-jihva*, one who has seven tongues. For instance the *Mundaka Upanishad* speaks of the seven tongues of Agni:

“Kali, the black, Karali, the terrible, Manojava, thought-swift, Sulohita, blood-red, Sudhumravarna, smoke-hued, Sphulingini, scattering sparks, Vishwaruchi, the all-beautiful, these are the seven swaying tongues of the fire.

He who in these when they are blazing bright performs the rites, in their due season, him his fires of sacrifice take and they lead him, these rays of the sun, there where the Overlord of the Gods is the Inhabitant on high.”

It is not enough if a teacher only teaches that nights are dark and days are illumined with light. He has also to gently point out that there are other variations in the day-night colours. The student should gain the inspiration to seek the colours of twilight, of the day when dark clouds hang over the city, of the thunderous and rainy nights when lightnings streak across the sky. That is how the guru works, he chases away the darkness (ignorance) in the mind of the student by suggesting to him to do it himself. Studying *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* with Sri Aurobindo’s assistance in the pages of notes and articles would lead us to the Upanishads and the rest. In his writings, one finds constant cross-references which encourage us silently to take up other writings in our culture and study them.

Here is the instance of “seven ecstasies” (*sapta ratna*) and “seven tongues” (*saptha jihva*). Having read Sri Aurobindo’s translations, these English phrases remained with me. ‘*Rose of God*’ is a poem I have been familiar with from my student days. But suddenly one day I felt a prod and went back to the poem: it is a seven-petalled Rose!

“Rose of God, vermilion stain on the sapphires of heaven,
Rose of Bliss, fire-sweet, seven-tinged with the ecstasies seven!
Leap up in our heart of humanhood, O miracle, O flame,
Passion-flower of the Nameless, bud of the mystical Name.”

‘*Rose of God*’ had remained an experimental poem in pure stress metre explained by Sri Aurobindo:

“...pure stress metre depends entirely on stress ictus. In ordinary poetry stress and natural syllabic quantity enter in as elements of the rhythm, but are not, qua stress and quantity, essential elements of the basic metre: in pure stress metre there is a reversal of these values, quantity and accentual inflection are subordinate and help to build the rhythm, but stress alone determines the metrical basis. In *Rose of God* each line is composed of six stresses, and the whole poem is built of five stanzas, each containing four such lines; the arrangement of feet varies freely to suit the movement of thought and feeling in each line.”

A lecture on classical Greek prosody! Wherever you turn in the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, there is the ideal teacher helping us spread our wings and fly in a healthy atmosphere. ‘*Rose of God*’ bridges a lesson on classical metres and the ancient Agni sukthas. Agni as a flower is invoked in the poem as a red rose, a “red icon of might”, the “divine knowledge” that would lead us to exceed ourselves in our endeavours. The poem gets connected easily to the Upanishadic reference to the seven goddesses of varied powers, Kali, Karali, Manojava, Sulohita, Sudhumravarna, Sphulingini, and Vishwaruchi. After this connectivity, I have always watched the fire ceremony at home on special days with Sri Aurobindo’s poem as a background benediction:

Rose of God, like a blush of rapture on Eternity’s face,
Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!
Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature’s abyss:
Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life beatitude’s kiss.

When did I begin to think of Sri Aurobindo as the ideal teacher in my life? A few years ago I had gone to interview the pontiff of the Sri Ahobila Math in his monastery. One of the famous Srivaishnava Maths, it has a global presence and has millions of devotees spread all over the world. Thousands had come from far and near to take his blessings and celebrate his birthday. *The Hindu*

had phoned to me for the interview. I was happy since I knew the pontiff, called Jeeyar, quite well. He gave me an appointment and received me with affection. We then settled down for a question and answer session. In the course of it I happened to ask him whether he believed in the restrictions that are still held sacred by the traditionalists in our religions.

“I know, you always come to this point. But traditional discipline should be adhered to, as they have been shaped by great rishis and scholarly saints like Sri Ramanuja and Vedanta Desika.”

“But times have been changing, isn’t adjustment necessary?”

“Child, now you will start speaking of your Aurobindo to cite examples ...” he laughed pleasantly.

“Swami! I would not have read our scriptures, the *Mahabharata* or even the Vedas if I had not studied Sri Aurobindo.”

“Really? That is good news to me and also to know he has written about these subjects. You see, I have not learnt English. Only Sanskrit and Tamil.”

The Jeeyar was a person of divine humility. At his advanced age, when thousands awaited his darshan outside, he heard me for thirty minutes and clapped his hands when I said Sri Aurobindo was a scholar-translator of the Vedas and the Upanishads and that he considered *Sri Vishnu Purana* and the Gita as immaculate scriptures. “See, this nation is so great. Through English, Aurobindo has taught you what you should know. This culture unifies all of us,” he said and blessed me as I prostrated before him and took my leave. The Jeeyar withdrew from his physical two years ago. But his words about Sri Aurobindo being my teacher have remained with me as an unforgettable experience.

- i. SABCL, vol. 11, p. 492
- ii. Savitri, Book I, canto i. (4th ed, 1993, pp.3-4)
- iii. Ibid., Book VII, canto v, 4th ed, 1993, p.527
- iv. SABCL, vol 11, p. 493
- v. I, ii, 1-5. Translation by Sri Aurobindo.

Indian Wisdom Literature in the Light of Sri Aurobindo

Debashish Banerji

Introduction

Indian civilisation has been built on a continuous expansion of spiritual experience, thought and culture. This is not to suggest that material or secular concerns have been lacking in India; or that all of India’s literary or cultural output is spiritual in nature. Modern academic studies of India have indeed privileged its social and political histories, or its cultural psychology, from the viewpoint of addressing its postcolonial problems. All its cultural output, including its literature, have been viewed from the vantage of these concerns. This has tended to obscure the histories of spiritual seeking and realisation which have developed over the millennia throughout India and had their impact on all areas of its culture. Ignoring these histories has led to two deplorable contemporary attitudes which are also related to ideological agendas – a secular agenda which refuses to acknowledge their existence or importance; and the agenda of religious nationalism which essentialises them in the name of an eternal unchanging spirituality, *sanatan dharma*. Sri Aurobindo’s approach to the spiritual heritage of India construes its perennialism (*sanatan dharma*) not in terms of a static uniformity but as a continuous culture of spiritual seeking which has renewed itself, adding new elements and experiences. Moreover, neither has this “continuity” been without breaks or ruptures, nor has it “said the same thing” in different ways. What is oft repeated now as a platitude is the saying from the Veda, India’s earliest wisdom texts — “The Truth is One, the sages speak of it differently.” This is often coupled with the generic pan-Indic parable of the elephant and the blind men, who each described the elephant according to the part they touched. These clichés are repeated to emphasise the “oneness” of

the spiritual experience and its “national” provenance. Yet, what underlies these and other such statements is the poignant insurmountable gulf between Reality and its descriptions; they also highlight the inevitable paradox of the encounter between finitude and infinity; finally, they draw our attention to the need to acknowledge and pay heed to both sides of the paradox without subordinating one to the other – a radical monism and a radical pluralism. It is in this spirit that we will approach our study of the Indian wisdom traditions – not as an attempt to reduce them to some “sameness,” but to attend to the variety of goals of and approaches to the spiritual life that have developed in India as part of a continuous conversation with its identities, differences and singularities.

One of the goals of the modern knowledge academy is a search for a comprehensive understanding of the human being – its capacities, possibilities and its structural and functional relations, whether morphological or psychological. The archiving of different human experiences and understandings is part of the attempt to arrive at such a universal philosophical anthropology. Sri Aurobindo’s approach to the history of Indian wisdom includes this dimension in his seeking for the sources of integrality. Yet such a seeking is scrupulous to retain the singularity of each tradition of experience and its cultural expressions, including its literature, while assimilating its essence into a transpersonal integral psychology that remains, at least mentally, ever incomplete. Our study of the wisdom literatures of India will follow this approach – we will consider textual bodies in relation to their cultures of experience with a view to understanding their unique questions and answers and the part these may play in a contemporary post-secular integration of the spiritual life. Moreover, our approach will not be merely ideational, a search for mental understanding, but will try to introduce the reading of these texts as a form of spiritual praxis – in other words, with the aim of guiding the reader into an attentive experience of the transformative power of these texts. This, indeed, is how these texts were meant to be read – as ideas grounded in experience and expressed in words that carried some power of the experience.

This power of texts to convey spiritual experience is the subject of our present consideration. At the outset we need to orient ourselves for such a consideration. If the archive of Indian wisdom literature is to be taken as carriers of spiritual experience, we must approach this archive with faith and reverence

(*śraddha*) to the gurus and spiritual personalities whose experiences are encapsulated in the language of these texts. Yet this reverence is not idolatry, it is not a surrender of one’s analytical or critical faculty. Rather, it is a concentrated intuitive receptivity, not only to the ideas being expressed but to the medium of the expression, the power of language. We also need to orient ourselves as individuals who have grappled with the deepest questions of life, and be awake to something inside us which seeks answers to these questions, other than our surface personalities, the needs and desires of our family lives or livelihood. This is something which moves at a deeper level engaged with the foundations of existence and forms the basis of a living and existential philosophy. To derive answers and experiences from wisdom literature, one must have an intimate living familiarity with the questions of existence and be open to the suggestive properties of language through which these questions are raised and answered.

From its earliest texts, this power of language to model experience has been sacralised in the Indian wisdom traditions. Sri Aurobindo draws attention to this in a number of his texts, most of all in his book *The Future Poetry*. Here he points to the suggestive powers of language, and gives the highest importance to the primordial power of sound (*śabda*) and rhythm (*chhanda*) to carry spiritual experience below the threshold of cognition. All poetry exploits this power to some degree. Even the modernist poet T. S. Eliot points to this non-cognitive dimension of poetry when he tells us that the “meaning” of a poem is only the bone that the robber throws through the window to placate the watchdog mind while it does its work. The primary language in which Indic wisdom texts are written is Sanskrit; and of all languages, it is Sanskrit that has given the greatest attention to the primordial power of sound and rhythm to communicate experience. This is what makes it preeminently the language of the spiritual life. Sanskrit self-reflexivity as a language has theorised this power and used it consciously as what has been called the mantra. The root “*man*” refers to the mind, while the suffix “*tra*” indicates transcendence, going beyond. Thus the mantra is that power of language which communicates experience beyond the mind. We also notice from this etymological exercise that these word roots are not foreign to English speakers. This indeed, is because both English and Sanskrit belong to the Indo-European family of languages and have a kinship that may have a common origin in a lost language which has been called Proto Indo-

European. Whether there was indeed such a language, the self-consciousness of Sanskrit to this power of sound makes it easier for us to be intuitively conscious of these sound values by extension from Sanskrit to English. Both from the earliest texts and in all traditions of yogic practice, the mantra has been used extensively in India to communicate spiritual experience, becoming the medium of transference from yogi to yogi. Traditions of initiation, *diksha*, have relied on this means, often through the passage of a Sanskrit sentence, word or single syllable, from a guru secretly into the ear of the initiate. When the initiate was ready, this word conveyed the experience that it carried. Sound syllables, known in yogic terminology as *bijas* or seeds, also form the basis of Sanskrit words, as the roots of verbs (*dhatu*) from which conjugations as well as nouns are derived. This retention of a verb-root foundation in Sanskrit is one of the principal means which has allowed it to carry its mantric power. This is because verbs are action words and represent the power of becoming just as nouns represent the power of being. By deriving nouns from verbs, Sanskrit maintains a fidelity to the idea of actions based in vibrational movements that can crystallise into objects or “things.” This is how the power of sound syllables relates to the animistic essence of things, connecting us to an experience of identity with their becoming. We will have occasion to dwell on this in greater detail. So the words of Sanskrit have travelled to us, charged with experience. Thus is how an entire dimension of philosophical and experiential meaning, not available in our ordinary life is contained in these words, that comes to us through Sanskrit terminology.

As our receptivity to the sound power of words increases, it is hoped that each reader in his/her own way, will become open to the multi-valent powers of these words; because one of our objectives in this study is the secret science of sound and meaning. We will be able to observe how certain words have moved into present day languages and how even in contemporary English we find words that carry a power of similar vibration.

This brings us to the question — is language denotational? In other words, are words minted out of the mind and associated arbitrarily with meanings? This is the common understanding of language that comes to us from the discipline of Linguistics. Languages are arbitrary forms of social contract. We agree on conventions of relation between words and ideas or meanings and from this settled agreement arises linguistic communication. We move together socially

(*samsara*) because these conventions are shared by the community of language speakers as second nature. But is this all there is to language? We can ask this question and consider where so-called arbitrary words have come from. We know that some words are obviously not associated arbitrarily with meanings. We have onomatopoeic words, which convey meanings due to their natural sound values — water splashes, a duck quacks. These carry what we may call sound images of what is being talked about. Of course, there is only a limited set of such words. One may extend the consideration to ask how we deal with abstract words, words that carry ideas. Can these be onomatopoeic? Certainly these don’t belong to the natural world in the same way that ‘a duck quacks.’ But mental objects have their own nature and Sanskrit theories of the word exploit the creative aspect of such objects that underlie the natural creation.

The Gospel according to John begins, “In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. According to the Vedas too it is the Word that has become this world. What is meant by this? How can the word have become this world? Has this any relation with the word or words that humans share as currency of communication?

Or is it something esoteric, which has no relation with our speech? It is easy to dismiss these ideas in this manner, just as it is customary to take God as extra-cosmic, even were one to admit his existence. This dualism is summarised in the adage, give to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Our world is constrained by the laws of Caesar, while God remains in his heaven. So it is with our understanding of the Word. It’s nice to say once in a while “In the beginning was the Word;” however as far as we are concerned we share another speech, which is arbitrary. This is the understanding we commonly hold. But in the Indian tradition, there is a sacredness to the word even as speech, whether written or spoken, an intrinsic understanding of the divinity of words. In his *The Secret of the Veda*, Sri Aurobindo points out how Brahman, Brahma, Brihaspati and Brahmanaspati are deities and powers in the *Rig Veda* representing shifting emphases related to such a process of creation by the Word. Both the ideational and the animistic-vital energy of the cosmos and its constituents are self-contained possibilities within the cosmic Being that emerge and evolve through the intent of the self-expressive power of Being. This emergent Idea-vibration is the Word, Vedic *brahman*. The soul-power by

which it arises is Brahma, which thus becomes, in later texts, the cosmic Creator. The highest wisdom immanent in the Word belongs to Brihaspati, the Lord of the Infinite Idea manifesting in the creative vibration. This is what makes Brihaspati into the teacher of the gods. Combining the highest understanding and general power of the Word, Brahmanaspati is the Lord of the creative Word.

The word 'Brahman' is more familiar today from the Upanishads where it attained to primacy as the word describing the Divine as the one Conscious Reality without a second. Later to clarify its earlier Vedic sense as the Divine Word, the term *Shabda*, sound, is coupled with the word Brahman and we have the term *Shabda Brahman*: the infinite consciousness in the form of Vibration, the sound body of the Divine Consciousness. A synonym of *Shabda* also appears in the Veda and assumes a vast significance. This is the term *Vak*, which is also the name attributed to a female seer or rishi by name of *Vak Abhrini*, to whom a very important Vedic hymn is attributed. The word *Vak* means the spoken aspect of the Divine Word. Later, in Tantric theory, this idea of the Divine Word as *Vak* becomes the cornerstone of an elaborate theory of the Word which we will have occasion to consider. Again, the Veda refers to the dynamic power of becoming of the Word as the goddess Saraswati, the goddess of divine Inspiration. Saraswati literally means "She who flows." This is taken to be a reference to a deified river, but in yogic terms she is the goddess of the dynamic expression of the Word. This is why she is later represented as Brahma's consort and is associated with learning in the common Indian imagination. It is from such sources that the notion that the Word is God holds some weight in the Indian mind. This notion may have become conventionalised today, but still something remains of its sense. Later, in the Upanishads, this primordial Word is referred to as the *pranava*, the Causeless Origin and is referred to as *Om*.

The Upanishadic idea of the primordial sound *Om*, *pranava* or *Shabda Brahman* enters yogic practice as the most powerful mantra and travels through the history of Indic wisdom, coming down to our times. It is also called *Nada*. I have already referred to the tradition of Tantric yoga related to the utterance of the *Om*, which is called *Nada Yoga*. The term *Nada* is often coupled with an attribute, *Anahata*, literally "unwounded" or "unstruck." *Anahata* is that which

has never been struck and hence is unwounded. Note the sense of the word 'struck'. When we strike we wound; we are talking about subjective consciousness in the sense that all is conscious. Thus even when we strike an unconscious material object, we may say that something is wounded.

In this regard, there is an instructive experience in the life of the great Bengali yogi and saint Sri Ramakrishna, a follower of the Divine Mother in the form of Kali. In the precincts in the outskirts of Kolkata where he lived, Dakshineswar, there appeared a follower of *Nada yoga*. In Dakshineswar of that time, as in most sacred sites of India, many itinerant yogis congregated as they could share ideas and find food and shelter. Ramakrishna walking by saw that this man was a follower of *Nada yoga* and he formed an intent of convincing him that it was more appropriate to worship Kali. Ramakrishna asked him what he followed and the yogi told him that he only repeated the sound *Om*. Ramakrishna then told him that every word signified something; so what did *Om* signify or indicate? Many of the conversations at sites like this followed a dialogic method not dissimilar to what was followed in ancient Greece and has come to be called the Socratic method. It was Ramakrishna's intent to get the *Nada* yogi to acknowledge that *Om* signified the Divine Consciousness, upon which Ramakrishna would argue that Kali was the personified Divine Consciousness, which was better experienced through her worship. But the *Nada* yogi said that this Word signified nothing but itself. As soon as he heard this, Ramakrishna gave a great shout and went into Samadhi. He recognised immediately the truth of the yogi's answer and experienced it.

The *Mandukya Upanishad* concerns itself exclusively with the *Om* as the Brahman in its sound manifestation. One may thus say that it validates the Vedic sense of the word Brahman. According to this the *Om* has four stations of consciousness, which includes the subjective and objective words and worlds that are eternally unmanifest. All words, things and worlds are contained in this Word. In the transcendental experience of the *Om*, one has a momentary glimpse of that original vibration that has within it the potential of all sounds, all words and the entire world of objects. Each object in the world is a condensation of a sound power derived from that original vibration which can be experienced in the transcendental potency of the *Om*.

This is the experience of the *Om* in its transcendental state. One may ask

the question, how is it logically possible to experience a sound and be aware of manifest and unmanifest realities contained in it? We may recollect a reference to a similar experience in another powerful wisdom text of India, the *Bhagavad Gita*. This is the experience that Sri Krishna discloses to Arjuna in his supramental form. This is a paradoxical form that contains all forms, past, present and future. Krishna prefaces this disclosure by saying that what he is about to disclose is beyond the experiential boundaries of humanity, but he will make it possible for Arjuna through the gift of a transcendental sight, which will raise him beyond humanity for a transcendental instant, a moment made eternity. In that instant Arjuna perceives simultaneously One Form which is all forms, the One Present which is all Time. Arjuna's experiencing apparatus breaks down under the impact of this supramental experience and he begs Krishna to revert to his more familiar divinity, his Form as the Cosmic Being which does not exceed the laws and furthest reaches of the Mind. Here we are talking of an unprecedented kind of divine experience. It is difficult enough to experience the One that is in all things, cosmic. It is difficult to experience the One that is outside of all things, extra-cosmic. But this experience of the One that is at once all things, the Form that preserves all forms and doesn't disintegrate into the Formless — is a supramental experience outside and above our present humanity, a state perhaps we are evolving towards. But certain yogic experiences can give us glimpses of this future and this is the full significance coded into the possibilities of the *Om* as the Primordial Divine Sound. *Om* is the Silence and the Word which breaks the Silence. It creates the manifestation. And in the creation of the manifestation, it brings forth into disclosure that which is hidden in the infinite.

We may further explore how the Indian wisdom tradition has attempted to formalise this understanding. Perhaps the greatest theoretical elaboration of this dimension comes to us from the Tantric literature of Kashmir Shaivism. The tantric philosophers of Kashmir Shaivism theorised the power of creation and revelation by Vibration. Out of this developed a spiritual path or yoga known as *Nada Yoga*, the yoga of primordial sound. But prior to the consideration of *Nada Yoga*, we still need to explore how the Word becomes this world and how this relates to the opening line of the Gospel according to John, which states, immediately following its line about the Word, "God said let there be Light and there was Light." In other words, the power of the Word was mobilised

to become the power of disclosure. Light discloses; it reveals. What is happening here? What is the Word and what is Light?

The tantric seers of Kashmir Shaivism of the 8th-10th c. expressed the doctrine of Vibration, known as *Spanda*. The original work on this may have been written by the 9th c. sage Vasugupta. According to this, a vibration or ripple arises within the primordial stillness of the Divine Consciousness, equated with Shiva. This Vibration is termed *Spanda*. Since there can be no movement within the stillness, nor any Time if there is no movement of consciousness, this is a paradoxical statement of an eternal dimension of self-existence as Time or Becoming. However, since we have no way of transcending Time except by escape into a transcendence beyond it, its image is best understood by us as a ripple which appears in a still lake. When we see a ripple on a lake we usually look for an external cause. A stone was dropped, the wind blew, a leaf fell in. But to this ripple there is no cause because there is nothing apart from that which was still. Thus the appearance of the ripple is a paradoxical Mystery to the dimensional limits of our experience. In the acknowledgement of the mysteriousness of the manifestation, this mystery has been called Shakti and Maya, the great Mother of the cosmos. This movement of Consciousness within Pure Being is Something which transcends consciousness and unconsciousness, and wills to express itself as the actualisation or manifestation of Consciousness. This ripple in the stillness is the original Word, the Vibration which tears apart the Stillness, yet leaves it immune. We can recollect our earlier discussion of the *Om* as the "unwounded sound" *Anahata Nada* here. The *Spanda* is a vibration that appears without a cause, there is no stone thrown into the still lake to make it appear. Thus it is the unstruck vibration, the sound that appeared without any striking. It is this that is invoked in the Zen Koan about the sound of one hand clapping. What is the sound of one hand clapping? It is the unstruck sound, the sound that is unwounded, the sound that is caused by itself. The sound that does not signify anything outside of itself.

If conscious stillness is the essence of Self-Knowledge, the *Spanda* is the turn towards self-exploration and self-description. It is thus the origin of Time, which is equable to eternity; Time, which is therefore perpetuity, a constant and unending self-disclosure of the infinite. This disclosure is the ever-changing cosmos (*jagat*). It is that in which we find ourselves; that we see all around us

as the present, that which went before as our past that which is evolving into the future. It is that one ripple that is beginningless and endless and ever-continuous. It is thus original in the most original sense of originality. It is originary, causative at the origin of time and timelessness. So *Spanda*, the principle of self-disclosure, is the Vibration of Consciousness from which meaning arises.

This is originally subjective vibration, vibration of consciousness, but Vibration that throws up the matrix of ideas, feelings, sense-experiences, and materiality.

An even earlier term that relates to such ideas comes to us from the tradition of grammarians in India. This also highlights the close connection between spiritual metaphysics and practical linguistics in India. The idea makes its first appearance in the 2nd c. BCE in the work of the grammarian Patanjali (who may have been the same as the writer of the Yoga Sutras) but received its fuller exposition in the *Vakyapadiya*, a grammar text by the 5th c. polymath Bhatṛihari. The idea and word in question is *Sphota*, which means explosion. The theory of *Sphota* relates to spontaneous cognition of meaning-units carried through sounds. If *Spanda* operates in the mode of continuous vibration, *Sphota* is conceptualised in the key of discrete units. In the same paradoxical way as *Spanda*, *Sphota* may be thought of as an eternal recurrence of manifestation marked by beginnings and ends. This has led to Puranic ideas of cosmic recurrence and the relativity of time-units. Language at the human level too operates through spontaneous cognition of sound, word, sentence and thought units, not through an analytical division in our minds of grammatical parts but all at once. We may relate the two paradigms of *Spanda* and *Sphota* by thinking of them as depth and surface phenomena — if we see a ripple on the surface we can be sure that there is an explosion in the depths. With the term *Sphota*, we return to an onomatopoeia which covers the spectrum from the natural to the ideational and the metaphysical. The term also retains its Indo-European resonance in its English translation, as one can see if one contemplates the sound-image of the word *Sphota* next to the word “explosion.” There is something beyond the word, which vibrates and communicates an experience at a pre-cognitive level which nevertheless includes a cognitive and cosmic significance.

This view of Sanskrit grammarians and yogis pertaining to the experiential power of sound and language is intrinsic to Indian wisdom literature and our

study will concern itself with this dimension in conjunction with the power of ideas and their nuances as we move through the textual bodies of these traditions. The nuances of ideas and their changes through literature are often accompanied with changing nuances in the sound power of the same words, which is why words in the Indian wisdom traditions are not fixed in their meanings, but develop a fuzzy accretion of connotations, which continue to lend themselves to creative use. It becomes important to understand these connotations in context if we are to engage with textual traditions and their interpretations. *Sphota*, for example becomes a term which generates a variety of experiential properties over time, in derivatives that spread in vernacular use. One such nuance is that of blossoming, a sudden opening from bud to flower, that seems like an instantaneous surprise. This does not contain the chaotic violence of an explosion, but subjectively it partakes of the same suddenness, like an explosion of consciousness from a condition of dreaming into the light of day. Here the more subjective power of the term *Sphota* is exploited, drawing attention to unheard and unseen aspects of consciousness and their movements. In his interpretations of wisdom texts, Sri Aurobindo is scrupulous about the connotative contexts of words, though he also draws attention to alternatives of meaning which inhere in the ideation and sonic space of words. This is important to arrive at a fuller appreciation of the potential of these texts, since they continue to live in our times and contain answers whose relevance today may not be the same as in their time of creation. Sri Aurobindo’s purpose in studying and interpreting wisdom texts is ultimately not merely academic but practical, pertaining to their value to help us today. Thus the creative interpretation of texts, within their connotative boundaries is also something he encourages, with the viewpoint to their transformative power in our present lives. This kind of hermeneutics is more like a conversation between present and past and belongs to the discipline of constructive philosophy.

In preparing ourselves to study the wisdom traditions of India, we can reflect more deeply on the world of experiences opened up by sounds and words. We spoke of the discrete and sudden movement from state to state of consciousness, such as from dream to waking, as a kind of explosion of consciousness, *Sphota*. We can change the quality of the movement and think of it as vibration, *Spanda*. When one wakes up in the morning, there is sometimes the sense of a ripple of

awakening that passes through one. If you are very still you will experience this. There is almost a little shiver that passes through the being as one wakes up; this is a repetition of the *Spanda* inside us. There is a similar shiver in the act of being born and in the act of dying, subtle passages from state to state of consciousness. Here we see that the realities referred to by words, are as symbolic as the words; they are experienced through movements of Consciousness, both personal and cosmic, that are enacted in nature repeatedly. We can experience them even in our everyday lives and work back from these experiences to glimpses or experiences of cosmic and metaphysical realities which they symbolise.

Wherefrom arises this sense of language, how is that what we have called the essential Vibration becomes the word as we speak it?

I mentioned earlier the gulf between these two: the Word that is God and the word that we speak; and asked whether these are radically different or if there is a relation between them or if they are transformations of the same Divine Word, *Shabda Brahman* or *Vak*? When discussing the *Shabda Brahman*, I spoke of the four stations or *avasthas* of the *Om* as described in the *Mandukya Upanishad*. The highest transcendental and nameless station (*turiya*, “the fourth”) is radically Unmanifest; the second Causal station (*shusupti*) transcends the cosmos but embodies its supramental Truth; the third is the Universal Subjective cosmic realm of Dream (*swapna*) and the one closest to us is that of the objective material cosmos experienced in waking (*jagrat*).

The Tantriks of Kashmir Shaivism adapted a similar fourfold theory pertaining to *Vak* to describe the transforms of the Divine Word. The origins of this theory may lie in Bhartrihari, the 5thc. poet, grammarian, philosopher and yogi we have encountered earlier. Bhartrihari’s division of the *Vak* is further theorised by Kashmir Shaiva philosophers such as Utpaladeva (900-950). According to these yogi-philosophers, there is a gradation by which the original Word becomes the human word. Thus they see four levels to *Vak*. The first of these is *Para Vak*. *Para Vak* is the Supreme Word. This is the *Logos*, what in Christian mysticism has been called the Bride of God; it is the Unmentionable, before all particularities. It is the supramental Word, as we have spoken earlier, embodying the experience that is beyond the human capacity of experience, illimitable.

But this Word coming through the mental ether becomes the “seeing word,”

Pashyanti Vak. *Pashyanti* literally means that which sees. It is worth pondering that this is not that which is seen but that which sees. It is a living and conscious thing. It has consciousness and power and the ability to see, not only be seen. This is the basis of what is called *Darshan*, non-dual mutuality of Seeing. *Darshan* is generally used for visual icons; but from the standpoint of consciousness, words, as we have seen, are sound-images and may have the power to see and be seen. This is *Pashyanti Vak*: it has a power of consciousness, intelligence and sight and can act on us even before we understand it. This is what constitutes the power of the highest mantra, the sound-body of the gods. In this regard it is instructive to note that the general term for philosophy in India, particularly the tradition of commentaries on wisdom texts that concerns us, is also called *darshan*. This highlights both the quality of these texts as experienced or “seen,” as well as their power of consciousness or agency, their power to “see.”

From the station of *Pashyanti Vak*, *Vak* passes into the life world and becomes the *Madyama Vak*, the intermediate word. Here, it gathers emotions, sensations and feelings. But it is still in the form of subtle vibration, not yet materialised as audible sound. All these three are inner or subjective states of the word. The *Madhyama Vak* is the vibration body in the life world. Finally *Vak* enters the throat and voices itself as the material word, *Vaikhari Vak*. The word utters itself as the mantra communicating its experience from human to human.

Also in this vibrational evolution we find that the media through which the word travels are themselves created by the word. The highest is the *Vyom* or *Akasha*, which is the etheric element, which contains the illimitable and undivided/indivisible Word. It’s the One Vibration carrying all others, the vibration of the Infinite One. Manifesting, it creates the principle of polarity, of attraction and repulsion so that it may circulate in virtual fields of “wind” or *Maruta*. Emerging closer to materiality, it generates a form of friction within itself to create the medium of disclosure, the radiant element, Agni, fiery and luminous. *Tejas*, this vibration of powerful radiance further generates the watery element of fluidity which can become a carrier of taste, *rasa*, experiences of feelings and emotions; and finally it condenses to the material medium and subjects itself to this medium as its physical carrier. This is the earthly element *Kshiti*.

So it is this evolution of the Word that we see as we move from *Para Vak* to *Vaikhari Vak*.

In the Tantric idea of the Shakti schools, the Word is the divine Mother Kali, who becomes this world through the vibrations of seed-syllables, *akshara* (indestructible) *bija* (seed). The word *akshara* also means alphabet. These seed vibrations enter the universe and constitute it through their combinations. When the universe dissolves Kali takes them back to herself and wears them around her neck like a garland of severed heads. This is the *Akshara Mala*, or necklace of alphabets; the garland of letters. The pioneer of Tantric studies, Sir John Woodroffe wrote about this in his book *The Garland of Letters*. According to this, the Word contains knowledge *Jnana*, which is not just mental knowledge but spiritual knowledge of experience that is recognised in us by the “Knower and Controller Within” *Antaryamin*.

The scope of our study will start from the Veda, the earliest wisdom texts of India, which means “Knowledge” and move to the Upanishads or Vedanta. The word Upanishad literally means “to sit near” and is used because the language of the Upanishad is an intuitive language that sits close to the Truth. From here, we will move to the post-Upanishadic schools of empirical metaphysics, such as Buddhism and Sankhya and thence to the *Bhagavad Gita* or Song of God. This will be followed by a consideration of the Puranas or “ancient teachings,” dealing with the Hindu gods, Vishnu and Shiva; and the Tantras or texts on the Devi or Divine Mother and on yogic technologies for liberation and enjoyment (*mukti* and *bhukti*). We will touch on the Agamas, another body of literature pertaining to Shiva, Vishnu and the Goddess and will conclude our study with a consideration of the schools of Vedantic interpretation, leading into modern times.

Psychological perfection

(Continued from the previous issue)

James Anderson

[Author's note:

It is being increasingly recognised that our thoughts and feelings, desires and impulses have an effect upon the body, — surely on our own and in all likelihood upon other bodies as well. We are like receivers and transmitters of states of consciousness, of goodwill and ill-will and thereby decrease or increase the overall health or illness in the group-life we inhabit. This insightful article explores how we can improve upon what we receive and transmit by directing our consciousness upon any unwanted harmful thoughts and emotions that stand in the way of our individual and collective evolution. Based on the principles of the Integral Yoga, these psychological processes can be practised by anyone who aspires for an integral health.]

Rejection

There is one remedy that does not rely exclusively on the radiating touch of the soul. That is rejection. The Mother says that an inner aspiration is always important, but even if this is absent, a persistent refusal to allow the lower movements any acknowledgment will produce a positive effect. Because of this, it is logical that this practice can be particularly beneficial in the early phases of sadhana, particularly at a time when the soul is more buried by its instrumental nature. This is clearly the realm of personal effort and this stage, we all know, can last a very long time. I guess too, it also depends on whether this process of catharsis resonates in the individual concerned. The Mother comments:

“It is by refusing to give expression — I mean not only in action but also in thought, in feeling. When impulses, thoughts, emotions come, if you refuse to express them, if you push them aside and remain in a state of inner aspiration and calm, then gradually they lose their force and stop coming.

So the consciousness is emptied of its lower movements....

“In a great aspiration, if you can put yourself into contact with something higher, some influence of your psychic being or some light from above, and if you can manage to put this in touch with these lower movements, naturally they stop more quickly. But before even being able to draw these things by aspiration, you can already stop these movements from finding expression in you by a very persistent and patient refusal. When thoughts which you do not like come, if you just brush them away and do not pay them any attention at all, after some time they won’t come any longer. But you must do this very persistently and regularly (1).”

The Mother’s words are very clear here and the mode of rejection should never be confused with suppression. Suppression is no sort of solution. I find it only cramps and infuriates the nature. Goodness knows though, we still carry on doing it! But refusing to give the lower movement any expression deprives it of all sustenance. At least, that is my understanding. It cannot survive in such a void and so it sinks down into lower and lower regions. Finally, the Mother says, it reaches its final lodging in the inconscient, and when it is expelled from there it disappears for good. This, I guess, is what is often inferred when someone states that his or her yoga is ‘in the subconscious’: it indicates how far this process of rejection has gone.

Our path

Ultimately though, I believe that our path is one of transformation and not rejection. Rejection, on its own, is a preparation, albeit sometimes essential, but not the ultimate answer. I feel that each one of us has to finally find our own way to align ourselves. To be honest, it is not a solution that I have ever consistently espoused. There have been brief incursions, even the odd experiment, but another way has always seemed to more naturally fit.

Almost from the beginning, there has only been Her Force and Light and for me, they hold all the answers: even to our most deep-rooted disorders. It is just a matter of opening. The Mother’s way, I feel, is finally to transform and not reject. I understand that rejection can provide a crucial stepping-stone, particularly when one is groping in the dark. Sri Aurobindo’s ‘aspiration, rejection and surrender’ holds the key to so many doors but ultimately these three poises are quite meaningless without consciousness. Sri Aurobindo’s words always

have to be understood in their entirety. I believe that consciousness is the single necessity whatever method (if any) one chooses to apply on our way to inner growth.

I also believe that there is a danger too that this action of rejection can almost become a religion. I feel that if the void is never filled by the Higher Force or never touched by the influence of the psychic being, one is left with something almost sterile and bone-dry. Here, Sri Aurobindo advises a disciple on the right action with regard to desire:

“No one can easily get rid of desires. What has first to be done is to exteriorise them, to push them out, on the surface and get the inner parts quiet and clear. Afterwards they can be thrown out and replaced by the true thing, a happy and luminous will one with the Divine’s (2).”

I am convinced that Sri Aurobindo never intended the Integral Yoga to be a path of rigid asceticism and self-denial. From his words here, it is clear that this distortion of desire is going to be replaced by something so much more rich and true. It is just a question of moving to a higher vibration. It is an elevation and not a sacrifice.

Man is neither an automaton nor a machine, he is something so much more: he is a living soul. This soul cannot be satisfied with lavish postures. This soul is waiting at every moment to step forward in our life. But surely it doesn’t require any overt sacrifice and austerity to respond to our call.

Detachment

A detached attitude is such a boon to our inner well-being. I feel that the ability to ‘step back’, disengage and simply observe can save us from a whole heap of trouble. If something inside us remains alert and intact, it saves us from plunging into those chasms of nature. It is so necessary, as Sri Aurobindo often advised, to keep one’s station above the movement that you want to change.

There was a mistake I made on one occasion and it almost had disastrous consequences. I allowed myself to plunge down into the lower domains and proceeded to grapple with their elements head on. I suppose, at the root, there was a stupendous arrogance. It was almost as if I was trying to wrench the sadhana from the Mother’s hands. Sooner or later, with the pressure of the practice, these movements would have surfaced in any case, but my mind and vital were insisting on their own protocol.

Rejection implies not paying attention to our lower movements and here I was, trying to wage war on all my desires. I allowed myself to go down to their level and I got swamped. But in the end, that still, quiet voice saved me from being caught in a very nasty mesh and the Mother disentangled me once more. The psychic voice is invariably our final recourse. If we lose touch with that, even madness can engulf us.

The action of truth

Most people, if asked, would claim that truth is just a static concept. It is one of life's 'shoulds': you should tell and adhere to the truth and just that. It almost comes down to an ethical stance. But Truth, for me, really implies integrality: there is a wholeness about it. Its action brings a spontaneous harmony and it has such a power. It also has an action. Indeed, there is a vast consciousness-force that accompanies it. Moreover, this consciousness is our future; it is the next rung that man has to climb. It is what can even lift him up to the level of a god. The Mother says that it has to fully manifest before anything else, even before love. It is already alive and working in the earth atmosphere. Its effects can be felt quite concretely if we remain open.

Most of all, it bears the stamp of the Divine Mother. The Mother, I feel, is the living embodiment of this Truth: when I call Her, I simply call it into my being. There is a part of us which is a portion of this Truth and that is the soul. Not surprisingly, that is where the Mother resides. This is the perfection that integrates everything and the key, I suggest, is consciousness.

Practice

Finally the Truth resolves: it can have a very decisive action. It induces the very act of transformation. Very often, before I start working inside, I might sense a gnawing feeling of unease inside. Something is not right and I feel disturbed. However, I can't put my finger on the root of the problem. It's almost as if a little worm is wriggling inside and I can't locate it. It's just there and I wish it would go away.

So I call Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for help and guidance. I close my eyes and then look within. I quieten the mind and try to look at my nature from the perspective of the soul. I start at the top of my body and work my way slowly down, pausing at each energy centre. As I observe my nature disinterestedly, I can see many uneven patterns. But there can be long pauses

when no response seems to come. There are locations where the flow of the Force is interrupted. I might also observe a stain buried somewhere but I have no idea why it is there. I simply cannot understand it. I am feeling in the dark.

I need to go into the source of the pain; I want to know what makes it live and breed. At this point, I might feel a stabbing pain and so I allow my consciousness to go right inside it and I silently enquire into its origin. I allow myself to absorb the pain and try to understand it. At the same time, though, a distance is always maintained.

When something true takes over, the action can proceed very quickly. Very often though, if the mind is active, I need to be patient and bide my time. I call for help and unexpectedly an illumination comes. A truth dawns and in the knowledge of that truth the distortion disappears. Its support vanishes into thin air. I also find it is good to express this knowledge out loud. I so often find that expression accompanies manifestation. If I am present in the psychic, the words will come out automatically. When this action happens, a peace descends. I know the process is complete when I can feel this state vibrating in all the pores of the body. Until the body itself can share in this joy, the work is still incomplete. When it does arrive, there is no feeling quite like it. Sometimes I call peace systematically from top to bottom in the body and this creates a unique vibration in my being. This peace has become my true support in life: it is the source of all stability.

I am finding that the work is going deeper now. I believe that if we are sincere, everything will eventually rise to the surface. When I first came here, I used to bruise quite easily from outer impacts. Now I find that my weak points have deeper roots and so a more probing observation is required. There are parts of my being which continue to cling to the past. There are so many long buried memories which need to be filed away and put away for good. So I find myself going down into darker corners. We can never stand still: if progress stops, we will simply fall back. We need a brighter beam all the time.

The light of truth

There is only one Truth. It is absolute, but I suggest that we translate it according to our own degrees. The action, I feel, is unique although it will often vary in intensity. Sometimes however, a more decisive remedy may be required. There may be a stubborn little twist that torments us deeply. It is like a foreign

object that has taken up lodging inside our nature. It may indeed be something we can't locate. But we almost feel as if something alien is trying to unbalance or take over our being.

When the Mother directs the light of truth upon us, I believe that the force is even more bright and intense. I guess too, much depends on our capacity to withstand it. The Mother has said that this light of truth is everywhere: it's just that we don't know how to use it. At the highest point, I believe that such tiny drops will one day be our first glimpse of the Supramental Force itself. This is something quite outside my experience, but as long as I open myself to the action of truth, I trust the Mother will prepare me in due time for the inevitable transformation. I also believe that whenever I align myself to the Mother, I open myself more and more to the action and light of the Truth. A simple aspiration is enough.

Calling the light

The Mother says that calling this light is quite simple:

“Of course if you ask me, ‘What should I do?’ — anyone at all among you — I shall tell you, ‘My children, it is very easy, you have only to call me, and then when you feel the contact, well, you put it upon the thing till that part has understood (3).’”

The Mother describes the action as follows:

“There is a great difference between pushing back a thing simply because one doesn't want it and changing the state of one's consciousness which makes the thing totally foreign to one's nature. Usually, when one has a movement one doesn't want, one drives it away or pushes it back, but one doesn't take the precaution of finding within oneself what has served and still serves as a support for this movement, the particular tendency, the fold of the consciousness which enables the thing to enter the consciousness. If, on the contrary, instead of simply making a movement of reprobation and rejection, one enters deeply into his vital consciousness and finds the support, that is, a kind of particular little vibration buried very deeply in a corner, often in such a dark corner that it is difficult to find it there; if one starts hunting it down, that is, if one goes within, concentrates, follows as it were the trail of this movement to its origin, one finds something like a very tiny serpent coiled up, something at times quite tiny, not bigger than a pea, but very black and sunk very deeply.

“And then there are two methods: either to put so intense a light, the light of the truth-consciousness so strong, that this will be dissolved; or else to catch the thing as with pincers, pull it out from its place and hold it up before one's consciousness. The first method is radical but one doesn't always have at his disposal this light of truth, so one can't always use it. The second method can be taken, but it hurts, it hurts as badly as the extraction of a tooth; I don't know if you have ever had a tooth pulled out, but it hurts as much as that, and it hurts here, like that. (Mother shows the centre of the chest and makes a movement of twisting.) And usually one is not very courageous. When it hurts very much, well, one tries to efface it like this (gesture) and that is why things persist. But if one has the courage to take hold of it and pull it until it comes out and to put it before himself, even if it hurts very much... to hold it up like this (gesture) until one can see it clearly, and then dissolve it, then it is finished. The thing will never again hide in the subconscious and will never again return to bother you. But this is a radical operation. It must be done like an operation (4).”

The Mother has stated that this procedure can be adopted and, whatever the circumstance, the result is always the same:

“Some people have all kinds of little things like this in their head, dark little things. Some people have them here (Mother points to the heart), others have them lower down, for each one it depends... but for each one it is the same thing, it is always... I am saying this because it is very remarkable that if one does the work — whoever it may be — the result is always the same, wherever it may be, whether in the head or the chest or in all the centres of consciousness, if one pushes the investigation far enough, step by step, step by step, untiringly, one always reaches something.... Then one takes it by the tail and pulls it out (5).”

Our nature

Many influences build up our nature. I sometimes have the feeling of a mighty edifice that goes back generations before my birth. I believe that even our individuality, which is unique, creates certain tramlines for these patterns of nature to emerge. These patterns create grooves and, over time, our nature is formed. Our nature is not ‘us’; it is but a façade, but I feel that our truth can get so buried inside it that we lose track of who we are. It is a very unpleasant

situation and that probably explains why most of society is simply dissatisfied. To go through life without this knowledge seems almost absurd but that seems to be a reality for many.

It is only by changing the tilt of our awareness that this situation can change. I believe that we can transcend and rise above our nature. At least we can try. True fulfilment lies in growing, by meeting what Sri Aurobindo terms the ‘impulse towards self-exceeding’. This, I feel, must surely be why the Mother termed an ‘aimless life a miserable life’.

Truth of the being

It can take a while to understand our true individuality. I have found it requires considerable observation and this knowledge can only come through experience. Whenever I find my attention upstairs in the head I get pulled around in all sorts of directions. Over time, I have discovered that a truer home is the heart. For me, there is always a feeling of resonance when I stand in this truth; it’s like I become quite transparent. It’s a little like swimming with an enormous tide behind me. And nothing can move us as much as love. It brings such a simple joy and that’s why it particularly vibrates in this body. In fact, the body has become almost entirely dependent on it.

I sometimes feel that one single drop of love would be enough to totally transform and cure the body. It’s just that one must be in a proper state to receive it! When love rises up to more sublime heights, occasional glints of bliss pervade the being. For me, it is the most natural gateway to the soul. Every heightened experience I have seems to emanate from love. On the other hand, when I feel grey and dry inside, when the ordinary mind engulfs it, I feel lifeless and narrow. Whenever the mind stamps on the heart, it throttles the truth that the being wants to express.

Love and attachment

But I find that the way of the heart can bring complications. One that has particularly fazed me is attachment. From our first days on this earth, we seem to build up networks of attachment. We do this to people, to objects and to circumstances. In fact, we often seem to do it with almost anything we covet and, in so doing, we bind ourselves hand and foot. The trouble is, we build up requirements; we try to impose conditions. It’s like what we have inside us is not enough. We impose expectations on the outside and lose touch with what is

true inside. Whilst we’re doing this, we’re not only imprisoning others but casting a huge net around ourselves too. And so we relinquish our seat of power to nature herself. We lose our freedom and we become more vulnerable to attack, creating many gaps that leave us gaping inside. There is a feeling of being raw and exposed.

I believe that many of us face a challenge with at least one relationship in our life. It is like a concentration of all our ‘impossibilities’. It is the one knot that we must untie in this life. The Mother emphasises the need to build up company which truly nurtures us. But sometimes we do not have a choice. There are some relationships which are not so free. I can feel such contacts suffocate the being and still they continue to cause me pain. I sometimes feel trapped: they reinforce negative patterns and the formations that often arise from them simply make me shrink. Distance is quite immaterial in this context; these threads of attachment can run for thousands of miles! When faced with a wall of negativity, I find it so difficult to stand in my truth. But the Mother tells us that the solution is not to run away:

“To be free from all attachment does not mean running away from all occasion for attachment. All these people who assert their asceticism, not only run away but warn others not to try!

“This seems so obvious to me. When you need to run away from a thing in order not to experience it, it means that you are not above it, you are still on the same level.

“Anything that suppresses, diminishes or lessens cannot bring freedom. Freedom has to be experienced in the whole of life and in all sensations (6).”

I’m convinced that it is possible to reach a zone where one can truly love without possibility of recoil. I have now concluded that my only solution is to only love more and try to love more truly. It might be more convenient to abide in a state of sattwic indifference but I really don’t think that is the way that the Mother intends for me. I feel that my challenge is to raise its level to the highest possible vibration. At the highest point, love is vast and free. It is an impersonal force. True love is, after all, totally disinterested, but I’d sooner love imperfectly than not at all.

The net

To have no idea who or what we are is the ultimate obscurity, but to have an

inkling and pretend what one is not probably causes an even greater suffering. And yet, I suggest, this is what we do much of our time. It is so ingrained and, at the core, it is really a very subtle falsehood. The desire to be popular, the desire to be admired, the desire to be virtuous and even the desire to be just plain good are examples of this. Every time we project ourselves in a way we feel that the world should see us, we play this game of hide and seek. We try to create a stereotype of ourselves and that only cramps us and makes us very, very small. What's more, we can never achieve anything; it is totally illusory. Even animals suffer less than man. In reality, we create our own net. The ego, after all, is the final limitation and the only way we can expand is to drop this cloak and stand in our truth. That is why I feel that it is the key to inner perfection.

A new life

To shed our nature and stand in our truth can sometimes be a painful journey. For some, I guess, it is a road laid with thistles and thorns. That is why I am so grateful to the Mother for the gentle way She has eased me into a very different culture and way of life. Over ten years' ago, I came to Pondicherry and started a new life. I arrived weighed down with baggage. Inside, everything was tangled up and confused. I am so grateful that, from day one, the Mother had taken charge of my being.

Most of all, I feel, the Mother has greatly simplified my life and simplified my being. At times though, She has almost stripped me down to the bone. The body too has emerged as an unusual ally and together they are teaching me the art of true humility. Any vestige of self-importance is still being squeezed out from me drop by drop. As a friend once told me long ago, it is easier to be a 'nobody' if you intend to walk this path.

Living in the soul

To live in the soul is the culmination of a colossal journey. In some ways, I believe that it is perhaps the greatest expedition that man has ever made. It is surely a voyage without end. It is a journey which takes us deeper and deeper to the core of our existence. I know that some reversals are inevitable but long-term progress must surely be a key to true inner health.

Just to aspire and grow, for me, is sufficient. It is a little like passing through a very long tunnel into the light. This light is truly the answer to all my yearning. Observing myself, this yearning, which was almost hidden at the outset, has

now come more and more to the surface. I believe that it is this yearning that keeps us going. And when the destination is reached, the Mother says, it is truly a new birth:

“You become a new person, and whatever may be the path or the difficulties of the path afterwards, that feeling never leaves you. It is not even something — like many other experiences — which withdraws, passes into the background, leaving you externally with a kind of vague memory to which it is difficult to cling, whose remembrance grows faint, blurred — it is not that. You are a new person and definitively that, whatever happens. And even all the incapacity of the mind, all the difficulties of the vital, all the inertia of the physical are unable to change this new state — a new state which makes a decisive break in the life of the consciousness. The being one was before and the being one is after, are no longer the same. The position one has in the universe and in relation to it, in life and in relation to it, in understanding and in relation to it, is no longer the same: it is a true reversal which can never be undone again. That is why when people tell me, ‘I would like to know whether I am in contact with my soul or not’, I say, ‘If you ask the question, it is enough to prove that you are not. You don't need an answer, you are giving it to yourself.’ When it is that, it is that, and then it is finished, it is no longer anything else (7).”

Oneness

Last of all, I feel, truth means oneness. We are one. We are one with creation: we are one soul and we swim in a vast sea of oneness. I believe that when we realise this fact we at last stand in our truth. Indeed, it is only the action of truth that can harmonise the different shades and contrasts of existence. Indeed, perhaps it is these diverse hues that make life so rich and fascinating! But the reality is that everything is essentially one.

I believe that each one of us can start with one small detail to fully appreciate this. This detail can be our own being itself. I guess that all true understanding starts at the microcosm. As we get closer to this knowledge, we can clearly see that it is only separation and division that cramps us. We call that the ego. But once this simple wisdom is fully absorbed, even our own nature might be looked upon as just a small link in this captivating game of multiplicity and oneness.

Inside all of us, I believe, is something that fully understands this truth. It's just that it wants to live it in all its aspects. Making our being one is true progress;

only then can it truly expand and become free. And to live in the soul, I suggest, is to live in this state of oneness. I can't really think of anything more perfect than that.

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(Concluded)

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When Sri Aurobindo Directed the Revolutionary Movement

Charu Chandra Dutt

[**Note:** This article, written by Charu Chandra Dutt, [1877-1952] I.C.S., an associate of Sri Aurobindo in the revolutionary work who later became his disciple and an inmate of Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the 1940s, was published on 17 December 1950 in the journal, *Sunday Times*.

The main article was preceded by the following introduction: “Stirred by the echoes of the Sepoy War even during his boyhood days and panting to bring about the overthrow of the foreign Government in his adolescence, Sri C.C. Dutt had started to use his opportunities as a member of the Indian Civil Service to secretly promote the subversive movement even before he finally placed his services under the command of veteran revolutionaries. The following excerpts from a recently published article of his gives almost a connected account of the part played by Sri Aurobindo in the revolutionary movement.]

My first meeting with Sri Aurobindo was a casual encounter on the Baroda Railway platform in 1900. I was going to Bombay, and he had come to see a friend off. I introduced myself as a friend of his eldest brother and of his wife's people. He was very kind to me, and said, as my train was starting, “Now that we are both in Gujerat, we are sure to see each other often.” This is how I first met face to face, my Master, or my Chief, as I called him in those days. As a matter of fact, we did not get together for three years, as I was packed off by Government to a district in the far south. I employed that period in extending the scope of my secret organisation. It had all to be done very cautiously. Still some progress had been made by the time I was posted back to the neighbourhood of Bombay city in 1903. Soon after this, emissaries, men of position, came twice to me from the central revolutionary organisation asking me to join that body. I

turned them down summarily saying, “I don’t think much of a secret society that discloses itself to a stranger so glibly, as you seem to be doing.”

I think it was early in 1904 that Aurobindo Babu came to me first at Thana and offered to take me into his Bhavani Mandir movement. Needless to say I was beside myself with joy at having been chosen by such a great man. But there was a slight difficulty. I knew nothing of Yoga, nothing at all, and the whole training of a novice in the proposed Mandir seemed to be based on Yogic practice. When I mentioned this to the Chief, he laughed and said, “Your aim and ours are exactly the same, why not look upon the ochre garb as a uniform?” I was convinced quite easily that by joining this temple organisation, I would get greater facility for the work I had chosen for myself, not to speak of such noble guidance. The Chief and I met several times after this and I tried to make myself useful in various ways. I continued to be in the I.C.S. however, much against my grain... I asked my chief often, whether I should throw up my mask and become a wholetime worker in the country’s cause. I remember he said to me, one day, later on, “No, don’t be in a hurry; some people will have to remain behind, ready to form a new line in case of necessity.”

When after the partition of Bengal, aggressive nationalism took the whole country by storm, there arose many impatient young people all over India, (but more particularly in Maharashtra, Bengal and the Punjab) who clamoured for a virile political programme. I was, myself also, growing impatient and a few of my underground workers in Maharashtra were getting out of hand. At this juncture, Aurobindo Babu came one day to me at Thana and took me away for the night to Bombay. His brother Barin was with him. We went to a house in Girgaum, where there were no menfolk present. Soon after our arrival, when, we had locked ourselves inside the parlour, the Chief turned towards me solemnly and said, “Now Charu, do you want to join us in our work? You have twice turned down our offer.” I understood that he was referring to the big organisation which I have mentioned already. Some of my men had joined this society recently. I made up my mind very quickly and said, “I don’t know whom you mean by us, and I don’t wish to know them. But I shall be proud to serve under you personally, if you would have me: I am yours unreservedly and unconditionally.” The exact words I have forgotten but I spoke more or less in this strain. He accepted me without any formality saying, “I have been asked not to

give you any oath.” I felt deeply grateful to him for this trust.

Soon after this, Sri Aurobindo left Baroda and took up open political work in Calcutta. In no time, he became the acknowledged leader of the Nationalists in Bengal and, through his paper *Bande Mataram*, went on moulding public opinion, not only in his own province but all over the country. In the wider field of Indian politics, he was the trusted friend and associate of Tilak. For a while, these two, along with Lajpat Rai, were looked upon as the prophets of an imminent revolution. Tilak and Lajpat Rai were, apparently, their own masters as far as the secret work in their respective provinces was concerned. But they were not wholly so. For, it must be remembered that there was a central organisation existing throughout, to which all owed allegiance. In fact, it was generally believed, and rightly so, that almost all underground activities followed a fixed general plan.

I shall now recount a short tale to show this. Sometime in 1907, a couple of Allahabad students came to me at Calcutta and asked for a live bomb, saying that they wished to use it against Hewett, their Governor. They appeared trustworthy; so I sent a bomb to Allahabad with one of our own boys. He came back, however, in a couple of days and reported that Lala Lajpat Rai had forbidden the attempt on Hewett, saying that U.P. was in his jurisdiction and he did not want any row, just then. When I informed the Chief of this he smiled and said, “Yes, that’s quite correct.”

Aurobindo Babu ever since he had left Baroda and assumed charge of his secret organisation, acted almost entirely on his own, though there never was any lack of coordination between him and other regional leaders. There was one notable thing, however, which differentiated our Chief from these other leaders. Though Aurobindo Babu of those days was not generally looked upon as a great religious leader, yet the whole basis of his political teaching was spiritual, as was apparent from the writings in his various journals — in the *Bande Mataram* and the *Yugantar* before his imprisonment, as much as in the *Karmayogin* and the *Dharma* after his release. In the little school started by him and his friend Deshpande, in the Ganganath Ashram on the Narmada and in his now famous garden house near Calcutta, the boys had a basic training in Yoga, along with the teaching of various other things.

In the year 1907, things had come to a head both in our open work as the

Nationalist party, and in our secret activity as terrorists and revolutionaries. I was in Calcutta for several months that year and was due to rejoin my work in February, 1908. I spent the whole time in soothing the boys and putting before them various attractive plans. But no definite departure from our usual line of work could be made till after the Nationalist leaders had met together in December and considered things in detail. The Moderate party, led principally by Messrs. Mehta, Surendra Nath and Gokhale had made up their minds to make a mighty effort to smash the extremists (as we were called) at Surat. This we had learnt beforehand, and our friends in Gujarat had warned us that Mehta had even ordered lascars to be hired for the purpose of giving our people a sound hiding. A good many of us thought we should not go to Surat at all, but hold our own separate conference at Nagpur. Aurobindo Babu was away for a short change of air. We, who were in charge in Calcutta, sent round wires to various Nationalist leaders pressing our proposal. Some like Moonje and Chidambaram Pillai, agreed with us promptly, but Tilak was adamant. I still remember the text of his wire — For Heaven's sake, no split.

Shortly after this, our Chief returned from Deoghar. After looking at the various messages, he brushed aside our objections and decided in favour of Surat. So to Surat went all our leaders, determined to give the veterans a good fight. The constitutional aspect of the struggle did not touch me, but I was vitally interested in the Chief's physical well-being. So a few boys were sent to Surat with Barin. They had instructions to close round Aurobindo Babu in case there was a row. As some of these boys carried fire-arms, it was a very good thing that the Moderates exercised some self control. The Congress session broke up in confusion.

The Chief went on a tour in Western India and addressed large assemblies in the bigger towns. In the third week of January, the Chief returned to Calcutta. It did not take us long to realise that he was tired out and needed rest. Moreover, in his talk, he appeared listless and absent-minded. Subodh and Barin and I were seriously worried, and told him so. Ultimately he permitted Barin to send a wire to Lele, a Maratha yogi, with whom he had spent a short while in Baroda recently. Lele arrived duly.

A few days spent quietly with him in our villa on the river gave the Chief all the rest he needed and he came back thoroughly refreshed. He was so much

like his usual alert self that he promptly brought out his suitcase with a smile, "Tilak has sent these Charu, for your inspection and approval." This remark gave me the opening I wanted. I said, "Friend, please don't take what I am saying amiss. I know you have much greater things to think of than bombs and pistols. But tell me, assure me, that you will look after the boys. Otherwise, I shall not go back to service. There are critical times in front of us, for we have got to surge ahead."

The Chief replied with a gracious smile, "I assure you, Charu, I shall look after the boys here. But you must go back to your job. Gujarat, isn't it? Well, there are reasons why my best recruiting sergeant must be in Ahmedabad just now." These were almost precisely his words, but I did not understand the meaning then. I did, later, when after the Chief's arrest, the whole of Ahmedabad showed me signal honour as his friend and servant — such demonstrative honour as has fallen to the lot of but few. There are two more things that should be mentioned here. They may, of course, have been pure coincidences. The first was that Tilak was kept at the time in the Sabarmati jail, only three miles from me, and that I managed to get into touch with him right under the nose of the C.I.D. The second was that the bungalow occupied by Aurobindo Babu's sergeant in Ahmedabad in 1908 became the first residence and Ashram of Gandhiji three years later.

I shall now go back, for a little while, to Lele's visit to the Chief in Calcutta, in January, already referred to. While there, this Yogi paid visits to the suburban garden house, where Barin and some of the boys lived and underwent their manifold training. He saw them meditating and doing various yogic exercises and was pleased with their progress. But one of them Prafulla Chaki struck him as a remarkably apt pupil and Lele wished to take him away and give him a specialised training in Rajayoga. He spoke to the chief about it and got the reply, "Charu is not likely to agree, speak to him." The Chief called me in and referred the matter to me — perfectly confident, I suppose, of the result. I objected vehemently to Lele or anybody else taking our boys away.

We had a short, but sharp discussion, at the end of which Lele said somewhat excitedly for a Yogi: "What is the use of killing such a promising lad? Give him to me and I shall make a Yogi of him. He has got some very great gifts." What could I say to such a blind man? I replied: "You think that the best boys

are for your Yoga, and that the worst are good enough for ours! Well, if the boy wants to go with you to safety, let him do so, we shan't raise any objection." Barin was present there, listening to us with a wry face. I sent him to fetch Prafulla. The boy came to me in a little while; he listened calmly to the Chief as he put the whole matter before him, and then, touching the Chief's feet, he replied firmly: "I do not wish to go anywhere, Sir, unless you are dissatisfied with me and want to send me away." The matter was easily settled after this. Lele left Calcutta alone. In a few days, I, too, bid goodbye to friends and comrades, and left for Ahmedabad. I went with a heavy heart, in spite of all that the Chief had said about the desirability of my presence in Ahmedabad just then.

In May, the debacle came. A spy, Rajani Sarkar by name, had gained admittance into the garden as a friend of one of the boys and conveyed information to the police. The police waited till the Muzaffarpur outrage had been committed, and then closed in. The Chief and a number of young men were arrested and put up for trial. The idea of a second line of defence came more or less, to nought. But fresh people took up the work and carried it on. They wore different guises, uttered different slogans, but they moved forward steadfastly towards the goal. And the goal was achieved in God's own time.

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Indian Nationalism and Sri Aurobindo – Part I

Sabita Triapthy, Nanda Kishore Mishra

One of the strongest foci of strong resistance to colonial regime in colonised societies was the evolution of the concept of 'nation'. It is the concept of a shared community, one which Benedict Anderson called the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983:15) that has enabled the post-colonial societies to invent a self-image through which subject people could act to liberate themselves from imperialist oppression. Theorists like Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson championed the cause of nationalism as a legitimate form of political organisation appropriate to the social and intellectual conditions of modern world. Ernest Gellner (1996) shifted our attention from the pre-industrial society to intense industrialisation in support of nationalism because the latter could create national consciousness for the maintenance of a homogenous industrial workforce and polity. Nationalism, to him meant, 'primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit be congruent' (387). Agreeing with Gellner's views, E. J. Hobsbawm (1999) stressed on the elements of artifact, invention and social engineering that entered into the making of a nation. Hobsbawm made the concept more explicit while indicating that nations were not always god-given and natural way of classifying men to decide their political destiny. He (1999: 48-9) averred that nations could be recreated on the basis of pre-existing cultures:

Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent...political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: *that* is a reality.

But Benedict Anderson (1983) attributed the growth of nationalism to the dwindling away of strong religious mode of thoughts. The concept of nation

was a product of secular and modern imagination.

Nationalism could be of various kinds. John Plamenatz in an article “*Two Types of Nationalism*” (23-6) focused our attention on two types of nationalism. One was the ‘Western’ that emerged primarily in Western Europe; and the other ‘Eastern’ that was to be found in Eastern Europe, in Asia and Africa, and also in Latin America. In both the types “a state of the development of a particular national culture is measured.” Both the types of nationalism were primarily a cultural phenomenon but could often take a “political form.” The ‘Eastern’ type of nationalism had to re-equip itself in terms of certain global standards set by the advanced nations of Western Europe.

While making a distinction between ‘good’ nationalism and ‘evil’ nationalism, Hans Kohn (1965) directed our attention towards the way a profoundly liberal idea became distorted and produced grossly illiberal movements and regimes. Naturally, nationalists have often not been liberal as they have to act in unpropitious conditions for their freedom. Yet, their movement represented a universal urge for freedom and progress. Plamenatz (1976) gently chided the distaste of the Western critics of nationalism for the inherent backwardness of the peoples in these words:

In a world in which the strong and rich people have dominated and exploited the poor and the weak peoples, and in which autonomy is held to be a mark of dignity, of adequacy, of the capacity to live as befits human beings, in such a world this kind of nationalism is the inevitable reaction of the poor and the weak (6).

Nationalism had often had a great humanising and civilising influence. It was misleading to brand nationalist politics as a secret conspiracy, terrorism or nihilism, though these had the same features of nationalism under extreme situations under which they operated. Nationalism has been abused as a self-conscious and rational attempt by the weak and poor people of the world to achieve autonomy and liberty. Elie Kedourie in *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (1970) seemed to be sceptical of nationalism as he believed the ruler and the ruled were ‘different species of men;’ and it befitted the political order when this distinction was clearly maintained. He ignored the efficacy of nationalism in developing countries in which the new regime maintained political stability and kept a fissiparous population under a single control. But he forgot that

nationalism provided an impetus to constitutional reforms and could legitimise social changes. He would rather opt for a political environment in which emotions and passions were kept to a minimum. Anthony Smith (1971: 12-24) critiqued Kedourie’s contention of nationalism as a one-sided misrepresentation. In his opinion, Kedourie overlooked the “advantages and blessings of nationalist revivals.”

The danger of giving over-emphasis on nationalism might give rise in its extreme form to chauvinism and xenophobia which would in turn justify “organised violence and tyranny.” Excessive importance given to nationalism was the cause of justification for the excessive brutality of Nazism and Fascism; moreover, it bred racial hatred in the colonies and provided scope for irrational revivalist movements in the contemporary world. Partha Chatterjee (1986, 2-3) in his scholarly study, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, drew reader’s attention to the harmful effects of nationalism as an ideology. Nationalism could be irrational, narrow, hateful, and destructive. Chatterjee showed that such scurrilous effects were observed in Europe which exported this concept to the rest of the world. His disparaging criticism against this extreme form of nationalism could be summed up:

Nationalism as an ideology is irrational, narrow, hateful, and destructive....It is wholly a European export to the rest of the world. It is also one of Europe’s most pernicious exports, for it is not a child of reason or liberty, but of their opposite: of fervent romanticism, of political messianism whose inevitable consequence is the annihilation of freedom (7).

J. C. Herder (1744-1803) believed the nation to be the natural basis of the state; so he supported the right of any given people to self-determination. It is the nation that provides people with a positive sense of association. It is a natural, not an artificial unit of humanity. He accepted cultural diversity as natural and the best state of affairs. Moreover, nationalism could provide an impetus to constitutional reforms as in India or Ottoman Turkey. It could legitimise sweeping social changes and modernisation in a country. Anthony Smith (1971) continued on the defensive side by building up a core doctrine of nationalism. His doctrine of nationalism embraced a moral claim made up of three separate but interrelated parts such as the “collective self-determination of the people, the expression of national character and individuality, and finally, the vertical division of the world

into unique nations each contributing its special genius to the common fund of humanity” (1971: 23).

Some of the nineteenth century European thinkers, particularly Herder, Schlegel, Fichte and Schleiermacher made use of culture and language in defining a nation which was subsequently taken up by the intellectuals of the East. Other critics emphasised on history as a mode of thought in the life of a nation. Kedourie analysed history as a distinct mode of thought in which the nation could be represented: “Nationalist doctrine...decrees that just as nations exist so nations by definition must have a past” (36). Modern European theorists did not only posit the view that nations must have a past; it should have a future too. Obviously, the idea of progress was inherent in nationalist thought. In Asia and in Africa nationalism set out its freedom from European domination. The disparate elements of nationalist thoughts that counted in the struggle for freedom could be enumerated in Kedourie’s words as “Resentment and impatience, the depravity of the rich and the virtue of the poor, the guilt of Europe and the innocence of Africa, salvation through violence, the coming of the reign of universal love....” (146-7)

George Orwell (1953:74) insisted that the goal of the nationalist was to “secure more power and prestige, not for him but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his individuality.” The nationalist texts questioned the moral claim of the colonial masters to rule over the weak states. Nationality denied assigning the status of inferiority to the colonised people. Nationalism has demonstrated the falsity of the colonial claim that backward people were culturally incapable of ruling themselves in the modern world. Thus, nationalism was an important feature in the struggle for decolonisation. Edward Said (1993: xii), an advocate of postcolonial studies, argued in favour of self-determination and national independence as the common goal to achieve decolonisation.

Along with armed resistance in places as diverse as nineteenth century Algeria, Ireland and Indonesia, there also went considerable efforts in cultural resistance almost everywhere, the assertions of nationalist identities, and, in the political realm, the creation of associations and parties whose common goal was self-determination and national independence.

Nationalism asserted that a backward nation could preserve its cultural distinctiveness while modernising itself. In fact, to fight for national culture

implied a strong resistance to imperial dominance. For Timothy Brennan (1990: 183) nationalism was important for the need for preservation of cultural distinctiveness:

The idea of the nation is often based on naturalised myths of racial or cultural origin. That the need to assert such myths of origin was an important feature of much early post-colonial theory and writing, and that it was a vital part of the collective political resistance which focused on the issues of separate identity and cultural distinctiveness.

One should remember that there were other attributes of nationalism. Race, geography, tradition, language, size, or some combination of these was insufficient for determining national essence. The imposition of cultural homogeneity from the top through state action could bring “official nationalism” as in Russia. Partha Chatterjee (2008: 34) approvingly quotes J.V. Stalin’s views on the essential characteristics of a nation:

A nation is historically constituted, stable community of people, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture...none of the above characteristic taken separately is sufficient to define a nation. More than that, it is sufficient for a single one of these characteristics to be lacking and the nation ceases to be a nation.

There were other ties of affinity that were necessary to constitute a nation. For Ramsay Muir, unity of race was supposed to be an essential element in nationhood. In Muir’s opinion, there was no nation in the world that was not of mixed race. So long as the races merge, there will be free intercourse by intermarriages and other means. But the most harmful spirit emerged when one of the constituent races tried to assert its sense of superiority over other(s). The mixed races of Hungary could have developed into a nation had not the Magyars held themselves aloof from their Slavonic and Rumanian subjects and treated them as inferiors. The greatest obstacle to the growth of nationalism in India was her rigid caste system which prevented the merger of the masses. The egoistic assertion of racial superiority of Teutonic race in Germany and its fundamental antipathy turned into a big curse in the world. Obviously racialism: the inherent antipathy between races, the sense of superiority of one race over another, was antithetical to nationalism. Generally, the union of races into a coherent body of people dwelling together and their ties of affinity made it easy

for them to understand one another, and exert their right to enjoy their life in freedom. Ramsay Muir (1917:14) lucidly explained what people understood by certain affinities that united them as a nation:

It is obviously not the same thing as a race, and not the same thing as a state. It may be provisionally as a body of people who feel themselves to be naturally linked together by certain affinities which are so strong and real for them that they can live happily together, are dissatisfied when disunited and cannot tolerate subjection to peoples who do not share these ties.

Some theorists viewed the unity of language as essential for the formation of a nation. Unity of language was a strong element that had a binding force in the formation of nationality. The racialist theories of the Germans were supported by this factor even though it was a fallacious assumption. Yet, history revealed that the unity of language did rarely bring national unity and disunity did not prevent it. Spanish language dominated Central and South America but the people had no political affinity with Spain. Though Americans speak English, they are a distinct nation. The Scots are a nation but some people speak Gaelic, yet others speak English. The Swiss are a nation having no single but several languages. The Belgians are a nation speaking Flemish, French, and German. Unity of language was certainly a nation-building force, but it was not indispensable for the growth of nationality.

There was no guarantee that a unity of religion would create national unification. The religious differences between the Dutch and the Belgians did not prevent them to live together in a single state. Moreover, religious disunity was the main obstacle to the national movement in Ireland. The strife between Catholics and Dissidents was one of the significant causes of the downfall of Poland. Yet there were instances in which deep-rooted religious differences did not stand as an obstacle in national unification. Germany had an almost equal portion of Protestants and Roman Catholics. England has never known religious unity after the great Reformation. A deep-rooted antipathy between the Hindus and the Muslims has proved fatal to the unification of the peninsula. Religious unity could not solely bring a strong sense of nationalism among the people of a country.

Nationalism arose under a despotic rule where people became fed up with the oppressive maladministration of their ruler. Muir (1917: 17) pointed out the

experience of common subjection to an alien power for a long period of time that could positively help in the formation of a nation:

Common subjection, during a long stretch of time, to a firm and systematic government, even to a government of a despotic character, may well help to create a nation, especially if the government is able to establish a system of just and equal laws which its subjects can fully accept as part of their mode of life.

He cited the cases of France and Spain. The nationhood of France owed its origin to the despotic rule of Charles V. Similarly, Philip II united the fragmented states of Spain into a real nation. The British domination over India for centuries inspired Indians to create a strong sense of nationhood. Moreover, the political unity of India brought about by the colonial power under one administration generated a sense of national unity.

A community of economic interest as a controlling factor in the modern era has contributed to the building of nations. The fiscal policy of a government may help to strengthen national unity but it is a less important factor. Ramsay Muir (1917: 18) voiced the same concern in pointing out a common tradition as another factor that constitutes a nation:

But it is probable that the most potent of all (nation moulding factors), the one indispensable factor which must be present whatever else be lacking, is the possession of a common tradition, a memory of sufferings endured and victories won in common, expressed in song and legend, in the dear names of great personalities that seem to embody in themselves the character and ideals of the nation, in the names also of sacred places wherein the national memory is enshrined.

So historic achievements, heroically achieved, agonies courageously endured, awakened the spirit of nationhood. No one contributed more to the patriotism of a country as *its conqueror* who by trying to destroy the nation gave an opportunity to the conquered people to ignite the flame of nationalism, by arousing its indefatigable spirit of patriotism. Ramsay Muir cited the case of the inextinguishable fire of German patriotism which was lit by the tortuous tyranny of Napoleon.

Geography played an important part in the formation of nations. Rivers and mountains help in demarcating natural boundaries. But all mountains and rivers

could not make the division of states. It was neither soil nor race that made a nation. Military strength also could not constitute a nation; otherwise, there would be unending wars in our globe. Nothing material suffices to constitute a nation. We arrive at a point in our discussion where we find there is no infallible test to constitute a nation: no single factor, such as geographical unity, race, language, religion, any common body of custom, or community of economic interest, seems indispensable to nationhood. Each nation in order to prove its nationhood most often fights for it against hostile forces.

Another factor, territory provided the substratum, the field of struggle and labour, but it was the people who furnished the soul. People counted a lot in the formation of a nation. The binding force of a nation is its spiritual principle. Ernest Renan (1990) in an essay titled “*What is a Nation?*” defined a nation as a soul, a spiritual principle. Race, language, material interest, religious affinities, geography, and military strength are not adequate for the creation of such a spiritual principle. As Renan recorded two things constitute this soul or spiritual principle:

One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.... The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of long past endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion. (19)

In addition to this he showed that the essential conditions of formation of a nation was to have a heroic past, great men, common glory in the past, to have a common will in the present and the wish to perform great deeds together. Akin to such a condition was Bhabha’s analysis of the historical growth of a nation that contributed to the culmination of long past endeavours, sacrifice and devotion. Psychologically, one loves the memory of having suffered, enjoyed, sacrificed and hoped together to which he has consented. Suffering in group cements the ties of nationhood in the people more than joy does. So far as memory is concerned one’s grief is longer lasting than one’s triumph. A nation has no more interest in annexing or holding on to a country against its will. To understand the nation-centredness of the post-world war, Homi K. Bhabha (1990: 46-7) supported the following idea of Foucault:

The nation is precisely what Foucault has called a ‘discursive formation’ –

not simply an allegory or imaginative vision but a gestative political structure which the Third World artist is consciously building or suffering the lack of it.

There is no ‘scientific means’ of establishing what all nations have in common. The spiritual aspect of nationalism as discussed by Ernest Renan (1990) in his seminal essay took a religious turn in Sri Aurobindo’s treatment of nationalism. For the latter, nationalism was not a political programme; it was based on spiritual stuff: “Nationalism is a religion that has come from God”. Giving a spiritual interpretation of Nationalism, in a lecture delivered to a large gathering at Mahajan Wadi, Bombay on the 19th January 1908, Sri Aurobindo (*Speeches*, 2005: 19-33) prophesied that the people of India were the instruments of God who would spread Nationalism to every nook and corner of India. Like Swami Vivekananda and Tagore, he believed in India’s mission of spiritualising the world. In an article “*Spirituality and Nationalism*” (*Bande Mataram*, 1997: 799-801) he claimed that the East alone has the truth of the secret of spirituality. So the East alone could teach the West to save mankind. India was the workshop of various spiritual experiments. The perfect expression of Hindu spirituality was the signal of the resurgence of India.

Sri Aurobindo’s faith and hope in God to arouse the religious sentiments helped to strengthen people’s nationalistic feeling in the first decade of twentieth century in Bengal during the struggle for freedom from colonial rule. A foreign power could not permanently crush the spirit of nationalism in a subject people. To arouse the supine consciousness of people who were disunited, Sri Aurobindo assured the hesitant mass: “Nationalism survives in the strength of God, so it has not been crushed” in India. In his political speech he advised people who were basically God-believers that whatever weapons were used against Nationalism, the spirit of people could never be suppressed:

Nationalism is immortal... because it is no human thing; it is God who is working in Bengal. God cannot be killed, God cannot be sent to jail...(It is) God that is born in you ... You (people) are merely instruments of God for the work of the (SABCL, vol.1, p.653).

Sri Aurobindo took it as a self-imposed cardinal duty to arouse the supine spirit of people as they had to play a major role in the spread of nationalism. The cosmopolitan upper classes and intellectuals were easily influenced by foreign

ideas and cultures. The ‘folk’, the ‘plebeians’ and the working class became the important component of a nation. Bruce King (1980: 42) gave priority to rural people in the spread of nationalism:

Nationalism is an urban movement which identifies with the rural areas as a source of authenticity, finding in the ‘folk’ the attitudes, beliefs, customs and language to create a sense of national unity among people who have other loyalties. Nationalism aims at... rejection of cosmopolitan upper classes, intellectuals and others likely to be influenced by foreign ideas.

Sri Aurobindo indirectly hinted at the arousal of a voluntary zeal of the common people to strengthen nationalism. The ‘folk’, the plebeians’, and the ‘working classes’ were the important components of a nation. The plebeian authenticity was a feature of English literature in the rise of modern nationalism in Europe.

Ernest Renan advanced the ‘voluntaristic’ argument in the formation of a nation. His contention was “to deny any naturalistic determinism of the boundaries of nations,” these were *not* dictated by language, geography, race, religion, or anything else. He strongly disliked the spectacle of the nineteenth-century ethnographers as advance guards of national claims and expansion. Elsewhere, Renan was of the opinion that nations were not something eternal. Nations came into being at a certain point in time and have a limited life. These were made by human will. Ernest Gellner agreed with Renan that the will of people created nationalism: “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist” (2006: 15). So “a large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart” created a moral atmosphere in which a nation existed.

A voluntary zeal of the people was required to launch anti-colonial resistance. In the context of anti-colonial resistance nationalism was invented by the subject people where it did not exist as in African and Asian countries. Frantz Fanon in his essay on “*The Pitfalls of National Consciousness*” in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) drew a clear distinction between two kinds of nationalist ideology in the context of anti-colonial struggle. One type was the bourgeois nationalism and the other was liberationist, anti-imperialist, or nationalist internationalism. The bourgeois nationalism represented the interests and the goal of attainment of nationhood through capture and subsequent appropriation of the colonial state. The second type of nationalism operated in the Algerian

freedom struggle by the Front de Liberation Nationale, the firebrand anti-colonial resistance movement for whose cause Fanon vouchsafed his heartfelt support.

Fanon enumerated the drawbacks of ‘bourgeois nationalism’ which in his opinion was good for nothing: “It is solely directed to transfer into native hands – the hands of the nationalists – those unfair advantages which are the legacy of the colonial period” (1968: 152). In the context of the postcolonial struggle for freedom, Fanon issued a strong warning that if after independence of a country, leadership came to the hands of the elite class ‘the whole momentum of the struggle for liberation may be jeopardised’. He therefore admonished the radical anti-colonists to oppose tooth and nail ‘bourgeois nationalism’ as vehemently as they opposed imperialism. What made Fanon convinced of opposing the rule of the bourgeoisie might be stated as:

In the underdeveloped countries, the bourgeoisie should not be allowed to find the conditions necessary for its existence and growth. In other words, the combined efforts of the mass led by a party and of intellectuals who are highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles ought to bar the way to this useless and harmful middle class (174-5).

In the whirlpool of liberation movement the consciousness of both intellectuals and masses steadily undergoes continual transformation. A nationalitarian force is transformed through the creation of a national consciousness that aims at national liberation. The movement for liberation could not be extirpated by any local politics of the people. Sri Aurobindo like Fanon tenaciously held to the belief that the working mass, the peasants played a decisive role in strengthening their political awareness by assimilating the principles of national and social revolutions. They provided the principal driving force behind any national liberation movement.

While exposing the Nationalist ideal in *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo advocated the struggle for ‘Swaraj’ first, because

“Liberty is in itself a necessity of national life and therefore worth striving for for its own sake; secondly, because Liberty is the first indispensable condition of national development intellectual, moral, industrial, political...and therefore worth striving for for India’s sake...(op.cit, p.465).

There was an encounter between nationalist consciousnesses and post-enlightenment rationalist thought. Modern European culture claimed superiority

over the Eastern as it was well equipped to subject the countries of the East to poverty and political dominance. But the nationalists argued that backwardness could be changed by a nation collectively in adopting modern attributes of European culture. They pointed out that the superiority of the European culture lied in its materiality of culture advanced by the progress of science and technology. They believed that progress could be achieved by combining superior qualities of the Western culture with the spiritual wealth of the East. Sri Aurobindo was one of those thinkers of twentieth century who demonstrated the meeting of the East and the West in his progressive thought embodied in his early political pamphlet *The Bhavani Mandir*. He was convinced that such an ideal could be materialised by implementing an elitist programme.

Colonised intellectuals shrank away from the Western culture in their passionate search for national culture that existed in the pre-colonial era. In India Sri Aurobindo made all efforts for revival of Indian culture in his treatise *The Foundations of Indian Culture*. The colonised intellectuals upheld the view that there was nothing to be ashamed of in their past. Their claim to national culture rehabilitated the nation and justified the hope of a future national culture. The outlines of a “National Culture” could best be summed up in the words of Frantz Fanon:

A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence (155).

To fight for one’s national culture amounted, in the first place, to fight for the liberation of the nation from imperial dominance that in turn assumed the form of a popular struggle. However, Fanon, as a theorist, warned against the pitfalls of national consciousness. The national bourgeoisie while using nationalism demonstrated the danger of appropriating the hegemonic control of the imperial power which it had vowed to oppose. Nationalism set out to exercise its freedom from European domination. But it was degenerated in postcolonial societies into a “hegemonic and monologic status.”

Colonialism was entrenched on the basis of cultural emasculation of the subject people. So struggle for national liberation became an act of cultural resistance as its object was the “freedom of a society and its values from foreign dominations.” The great force of culture derives its ability to reflect

history as it could influence the relationship of people with the society since a culture has a mass character.

From a broader field of discussion on nation and nationalism let me turn my attention to nationalism in India. The growth of nationalism in India was a complex phenomenon. Pre-British Indian society had a unique social structure. India was a vast country inhabited by a large population where people spoke diverse languages and professed different creeds and religions. The structure of the Hindu society was categorised by castes and sub-castes. The Hindu religious community was a conglomeration of various sects and creeds. This disparate spectacle of the Hindu society in particular and the Indian people in general prohibited for a long time the unitary growth of Indian nationalism. However, sundry factors contributed to the unity of the country such as the advent of British rule in India for its own purpose, the impact of British domination over India, the establishment of a centralised state, the introduction of modern European education system, and the spread of modern network of communication, led to the unification of Indian princely states under one system of government. Religious upheavals, such as the rise of Buddhism and Jainism, the militant movement of Shankaracharya for restoration of Hinduism, the Bhakti movement, the movement of Ramanuja, the spiritual movements of Nanak and Kabir synthesised the religious beliefs of Hindus and Muslims and other communities that helped in the formation of common national sentiments or consciousness of the nation. The rise of the new social classes as the offspring of a new national economy formed the progressive sections of the bourgeoisie, the peasantry and the proletariat. But the culture of these classes was punctuated by conflicting class interests in proportion to their group consciousness. The cultures of these awakened classes reflected the needs for the development of an Indian nation.

Indian elites who studied English democratic literature, ideals and imbibed democratic principles became inspired to raise their voices against the reactionary social institutions, authoritarian social philosophy and caste division to bring radical reformatations. No doubt the intelligentsia exerted ideological influences on the people. They augmented a national movement for democratic objectives such as widening of franchise, freedom of press, speech and associations, representative government, and executive responsibilities for the people, etc.

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(To be continued)

Indian Spirituality and Life — an Exploration

(Based on *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, by Sri Aurobindo)

Supriyo Bhattacharya

I

Maurice Herzog known throughout the world as a mountaineer and author of the classic *Annapurna*, the best selling account of his successful Himalayan expedition in 1950, in his brilliant introduction to *HIMALAYA: Encounter with Eternity* (1985) wrote in a pensive mood:

“The West is becoming a soulless place. Its people are suffering progressively from the effects of frustration and restlessness, anxiety and outright fear — not to mention actual life and warfare. Of course we take pride in this world of ours, which can justly boast of technological breakthrough and ever-increasing standard of material well being...(but) we are all of us slaves, yet we still dream of freedom, of rediscovering our true selves and our proper values.”

Herzog sought refuge in monastery or undertook a pilgrimage or finally climbed the Himalaya where he found “*God still dwells*”. What Herzog and millions like him seek in the rest and grandeur of the Himalaya, can also apply to the truest part of Indian civilisation because, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, “Indian civilisation was not only a great cultural system, but an immense religious effort of the human spirit.” The flame that was kindled thousands of years ago by the sages still burns in the heart of India in spite of all the dust and heat of dissensions and clashes or the slush and slime of the human world.

There is sharp difference of opinion regarding the root of difference between Indian and European culture. Sri Aurobindo however, ventures to put the whole root of difference as lying in the spiritual aim of Indian Civilisation. He boldly says that a spiritual aspiration was the governing force of Indian culture, “....

its core of thought, its ruling passion.” This is because, Sri Aurobindo believes, India not only made spirituality the highest aim of life but also tried to turn the whole of life towards spirituality. Sri Aurobindo admits that the highest spirituality is far above the lower stage of seeking which is dictated by religious form and dogma. True spirituality born of experience is unintelligible to the formal religious mind. But man travels only gradually to that higher inner elevation.

Next, Sri Aurobindo points out the first baffling difficulty over which the European mind sometimes stumbles; often it fails to make out what Hindu religion is. Where, it asks, is its soul? Where is its mind? Where is the form of its body? And more seriously, how can there be a religion which has no rigid dogmas demanding belief on pain of an eternal damnation, no fixed theology and no credo? How can there be a religion which has no papal head, no governing ecclesiastical body, no church, chapel or congregational system, no one administration and discipline? The Hindu priests are mere “ceremonial officianes” without any ecclesiastical authority or disciplinary powers. The Hindu Pundits are mere interpreters of *Shastra*, not the law-givers of the religion or its rulers. Moreover the question is often raised: how can Hinduism be called a religion when it admits all beliefs, allowing even a kind of “high-reaching atheism and agnosticism” and allows all possible spiritual experiences, all kinds of religious adventures? Sri Aurobindo raises all these questions on behalf of people who see Hindu religion or spirituality from outside or a Western orientation.

Before answering these questions Sri Aurobindo first concedes to opponents that Hinduism too has got a fixed, rigid, positive and a clear social law and even that varies in different castes, religions, communities. The caste rules and not the church; even the caste system cannot punish a man for his beliefs, ban heterodoxy or prevent his following a new revolutionary doctrine or a new spiritual leader. If a Christian or Muslim is excommunicated it is not for religious belief or practice, but because they break with the social rule and order. This is why many people have said, particularly Westerners, there is no such thing as a ‘Hindu religion’, but only “Hindu social system with a bundle of the most disparate religious beliefs and institutions.”

Sri Aurobindo now brings out the reason behind this Western misunderstanding; it is a total difference of outlook on religion that divides the Indian mind and the normal Western intelligence. Sri Aurobindo points out that

to the Indian mind the least important part of religion is its dogma; what matters is the ‘religious spirit’ — the theological credo takes a back seat or remains in the background. As against this, to the Western mind a ‘fixed intellectual belief’ is the most important part of a cult and its core of meaning which distinguishes it from others. These formulated beliefs make it either a true or false religion, according to its agreement or disagreement with the credo of the critic. The Western idea generally supposes that intellectual truth is the highest verity. The Indian religious thinker knows that the highest eternal truths are truths of the spirit. These truths are neither the rigid conclusions of logical reasoning nor the affirmation of credal statement, but are born of the soul’s inner experience. Intellectual truth is only “one of the doors to the outer precincts of the temple.” Intellectual truths turned towards the Infinite must be in its very nature many-sided. And therefore the most varying intellectual beliefs can be equally true because they mirror different facets of the infinite. Though they may be separated by intellectual distance, they may still form “so many side-entrances”, so that the mind may have a “faint ray from a supreme light.” Therefore Sri Aurobindo concludes, “There are no true and false religions, but rather all religions are true in their own way and degree.”

Sri Aurobindo sums up the four necessities that Indian religion places before human life. First, a belief in a highest consciousness or state of existence universal and transcendent of the universe, from which all comes, in which all lives and moves without knowing it and of which all must one day grow aware, returning towards that which is perfect, eternal and infinite.

Next, Indian religion put before individual life the need of a self-preparation by development and experience. Third, Indian religion placed before human mind a well-founded, well-explored, many-branching and always enlarging way of knowledge and of spiritual or religious discipline. Last, it provided, for those not ready for these higher steps, an organisation of the individual and collective life, a framework of personal and social discipline and conduct, of mental and moral and vital development by which they could move each in his own limits and according to his own nature in such a way as to become eventually ready for the greater existence.

The first three are the most essential elements to any religion, but Sri Aurobindo points out:

“Hinduism has always attached to the last also a great importance; it has left out no part of life as a thing secular and foreign to the religious and spiritual life. Still the Indian religious tradition is not merely the form of a religio-social system.”

The core of Hinduism is a spiritual, not a social discipline. In this context, Sri Aurobindo would have us look at the Sikh religion counted in the Vedic family although it broke down the old social condition and invented a novel form. Sri Aurobindo reminds us that the Jains and Buddhists were traditionally considered to be outside the religious fold although they observed Hindu social custom and intermarried with Hindus, because their spiritual system and teaching contained originally a denial of the truth of Veda and the departure from the continuity of the Vedic line. In all the four elements (mentioned above) that constitute Hinduism, there are major and minor differences between Hindus of various sects, schools, communities and races, but the fact remains that there is a “general unity of spirit, of fundamental type and form and of spiritual temperament which creates in this vast fluidity an immense force of cohesion and a strong principle of oneness.”

Sri Aurobindo once again emphasises the fundamental idea of all Indian religion, which is one common to the highest human thinking everywhere:

“The supreme truth of all that is a Being or an existence beyond the mental and physical appearances we contact here. Beyond mind, life and body there is a Spirit and Self containing all that is finite and infinite, surpassing all that is relative, a supreme Absolute, originating and supporting all that is transient, a one Eternal.”

Soul, nature, life are only a manifestation or partial phenomenon of this self-aware Eternity and this conscious Eternal. Here, Sri Aurobindo brings in a point which is of vital importance — a point often lost sight of. This Truth of Being was not seized by the Indian mind only as a philosophical speculation, a theological dogma, and an abstraction contemplated by the intelligence. It was not an idea to be indulged by the thinker in his study, but otherwise void of practical bearing on life. Sri Aurobindo emphasises, it was not a ‘mystic sublimation’ which could be thrown to the winds when it comes to the dealings of man with the world and nature.

“It was a living spiritual Truth, an Entity, a Power, a Presence that could be

sought by all according to their degree of capacity and seized in a thousand ways through life and beyond life.”

This Truth has to be lived and even to be made the governing Idea of thought and life and action. This recognition and pursuit of something and someone Supreme is behind all forms the one universal credo of Indian religion and it has taken a hundred shapes because it was so much alive. Sri Aurobindo explains to us the subtle reason behind this: “The Infinite alone justifies the existence of the finite and the finite by itself has no entirely separate value or independent existence.” As he illustrates, — life, if it is not an illusion, is a divine play, a manifestation of the glory of the Infinite. Or it is a means by which the soul growing in Nature through countless forms and many lives can approach, touch, feel and unite itself through love and knowledge and faith and adoration and Godward will in works with this transcendent Being and this infinite Existence. This Self or this Self-Existent Being is the one supreme reality, and all things else are either only appearances or only true by dependence upon it. It follows that self-realisation and God-realisation are the great business of all living and thinking human being. “All life and thought are in the end a means of progress towards Self-realisation and God-realisation.”

Sri Aurobindo goes on to make another claim:

“not only was the greatest and widest spiritual truth seen in India with the boldest largeness, felt and expressed with a unique intensity and approached from all possible sides, but it was made consciously the grand uplifting idea of life, the core of all thinking, the foundation of all religion, the secret sense and declared ultimate aim of human existence.”

Sri Aurobindo concedes that the truth announced is not peculiar to Indian thinking; for it has been seen and followed by the highest minds and souls everywhere. But what is to be noticed is that elsewhere it has not embraced the mass of humanity and touched their life and perception. Only a few thinkers or some rare mystics or exceptionally gifted spiritual masters have grasped the truth. The mass of men have remained largely in darkness; thinking of religion largely remained for the masses a mysterious business to be respected or watched from distance but it has not touched their lives with its nourishing grace or *the benison* of a fertilising rain. As a result, masses of men have not been able to open to light or penetrate to the core of the teaching — it has

remained like a distant rising sun but they have found little chance to bask in its warm rays. On the other hand, they have lived in the scorching rays of sectarian wrangles of religion, succumbing to inferior ideas of the Deity or wallowing in the dull dreary game of the outward mundane life. But Indian culture waded through the muddy waters, but did succeed by the strength and purity of its vision, the wide reach of its approach, the ardour of its seeking in doing what has been done by no other culture. It succeeded in freeing religion from its tame tenets ‘sicklied over with the pale cast of thought’ and infused in it the vibrant force of real spirituality; it brought within the reach of even the commonest man a living ambience of the very highest spiritual truth and the breath and fire of its influence into every part of the religious field. What seemed dark and arcane pulsated with life and had a familiar face; it beckoned from the beyond yet communicated like a close friend. Nothing can be farther from the truth than to say that the general religious mind of India is a Philistine who has only made some fun of religion or filled the cool hours of the evening darkness at home with zealous cries at some mysterious beyond — that is, the pundits here and elsewhere believe that the general religious mind has not got a grip on the higher spiritual or metaphysical truths of Indian religion. Sri Aurobindo boldly says that is a sheer falsehood or a wilful misunderstanding to say that the general religious mind of India has always lived in the externals only of rite and creed and shibboleth; on the contrary, he says that the main metaphysical truths of Indian religious philosophy in their broad idea-aspects or in an intensely poetic and dynamic representation has been stamped on the general mind of the people. This can be seen whenever one takes a stroll in the countryside to watch the lives of the rural people, even when they work in the dust and heat of the fields or in the cool of the evenings when they return home or get drenched in the blinding showers or has too trudge along miles at the end of the day — they never forget to take the name of God and hum to themselves the praises of the Divine.

Not only that, the ideas of *Maya*, *Lila*, Divine immanence are as familiar to the Indian man in the street and the worshipper in the temple, as to the philosopher in his seclusion, the monk in his monastery, and the saint in his hermitage. The spiritual reality to which these ideas point has filled with *Rasa*, the literature, the art, and even the popular religious song of a whole people. That is why, even

when the common people of India live married life in the family with their near and dear ones, engage themselves in so-called worldly pursuits or quarrel and fight among themselves over petty issues or waste themselves in the heady wine of luxurious life or pride themselves on the tinsel brilliance of their social, political or other worldly achievements — even then they are bitten by a secret flute-call, the never-failing touch of a deathless ecstasy. They begin to feel at the end of the day or in the depths of night or at the crossroads where one comes face to face with oneself, the glimmer of a truth beyond comes close and begins to play in the veins like an irresistible child. Add to this the inexhaustible store of popular songs, fables, stories and poems which pervade their lives like a cool, hidden shadow under which they can come and wait for a new breath of life. Ideologies rise and fall, cults appear, flourish for a time and then die out in the vanishing wilderness, the intellectual puts forward his ideas only to come back to enliven it in the cool showers of the wisdom waiting in silence, the politician fights and shouts and plays his never-ending dubious game, then hears a simple saint of India going before him with a song of the ancient godhead; the futilities of dark tricks and loud speech begin to wither and the Soul aspires to mount to the heights.

The minds of men more readily realise through the fervour of devotion than by strenuous thinking. That is because, Sri Aurobindo explains, the heart of man is nearer to the truth than his intelligence. A constant stream of saints and religious thinkers and the teaching of illuminated *sannyasins* in India has kept the reality vivid and resisted the deadening weight of form and ceremony and ritual. These messengers of the spirit have continued to come and inspire generations of men and what is still more significant is that the common mind has always shown a happy readiness to listen to the message. The critic might say that the ordinary materialised souls, the external minds are the majority in India as elsewhere. But Sri Aurobindo points out that at least the people of India, even the ‘ignorant masses’ have this distinction that by centuries of training they are nearer to the inner realities. Consider the lofty, austere and difficult teaching of a Buddha — where else has it made such a deep impression on the popular mind? Or take the songs of a Tukaram, a Ramprasad, a Kabir, the Sikh-gurus and the chants of the Tamil saints with not only their fervid devotion, but also their profound spiritual wisdom. Where else have these things found so

speedy an echo and spawned a popular religious literature? This is the sign and truth of an age-long, a real and still living and supreme spiritual culture.

Sri Aurobindo next speaks of the perplexity of the European mind (at least a few decades ago) regarding the endless variety of Indian philosophy and religion. A time was when the European scholars considered Indian philosophy bewildering, wearisome and useless. And also it missed the common spiritual life in the multitude of its form. But this infinite variety is itself, as Vivekananda persistently pointed out, a sign of a superior and religious culture. The Indian mind has always made it clear for us that the supreme is the infinite; if we go back to the dawn of Indian civilisation we find that the Vedic seers have portrayed in luminous words that to the soul in Nature the Infinite must always present itself in an endless variety of aspects. Quite often the West cherished the aggressive and quite illogical idea of ‘a single religion for all mankind.’ Sri Aurobindo calls this ‘grotesque creation of human unreason’, the parent of so much intolerance, cruelty, obscurantism and aggressive fanaticism. This has never been able to possess the free and subtle mind of India. Sri Aurobindo admits that men everywhere have common human failings and intolerance and narrowness, especially in the matter of observances and India is no exception. For example, much violence of theological disputation, querulous bickering of sages with their pretensions to spiritual superiority and greater knowledge took place in certain parts in India; sometimes specially in Southern India, there have been brief local outbreaks of active mutual tyranny and persecution even unto death as a result of acute religious differences. But Sri Aurobindo reminds us that these things have never taken the proportion which they assumed in Europe. Intolerance, there has certainly been in India, but one must remember that it has not spread beyond the minor form of polemical attack or social obstruction or ostracism; very seldom they have spilled over into major forms of barbaric persecution which, as Sri Aurobindo puts it ‘draw a long, red and hideous stain across the religious history of Europe’. This is because, according to Sri Aurobindo, the presence of a ‘saving perception of a higher and purer spiritual intelligence’ which has had its hold on the mass mentality. Indian religion has never forgotten that the minds, the temperaments, intellectual affinities of men are limitless in their variety and therefore a perfect liberty of thought and worship must be allowed to the individual in his approach to the infinite.

Thus in India, the authority of spiritual experience and knowledge was recognised, but the need of variety of spiritual experience and knowledge was still more recognised. Consider, in this context, the days of decline in India when the claim of authority became rigorous and excessive in too many directions, but still the saving perception was alive that there could be one but must be many authorities. Always there was an alert openness to new knowledge enlarging the old tradition. Here Sri Aurobindo draws an interesting parallel between India and the West: Indian civilisation did not develop to a last logical conclusion its earlier political and social liberties; but the West could surely take pride in that greatness of freedom or boldness of experiment. But India has always to its credit the liberty of religious practice and a complete freedom of thought in religion and in every other matter. Think of the atheist and of the agnostic — they may have been the butt of ridicule or derision, but mostly they were free from persecution in India. Buddhism and Jainism might be described as unorthodox religion but they could live freely side by side with the orthodox creed and philosophy; even, as much of their truth as was assimilable was taken into the stock of the common and was allowed to enlarge the continuity of their spiritual experience. That ageless continuity was carefully conserved, but it could always open its doors to admit light from all quarters. In later times another wonderful development took place: some of the major Hindu saints and Islamic saints met and mingled and gave birth to a marvellous fusion of knowledge and leaders and prophets of both religions who came together in the bold endeavour earned the recognition of love of both the communities. It is true that the saints of both the communities who joined hands to proclaim the unity of thoughts and the variety of approaches and realisations had to meet the opposition of the priests and *pundits* and the *maulavis* who are instinctively adverse to any change. But in the gathering fragrance of the new elements the opposition gradually faded away and the new elements that came out of the meeting of minds of both the religions soon found a lasting place in the free and pliant body of the national religion and its ever plastic order.

It is necessary to emphasise this synthetic character and embracing unity of the Indian religious mind, because otherwise the whole meaning of Indian life and the whole sense of the Indian culture remain a closed book to us. Sri Aurobindo sums up by saying that Indian religion is founded upon three basic

ideas or rather three fundamentals of a highest and widest spiritual experience. First is the idea of the one existence of the Veda to whom sages gave different names, the One without a second of the Upanishad who is all that is and beyond all that is, the Permanent of the Buddhists, the Absolute of the Illusionists, the Supreme God or Purusa of the theists who holds in His power the soul and Nature, — in a word, the Eternal, the Infinite. This is the first common foundation; but it can be and is expressed in an endless variety of formulas by the human intelligence.

At this point Sri Aurobindo corrects a historical error of great importance. Many people harbour the belief that the only religion that India has apparently rejected in the end, is Buddhism. But Sri Aurobindo boldly points out that in fact this appearance is a historical error. Buddhism lost its separative force, because its spiritual substance, as opposed to its credal parts, was absorbed by the religious mind of Hindu India (Hindu in the broadest sense). Even so, it survived in the North and was exterminated, according to Sri Aurobindo, not by Sankarachariya or another, but by the invading force of Islam.

The second basic idea of Indian religion, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the manifold way of man's approach to the Eternal and Infinite. The Infinite is full of many infinities and each of these infinities is itself the very Eternal. In each finite we can discover and through all things as His forms and symbols we can approach the Infinite. All cosmic powers are manifestations, all forces are the forces of the One. An Infinite Consciousness-Force, executive Energy, Will or Law, Maya, Prakriti, Shakti or Karma, is behind all happenings, whether to us, they seem good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, fortunate or adverse. The Infinite creates and is Brahman; it preserves and is Vishnu; it destroys or takes to itself and is Rudra or Shiva.

One interesting thing, however, has been pointed out by Sri Aurobindo in this context. Many modernised Indian religionists tend to make an intellectual compromise with modern materialistic rationalism by explaining away the above-mentioned Indian godhead as symbols; but the ancient Indian religious mentality saw them not only as symbols but as world-realities. Sri Aurobindo offers a brilliant explanation of this. He says that between the highest Unimaginable Existence and our material way of being the spiritual and psychic knowledge of India did not fix a gulf as between two unrelated opposites. The Indian mind

was aware of other psychological planes of consciousness and experience and the truths of these supraphysical planes were no less real to it than the outward truths of the material universe. Man approaches God at first according to his psychological nature and his capacity for deeper experience, *svabhava*, *adhikara*. The level of Truth, the plane of consciousness he can reach is determined by his inner evolutionary stage. Herein lies the explanation of the variety of religious cults, but its data are not imaginary structures, the inventions of priests or poets, but truths of a supraphysical existence lying between the consciousness of the physical world and the ineffable superconscience of the absolute.

Last but not the least, comes the third idea of strongest consequence at the base of Indian religion and it is the most dynamic for the inner spiritual life. The Supreme or the Divine can be approached through a universal consciousness and by piercing through all inner and outer nature, but That or He can also be met by each individual soul in itself in its own spiritual part, because there is something in it that is intimately one or at least intimately related with the Divine Existence. Therefore, the essence of Indian religion for man is to grow and live in such a way that man can grow out of ignorance which veils the self-knowledge from his mind and life and become aware of the divinity, the Secret Splendour within us, of which the poet, George Russell (A.E.) has given so memorable an expression:

Within that quivering shell, the ear,
Far borne, a myriad voices throng.
Be still and listen: you shall hear
The Universe revealed in song.

(To be continued)

In Search of Organisational Soul

Suhas K. Mehra and Beloo Mehra

Let us begin with a brief look at an institution which was established with a very specific objective to facilitate the seeking of soul both on the level of the individual and the collective. Sri Aurobindo Ashram serves as an excellent example to demonstrate that the idea of soul-seeking is not a utopian concept but can rather be a living ideal to pursue and a concrete purpose of existence for some organisations. It is important to mention that many other examples of such intentional communities and spiritually-inclined institutions may be found all across the world.

“[The Mother] started working along two complementary lines with a dual purpose — individual and collective— in view. In order to understand what this dual purpose meant in actual practice, we have to remember that one of the cardinal points of Sri Aurobindo’s teaching is that there are more than one overhead planes of spiritual consciousness above the ordinarily functioning mental, and it is possible through yogic sadhana to bring these superconscient planes down to illumine and heighten our everyday life; and that, in the depths of our being, there is a will much stronger and purer than our surface human will, and this deeper force of action can be brought to the forefront to direct our daily activities. It is in the light of these truths of occult psychology that the Mother sought to give a new orientation to the life and form of the fledgling Ashram.

This was the individual aspect of Sadhana, what every inmate of the Ashram was expected to put into progressive practice for his own march towards spiritual perfection. But there was at the same time a collective aspect to it. Thus the second line along which the Mother worked was to make the collectivity as real and living as the individual aspect.”

The above passage presents an ideal for any organisation trying to discover its soul both at the individual and collective level. At the core of this ideal is a belief both in the existence of source of true knowledge beyond the mind, and in the possibility of developing appropriate faculties to access that knowledge and utilise it to transform all spheres of human activity, including business and commerce. Furthermore, each individual carries within the will for self-growth and perfection, which must be consciously and progressively pursued. If, however, this self-growth is not pursued consciously, then too the individual will continue to progress in a half-conscious or unconscious manner and through a path of several detours and iterations. These individual paths of self-development have a direct impact on the collective pursuit of an institution's or organisation's own self-finding and growth.

Most business organisations are nowhere near the ideal of conscious human development as sought by Sri Aurobindo Ashram and its members. Nevertheless, there are deep insights to be gained when we begin by setting an ideal in front of our quest.

Self-development as a Primal Goal

“The primal law and purpose of the individual life is to seek its own self-development. Consciously or half-consciously or with an obscure unconscious groping it strives always and rightly strives at self-formulation, — to find itself, to discover within itself the law and power of its own being and to fulfil it.”

The importance of self-development has been emphasised by several modern day thinkers in business studies. To take one example, American entrepreneur, author and motivational speaker, Jim Rohn recalls the advice given to him by his mentor, “Jim, if you want to be wealthy and happy, learn this lesson well: Learn to work harder on yourself than you do on your job.... Since that time I’ve been working on my own personal development. And I must admit that this has been the most challenging assignment of all. This business of personal development lasts a lifetime.” He adds, “A very rich man once said, – if you took all the money in the world and divided it equally among everybody, it would soon be back in the same pockets it was before....It’s hard to keep that which has not been obtained through personal development.”

Similarly, Peter Drucker, considered as the father of modern management, has emphasised the importance of self-development in several of his writings. For example, in one of his highly popular books “*Managing Oneself*,” he wrote, “We will have to learn to develop ourselves. We will have to place ourselves where we can make the greatest contribution. And we will have to stay mentally alert and engaged during a 50-year working life, which means knowing how and when to change the work we do.”

Roth, Drucker and others have emphasised the need for personal self-development as a prerequisite for continuous growth in one's professional as well as other spheres of life. But for a greater conscious personal fulfilment it is important to look deeper within to understand the reasons for the self-development.

In our previous article, “*The Organisational Cycle – From Reason to Subjectivity*” we had briefly discussed the different parts of our being – physical, vital, and mental. To briefly recount, “...physical would refer to the body itself. Vital would refer to the energy or flows in the body, whether of blood, nerves, impulses, passage and digestion of foods, and flow of air, among other vital flows. Mental would refer to the intelligence embedded in the body by which each subsystem integrates holistically with the body system.” On an organisational level, these parts will correspond as follows:

The Architecture of a Business

Orientation

	Physical	Vital	Mental
Physical	Tangible assets such as land	Tangible networks such as transportation	Fixed world, processes, approach
Vital	Tangible energy such as cash	Flows of energy such as financial assets and customer experience	Variable world; assertion through financial means
Mental	Intangible assets such as goodwill	Flow facilitating creation of intangible assets	Idea driven and higher fluidity

Source: Pravir Malik. 2015. *The Fractal Organisation: Creating Enterprises of Tomorrow*. p.59.

When we speak of self-development or working on ourselves, we need to look deep inside to determine which part of our being is being fulfilled through this self-development process. For example, Rohn's words quoted earlier – "Learn to work harder on yourself than you do on your job," – may suggest that perhaps working on oneself is a higher goal to pursue than working at one's assigned job. But a closer reading can help us understand that the assumption here is that generally one's job is not the means of a meaningful self-development, and for that one has to look elsewhere. As long as one's job is viewed only as a means to meet lower level physical needs (e.g. salary and other tangible rewards), there may not be much room for a deeper self-development which by itself could be a greater motivator for an employee. Additionally, there seems to be an assumption that all self-development happens in a very conscious manner with full awareness.

A brief personal example is in order at this point. After studying and working at prestigious institutions and organisations in the US, we (the authors) decided to return to India and settle down at Pondicherry. We quit satisfying jobs that had contributed much to our self-development in the realms of physical, vital and mental growth and progress. As long as one tries to understand everything with mind, one can never be completely certain about the root cause of a certain choice one makes in life. That's why looking back at our decision to move to Pondicherry we may say that it was perhaps taken half-consciously or it was led by an obscure unconscious movement within.

We were quite aware and conscious of the fact that the kinds of professional careers we had experienced in the USA would not and could not be replicated in Pondicherry, not even to a much smaller degree, and that we would have to search for something else, something that would help us satisfy both our physical need of financial sustenance and a mental need for intellectual growth. And yet somehow there was a subtle feeling, a kind of an assurance even, that some opportunity that is meant to help us go on with our path of self-development, perhaps in some new direction, will find us. Little did we know at the time that one day we would be co-writing articles in the field of business studies or management, something that is a drastic departure from our past professional lives and fields of study. In retrospect, we can say that unconsciously or half-consciously all the years prior to our move to Pondicherry were, in a way,

events and opportunities geared toward a continuous self-discovery which were perhaps preparing us for a new self-formulation. Similarly, our present experiences are preparation and means for self-development toward what lies ahead in future. This is practically true for all, individuals and groups alike.

Self-development is a life-long process but what happens to the accumulated experience, knowledge and wisdom after one dies? It's interesting to read an excerpt from "*Steve Jobs*," authored by Walter Isaacson, based upon more than forty interviews with Jobs over a two-year period. At the very end of this book we find a seriously ill Jobs sitting in his garden reflecting about his imminent death and talking about his experiences in India and his views on spirituality. He says,

"For most of my life, I've felt that there must be more to our existence than meets the eye. I like to think that something survives after you die. It's strange to think that you accumulate all this experience, and maybe a little wisdom, and it just goes away. So I really want to believe that something survives, that maybe your consciousness endures."

This introspective passage by Jobs reminds one of Sri Aurobindo's words about an individual being more than an "ephemeral physical creature, a form of mind and body that aggregates and dissolves." He speaks of an individual as "a being, a living power of the eternal Truth, a self-manifesting spirit." Both Jobs and Sri Aurobindo are speaking of a continuous self-manifesting journey of the inmost being over lifetimes, and each life becoming a means to grow and develop through various experiences and opportunities.

Similarly, a self-manifesting spirit also guides the collective progress of mankind. Jobs (and many other great innovators before him) have credited the contributions of others for enabling their own contributions. In his words,

"I think that most creative people want to express appreciation for being able to take advantage of the work that's been done by others before us. I didn't invent language or mathematics I use. I make little of my own food, none of my own clothes. Everything I do depends on other members of our species and the shoulders that we stand on. And a lot of us want to contribute something back to our species and to add something to the flow... We try to use the talents we have to express our deep feelings, to show our appreciation of all the contributions that came before us, and to add something to the

flow.”

Peter Senge speaks about this relationship between individual and collective progress using a deeply Indian metaphor of tree and seed:

“It’s common to say that trees come from seeds. But how could a tiny seed create a huge tree? Seeds do not contain the resources needed to grow a tree. These must come from the medium or environment within which the tree grows. But the seed does provide something that is crucial: a place where the whole of the tree starts to form. As resources such as water and nutrients are drawn in, the seed organises the process that generates growth. In a sense, the seed is a gateway through which the future possibility of the living tree emerges.”

Individuals are the tiny seeds, in order to grow and eventually contribute to the ecology they first need the nutrient and resources from the collective, like the air, water, soil, tree, animals, microscopic beings who were there before the seed. This forms a symbiotic relationship between the individual and the collective, a part and the whole. Contributions made by individuals become part of the collective knowledge and future innovators use the prior knowledge for their own creative ideas, and thus develops a continuous chain for the collective progress of the mankind.

A vast majority of the modern day advances in almost all spheres of human activity happen within the context of a collective organisation, though the creativity and innovation may be largely led by an individual (or a small group). Some of the earliest examples of multinational organisations may include the Church at Vatican, and later the imperialistic European countries which were able to proliferate across national boundaries. Presently, numerous multinational organisations have emerged including commercial businesses as well as non-commercial, religious, scientific, cultural, and social organisations. Further due to the advent of Internet several on-line organisations have also emerged for whom national boundaries are not a hindrance. These organisations have tremendous influence on individuals’ lives, on the ways people live, think, eat, work, communicate, etc. Therefore, it is important to closely understand the dynamic relationship between an individual’s pursuit of self-development and the possible ways in which an organisation or a collective may impact the process.

Machine versus Living Being

The organisational arrangement of a collective or a group may find itself somewhere on a spectrum which has on its one end the view of fully structured and mechanised “machine” and on the other that of an organically growing “living being.” In other words, a collective may organise itself like a machine or view itself as a living being or somewhere on the continuum between the two. The machine view can be explained using an example of a television. Here, the whole (TV) comprises of parts such as the LCD panel, electronics, speakers, etc., implying that the television is assembled from all these parts and for it to operate all the parts must perform optimally otherwise the part(s) need to be replaced. On the other end, a living organisation could be understood using the previously mentioned analogy of the seed (part) and the ecosystem (whole). As opposed to the machine view, an organisation as a living being continuously interacts, grows and adapts with the changing environment.

The sharp contrast between these two views illuminates a host of core assumptions about management and organisations.

- A machine is owned and controlled by someone whereas a living being is self-governing;
- a machine exists for a purpose conceived of by its builders while living beings discover their own purpose over time;
- a machine must be controllable by its operators, but the living beings can be influenced only through complex interactive processes (which gives rise to the power struggles, perhaps the root of most corporate politics);
- a machine is created by an outside entity while the living company creates and evolves itself;
- organisation as a machine implies its static nature which would change only if someone from the outside makes the change, whereas an organisation as a living being implies its organic growth over time;
- machine view identifies the organisation with its builders whereas the living view emphasises an organisation’s own sense of identity;
- in a machine view, all actions are the results of management decisions whereas a living organisation formulates its own goals and its own capacity;
- unless a machine is repaired it will run down while a living organisation has the capability of rebuilding and regenerating itself continuously;

·a machine view would consider human resources as a commodity to be used like any other raw material, the opposite view would be where workers are individuals collaborating to achieve their and their organisation's goals;

·in the machine view the entire knowledge and experience of an organisation is seen as the sum total of the knowledge of its parts, namely, the workers; in a living company, knowledge-creation is a continuous phenomenon emerging out of its dynamic relationship with the environment as well the ongoing interaction between the individuals and the collective.

Arie de Geus, who worked at Shell for close to forty years, and his team researched the factors effecting the longevity of a company. They selected companies that were older than Shell group, i.e. companies that existed prior to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The other criteria for sample selection were that the companies must be business leaders in their own industry, be as big as Shell, and have corporate identity. After studying 30 such companies ranging from 100 to 700 years old, the team's major finding was that these companies "have a personality that allows them to evolve harmoniously. They know who they are, understand how they fit into the world, value new ideas and new people, and husband their money in a way that allows them to govern their future."

Ironically, this is just as much applicable at the level of an individual, once again emphasising the identity between individual and collective. At the same time, the question arises – what is this distinct "personality" that allows a harmonious growth, facilitates an understanding of how one "fit[s] into the world", and "allows them to govern their future". An answer to this may be found in what is not being said in this finding by the Shell research team. Sri Aurobindo reminds us that behind a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament of both an individual and a collective (nation, society, organisation) exists "a developing mind and a soul" for the sake of which all the outer instruments and powers exist.

It is this "developing mind and soul" that is behind the constantly evolving, adaptive and growth processes going on in a living organisation which results in its continuous self-discovery. According to Sri Aurobindo, the purpose of a collective's existence is to seek its own self-fulfilment, just like an individual. He adds,

"it strives rightly to find itself, to become aware within itself of the law and power of its own being and to fulfil it as perfectly as possible, to realise all its potentialities, to live its own self-revealing life. The reason is the same; for this too is a being, a living power of the eternal Truth, a self-manifestation of the cosmic Spirit..."

As we reflect a bit more on this thought, especially in the light of self-development and self-fulfilment being the primal law and purpose of life, we are further reminded of the identity of nature between the individual and the collective. And yet, there is a major difference. That difference, according to Sri Aurobindo, rests in the fact that the soul of a group or a collective being is much more complex in nature than that of an individual being.

"...the group-soul is much more complex because it has a great number of partly self-conscious mental individuals for the constituents of its physical being instead of an association of merely vital subconscious cells."

A Living Organisation

The above idea also tells us that individual paths of self-development – though varied and diverse, have a direct impact on the collective pursuit of an institution's or organisation's own self-finding and growth. It, therefore, becomes essential for an organisation or any For fiscal year 2012, revenue grew to a record \$73.7 billion. We also maintained men and women who compose the nation-unit [corporation], a body ever changing, yet always the same like that of the individual man, we are on the way to a truly subjective communal consciousness."

There are two major implications of this realisation that the real body of an organisation is its employees. Because individuals are living beings and because an organisation is a collective of individuals it naturally makes the organisation a living being, always growing, changing, adapting and evolving. An individual's physical appearance, feelings, emotions, thoughts, mental ideas, biases, ways of thinking etc. continue to change over a lifetime. And yet, there is something behind which serves as a constant basis of as well as a silent witness to all these changes over time, something that both supports the growth of the outer instruments of body, life and mind and also increasingly expresses itself through these instruments, something that gives a unique, unchanging stamp to the individual's identity despite all the outer changes. This has been called soul by

some, using Sri Aurobindo's terminology we may call it the inmost being, the psychic being. To get in touch with that, to discover this deep entity within, to make that as the leader of all outward march is the ultimate goal for an individual's path of self-development and self-fulfilment. But even without being consciously in touch with this deeper entity, all outer self-development that an individual experiences may be semi-consciously or unconsciously a result of the direction of evolution that this psychic being needs for its greater expression and manifestation through the individual's outer instruments of body, life and mind.

Same may be said about an organisation's outer evolution over time. Let us consider an example from Coca Cola. During the 1980's the company's market share had been steadily losing ground to diet soft drinks and non-cola beverages for many years. Meanwhile the consumers who were purchasing regular cola drinks seemed to prefer the sweeter taste of Pepsi, as Coca-Cola learned in conducting blind taste tests. In order to regain lost market share the company introduced reformulated Coca-Cola, often referred to as the "New Coke," marking the first formula change in 99 years. The original Coca-Cola was recalled from all the stores. The American public's reaction to the change was negative, even hostile. After 79 days the original cola "Coke Classic" returned alongside the "New Coke." The New Coke was eventually discontinued internationally in July 2002. This incidence is considered as a classic case study cautioning businesses against tampering too extensively with a well-established and successful brand. This makes good sense when seen from an external and objective point of view. At the same time, it must be noted that despite the seemingly outward loss of branding (temporarily), the company did manage to make financially sound decision to switch over from sugar to high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), a cheaper sweetener, when it re-introduced "Coke Classic," its original brand. Again, from an objective point of view, the original decision did lead to financial benefit for the company.

But there is a deeper subjective learning or self-discovery the company made through this experience, which is of our concern. First, was the learning about "the bond consumers felt with their Coca-Cola — something they didn't want anyone, including the Coca-Cola Company, tampering with." And second and more important, was realisation that to re-discover a company's identity is a long-term but inevitable process which while unavoidable has to be done with

an attitude to taking "intelligent risks." Mr. Goizueta, then chairman and CEO, told employees that "New Coke" decision was a prime example of "taking intelligent risks." He urged all employees to take intelligent risks in their jobs, saying it was critical to the company's long-term success. This attitude is an example of the living nature of an organisation which constantly attempts to renew itself through iterative processes of self-discovery while still being mindful of what constitutes as its core.

Another important realisation from this example is the fact that by encouraging employees to take intelligent risks, the company is facilitating a culture of self-development wherein employees are not only working for a greater professional reward but also feel motivated to try out well thought-out innovative ideas thereby discovering new capabilities and opportunities for self-expression. This is not a small thing, because self-development for an individual worker is not merely about vital and intellectual fulfilment, it is more importantly about discovering an inner joy in one's field of work. It is this subjective feeling of joy that further opens the inner being to pursue deeper self-development, self-expression and self-fulfilment.

Another major implication of 'employee first' orientation is the realisation that the primal purpose of an individual is an ongoing self-development and self-expression through various creative and constructive actions, choices, and decisions he or she makes. Any collective 'living' organisation on the path of its own self-discovery and growth must be conscious and mindful of the need to facilitate the self-development journeys of its 'living' individuals. Recently a joke on employee training was making waves on social media: "What if we train our employees and they leave? What if we don't and they stay?" This joke speaks of a deeper truth that an organisation's continued growth, longevity and constant renewal depends very heavily on constant learning, growth and development of its individual members.

At the same time, the organisation also needs to be mindful of the range of self-development goals among its various employees. The variation comes from individuals being at different stages of self-development corresponding to the different parts of their being. At the very basic level the organisation must take care of the physical needs of all its employees through a reasonable salary structure. For the workers who are primarily associated with the physical state

of their being a decent salary may suffice their self-development goals. For example, for an unskilled daily wage-earner a good salary to meet physical demands may be most important. Over time, as the vital needs come into the picture and with that come the need to fulfil one's emotional and other ego-related expectations, something more than the physical salary is needed for their self-development. For example, the semi-skilled or skilled workers will not be fully satisfied with merely a salary, they want their work to also fulfil their needs for self-respect and self-esteem. As we move up the ladder, for individuals associated more with the mental parts of their being, who also have a sense of pride in their thoughts, ideas and learning, there is a greater need for opportunities which will allow them continuous mental development as well as more creative expressions of their ongoing self-discovery. For such individuals, salary may not be the most primary concern when choosing an appropriate work opportunity (though of course, they too would want their basic physical and vital needs to be met).

These implications that an organisation is a living being and that its development is intimately tied to the development of its individual members speak of the subjective dimension of an organisation's existence. Any measures to address these subjective dimensions cannot be formula based or of the nature of one-size-fits-all. An individualised approach is required depending upon the physical, vital and mental needs of the individual and collective, and keeping in consideration that all such needs will change over time as the individual and collective living beings evolve. This requires awareness and mindfulness of the psychological make-up of an individual.

In the light of Sri Aurobindo's thought, this move towards an 'employee first' focus may be seen as an initial important step toward "the way to a truly subjective communal consciousness." It may even be said that only when a collective, a group or an organisation develops a truly subjective communal consciousness that it opens itself to a path of greater self-discovery. Only through a subjective knowing of the many parts of our 'self' we move toward a deeper self-knowledge, a knowledge of the truer being within. This is not only true for the individual, but also for a collective. In this regard, the increasing trend of a greater employee-orientation seen in some of the leading business companies is

a positive sign.

However, this employee focus leading to a path to a greater subjective communal consciousness is also not free of possible pitfalls. From the point of view of the management, having a greater employee focus may end up as simply another 'means' to improve their bottom-line, in the sense that satisfied employees lead to better performance and therefore better revenues for the company. This will dilute the real purpose of facilitating self-development of the employees. Secondly, from the point of view of the workers, there is a possibility that they may end up having a disproportionate sense of entitlement, in the sense that they can expect more and more 'welfare type' benefits from the organisation. This in turn may lead to a culture of inefficiency and mediocrity at the organisation. The Indian concept of '*adhikara*,' varying natural capacity of the individual, must be kept into consideration when framing an appropriate approach for an 'employee first' focus.

These pitfalls may be avoided if the employees feel a greater and more meaningful sense of alignment with the *raison d'être* of organisation. This presumes that the organisation in itself, as a living being, is making conscious effort toward discovering its true purpose. This parallel journey of individual and collective self-discovery and self-development necessitates that the organisation makes concerted effort at the time of recruitment to give greater weightage to a more subjective criterion of how the potential employee would fit in with the deeper values of the organisation instead of focusing only on objective aspects such as employee's technical or professional preparation or experience. A good example of this is seen at Aravind Eye Hospital.

"When hiring [employees], Aravind's focus is on value-fit over skill-fit. It looks not for accomplishment, but for people suited to its pattern of working. "Our task is to make an ordinary person extra-ordinary," says Natchiar briskly."

Such a subjective view of business management is a recent phenomenon when seen in the overall historical evolution of business. It is therefore prudent to look briefly into that history. This is what we shall do in the concluding part of this article .

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The History of the Ashram School (Part III)

(Continued from the previous issue)

Kittu Reddy

Before we move on to the next part dealing with the meetings with Mother, it is important to mention about another aspect of the project of *The Spiritual History of India*. Manoj Das Gupta wrote a letter to Mother regarding the project to which Mother replied with a long comment in a conversation with Satprem. We are reproducing the conversation below.

5 April 1967

(Mother writes a note.) It is an answer to a question. Do you know what I told the teachers of the school? I have been asked another question. Here is the beginning of my reply:

“The division between ‘ordinary life’ and ‘spiritual life’ is an outdated antiquity.”

Did you read his question? Read it again to me.

“We discussed the future. It seemed to me that nearly all the teachers were eager to do something so that the children could become more conscious of why they are here. At that point I said that in my opinion, to speak to the children of spiritual things often has the opposite result, and that these words lose all their value.”

“Spiritual things” – what does he mean by spiritual things?

Obviously, if the teachers recite them like a story...

Spiritual things... They are taught history *or* spiritual things, they are taught science *or* spiritual things. That is the stupidity. In history, the Spirit is there; in science, the Spirit is there – the Truth is everywhere. And what is needed is not to teach it in a false way, but to teach it in a true way. They cannot get that into their heads.

He adds: “I have suggested that it might be better to meet and listen to Mother’s voice, for even if we don’t understand everything, your voice would

accomplish its own inner work, which we are not in a position to evaluate. About this, I would like to know what is the best way of bringing the child into relation with you. For all the suggestions, including mine, seemed arbitrary to me and without any real value.

“Mother, wouldn’t it be better if the teachers were to concentrate solely on the subjects they are teaching, for you are taking care of the spiritual life?” I shall give him this reply: There is no “spiritual life”! It is still the old idea, still the old idea of the sage, the sannyasin, the... who represents spiritual life, while all the others represent ordinary life – and it is not true, it is not true, it is not true at all.

If they still need an opposition between two things – for the poor mind doesn’t work if you don’t give it an opposition – if they need an opposition, let them take the opposition between Truth and Falsehood, it is a little better; I don’t say it is perfect, but it is a little better. So, in all things, Falsehood and Truth are mixed everywhere: in the so-called “spiritual life”, in sannyasins, in swamis, in those who think they represent the life divine on earth, all that – there also, there is a mixture of Falsehood and Truth.

It would be better not to make any division.

(Silence)

For the children, precisely because they are children, it would be best to instil in them the will to conquer the future, the will to always look ahead and to want to move on as swiftly as they can towards... what will be — but they should not drag with them the burden, the millstone of the whole oppressive weight of the past. It is only when we are very high in consciousness and knowledge that it is good to look behind to find the points where this future begins to show itself. When we can look at the whole picture, when we have a very global vision, it becomes interesting to know that what will be realised later on has already been announced beforehand, in the same way that Sri Aurobindo said that the divine life will manifest on earth, because it is *already* involved in the depths of Matter; from this standpoint it is interesting to look back or to look down below – not to know what happened, or to know what men have known: that is quite useless.

The children should be told: There are wonderful things to be manifested, prepare yourself to receive them. Then if they want something a little more

concrete and easier to understand, you can tell them: Sri Aurobindo came to announce these things; when you are able to read him, you will understand. So this awakens the interest, the desire to learn.

I see very clearly the difficulty he is referring to: most people – and in all the things that are written, or in the lectures they give – use inflated speech, without any truth of personal experience, which has no effect, or rather a negative effect. That is what he is referring to.

Yes, that is why they should do as I have said.

Ah! But not so long ago, most of the teachers were saying, “Oh! But we must do this, because it is done everywhere.” (*Smiling*) They have already come a little distance. But there is much more to be covered.

But above all, what is most important is to eliminate these divisions. And every one of them, all of them have it in their minds: the division between leading a spiritual life and leading an ordinary life, having a spiritual consciousness and having an ordinary consciousness – there is only one consciousness.

In most people it is three-quarters asleep and distorted; in many it is still completely distorted. But what is needed, very simply, is not to leap from one consciousness into another, but to open one’s consciousness (*upward gesture*) and to fill it with vibrations of Truth, to bring it in harmony with what must be here – there it exists from all eternity – but here, what must be here: the “tomorrow” of the earth. If you weigh yourself down with a whole burden that you have to drag behind you, if you drag behind you everything that you must abandon, you will not be able to advance very fast.

Mind you, to know things from the earth’s past can be very interesting and very useful, but it must not be something that binds you or ties you to the past. If it is used as a spring-board, it is all right. But really, it is quite secondary. (Silence)

It would be interesting to formulate or to elaborate a new method of teaching for children, to take them very young. It is easy when they are very young. We need people – oh! we would need remarkable teachers – who have, first, an ample enough documentation of what is known so as to be able to answer every question, and at the same time, at least the knowledge, if not the experience – the experience would be better – of the true intuitive

intellectual attitude, and – naturally the capacity would be still more preferable – at least the knowledge that the true way of knowing is mental silence, an attentive silence turned towards the truer Consciousness, and the capacity to receive what comes from there. The best would be to have this capacity; at least, it should be explained that it is the true thing – a sort of demonstration – and that it works not only from the point of view of what must be learned, of the whole domain of knowledge, but also of the whole domain of what should be done: the capacity to receive the exact indication of *how* to do it; and as you go on, it changes into a very clear perception of what must be done, and a precise indication of when it must be done. At least the children, as soon as they have the capacity to think – it starts at the age of seven, but at about fourteen or fifteen it is very clear – the children should be given little indications at the age of seven, a complete explanation at fourteen, of how to do it, and that it is the only way to be in relation with the deeper truth of things, and that all the rest is a more or less clumsy mental approximation to something that can be known directly.

The conclusion is that the teachers themselves should at least have a sincere beginning of discipline and experience, that it is not a question of accumulating books and retelling them like this. One can’t be a teacher in this way; let the outside world be like that if it likes. We are not propagandists, we simply want to show what can be done and try to prove that it *must* be done.

When you take the children very young, it is wonderful. There is so little to do: it is enough to *be*.

Never make a mistake.

Never lose your temper.

Always understand.

And to know and see clearly why there has been this movement, why there has been this impulse, what is the inner constitution of the child, what is the thing to be strengthened and brought forward – this is the only thing to do; and to leave them, to leave them free to blossom; simply to give them the opportunity to see many things, to touch many things, to do as many things as possible. It is great fun. And above all, not to try to impose on them what you think you know.

Never scold them. Always understand, and if the child is ready, explain; if

he is not ready for an explanation – if you are ready yourself – replace the false vibration by a true one. But this... this is to demand from the teachers a perfection which they rarely have.

But it would be very interesting to make a programme for the teachers and the true programme of study, from the very bottom – which is so plastic and which receives impressions so deeply. If they were given a few drops of truth when they are very young, they would blossom quite naturally as the being grows. It would be beautiful work. (CWM, Volume 12, pp. 4013-07)

We shall now take up the talks that we had with Mother for a period of four months from December 1972 to March 29, 1973. It will not be possible to give all the details of the conversations, but I will try to give the highlights and the key points that Mother stressed upon. As already reported earlier, Mother took a lot of interest in the running of the school and was keen that it should be brought up to the expected standard. The key points may be summed up as follows:

1. She wanted to introduce the free method of education from the earliest possible age. In fact She sent Tanmaya to the Primary section *Avenir* (age 7 to 9) to select students who were ready for the gradual use of freedom.

2. She was insistent that in order to succeed in this endeavour, the most important requirement was that at least some teachers should be in contact with their psychic being, or at least make a serious effort to do so.

3. She also identified the obstacles that were blocking the progress of the school. They were first the attitude and the expectations of most parents and second the giving of certificates after they finished their studies; she felt that it was one of the main reasons for diluting the motives of the students.

4. She was clear in Her mind that many of the text books in the field of Humanities like History, Literature etc, should be rewritten in the light of Sri Aurobindo.

5. She was at a very sensitive stage of the transformation of her body and every dispute in the school or in the Ashram affected Her. She explained a mantra that She would repeat all the time.

All these points will be illustrated in the next article with quotations from Her conversations first in French and then in the English translation.

We shall now go into the details of the points mentioned at the end of the

previous article.

1. The first point was Mother's keenness to introduce the free system from the Primary section to those children who were ready; this was to be done in a graduated manner starting at the age of 7-9 in the section known as *Avenir*. Almost from the very beginning of December when the interviews began, Mother wanted us to explore the possibility of finding out the children in the Primary section who were ready to use their freedom in the right way. As expected there was some resistance from some teachers and a lot more from parents; there were also some minor misunderstandings among the teachers. Some of them wrote to Mother to explain their position; while Mother appreciated their goodwill, She was firm that this should be started and tried out on however small a scale. Consequently She sent Tanmaya to identify these children and two or three were chosen with Mother's approval. Here is an extract from the Mother's talk:

Mère :

En principe c'est les enfants qui devraient choisir ... parce que vous n'êtes pas sûrs de ne pas vous tromper. En principe c'est les enfants qui ... en tout cas, d'abord, on devrait dire aux enfants: "Voilà il y a maintenant deux classes. Dans laquelle voulez-vous être? S'ils disent: "Ah! Nous ne savons pas"... alors, ceux là, ça ne fait rien. Il peut y en avoir qui diront: "Oh! Nous voulons aller là."

Tanmaya:

C'est ça.

Mère :

Et alors, il faudrait que toi - toi, je veux dire Tanmaya – que tu vois ces enfants et que tu tâches de faire sortir d'eux ce qu'il y a. Et alors après ça on décidera.

10 Mars, 1973

Here is the English translation.

Mother:

In principle, it should be up to the children to choose... because you can't be sure you are not mistaken.. In principle it's up to the children who... Anyway, first of all, one should tell them:" There are now 2 classes. Which one do you want to attend?" If they say:" Ah! We don't know...." Then for

those, it doesn't matter. There may be some who will say: "Oh! We want to go there!"

Tanmaya:

That's it.

Mother:

Then you should... you, — I mean Tanmaya — you should see these children and try to bring out what there is deep inside them. And after that we'll decide.

10 March, 1973

It is obvious that Mother had a lot of confidence in Tanmaya.

2. At the same time, Mother was absolutely clear that for this to be successful the teachers or at least some of them must be in contact with their psychic being or at the least, it must be their chief preoccupation. This point is central to education in the Ashram school; it is the importance of discovering the psychic being particularly by the teachers; only then can they help students who have the possibility and the aspiration. On February 8th, Mother met six teachers, namely Kireet-bhai, Tanmay, Paru, Arati, Jhumur and Kittu. She explained in some detail what She expected from us and also from the students. I am reproducing the conversation in French and the English translation.

Tanmaya:

Quelle est la meilleure manière de nous préparer, jusqu'à ce que nous puissions mettre en place de nouvelles structures?

Mère:

Naturellement, c'est d'élargir et d'éclairer votre conscience — mais comment faire? Votre propre conscience... l'élargir et l'éclairer. Et si vous pouviez trouver, chacun de vous, votre psychique et vous unir à lui, tous les problèmes seraient résolus.

L'être psychique, c'est le représentant du Divin dans l'être humain. C'est ça, n'est-ce pas — le Divin n'est pas quelque chose de lointain et d'inaccessible. Le Divin est en vous mais vous n'en êtes pas complètement conscients. Vous avez plutôt... ça agit maintenant comme une influence plutôt que comme une Présence. Il faut que ce soit une Présence consciente, que vous puissiez à tout moment vous demander quel est... comment...

comment le Divin voit. C'est comme ça: d'abord comment le Divin voit, et puis comment le Divin veut, et puis comment le Divin fait. Et ce n'est pas s'en aller dans des régions inaccessibles, c'est ici même. Seulement, pour le moment, toutes les vieilles habitudes et l'inconscience générale mettent comme une sorte de couverture qui nous empêche de voir et de sentir. Il faut... il faut lever, il faut soulever ça.

Au fond, il faut devenir des instruments conscients... conscients... conscients du Divin.

D'habitude, ça prend toute une vie, ou quelquefois, pour certains, c'est plusieurs vies. Ici, dans les conditions actuelles, vous pouvez le faire en quelques mois. Pour ceux qui sont... qui ont une aspiration ardente, en quelques mois ils peuvent le faire.

8 Février, 1973 (CWM – French, Vol.13)

Here is the English translation:

Tanmaya:

What is the best way of preparing ourselves, until we can establish a new system?

Mother:

Naturally, it is to widen and illumine your consciousness — but how to do it? Your own consciousness... to widen and illumine it. And if you could find, each one of you, your psychic and unite with it, all the problems would be solved.

The psychic being is the representative of the Divine in the human being. That's it, you see — the Divine is not something remote and inaccessible. The Divine is in you but you are not fully conscious of it. Rather you have... it acts now as an influence rather than as a Presence. It should be a conscious Presence, you should be able at each moment to ask yourself what is... how... how the Divine sees. It is like that: first how the Divine sees, and then how the Divine wills, and then how the Divine acts. And it is not to go away into inaccessible regions, it is right here. Only, for the moment, all the old habits and the general unconsciousness put a kind of covering which prevents us from seeing and feeling. You must... you must lift, you must lift that up.

In fact, you must become conscious instruments... conscious... conscious of

the Divine.

Usually this takes a whole lifetime, or sometimes, for some people it is several lifetimes. Here, in the present conditions, you can do it in a few months. For those who are... who have an ardent aspiration, in a few *months* they can do it.

8 February, 1973 (CWM, Vol.12, p.430)

When She was asked whether we could give this as the aim for all the students, She replied:

Tanmaya:

Et Mère, on peut donner ça comme objectif à tous les enfants?

Mère:

Tous... non, ils n'ont pas tous le même âge, même quand ils ont le même âge physiquement. Il y a des enfants qui... qui sont primaires. Il faudrait, n'est-ce pas... Si vous étiez pleinement conscients de votre psychique, vous sauriez les enfants qui ont un psychique développé.

Il y a des enfants où le psychique est seulement embryonnaire. L'âge du psychique n'est pas le même, il s'en faut de beaucoup. Normalement le psychique met plusieurs vies à se former complètement, et c'est lui qui passe d'un corps dans un autre et c'est pour cela que nous ne sommes pas conscients de nos vies passées: c'est parce que nous ne sommes pas conscients de notre psychique. Mais quelquefois, il y a un moment où le psychique a participé à un événement; il est devenu conscient, et cela fait un souvenir. On a quelquefois... on a quelquefois un souvenir fragmentaire, le souvenir d'une circonstance ou d'un événement, ou d'une pensée ou même d'une action, comme ça: c'est parce que le psychique était conscient. Qu'est-ce que vous voulez, maintenant je suis près de la centaine, n'est-ce pas, il s'en faut de cinq ans seulement. J'ai commencé l'effort pour devenir consciente à cinq ans, mon petit. Voilà, c'est pour vous dire... Et je continue, et ça continue. Seulement... Naturellement, j'en suis venue à faire le travail pour les cellules du corps, mais il y a longtemps que le travail est commencé. Ce n'est pas pour vous décourager, mais... c'est pour dire que ça ne se fait pas comme ça !

Le corps... le corps est fait d'une matière qui est encore très lourde, et c'est la matière elle-même qui doit changer pour que le Supramental puisse se

manifest.

Voilà.

8Février 1973 (CWM – French, Vol.13)

Here is the English translation:

Tanmaya:

And Mother, can this be given as an aim to all the children?

Mother:

All... no. They are not all of the same age, even when they are of the same age physically. There are children who... who are at an elementary stage. You should... If you were fully conscious of your psychic, you would know the children who have a developed psychic. There are children in whom the psychic is only embryonic. The age of the psychic is not the same, far from it. Normally the psychic takes several lives to form itself completely, and it is that which passes from one body to another and that is why we are not conscious of our past lives: it is because we are not conscious of our psychic. But sometimes, there is a moment when the psychic has participated in an event; it has become conscious, and that makes a memory. One sometimes has... one sometimes has a fragmentary recollection, the memory of a circumstance or an event, or of a thought or even an act, like that: this is because the psychic was conscious.

You see how it is, now I am nearing a hundred, it's only five years away now. I started making an effort to become conscious at five years old, my child. This is to let you know.... And I go on, and it goes on. Only... Of course, I have come to the point where I am doing the work for the cells of the body, but still, the work began a long time ago.

This is not to discourage you, but... it is to let you know that it does not happen just like that!

The body... the body is made of a substance which is still very heavy, and it is the substance itself which has to change for the Supermind to be able to manifest.

There you are.

8February, 1973

(CWM, Vol.12, pp.432-33)

We are reproducing a note from the Mother on the qualities that a teacher must possess:

Personality Traits of a Successful Teacher

1. Complete self-control not only to the extent of not showing any anger, but remaining absolutely quiet and undisturbed under all circumstances.
2. In the matter of self-confidence, must also have a sense of the relativity of his importance. Above all, must have the knowledge that the teacher himself must always progress if he wants his students to progress, must not remain satisfied either with what he is or with what he knows.
3. Must not have any sense of essential superiority over his students nor preference or attachment whatsoever for one or another.
4. Must know that all are equal spiritually and instead of mere tolerance must have a global comprehension or understanding.
5. “The business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material.” (Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*)

Never forget that to be a good teacher one has to abolish in oneself all egoism. 10 December 1959 (CWM, Vol. 12 p.168)

3. She also identified the obstacles that were blocking the progress of the school. The first one was the attitude and the expectations of most parents and the second one was the giving of certificates after the students finished their studies; she felt that it was one of the main reasons for diluting the motives of the students.

Mother then asked Kireet-bhai to write a note for the parents; Kireet-bhai wrote that note which Mother appreciated and then it was sent to the parents. This note explained the work that was being done here and what was expected from the parents. It was an appeal to them to cooperate with the aims of the school.

Regarding the motivation of the students; Mother was keenly aware that the orientation of many students was towards getting jobs and success in the world. She felt after a few discussions that one of the main causes for this was the issuing of certificates after they completed the Higher course. She therefore decided to stop giving certificates. She asked Kireet-bhai to write a note announcing once more the statement that had been made earlier by the Mother

herself as to why we do not give certificates and diplomas; and that in pursuance of that objective, the certificates would be stopped in a gradual fashion. Students who were already in the Higher course would be given their certificates; but students who would be entering the Higher course would be told clearly that they would not be given certificates. These students would have to decide whether they would like to continue studying here or whether they would leave and study outside in any other college or institution.

A meeting was called of all the students of the Higher Course and the students who were in the last year of the Secondary course; Kireet-bhai addressed them and they were informed of this decision and were asked to make their choice and inform the authorities well in time. It was absolutely clear that Mother wanted to encourage students to study for the sake of knowledge and not primarily for jobs or any other mundane reasons. We are reproducing below a letter of the Mother which illustrates this.

Q. Why are no diplomas and certificates given to the students of the Centre of Education?

Mother:

For the last hundred years or so mankind has been suffering from a disease which seems to be spreading more and more and which has reached a climax in our times; it is what we may call “utilitarianism”. People and things, circumstances and activities seem to be viewed and appreciated exclusively from this angle. Nothing has any value unless it is useful. Certainly something that is useful is better than something that is not. But first we must agree on what we describe as useful — useful to whom, to what, for what? For, more and more, the races who consider themselves civilised describe as useful whatever can attract, procure or produce money. Everything is judged and evaluated from a monetary angle. That is what I call utilitarianism. And this disease is highly contagious, for even children are not immune to it.

At an age when they should be dreaming of beauty, greatness and perfection, dreams that may be too sublime for ordinary common sense, but which are nevertheless far superior to this dull good sense, children now dream of money and worry about how to earn it.

So when they think of their studies, they think above all about what can be

useful to them, so that later on when they grow up they can earn a lot of money.

And the thing that becomes most important for them is to prepare themselves to pass examinations with success, for with diplomas, certificates and titles they will be able to find good positions and earn a lot of money.

For them study has no other purpose, no other interest.

To learn for the sake of knowledge, to study in order to know the secrets of Nature and life, to educate oneself in order to grow in consciousness, to discipline oneself in order to become master of oneself, to overcome one's weaknesses, incapacities and ignorance, to prepare oneself to advance in life towards a goal that is nobler and vaster, more generous and more true... they hardly give it a thought and consider it all very utopian. The only thing that matters is to be practical, to prepare themselves and learn how to earn money.

Children who are infected with this disease are out of place at the Centre of Education of the Ashram. And it is to make this quite clear to them that we do not prepare them for any official examination or competition and do not give them any diplomas or titles which they can use in the outside world.

We want here only those who aspire for a higher and better life, who thirst for knowledge and perfection, who look forward eagerly to a future that will be more totally true.

There is plenty of room in the world for all the others.

17 July 1960 (CWM, Vol. 12 pp.353-54)

4. She also stressed that some of the text books in the field of Humanities (not of Science and Maths) should be written here by our own teachers or by the followers of Sri Aurobindo in that light. This conversation took place of 20th February 1973. She even suggested to me that I should write a book on Indian History in the light of Sri Aurobindo. She also emphasised that Her work depended to a certain extent on the success of this project. When she asked me to write the book, I was very diffident about it, but since She asked me to do it, I decided to go ahead with it. I do not know why Mother chose me to write that book; probably it was because a few years earlier in early 1968, I had prepared a syllabus for the two highest classes of the secondary section. It was shown to Mother who appreciated it. Here is the purpose of the syllabus:

Syllabus for EAVP 5 & 6

The purpose of this syllabus is to give to the students the necessary background information which will help them to understand the books of Sri Aurobindo— *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, and the *Foundations of Indian Culture*— when they go to the Higher Course. Ten topics have been selected for study in the Classes 5 & 6. All these topics have been extensively covered by Sri Aurobindo in these books. Each topic will be covered in a period of two months. I shall not go into the details of the syllabus, but it is sufficient to note that Mother was happy that these studies should be centred around Sri Aurobindo's vision.

5. One day She spoke about the mantra She uses regularly. Here is the conversation:

Mère:

Oui, oui, mais notre langage... J'allais te dire : «C'est une bonne idée», mais je me suis attrapée par l'oreille au moment où je me le disais. Ce n'est pas une idée, tu comprends, c'est notre langage qui a le... c'est comme une cloche qui est sur lui, une cloche mentale dont il ne veut pas se débarrasser. Vraiment, c'est un moment difficile. Je crois qu'il faudrait être très tranquille, très tranquille, très tranquille. Je vais te dire mon ancien mantra ; celui-là tient l'être extérieur très tranquille :

Om namo bhagavaté

Ces trois mots. Pour moi, ils voulaient dire :

Om — J'implore le Seigneur Suprême.

Namo — Obéissance à Lui.

Bhagavaté — Rends-moi divin.

C'est une traduction de ça. Je veux dire... Tu as entendu ?

Tanmaya:

Oui, Mère.

Mère:

Ça, pour moi, ça a le pouvoir de calmer tout.

14 Mars, 1973

Below is the English translation:

Mother:

Yes, yes, but our language... I was about to tell you, "It's a good idea," but I caught hold of myself by the ear just as I was saying it to myself. It is not an

idea, you understand, it is our language which has the... it is like a bell-jar covering it up, a mental bell-jar which it does not want to get rid of. Really, it is *a difficult time*. I think that we ought to be very quiet, very quiet, very quiet. I am going to tell you my old mantra; it keeps the outer being very quiet:

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE.

These three words. For me they meant:

OM — I implore the Supreme Lord.

NAMO — Obeisance to Him.

BHAGAVATE — Make me divine.

This is a translation of it, I mean... Did you hear?

Tanmaya:

Yes, Mother.

Mother:

For me that has the power to calm everything.

14 March, 1973 (CWM, Volume 12, pp.448-49)

I am adding a note on a side issue that took place during our talks. This is to dispel the impression that is currently widespread in some circles that Mother was against taking help from the Government of India.

Kireet went to Delhi twice during the period January- March 1973 for finalising grants given by the Government of India. On both occasions when he returned and met Mother, She was very happy to get the grants. Kireet also recounted how some of the senior officers were open to the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. On one such occasion, She told Kireet that if Indira Gandhi asked for help, he should respond positively.

In this series of articles, I have presented my interaction with the Mother both as a teacher and as one working in the administration of the school. Naturally it does not give a total view of the Mother's educational philosophy. Still it does reveal certain very important components of the Mother's vision. For Mother was just giving a body to the educational concepts of Sri Aurobindo. In a way, one might say that Mother tried to concretise and implement the educational philosophy of Sri Aurobindo on a small scale. We are quoting below an extract of the educational principles as laid down by Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo on the Three Principles of Education

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind; he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impose knowledge to him; he only shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface.

.....

The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature. There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a prearranged career. To force the nature to abandon its own *dharma* is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common. Every man has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of strength and perfection in however small a sphere, which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it, use it.

The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man's nature is almost always, in addition to his soul's past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully because insensibly. From that then we must begin. We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and

natural growth is the condition of genuine development.

(CWSA, Vol. 1, pp.384-85)

The question that arises is whether we – the followers of Sri Aurobindo, the government of India and humanity— are ready both physically and psychologically to implement this; for this demands a radical shift in the aims, goals and policy of education. But whether we are ready or not, it is always desirable to keep the ideal in front of our consciousness so that sooner or later the attempt to change will begin in real earnest.

It will be a great step forward if the governments started at least considering these ideas and then initiate the changes in a gradual manner.

To conclude, the points that Mother stressed for our education were:

1. Introduce the free system as early as possible to prepare the children for a free growth and flowering
2. Take the parents into confidence and make them understand the goals and methods of the new educational system. Their co-operation is indispensable.
3. Replace the utilitarian motivation by a higher motivation of seeking for knowledge and fulfilling one's *swadharma*. This does not mean that education must not be useful; on the contrary it is most useful when one is true to oneself.
4. Rewrite the text books in the light of the true and deeper Indianness and in the light of Sri Aurobindo. This is applicable for India. For other nations, the text books must reflect their deepest inner being.
5. The evaluation system prevailing now, based on exams, does not give a complete picture of the student; it must be much more broad-based and take the whole personality into account.
6. Teachers must try to develop the personality traits already mentioned in this article. Ultimately they must try to come in contact with their psychic being. A teacher must be a living example.

(Concluded)

Sri Aurobindo's Aswapati: Negotiating the Vedic 'Horse' as a Symbol

Rudrashis Datta

Abstract

The horse has occupied a pride of place among the animals in most civilisations since ancient times, more so in the Vedic age where it was not only used as a military asset but also as a powerful symbol that concerned the kings and the subjects alike. However, it is in its symbolic context that the horse or *aśwa* in Sanskrit has generated multiple interpretations. This study focuses on some of the symbolic aspects of the horse as evident in early Vedic Sanskrit texts and highlights the interpretation of Sri Aurobindo which served in significantly bringing down semantic differences in the context of the horse symbol. Aswapati, an important character in Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri*, is an elaborate illustration of Sri Aurobindo's reading of the *aśwa* as representative of '*prāṇa*' or life energy. This study illustrates that Sri Aurobindo's approach essentially harmonised the varied and often conflicting nuances which were generated as different systems of interpretations approached the symbol in accordance with their limited range of belief systems.

Keywords – Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, Aswapati, Horse, Symbol.

It is perhaps universally accepted that the horse has occupied a primal place among so termed, was a prized creature since the early Vedic age largely because of the leverage it gave to humans in terms of its mobility, agility and resilience. In other words, the internecine conflicts of tribes since the earliest days of our history demanded that horses were to be nurtured as military assets both to maintain peace through deterrence and also to act as aid in the movement of troops in the battlefield. It would therefore be appropriate to class the *aśwa* as an animal whose use was specialised to the ruling and the warrior class, unlike

the go or cattle which was commonly associated with the nuance of domesticity or the priestly class generally as units of wealth.

A corollary of the horse as a unit of royalty and power is evident in its use as the sacrificial animal in a royal ritual meant to perpetuate the prosperity and fortune of a king. In fact, the *Aśwamedha*¹ was one of the four most important rites in the ancient Vedic tradition, the other three being – *agnikīya* – building of the fire altar; *vājapeya* – a soma sacrifice; and *rājasuya* or royal inauguration. The ceremonies associated with the *aśwamedha* were elaborate, lasting for over a year and it culminated in the sacrifice of the horse with the king as the sacrificer. *Śatapatha Brahmana*² required that the sacrifice could be conducted only by a king and its object was to assert territorial sovereignty as well as to pray for general prosperity of the kingdom. As such the implication of a successful sacrifice was that the sacrificer, here a king, had unquestioned domination of neighbouring kingdoms as well as material prosperity within his territory.

However, it was this markedly material side of this ritual with the *aśwa* that brought into sharp focus a serious inadequacy of the scope of a horse as an asset of the royalty. While it stood for material power and military force, it would have hardly made a difference to the mystical traditions of the Vedic age unless it was invested with qualities which would have had a relevance to the priestly class and the sages. It is perhaps in this context that the *aśwa* assumed a cosmologic status in ancient Sanskrit literature.

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad,³ considered as one of the most important Upanishads, begins with a passage that reinforces the cosmic symbolism of the aswa. The first chapter, titled ‘The World as a Sacrificial Horse’ begins with a sustained correlation between the physiology of the horse and the external world order and the mysticism of the correlation cannot be missed:

Aum, the dawn, verily, is the head of the sacrificial horse, the sun the eye, the wind the breath, the open mouth the *vaishvānara* fire; the year is the body of the sacrificial horse, the sky is the back, the atmosphere is the belly, the earth the hoof, the quarters the sides, the intermediate quarters the ribs, the seasons the limbs, the months and the half-months the joints, days and nights the feet, the stars the bones, the clouds the flesh; the food in the stomach is the sand, the rivers are the blood vessels, the liver and the lungs

are the mountains, the herbs and trees are the hair. The rising (sun) is the forepart, the setting (sun) the hind part, when he yawns then it lightens, when he shakes himself, it thunders, when he urinates then it rains; voice, indeed, is his voice.⁴

While the correlation between the horse in its parts and the external nature can be understandable, the intricate detail of the *aśwamedha* takes this physical correlation further and stretches it into the realm of the mystical. *Yajur Veda*⁵ mentions that among the rituals of the horse sacrifice one involves the chief queen lying with the corpse of the sacrificed horse till the next morning when the priests raise her from the place. With very few Vedic rituals requiring the physical presence of the queen, the need of the queen to undergo a rather macabre rite of having to lie with the sacrificed horse for the night takes the horse’s role clearly beyond the merely symbolic. Even as a fertility rite the presence of a dead animal can be considered a rarity in comparative mythology, and it is this problem that points to the role of the *aśwa* as a symbol of life force or *prāṇa* with the ritual implication being that the *prāṇa* of the sacrificed horse goes to the chief queen as it dies, and permeates through her to the subjects of the kingdom with the expectation of ‘manly offspring’. In fact the *aśwamedha* rituals concluded with the following prayer:

May this Steed bring us all-sustaining riches, wealth in good kine, good horses, manly offspring.

Freedom from sin may Aditi vouchsafe us: the Steed with our oblations gain us lordship!⁶

Incidentally, Monier-Williams defines *prāṇa* as ‘the breath of life, breath, respiration, spirit, vitality’.⁷ If the theme of the Vedic prayers is any indication, advancement or perfection of the spirit and its vitality, was a basic concern of the sacrificers. In other words, when the *Taittiriya Upanishad*⁸ maintains that ‘from *prāṇa* alone are these creatures born and being born they live by *prāṇa* and to *prāṇa* they go hence and return’⁹ If *prāṇa* is taken as the force that governs life, clearly, it is mired in imperfection in case of the person who is yet to attain Brahman. Effectively therefore, all human beings operate through imperfect *prāṇa*-s. This perhaps explain why *aśwa*, when taken to imply *prāṇa* often have physical features which are strictly not of perfect horses. The *Rig Veda* refers to *Ashwins*, twin sons of the sky and brothers of *Usha*,

the dawn. They are described as gods with heads of horses. Again, the first prototype of the *aśwa* was the *Uchchaihshravas* who arose from the churning of the ocean of nectar – *amrita*. Literally meaning either ‘long ears’ or ‘neighing aloud’ or even both, the mythical animal had seven heads and could fly. The legend has it that Indra took it to heavens and returned the prototype after robbing it of the ability to fly. The fact that the animal could fly, unlike a normal horse, would in itself symbolically signify an imperfection or at least incompleteness. Interestingly, horses with unnatural physical features have been a common motif in most myths across the world. Examples include ‘hippocampus’ which has the foreparts of a horse and the hind part a scaly fish; Pegasus, white in colour and winged; the eight-legged Sleipnir of Norse mythology and the Centaur or Hippocentaur with the head, arms and torso of a human and the body and legs of a horse. All such myths ascribe certain powers to the unnatural or paranormal horses which are beyond the scope of either individual human beings or individual horses with natural features. As such when a rishi prays for a gift from Agni that has the form of a horse with a cow – *go* – in front, he is effectively asking for a great body of spiritual power or *prāṇa* led by light or wisdom, since the word *go* often meant ‘light of wisdom’ in Vedic hymns.

Be that as it may, an interpretation of the *aśwa* as a symbol of life’s energies, though perhaps inevitable in the context of the Vedas and the *sandhyā -bhāshā* – the twilight language¹⁰ – of its hymns, has its own special set of problems. For a contemporary reader of the classical Sanskrit texts, the greatest challenge is not of comprehension but of relevance. While ‘meanings’ of the hymns can be generated independently, relating the semantics to a wider practical nuance poses issues which are not easily resolved. Added to this is the evolution that concepts underwent in the course of centuries of use in the Vedic age. A classic example of such a problem lies in a query as to how many horses pulled the chariot of Arjuna in the battle of *Mahabharata*. While the *Bhagavad Gita* is silent on this issue, commentators have traditionally ascribed Arjuna’s chariot as having five horses. The source of the number is the *Kathopanishad*, 1.3.4 which says: ‘The senses they say are the horses; the objects of sense the paths (they range over); (the self) associated with the body, the senses and the mind – wise men declare – is the enjoyer.’¹¹ Clearly, since the number of senses normally attributed to humans are five, it was naturally assumed that Arjuna’s

chariot had five horses. Again, when Surya is described as having a *sapta-vāhana*, the semantics of the ‘senses’ give way to the days of a week, the implication being that the sun is a witness to us for all the days of the week. Interpretations of convenience often face similar ambiguities, especially in the context of literal comprehension of what the hymns ‘mean’.

Sri Aurobindo, while interpreting the hymns of the Vedas was acutely aware of the ambiguity that some of the hymns might generate in the minds of the modern reader. In his Foreword to ‘*Hymns to the Mystic Fire*’ Sri Aurobindo asserts:

We must take seriously the hint of Yaska, accept the Rishi’s description of the Veda’s contents as ‘seer-wisdoms, seer-words’, and look for whatever clue we can find to this ancient wisdom. Otherwise the Veda must remain forever a sealed book; grammarians, etymologists, scholastic conjectures will not open to us the sealed chamber.¹²

Sri Aurobindo was referring to Yaska, an almost forgotten Sanskrit commentator who preceded Panini and is traditionally known to be the author of the treatise *Nirukta*.¹³ Though not explicitly stated, Sri Aurobindo might have been referring to the naigama aspect of Yaska’s thesis wherein he developed an elaborate structure of interpretation involving terms and symbols special to the Vedas. Unlike those of other commentators, Yaska’s position was holistic, his stress being on the collective meaning of hymns seen in contexts rather than a grammarian’s isolationist approach.

That Sri Aurobindo adopted Yaska’s approach to the interpretation of the Vedas is evident from his reading of what the elaborate horse symbol at the beginning of the *Brhadāranyaka Upanishad* might have implied. Having individually analysed the physiological metaphor of the horse, he says, by way of making a contextual, collective meaning:

We are reminded that it is some Force manifesting in matter which the Horse symbolises; the material manifestation constitutes the essence of its symbolism. The images used are of an almost gross materiality.... The first image is therefore an image of knowledge expressing itself in matter, the second is an image of power expressing itself in matter. The third, the image of the rain, suggests that it is from the mere waste matter of his body that this great Power is able to fertilise the world & produce sustenance for the

myriad nations of his creatures.... Speech with its burden of definite thought, is the neighing of this mighty horse of sacrifice; by that this great Power in matter expresses materially the uprush of his thought & yearning & emotion, visible sparks of the secret universal fire that is in him – guhahitam.¹⁴

By leaving out specific connotations and instead focusing on the collective holistic implication of the horse symbol at the beginning of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, Sri Aurobindo was effectively generating a nuance of the *aśwa* that sustained his arguments at greater length in his epic *Savitri*.

The story of Savitri narrated by Rishi Markandeya to Yudhisthira appears as a minor episode or *upākhyāna* in seven Cantos (291-297) of the *Vana Parva* (Book of the Forest) of Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. The immediate purpose of the narration seems to be the alleviation of grief of the eldest of the Pandavas, Yudhisthira, who was afflicted by the plight of Draupadi, as she was sharing the hardships of exile of the Pandavas. During their wanderings in a forest, the Pandavas meet a rishi named Markandeya. Yudhisthira, asks the Rishi, 'O mighty sage, I do not so much grieve for myself or these my brothers or the loss of my kingdom as I do for this daughter of Drupada....Hast thou ever seen or heard of any chaste and exalted lady that resembleth this daughter of Drupada?'¹⁵ In answer, Markandeya narrates the story of Savitri and says that just as her husband Satyavan was saved from Death through the virtues of Savitri, the virtues of Draupadi are going to carry the Pandavas through all their difficulties.

It is the 'symbol' aspect of the tale that carries the importance in Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the *Mahabharata* episode. Each of the main characters of the tale is re-created by Sri Aurobindo and they become vehicles of his philosophy concerning the status of man and nature. For example, Satyavan literally means 'one who possesses or carries the Truth – *satya*'.¹⁶ In man it is his soul which carries the truth, since Indian philosophical systems consider each individual soul as a part of the Supreme soul or *paramātmā*. As the soul descends to earth in a body, it comes in contact with death. In other words, since Satyavan is born, he has to die. The etymology of 'Savitri' has two meanings, both equally significant in Sri Aurobindo's epic. In one, Savitri is a puranic God – the wife of Brahma, the divine Creator, and as such she carries the power of a creator herself. Sri Aurobindo says that Savitri is the 'Divine Word', i.e., the

word of Divine command that brings the universe into existence. The other association of the word 'Savitri' is one of the names of the Sun – traditionally considered in Indian traditions as the source of all energy and existence. Specifically, Savitri's name refers to the sun before it has risen above the horizon, and symbolically it indicates new possibilities of power, with the added significance that there is an element of inevitability in the descent of power and truth on earth. Indeed, one can detect in this association, an idea of a flame – agni – that has been considered by Sri Aurobindo as a Vedic symbol that acts as a bridge between the human and the Divine. Aswapati – Lord of the Horse – and Savitri's human father is described by Sri Aurobindo as the 'Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes'. Clearly, they have an element of restlessness in them. Aswapati, as the name signifies, is the lord of energy, i.e., one who has full control of his energy and makes them carry him in the path of spiritual endeavour from the normal human level of consciousness to higher planes of existence. We see in the epic how Aswapati travels from one plane of consciousness to another higher plane, until at last he reaches the Supreme Divine Mother and begs her to come down to earth. The spiritual efforts of Aswapati, Savitri's human father are rewarded as the 'Divine Mother' (as Sri Aurobindo refers to 'Truth' in the epic) descends on earth to be born as Aswapati's daughter. Almost half of the twenty-four thousand line epic is taken up by Aswapati's spiritual pursuit in quest of a successor and the fact that he has been rewarded is an evidence of his 'Lordship' over his *prāṇa* or life energy as the root of his name – *aśwa* – suggests.

It is significant that Sri Aurobindo makes Aswapati take the rigours of the spiritual travel and we find Aswapati experiencing, much as in Dante's famous work, both the bliss of the 'Truth-world' as well as the agony and suffering of the nether world. Since he had mastered his *prāṇa* or life energy, Aswapati could remain agile, active and perceptive. The fact that he could easily realise that the bliss of the 'Godheads of the Greater Mind', however complete they may seem, is not the highest level of ascension available to a spiritual quest, and decide to move on, is evidence of the power that mastery of *prāṇa* can give to a being. Aswapati finds his quest complete as he encounters and recognises the 'Divine Mother' and takes from her the promise of Savitri's birth in human form.

It is therefore appropriate that Aswapati forms the central character in Sri Aurobindo's epic both in terms of the space that he occupies as well as in terms of being a pioneer in a spiritual quest that his daughter, the earthly Savitri would undertake later as she followed the God of Death to reclaim Satyavan's soul and reverse his mortality. What marks Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the symbolism of the *aśwa* or horse is a consistency that is carried over into his epic both for an artistic recreation of the Savitri legend as well as for an illustration of the might that comes to a man who has mastered the powers which a horse stands for in Vedic parlance.

Notes

- 1 Literally, 'sacrifice of a horse or steed'.
- 2 *Śatapatha Brahmana* (lit. 'one hundred paths to Brahmana') is a prose text, elucidatory in nature, dealing with the Vedic rituals mentioned in the *Yajur Veda*.
- 3 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* (lit. 'great forest of knowledge') is one of the older Upanishads and is ascribed to the sage Yajñavalkya.
- 4 Translation of S Radhakrishnan, p.149.
- 5 *Yajur Veda* (lit. From *yajus* – 'sacrificial formula') contains details required to perform sacrifices, including the mantra-s or hymns to be chanted in the process.
- 6 Ralph T H Griffith's translation of the *Rg Veda*, titled '*The Hymns of the Rgveda*', 1896, p.87. A copy of the Second edition is available at www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/index.htm.
- 7 M Monier-Williams, p.705.
- 8 *Taittiriya Upanishad* is one of the primary Upanishads, dealing with the various degrees of bliss enjoyed by beings. A Mahadeva Sastri ascribes the name to Tittiri, a pupil of the Vedic commentator Yaska.
- 9 Radhakrishnan translates the lines as 'For truly, beings here are born from life, when born they live by life, and into life, when departing they enter.' Clearly, when he translates '*prāṇo brahmeti vyajanat*' as 'he knew that life is Brahman', he takes 'prana' to mean 'life', p.554. For the present hymn from the Upanishad, I go by M P Pandit's rendering in his Gleaning's from the Upanishads, p.153.
- 10 The concept of the 'twilight language' has been studied at great length by Bucknell and Stuart-Fox. Though their work was meant specifically for Buddhist texts, the concept can be used with equal validity in the context of the Vedas.
- 11 Trans. S Radhakrishnan. p.624.
- 12 *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, Foreword. p.5.
- 13 *Nirukta*, literally meaning 'etymology', is one of the earliest Sanskrit texts dealing with semantics in general and the methodology of the interpretation of the Vedas in particular. It is commonly assumed that Yaska, its author, preceded Panini and lived in the 6th century BC.
- 14 *Kena and Other Upanishads*, p.283.

- 15 The author followed Kisari Mohan Ganguli's translation of the *Mahabharata*.
- 16 Sri Aurobindo's 'Note' on the epic Savitri has comments on the symbolic significance of the main characteristics of the epic.

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