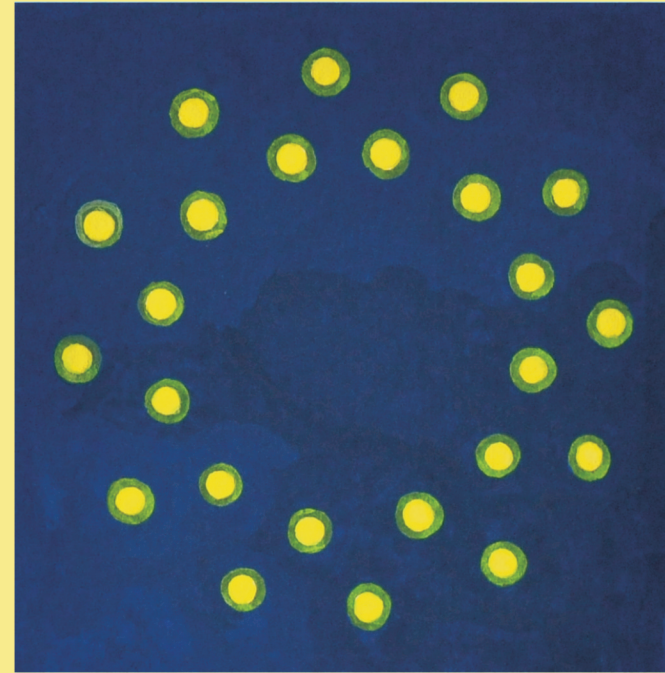


ISSN 2278-2117

Śraddhā श्रद्धा



Śraddhā



श्रद्धा



(Vol. 8 No.2)

24 November 2016

Courtesy : Nirmal Sethia Charitable Trust

24 November 2016



There are, in the history of the earth, moments of transition when things that have existed for thousands of years must give way to those that are about to manifest.... We are at precisely such a turning-point in the world's history. Just as Nature has already created upon earth a mental being, man, so too there is now a concentrated activity in this mentality to bring forth a supramental consciousness and individuality.

THE MOTHER

(New Year Message, 2001)

Śraddhā

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

Vol.8 No.2

24 November, 2016



Sri Aurobindo Bhavan
8 Shakespeare Sarani • Kolkata 700 071

Publication Details

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

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

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

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

US\$ 20 for soft copy

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

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Published by

Sri Aurobindo Centre for Research in Social Sciences

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8 Shakespeare Sarani

Kolkata 700071

Phone : 2282 3057, 2282 2162, 2282 1819

Printed by

Basab Chattopadhyaya

Shilalipi

16 A Tamer Lane

Kolkata 700 009

Phone 0336540 5390 / 98360 37601

Editorial

To Sri Aurobindo, ‘all problems of existence’ at whichever level, be they individual, national or universal, ‘are problems of harmony’. Mother, pragmatic as ever, conveys the same thing and phrases it slightly differently when she says things are not in their place. Even such issues as hunger, poverty, suffering, injustice, strife between nations, etc. cannot be resolved by solutions derived from the mind. If we persist in that, we shall be fruitlessly going round in circles arriving at compromises and half-measures which will only exacerbate the problems still further. Our aim should be to diagnose the root cause, the disease itself and tear it out ‘from its bleeding roots’. But we, men as of now,

.... live in mind’s uncertain light

And strive to know and master a dubious world

Whose purpose and meaning are hidden from our sight. (*Savitri*, 4th rev ed, 1993, p.484)

The way out is to rise to a station above the mind and from there look down deep into ourselves and find the true personality, the central consciousness of the evolving individual, which is the divine part of the human being, the true soul, our psychic being. Our immediate task, our one and only object should, therefore, be to identify this psychic being within us, start unifying all the jarring elements of our nature around it and let its light dominate and rule our mind, vital and physical and under its guidance and direction change the lower nature, ‘bringing the right vision, right impulses and feeling, movement and habit into the physical, all turned towards the Divine’. (Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*).

As the Mother says

‘.... the psychic being is that part of the being which is directly under the influence of the Divine Consciousness; the hostile forces cannot have even the remotest action upon it. ... It is the seat of the Divine Consciousness, the Divine Self in the individual being. It is a centre of light and truth and knowledge and beauty and harmony which the Divine Self ... creates by his presence, little by little; it is influenced, formed and moved by the Divine Consciousness of which it is a part and parcel. It is ... the deep inner being which’ one has ‘to find in order to come into contact with the Divine It is the intermediary between

the Divine Consciousness and’ our ‘external consciousness; it is the builder of the inner life, it is that which manifests in the outer nature the order and rule of the Divine Will. It is its influence gradually spreading from within towards the most outward and material boundaries of ... consciousness that will bring about the transformation of ... entire nature. Most people are unconscious of this psychic part within them; the effort of Yoga is to make you conscious of it, so that the slow process of ... transformation ... can be pressed into one life or even a few years’. (Moher, *CWM*, vol.3, pp.62-3)

What then is Sri Aurobindo’s recipe for a lasting and permanent solution to all of world’s problems? It is to ‘mould humanity into God’s own shape’. (*Savitri*, Ibid, pp.486-87)

But for such vast spiritual change to be,

Out of the mystic cavern in man’s heart

The heavenly Psyche must put off her veil

And step into common nature’s crowded rooms

And stand uncovered in that nature’s front

And rule its thoughts and fill the body and life. (*Savitri*, Ibid, pp.486-87)

Let us then make a determined effort to be conscious of our true soul, the psychic being, let us ourselves be consummately prepared to bear the healing power of this God-light and let our life – its every little movement, disposition, inclination, thought, action – be guided by its transforming light to mould us ‘into God’s own shape’ for us to be able to repay the debt we owe the Divine.

We are grateful to the Editor, *Philosophy East and West*, for granting permission to reprint the article by Indrasen which appeared in their journal in vol.7, No.3/4 (Oct 1957-Jan 1958). Our grateful thanks also to Aster Patel, daughter of the late Indrasen, for her consent to reproduce the article. We are obliged to the Editor, *New Race*, for allowing us to reproduce the paper by Larry Seidlitz, which was published in their journal in vol.xii, no.iv – Nov, 2011. We thank the Editor, Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir Annual, for agreeing to our request to publish the paper by Sampadananda Mishra which appeared in its 75th anniversary vol. in August 2016. Last but not the least, our gratitude to Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for making use of the following documents from the resources of the Trust.

-Excerpts from Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Letters on Yoga*, *The Life Divine*, the Mother’s *CWM*, vol.3,9,10 and the photograph and the message from Ashram *New Year message of 2001*.

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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Frontispiece : Photo of Sri Aurobindo and Mother on New Year Message, 2001
Cover : Painting by Giles Herdman

श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं
Śraddhāvāṃl labhate jñānam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

How do we know? Knowledge from within

Sri Aurobindo, Mother

Nothing can be taught to the mind which is not already concealed as potential knowledge in the unfolding soul of the creature. So also all perfection of which the outer man is capable, is only a realising of the eternal perfection of the Spirit within him. We know the Divine and become the Divine, because we are That already in our secret nature. All teaching is a revealing, all becoming is an unfolding. Self-attainment is the secret; self-knowledge and an increasing consciousness are the means and the process. — Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 54.

Ancient Indian thought meant by knowledge a consciousness which possesses the highest Truth in a direct perception and in self-experience; to become, to be the Highest that we know is the sign that we really have the knowledge. — Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p.685

For the inner knowledge comes from within and above (whether from the Divine in the heart or from the Self above) and for it to come, the pride of the mind and vital in the surface mental ideas and their insistence on them must go. One must know that one is ignorant before one can begin to know. — Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, vol. 24, *Letters on Yoga*, p.1114

The true sense of the guidance becomes clearer when we can go deep within and see from there more intimately the play of the forces and receive intimations of the Will behind them. The surface mind can get only an imperfect glimpse. When we are in contact with the Divine or in contact with an inner knowledge and vision, we begin to see all the circumstances of our life in a new light and can observe how they all tended, without our knowing it, towards the growth of our being and consciousness, towards the work we had to do, towards some development that had to be made, — not only what seemed good, fortunate or successful but also the struggles, failures, difficulties, upheavals. But with each person the guidance works differently according to his nature, the

conditions of his life, his cast of consciousness, his stage of development, his need of further experience. We are not automata but conscious beings and our mentality, our will and its decisions, our attitude to life and demand on it, our motives and movements help to determine our course: they may lead to much suffering and evil, but through it all, the guidance makes use of them for our growth in experience and consequently the development of our being and consciousness. All advance, by however devious ways, even in spite of what seems a going backwards or going astray, gathering whatever experience is necessary for the soul's destiny. When we are in close contact with the Divine, a protection can come which helps or directly guides or moves us: it does not throw aside all difficulties, sufferings or dangers, but it carries us through them and out of them — except where for a special purpose there is need of the opposite. — Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, Vol. 24, *Letters on Yoga*, p.1626

Knowledge by identity

If we go deep enough into mental human knowledge, we realise that all this knowledge as we have it externally in the mental consciousness is scarcely anything more than a language — a fairly complicated one — making it possible for us to understand each other but corresponding only very remotely to the truth of things.

There is a direct approach by identity which is much more effective and, so to say, gives you the concrete key to the whole machinery of things, a direct key that needs no complicated science to express itself — something that corresponds to movements of consciousness and will, which would not need all the mental complications to express themselves. Then the universal reality in its totality becomes a symbol and can be directly perceived in its essence. — The Mother, *MCW*, Vol.9, p.285

Two preparatory movements

We read, we try to understand, we explain, we try to know. But a single minute of true experience teaches us more than millions of words and hundreds of explanations.

So the first question is: “How to have the experience?”

To go within yourself, that is the first step.

And then, once you have succeeded in going within yourself deeply enough to feel the reality of that which is within, to widen yourself progressively, systematically, to become as vast as the universe and lose the sense of limitation.

These are the first two preparatory movements.

And these two things must be done in the greatest possible calm, peace and tranquillity. This peace, this tranquillity brings about silence in the mind and stillness in the vital.

This effort, this attempt must be renewed very regularly, persistently. And after a certain lapse of time, which may be longer or shorter, you begin to perceive a reality that is different from the reality perceived in the ordinary, external consciousness.

Naturally, by the action of Grace, the veil may suddenly be rent from within, and at once you can enter the true truth; but even when that happens, in order to obtain the full value and full effect of the experience, you must maintain yourself in a state of inner receptivity, and to do that, it is indispensable for you to go within each day. — The Mother, *MCW*, Vol. 10, pp.19-20

Faith: foreknowledge of the soul

Faith does not depend upon experience; it is something that is there before experience. When one starts the yoga, it is not usually on the strength of experience, but on the strength of faith. It is so not only in yoga and the spiritual life, but in ordinary life also. All men of action, discoverers, inventors, creators of knowledge proceed by faith and, until the proof is made or the thing done, they go on in spite of disappointment, failure, disproof, denial because of something in them that tells them that this is the truth, the thing that must be followed and done. Ramakrishna even went so far as to say, when asked whether blind faith was not wrong, that blind faith was the only kind to have, for faith is either blind or it is not faith but something else — reasoned inference, proved conviction or ascertained knowledge.

Faith is the soul's witness to something not yet manifested, achieved or realised, but which yet the Knower within us, even in the absence of all indications, feels to be true or supremely worth following or achieving. This thing within us can last even when there is no fixed belief in the mind, even when the vital struggles and revolts and refuses. Who is there that practises the yoga and has not his periods, long periods of disappointment and failure and disbelief and darkness? But there is something that sustains him and even goes on in spite of himself, because it feels that what it followed after was yet true and it more than feels, it knows. The fundamental faith in yoga is this, inherent in the soul, that the Divine exists and the Divine is the one thing to be followed after — nothing else in life is worth having in comparison with that. So long as a man has that faith, he is marked for the spiritual life and I will say that, even if his nature is full of obstacles and crammed with denials and difficulties, and even if he has many years of struggle, he is marked out for success in the spiritual life. — Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, Vol. 23, *Letters on Yoga*, pp.572-73

Silence

[F]or the knowledge of the Self it is necessary to have the power of a complete intellectual passivity, the power of dismissing all thought, the power of

the mind to think not at all which the Gita in one passage enjoins. This is a hard saying for the occidental mind to which thought is the highest thing and which will be apt to mistake the power of the mind not to think, its complete silence for the incapacity of thought. But this power of silence is a capacity and not an incapacity, a power and not a weakness. It is a profound and pregnant stillness. Only when the mind is thus entirely still, like clear, motionless and level water, in a perfect purity and peace of the whole being and the soul transcends thought, can the Self which exceeds and originates all activities and becomings, the Silence from which all words are born, the Absolute of which all relativities are partial reflections manifest itself in the pure essence of our being. In a complete silence only is the Silence heard; in a pure peace only is its Being revealed. Therefore to us the name of That is the Silence and the Peace. — Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p.316

The Veda

Debashish Banerjee

The earliest wisdom texts of India, and in fact, of the world, are the Veda. Veda literally means “knowledge.” Textually speaking, there are several ways in which this term is understood – most commonly, it refers to the “four Vedas” (*catur veda*), the *Rig Veda*, the *Sama Veda*, the *Yajur Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. Then, there is a larger body of texts, the 4 Vedas plus *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*, which are also called Veda. It may seem surprising that the Upanishads are included in the Veda, but according to this version, which is commonplace in India, the Upanishads are called *Vedanta*, or end-of-the-Veda, which itself is a historical construction, utilised by Shankaracharya to claim that that is the equivalent of calling it “the essence of the Veda.” The Upanishads stand in an interesting position vis-à-vis the Veda. They open a hermeneutical gulf, which allows for the distilling of a non-mediated practice from the elite appropriation of the Veda by the ritual device of collective control. In doing this they both distance themselves from the Veda and create an intimate relation with it.

On the other hand, asking the western historical question problematises the singularity of the Veda further. The earliest texts are the *Rig Veda Samhita*, at least 250 years older than the others, which are connected with ritual. The *Rig Vedas* are ten volumes or *mandalas* with invocatory mystic poems to various gods, who seem to personify natural forces. These poems or hymns are called *Sukta* and each stanza in them is called a *rik*. Each of the volumes (*mandala*) is attributed to a seer-clan (*rishi-kula*). Seers, called rishis, were poets – in fact the common word for poet to this day, *kavi*? is used for them. But they were not any poets; they were poets who prepared themselves to become vessels of the Word (*Vak*), a Vedic Goddess who manifest the subjective and objective cosmos by the vibrational and ideational power of her words. This preparation of the rishis was also undertaken through the use of various tools and processes of consciousness, and it is natural to suppose that it is these that

find expression in their poems. Indeed, the poems are called *mantra*, which means a form of words carrying power to convey experiences of a transpersonal nature. Undoubtedly, this was one of the functions of these poems – to cause to awaken the presence and power of the cosmic gods that are invoked, so that we may become like them and be able to contain them all and transcend them.

Each rishi-clan developed presumably their own approach to the goals of the Veda, though it is not clear anymore what these differences were. If the *Rig Veda* is the earliest of the Veda, — it has therefore, in my opinion, a much greater claim to the “authenticity” of the Veda, or what may better be called the truth of the Veda. The Angirasa seers are the earliest rishis of the *Rig Veda*, and have the greatest number of hymns attributed to them. They are called the forefathers (*pitri*) and given a divine-human status, like avatars, who came with the idea of the meaning of the cosmos and taught it through two means – an inner and an outer, yoga or *kriya*, psychological practice and ritual. Later seers adulate the Angirasas as superior even to the gods, as if they were the original arch-poets who created the cosmic order with their words, or rather, channelled the order of the creation through the Goddess *Vak*.

Returning to the nitty-gritties of the historical question, mainstream dating places the earliest of the books of the *Rig Veda*, *mandalas* 2-7, to approximately 1900 BCE – 1500 BCE. Two of the remaining three Vedas, the *Yajur* and *Sama*, contain mostly repetitions of the hymns of the *Rig Veda*, along with, in the first case, ritual instructions and in the second, chanting/singing instructions. The fourth Veda, the *Atharva* is believed to be chronologically the last. It contains a number of original hymns mixed in with magic spells of many kinds, which some scholars believe, could be the origin of Tantra or could have borrowed from Tantra or could have been co-created with it. All these were composed between 1200-1000 BCE according to academic scholarship. The principal Upanishads are believed by academia to have been composed between 7th c. BCE and 5th c. CE, and Upanishads are still being written.

The hymns in the *Rig Veda* are addressed to gods, many of whom bear a striking resemblance to the Olympian gods of Greece. This is not entirely unexpected, given the shared Indo-European language and culture. And just as in Greece, there were rituals offered to these gods, so was the case in Vedic India. In Greece, these gods were also invoked in mystery cults which saw and utilised them as animistic and psychological formations of consciousness. This was undoubtedly the case also in India. This line of consideration was extended in modern times through the work of Sri Aurobindo, who approached the texts and hymns as both a scholar and a yogi. In this view, the hymns of the Veda express coded invocations that are part of a cosmology of consciousness that relates through correspondence (the fractal folding of the universe) to the

psychology of the individual.

Prior to this, the Vedas attracted the scholarly attention of the West from the 18th century. Perhaps the western scholar who is most associated with the Veda is Max Mueller (1823-1900) who read the hymns of the *Rig Veda* as the utterances of a primitive humanity confronted with the enormities of nature — the sun, the wind, the lightning, fire — and responding to these primordial nature forces with wonder and adulation. They projected anthropomorphic divinities onto these forces of nature and thus expressed a glorified nature poetry. Since the early 20th c., the Veda has also been studied as a record of the invasion of the Aryan race; attempting to decipher the geographical locations, cultures encountered and wars fought. Today, the idea of an Aryan Invasion has been put to sleep due to lack of evidence, though the migration into the Indian subcontinent of an Indo-European language speaking people, is thought to be likely. A third scenario (which could be combined with the second) is one of cultural transmission and/or bilingualism.

In India, the most well-known and authoritative commentary on the Veda comes from a 17th c. South Indian scholar, named Sayana. This commentary looks upon the Veda mainly as a text for rituals. Prior to Sayana, we find that the Veda is treated as containing knowledge of three kinds. There is knowledge of a ritual kind geared towards worldly success. This kind of knowledge is later called *adhibhautika* or worldly knowledge. There is also knowledge of a philosophical and occult nature called *adhidaivika* or godly knowledge. Finally there is a third level of knowledge called *adhyatmika* or soul knowledge. According to this the Veda contains a Yoga, an approach to spiritual discipline.

Therefore, if we are to consider the Veda as wisdom literature, our first concern should be the decipherment of its cosmology and psychology. Following Sri Aurobindo's lead (1998) we can describe the broad lines of the cosmology thus:

1. Reality is divided into 2 zones or planes in a “vertical” relation – (1) the foundation above (*upari budhna*) or the solar realm of everlasting light; (2) the realm of the alternations of Day and Night, *aho-ratri*, the Two Mothers or Two Sisters, often spoken of as a Wheel.

2. Each of these zones is further divided into three levels. In the “upper zone” these are called the three luminous summits, *trini rochana*. In the lower, they are *prithvi*, *antaraiksha* and *dyaus*; also known as *bhu*, *bhuvar* and *swar*. These are the worlds of Matter, Life and Mind with which human beings are familiar.

3. These zones are inhabited by beings – in the upper zone, are Aditi and the solar gods, the Adityas. In the lower zone, are gods, mortal creatures and demons.

4. This cosmology (which is not a materialist cosmology but a cosmology of consciousness) is folded into each individual being as a psychology. The Veda is remarkable because of this early coherence of the macrocosm and the microcosm that it presents. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

“The sons of the Infinite [i.e. the gods] have a twofold birth. They are born above in the Truth as creators of the worlds and guardians of the divine Law; they are born also here in the world itself and in man as cosmic and human powers of the Divine. In the visible world, they are the male and female powers and energies of the universe and it is this external aspect of them... which gives us the external or psycho-physical side of the Aryan worship.... But in man himself, the gods are conscious psychological powers.”

5. The mythology of the Veda ties its cosmology and psychology together.

Vedic Mythology

The *Rig Veda* is a collection of mystical poems and making sense of it is like wading through a landscape of dreams. Reality is much more fluid here, not governed by material laws. Beings change form or name or merge into one another. However, once one finds a key to the interpretation, everything begins to fall into place. Some of the hymns are further elaborated in other texts, such as the *Brahmanas* and *Aranyakas* and may provide keys to the symbolism. Sri Aurobindo provides a powerful key in his text *The Secret of the Veda* (1998). We are lucky to have this, since we can test its ideas against the poems themselves and see how they confirm his guidelines.

As we can see from the lines of the cosmology above, the Veda develops its symbolism around the Sun, seen as the Supreme Divine. As such it espouses both a heliocentric and a geocentric theory apropos the relation of the sun and the earth. When looked at from the “upper foundation,” we have a heliocentric theory, as might be expected from a realm of everlasting Day. The gods from the realm of Day-and-Night have their origin here and keep their focus on this realm for their support. Hence it is said of Vishnu, seen as the solar deity, *Om tad Vishnu paramam padam sada pashyanti surayah diviva chaksuratatam* (RV I.22.20). In translation: “Salutations to that Vishnu, whose supreme station the gods behold at all times, like an eye wide-extended in heaven.” Since there is no separateness here, all is seen as the distributed Substance of the Sun and in the unobstructed Light of the Sun. It is called That One (*tad ekam*).

The “lower triple zone” views this same reality in a geocentric manner. We, as humans, are born into this experience of discrete appearances and disappearances. The sun rises at dawn and occupies an increasingly central position in the sky, until at noon, it illuminates everything equally. Such a condition brings us closest in experience to the zone of Everlasting Day. However, it begins to “descend” from its summit and disappear in the darkness. Mirroring

this cosmic alternation, our human lives move between birth, death and rebirth. Rebirth is not an idea specifically referred to in the Veda, but we may infer it from the idea of the returns of the One.

In terms of the ontology, the Darkness of Night is a gestation of the Sun preparing its rebirth; from this viewpoint, Ratri is a Mother (eg. RV: X.127). But, from the viewpoint of the individuals who experience this cosmic ontology, this condition is one of Ignorance, desertion, isolation, error, treachery and unconsciousness. Viewed from this psychological state, the Sun is “stolen” by the “robbers” (*panis*) and hidden in the cave of the demon Hill of Darkness, *Vala* (eg. RV: I.11.5; RV: II.12.3). The associations and correspondences of gods cause these movements to be repeated in variant tellings. Instead of the Sun, often it is the herds of the Sun that are stolen and hidden, or it may be the dawn goddess, Usha (eg. RV: VII.75). The king of the gods, Indra, who operates from *Swar* battles against the *Panis*, *Vala* and other powers of Darkness and eventually cleaves the Hill of Darkness with his thunderbolt, releasing the cows.

The equation of the solar forces with the cow was one of the figurative correspondences that form a method of Vedic symbology. According to this, a number of material objects of value to the Vedic pastoralists are equated to psychological or cosmic forces. Such an equation aided in the exoteric ritualisation of psychological processes, translating its transformative goals to material ones. The cow was undoubtedly one of the most precious possessions of such a society, particularly its milk and its derivatives such as butter, ghee and curds. These were all substances of importance in the Vedic sacrifice, and coded for powers of mental clarity that provided spiritual nourishment. To equate the esoteric and exoteric senses of the cow, the word used for it, *go*, also meant “light.” In the symbolic world of the solar gods, their Mother was Aditi, sometimes seen as a Divine Cow, who nourishes all the worlds. The ancient mythos of the Cow as a symbol of the Sun has Indo-European origins, as has the mythos of the release of the Sun from the Cave of Darkness. In Greek mythology, for example, the Sun God Apollo is a herder with cows, which were stolen by his half-brother Hermes, who hid them in a cave. The myth of the release of the Sun from the cave comes to us also from Japan, where the Shinto Sun goddess, Amaterasu hid herself in the Heavenly-Rock cave to escape the rampage of her brother Susanoo, putting the world in darkness. She was later persuaded to emerge from the cave.

In the Vedic case, however, there is a dead-serious battle involved; and the activities of the gods dramatise the psychology of human experience in its subjection to the forces of annihilation and in its development of means to be victorious. In other words, the cosmic battle is the mirror of the microcosm, where the human being, the Aryan, struggles to find means to survive, both

materially and spiritually, through the Night of Ignorance. The primary means it finds is Fire, Agni. Just as the Sun is at the heart of the heliocentric theory, Agni, Fire, is at the heart of the geocentric theory; since the Sun, though transformed and hidden, is present on earth as Fire. The Vedas speak of three kinds of Fire (Agni) – *saurya agni* (solar fire), *vaidyuta agni* (electric fire) and *jada agni* (material fire). These are the three visible forms in which the sun continues to be present in the realm of Day-and-Night. These three forms are represented by the god Surya (Sun) (*saurya agni*) in the “higher firmament,” the god Indra (*vaidyuta agni*) in the *Swar*, and the god Agni (*jada agni*) on *Prithvi*. In the intermediate vital realm, *Antariksha*, the solar presence takes a form of invisible energy, the life-force (*prana*) represented by the God of Wind, Vayu. The psychological symbolism and transformative practice of yoga can be intuited from this and that, in turn, should generate the form of the ritual, since ritual (*kriya*) is nothing but the dramatisation of psychological practice (*yoga*). To arrive at the psychological significance, the material manifestations must be translated into their consciousness forms. Agni in consciousness, is the aspiration to freedom, power and enjoyment coded into the material cosmos and carrying the savour of its lived experience, its ontological quality. This is further present in every will-to-individuation or entity in the cosmos.

At the human stage, Agni has crystallised into the psychic being or soul personality which has arrived at an intensity of knowledge and power where it can discover the real-images of its fulfilment. To do this, it must find a subjective technology of future-becoming and of self-transformation. It arrives at this through the intensification of Agni within itself and its direction towards the realms of *Antariksha*, *Swar* and beyond, to the zone of everlasting Day. From the vital (*antariksha*) worlds, it seeks the intervention of allied cosmic forces, such as Vayu, Rudra and the Maruts, the storm gods, so as to destroy the obstacles in the way with their Power; and from the mental (*swar*), it seeks the help of Indra with his lightnings to show the path in the Darkness. The lightnings of Indra here represent divine intuitions that bring knowledge in the ignorance. These psychological processes of giving shape to the inner aspiration (*agni*) are aided by the power of the *mantra*, the *Rk* or Vedic hymn as well as other gods and goddesses. It is also aided by the integration around this aspiration of the clarified intelligence and widened thought-mind and its various powers. The inner fire also feeds on blissful enthusiasm (later this will be called *bhakti*; sometimes *utsaha* – in the Veda, it is represented by the god Soma), which intoxicates it and multiplies its energy. Knowledge in the Darkness is the primary prayer of the Vedic seer – s/he lights the Fire of Aspiration and invokes Indra to illuminate the Night with repeated lightnings. S/he calls into service the mental powers, so that they may develop the capacity of receiving Indra’s intuitions

continuously, a chain of lightnings transforming the normal operations of knowledge. This birth of Indra and his action in the yogi and his intensification through the offering of the prepared mental instruments and the blissful enthusiasm, gives it the power to burst the Hill of *Vala* and release the Sun or Divine Consciousness in the life of the yogi. From this we can see how logically the greatest number of hymns in the Veda are addressed to Indra and Agni. The preparation of the mental capacities to become intuitive in character is also facilitated through direct invocation to the Sun god in the supreme realm of Gnosis. This is the basis for what is considered today the most sacred Vedic chant, the *Gayatri*: *Om Tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yonah prachodayat* IRV: X.16.3). (We meditate on the most blessed from of the Sun God, Savitra. May he illumine our intelligence).

The ritual correlates of the process described above can easily be recognised. I quote Dr. Judith Tyberg here, who was a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and an Indologist (1976: pp. 180-181):

[T]he inner sacrifice or the holy action of feeding or quickening the divine immortal spark in man, Agni, the Fire god, will be acted out by kindling the divine fire with the purified and clarified mind, symbolised by the *ghi* and the physical or outer manifestation of the divine in life, symbolised by food or *annam*. Agni thus invoked, calls and invites other gods to share in the fruits of the sacrifice and in turn each brings blessings, or interpreted, [this] means that once the god in man is awakened, it reveals its powers and aspects as the flame of his presence is sustained in life.

Then Indra, god of the Firmament, the Illumined mentality, appears and is represented as constantly struggling and battling with *Vritra* the Serpent Adversary who covers with his darkness all divine activity and who hides the cows, the rays of truth light in the caves of the *Panis* or the sense life. Indra is often aided in his fight by Rudra and his hosts of Maruts, the great Destroyer and the storm gods, symbolical of the Breaker of old molds and the powers of will and nervous or vital force. The *Ribhus*, the Seasons who accompany them are symbolical of the artisans of the god who help one repeat man's divine achievements.

Gradually *Ushas*, the dawn of higher truth comes escorted by the *Ashwins*, the Horsemen of the Sun, representing swiftness and effectiveness of action in the great journey to Truth and illumination, the Sun.

With the glorious Sun of Truth come his goddesses or aspects: *Savitri*, Divine Grace which manifests the immortal in the mortal; *Mitra*, the friend of the gods, the luminous power of love leading to harmony and thought, impulse and action; *Varuna*, the Vast Expanse, the oceanic wideness and unity of infinite Truth, *Aryaman*, the chief of the Milky Way, the immortal puissance

of clear discerning aspiration leading beyond.

Then follows *Rita* and *Ritachit*, Truth in action and Truth-Consciousness with their goddesses of powers: *Mahi* or *Bharati*, the Vast Word of greatness of Wisdom that brings us all things out of the Divine source; *Ila*, goddess of Truth vision or revelation; *Saraswati*, goddess of streaming Inspiration; *Sarama*, the hound of heaven, intuition; and *Dakshina*, goddess of divine Discernment.

Soma the god of immortal nectar is the consummation of beatitude, the wine of immortality and divine ecstasy.

Thus in the Vedas is portrayed richly the psychological science of the transformation of the human into the Divine, the mental into the Supramental, the falsehood into the Truth, darkness into Light, mortality into Immortality.

There are sufficient hints in the Veda to the effect that this liberation and enlightenment that is being interpreted at the level of individual psychology had a collective and cosmic manifestation also, the vision of a transformed society and a transformed world. There is a myth to this effect too – it is the myth of *Martanda* (RV: X.72):

Eight are the Sons of Aditi who from her body sprang to life.

With seven she went to meet the Gods; she cast Martanda far away.

So with her Seven Sons Aditi went forth to meet the earlier age. She brought Martanda thitherward to spring to life and die again.

Thus of her eight solar sons, Aditi cast away the eighth, *Martanda* (literally dead-egg) to be born and die. This is the solar Substance subject to the conditions of consciousness that characterise Matter. Whereas the other seven suns belong to the realm of Everlasting Day, *Martand* belongs to the Realm-of-Day-and-Night, subjectively Birth-and-Death. The materially embodied yogi partakes of this condition. But his job is to use the power of Fire in subjective and objective technologies of transcendence and transformation, so as not only to emerge himself from this condition to that of the Everlasting Day but to revivify the “dead-egg” Sun, *Martanda*, so that it becomes a solar natural habitat for a transformed humanity.

Equivalents and Allies

We have spoken of a number of correspondences and equivalences in the Veda. To elaborate a little on the more prominent, the solar zone provides many of the more well-known descriptors of Vedic gods and categories. For example, for the Unity Consciousness of the solar zone, it uses the term *Tad Ekam*, That One. From this quality and the relation between the absolute solar realm and the relative realm of Day-and-Night, we have the well-known statement in Hinduism: *Ekam sat viprah bahudha badanti* (RV: I.164.92). There is one Truth; the wise speak of it variously. The attributes of this One are given as

Satyam, Ritam, Brihad, the Truth, the Right, the Vast. *Ritam* means Right in the sense of the dynamic unfoldment of the Truth in a fashion which keeps everything in balance, which knows what is to be deployed when because All is Itself self-organised through its Knowledge faculty, Supermind.

Out of the One Truth there is, from which proceeds all sense of right, the One which stretches into infinity and to which there is no Outside, emerges the idea of Duality. Or we may say, in its possibilities of self-experience the idea of Duality is always already present. This twoness is spoken of in two fundamental ways – cosmologically as Night and Day, *Aho*, day, and *Ratri*, night; and subjectively as the duality of the I-Thou, *Aham*, I, *Sah*, He or That, conjoined and abbreviated to *Hamsa*, which means Swan, a creature that walks on earth, but flies in the sky, on its two wings, I and Thou. The human individual experiences itself always in and through relation. If we look deep enough into reality, we find that it has little meaning other than one of relation. We are here because That which is the One choosing to enjoy itself through relation, became two. The bliss, “*Soma*” of the self-existent solar Divine (*Bhaga*) in the One becomes love (*Mitra*) in the Two and the Many.

Vedic Cosmology and the Upanishads

The Upanishads, though referred to as “the end of the Veda,” distance themselves in important ways from the ritualism and symbology of the Veda. They prefer a more direct philosophical statement and introduce cosmological terms with which we are familiar to this day, due to the interpretations of the Vedantic acharyas. We find that the Upanishads give explicit terms to some of the divisions of cosmic or transcendental consciousness that the Veda kept hidden or unspoken. Hence, what in the Veda is the solar realm, “the upper foundation,” (*upari budhna*) the realm of That One (*Tad Ekam*) is given a name now – *Brahman*. As a condition of consciousness, it is called *Vidya* (Knowledge) and contrasted with its opposite in the “lower triple realm,” *Avidya* (Ignorance). The three shining words (*Trini Rochana*) of the Veda would then be the three qualities of the *Vidya* — *sat chit* and *ananda*. Similarly the lower realms of *Avidya* are divided into three “elements” – *tridhatu*, the lower triple world of Matter, Life and Mind. These three together compose what the Veda calls *Prithvi* or Earth. Between the *Trini Rochana* and the *Tridhatu*, in the Veda, is a principle known as *Mahar*. This is the solar realm of Gnosis, which the Upanishads refer to as *Vijnana* and Sri Aurobindo calls Supermind. He uses this term for lack of any better to denote something that is higher than mind, part of the Knowledge reality but something to which the mind is relative in the sense that the mind emerges from it. Supermind or *Mahar* stands between the causeless, spaceless, timeless, solar realm of the three shining worlds, and our world of mind, life and body in which reality unfolds through space and

time. But this unfoldment through space, time and causation has a meaning to it, and a plot determined by the mediating principle *Mahar*. *Mahar* as a divine principle is what we commonly call God. The word *Brahman*, so pervasive in the Upanishads means something quite different in the Veda. It means the Word, and is a synonym for *Vak*. This is the divine Word. *Brahma* of the *Puranas*, who creates by the Word (like the rishis) is called, in the Veda, the Lord of the Word (*Brahmanaspati*). Out of the totality of infinite expressibility, the divine Word expresses this manifest world through the power of *mantra*, in an unfoldment.

Variant Myths

The solar mythology of rebirth is not the only myth that is assumed in the hymns of the Veda. But often, other myths are related to the solar one in structure and upon scrutiny, in meaning. Such is the myth of the seven rivers hidden by *Vritra*, another demon, a Snake-Demon, who is also slain by Indra, so as to release the life-giving waters of the seven rivers. Waters, in Vedic literature, are just a transform of the rays of the Sun. Clouds are solar emanations containing solar power, which is released as nourishing water in the form of rain. A solar god, *Parjanya*, is responsible for rain. As the solar world is sometimes visioned as Aditi in the form of a Divine Cow, *Parjanya* is sometimes described as her udder, the lightnings of Indra are her teats and the Rain, her milk. These waters are the modulation of Consciousness forming the ontological foundation of the seven realms we have encountered – 3 of the “upper foundation” (*Trini Rochana*), three of the lower (*prithvi, antariksha, dyaous*), and one of the mid-world of Supramind (*Mahar*). These are called the seven oceans, *Saptasindhu* and sometimes the seven rivers, *Saptanadya*, or in a more psychological mood, *Saptadheeya*, the seven thoughts. Each of the seven planes of consciousness, is thus seen as an ocean, a vast infinite reality; each of them projecting its own manner of thought, the seven thoughts.

The Solar Gods

We have already encountered the Four Kings (*Mitra, Varuna, Aryaman, Bhaga*) of the Veda. These are embodiments of the supramental principle *Surya* or the Sun, also called *Savitra* and sometimes *Surya-Savitra*. We saw that the Sun has several other forms, such as *Vishnu, Pushan, Parjanya* and *Martanda*. One of its Vedic forms is *Yama*. Many are familiar with *Yama* as the God of Death. But etymologically, it is more properly the God of Control. In the Veda, *Yama* is an aspect of the supramental Sun closely related to the Law of Truth, *Ritam*. We have encountered this sense of Law in the term *Ritam*, which means Rightness. *Yama* is the guardian of this law of unfoldment according to which all things proceed. It is this aspect of the guardian of the Law which relates *Yama* to death. That which cannot abide by the Law of Truth, enters the kingdom

of Death; that which follows the law lives in Immortality. This is one of the central secrets of the Veda.

The advent of the Sun God from the Darkness is prepared by a number of solar deities, mostly feminine. In the psychological sense, these are the powers preparing the consciousness to receive the fullness of the Divine. First come the *Ashwins*, horse riding twins who precede the Dawn. They are physician, healers who bring good tidings of the coming of Dawn. Next comes *Ushas*, the Dawn goddess, gently illumining the darkness in anticipation of the sun's resplendent chariot lighting up the day. With *Ushas* comes *Savitri*. *Savitri*, derived from *Savitra* is the daughter of the Sun, the power of Divine Grace. Other female solar powers that are critical to human spiritual progress and divine manifestation are *Bharati*, *Ila*, *Saraswati*, *Sarama* and *Dakshina*. *Bharati*, sometimes referred to as *Mahi/Mahin*, is the goddesses of Wideness. She widens our mentality, our understandings which are incapable of flexibility or translatability. With the power of *Bharati*, we see correspondences in all things, and how thoughts may lose their rigidity and become capable of application in many ways. *Ila* is the goddess of Revelation, who uncovers to the inner vision and understanding the secret significances of all things. *Saraswati* is the goddess of Inspiration, who opens us to deeper internal knowledge, since indeed, all Knowledge is contained in each of us. By the power of *Saraswati*, the knower within awakes and brings to the front the knowledge that is hidden. *Sarama* is the goddess of Intuition. She is figured as a hound because she chases the creatures of the Darkness into their lairs, drawing out their secret motives. This indeed, is the spiritual function of Intuition, going beyond the seen into the unseen. *Dakshina* is the goddess of Discrimination, a critical faculty, because the power to discriminate directs us within the Darkness. This is the special grace of the goddess *Dakshina*.

The Powers of Darkness

On the side of Darkness, there is *Namuchi* (eg. R.V. the conscious power of Weakness), which represents lack of sincerity and makes the aspirant fail in his journey. It comes with the voice of temptation that lures us to a life of luxury and ease when there is work to be done. The *Panis* represent the life of the senses, which carry us away. They make the aspirant give his energies to the pursuit of sensual delights. This is what the Veda refers to as the robbery, the theft. It is the robbery because it is this energy that is meant to support divine illumination. The leader of the *Panis* is *Vala*. *Vala* is represented as a miser just as we are miserly with what we would give to the divine. We hoard it for our ego enjoyment. *Vala* is also a concealer because it has taken the cows of the divine and shut them in a cave. This is the way in which the Light in us is kept from illumining us. Finally there is *Vritra*, the Coverer, whom Indra fights. *Vritra*

is the Serpent and the Obscurer; in his coils he hides the seven modalities of Knowledge and prevents them from being of use.

Other Ideas

The 10th volume of the *Rig Veda* (*Mandala X*) is considered to be the latest of the set and introduces hymns containing new ideas. Two of the most famous of these are the *Purusha Sukta* (RV X:90) and the *Nasadiya Sukta* (RV: X:129). In the *Purusha Sukta*, the supreme Divine, who was earlier identified with *Surya*, is referred to as *Purusha* and hence granted an anthropic, though cosmic and transcendental form. The self-sacrifice of *Purusha* in the form of a self-dismemberment into four parts, is the theme of this *sukta*. Each of these parts is a soul-quality (referred to as “colour” or *varna*) – Knowledge, Power, Harmony and Service. These form what are known as the “castes” – Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. As such the hymn does not equate these soul qualities to any humans, but the implication is that *Purusha*, through his self-sacrifice, generates these four kinds of creatures. Naturally, this hymn has been much derived in our times, due to the cruel inequalities that have become socialised in India in its name. But the hymn merely refers to the fourfold power of divine expression that are integral to *Purusha* and manifest it through their harmonious action, controlled by the Unity Power and its right distribution (*Ritam*). In Sri Aurobindo's yoga formulation, these fourfold powers of expression are seen in Shakti terms as the four cosmic forms of the Divine Mother – Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati (1999: p. 780).

To whom or what does *Purusha* sacrifice itself? I would say it is the Integral Divine that sacrifices itself to its own power of plurality, so that the Many may independently and together manifest the integral body of *Purusha* in a collective life. Thus just as *Purusha* is bound to the creation and its creatures through its sacrifice, the Law of Sacrifice binds the creatures to *Purusha*. This is the message of the *Purusha Sukta*. Individuals must together manifest the dismembered integrality of *Purusha* by awakening this integrality within themselves and organising themselves dynamically through soul-connection. This is equivalent to thinking of the Vedic ritual as a collective sacrifice, the reciprocal dimension of the *Purusha's* sacrifice. Such growing ensembles could manifest collectively something of the integrality of *Purusha*, leading to a teleological cosmic vision of a new form of divine manifestation. The 10th *Mandala* ends appropriately with a hymn for collective reception of the results of the Sacrifice (RV: X.191).

The other famous hymn from the 10th *Mandala* is the *Nasadiya Sukta*, which has been oft-quoted as a sign of philosophical maturity due to what appears to be its concluding agnostic rhetorical question. Indeed, it is a marked change in the method of language use from other *Suktas*, which rely heavily on symbolism and coded language. Here, indeed, one encounters the birth of

philosophy with its naked intuitions and enigmatic wonder. The hymn talks about the Becoming of Being as a self-birth out of the Mystery beyond Being and non-Being. It ends with the agnostic question, which is more full of wonder than doubt. And it is not rhetorical; it is addressed to the Mystery of Being which is earlier than the Creation but is also the One who has become the Creation. This *Sukta* inaugurates the power of language use that informs the Upanishads, the language of mystical intuition. Here is A. L. Basham's translation (1954: pp. 247-248):

Then even nothingness was not, nor existence,
There was no air then, nor the heavens beyond it.
What covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping?
Was there then cosmic water, in depths unfathomed?

Then there was neither death nor immortality
nor was there then the torch of night and day.
The One breathed windlessly and self-sustaining.
There was that One then, and there was no other.

At first there was only darkness wrapped in darkness.
All this was only unilluminated water.
That One which came to be, enclosed in nothing,
arose at last, born of the power of heat.

In the beginning desire descended on it -
that was the primal seed, born of the mind.
The sages who have searched their hearts with wisdom
know that which is kin to that which is not.

And they have stretched their cord across the void,
and know what was above, and what below.
Seminal powers made fertile mighty forces.
Below was strength, and over it was impulse.

But, after all, who knows, and who can say
Whence it all came, and how creation happened?
the gods themselves are later than creation,
so who knows truly whence it has arisen?

Whence all creation had its origin,

he, whether he fashioned it or whether he did not,
he, who surveys it all from highest heaven,
he knows — or maybe even he does not know

References

1. "Lord of the thunder, thou didst burst the cave of Vala rich in cows. The Gods came pressing to thy side, and free from terror aided thee. [RV: I.11.15]
2. Eg. "The cows/rays remove the darkness and extend the light" (RV: VII.79.2).
3. I mean here that the word Aryan means the essence of the human, its metastable crystallisation of the historical past and its aspirations for survival and evolution.
4. The Force of the Sun is its heat, the Knowledge of the Sun is its Light.
5. "According to the experience of ancient yogis, Agni is threefold:
1) ordinary fire, *jada Agni*
2) electric fire, *vaidyuta Agni*
3) solar fire, *saura Agni*
Science has only entered upon the first and second of these fires. The fact that the atom is like the solar system could lead it to the knowledge of the third. – Sri Aurobindo in a conversation with Pavitra, as quoted in (Satprem 2008).
6. Thunder and lightning are manifestations of electricity.
7. The symmetry of the starting and ending hymns of the *Rig Veda* is interesting. These hymns serve as book-ends to what may be called the Adventure of Divine Sacrifice. They begin with a hymn to Agni (I:1), the psychic flame in the individual and the cosmos, that is at the centre of the Vedic Sacrifice in its reciprocal version. It ends with a collective hymn for "right" collective distribution and use of the divine powers that result from the Sacrifice (X:191).

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Prusna Upanishad – 4

The Chapter of the Third Question

The coming and going of Life

Alok Pandey

The question about birth and the cosmic powers that sustain it has been answered crisply and in keeping with the Vedic lore, cryptically and through significant symbols. Now arises the question of death and departure from birth. But also, since the Force of Life, Prana or Breath, has been exalted as the greatest if not the highest Godhead, it is natural to inquire as to how this godhead came into being.

What a great difference between the seekers of those days and of the present day. These have come asking for Wisdom and Truth, not for some worldly gain or satisfaction of earthly desires as very often the so-called disciples go looking for a Master. But such like are really not disciples of any Master, whatever they may allege. They are disciples of their Ego and Desire and the Spiritual Man is for them yet another means to satisfy and fulfil their lust and ambitions.

Of course we may say that now we know the answer to these questions. We know through biology what is life and the processes of breath and what happens when we die. But a close look will reveal to us that we do not really have the answers to these questions. All that we know is about the *processes* of life and death and nothing about the real and antecedent causes. Rather, satisfied of our presumptuous ‘knowledge’ we believe that perhaps there is no antecedent cause, taking the material phenomenon itself as the sole truth. However the world over we are beginning to wonder what really Matter is, its very substantiality is suspect. We know not how exactly the dance of particles and energy in empty space conjure to our perception the experience of solid

objects with fixed properties. We do not know what life really is in its essence and not as it seems to us determined by its processes. We do not know the immaterial forces that move Matter and Life and Mind, the occult processes, the conscious Godheads that stand behind unconscious Matter and the seemingly blind play of life? We do not know the subtle channels and passages through which the current of life flows and departs before and after it becomes cognisable in our nerves and their actions.

And afterwards

The Chapter of the Third Question.

1. Then the Koshalan, the son of Ashwala, asked him: “Lord, whence is this Life born? How comes it in this body or how stands by self-division? By what departs, or how maintains the outward and how the inward spiritual?”

Koshalan asks of his Master a very pertinent question. Since Life is the secret power that has given birth to all things then the logical question that would follow is what gives birth to life itself? How come this Universal Power assumes limited names and forms and where does it depart when it leaves the vessel called the body? What is the secret Power within it that directs the currents of life and its forces in the fivefold manner, upward and downward? Such are the questions that arise in the mind of the seekers. And the Master is keen to impart whatever he knows.

2. To him answered the Rishi Pippalada: “Many and difficult things thou askest; but because thou art very holy, therefore will I tell thee.

But before proceeding with the answer the great Seer clarifies that it is a difficult question since it takes us almost to the Origin of the Original Power. But the Seer has gauged that his disciple is neither an idle seeker nor merely a curious bystander who has asked a question for the sake of asking it. He is a real seeker and has practised holiness and lived a life of purity. He will be able to grasp the subtle teaching and the profound truths that are being disclosed. We cannot grasp the real sense of a spiritual teaching with this gross outward intelligence. Like other powers and capacities in us, our intelligence is also a tool. We can use it for indulging in our grosser appetites and for external objects or we can use it for our thirst for Wisdom and eternal truths. When placed at the service of the ego and satisfaction of desires the intelligence becomes crude and incapable of understanding sublime things. But when it is turned inward and upwards in a quest for higher things, when we shun the path of the ego and vainglorious indulgence and, instead, embrace the path of self-mastery, sacrifice and aspiration then we are ready for truly understanding the profundities of a true spiritual teaching.

3. **“Of the Spirit is this breath of Life born; even as a shadow is cast by a man, so is this Life extended in the Spirit and by the action of the Mind it enters into this body.**

4. **“As an Emperor commands his officers, and he says to one ‘Govern for me these villages’, and to another ‘Govern for me these others’, so this breath, the Life, appoints the other breaths each in his province.**

The power of Life that labours and struggles here is neither a vanity of vanities nor, in its origin an ignorant errant power. Nor is it a bad dream though thus it appears to some. It is not a freak accident either. Life is a gift of the Spirit itself. Its home is in the Home of Truth from where it descends to redeem earth and man as called and directed by the intermediary Mind. Mind is the mediator divinity between the realm of the Spirit and the material world here. The power of Life flows upon the paths where the mind directs. Mind builds the moulds and life fills it.

5. **“In the anus and the organ of pleasure is the lower breath, and in the eyes and the ears, the mouth and the nose, the main breath itself is seated; but the medial breath is in the middle. This is he that equally distributes the burnt offering of food; for from this are the seven fires born.**

What follows is an interesting occult-physical truth. There are centres and organs where the energy of Prana is invested in activities of pleasure and elimination. These are symbolically as well located in the lower portions of the body. Then there are organs and centres where the energy of Prana is invested in activities related to receiving and transmitting knowledge and expression through the senses and speech. Finally there is the energy that is involved in equalising the distribution of energy released from the metabolism of food.

There are also three types of energy available ordinarily to human beings. The lower type is drawn out of pleasures of the flesh and temporary satisfaction of small corporeal desires and lusts. The higher type is drawn through the respiration as well as eyes and ears through beautiful sights and harmonious sounds. It is expended in speech. Finally there is the average energy drawn from food that is distributed equally to the whole body for various functions and activities. The seven fires seem to refer to seven occult channels in the subtle body through which the force of prana flows into the nerves. It seems that the nodal point for this entry is somewhere in the middle, perhaps near the solar plexus from where it further distributes itself.

6. **“The Spirit in the heart abides, and in the heart there are one hundred and one nerves, and each nerve has a hundred branch-nerves**

and each branch-nerve has seventy-two thousand sub-branch-nerves; through these the breath pervasor moves.

This is further confirmed by the mention of a central hub, the hub of the Spirit which resides in the deeper inmost heart. The Spirit, though itself not a material entity, is still connected with the human body through subtle nerves that link the gross and the subtle body. It is through these subtle nerves or meridians that the Breath (Energy) moves within the human system.

7. **“Of these many there is one by which the upper breath departs that by virtue takes to the heaven of virtue, by sin to the hell of sin, and by mingled sin and righteousness back to the world of men restores.**

There is however one nerve in the subtle body that draws the energy upwards. It is through this passage that the Life-force animating the creature passes into the universal state and beyond. Depending upon how it had been utilised by the inner being of man, this energy released out of the human system at Death goes to its corresponding world, to higher states of joy and peace (the Heavens of the righteous) or to dark and despondent states (the Hells of the unrighteous and sinful). After a while it returns to the originating Source when the soul that dwelt within the body returns and assumes another body. Thus, this energy (of life) that undergoes change during a person’s life time through his karma, returns to help or to haunt him after it is momentarily released from the body at Death. The form, the body is destroyed but not the energy. It remains in the universal Nature and returns into the ‘individual’ when the soul takes upon another body. Such is the law.

8. **“The Sun is the main breath outside this body, for it cherishes the eye in its rising. The divinity in the earth, she attracts the lower breath of man, and the ether between is the medial breath; air is the breath pervasor.**

Just as the human body has three forms or types or levels of Energy so too there are the three corresponding worlds, — the worlds of Light and Truth that watch over creation through a subtle spiritual sight. It is the very Origin of life itself. Then there are the mid-worlds where the Aerial principle, the Maruts, rules. Finally, there are the lower worlds concealed below Matter, hidden in the bowels of the Earth. A secret link and bond ties the Earth to the Sun to whom she owes her origin. A secret inner link likewise ties the Earth to the Heavens towards which she is constantly drawn and attracted. Just as the Sun constantly draws all things upon Earth towards itself by its lone Splendour and Power so too the Divinity Above draws the divinity here concealed in matter and in lower and lesser forms of energy. The life worlds stretch right from the principle of Matter upto the very Source of all things.

We see here a reiteration of the fact that the Breath or the Primal Energy is born from the Spirit and pervades and animates all things even where it is unseen as in Matter.

9. “Light, the primal energy, is the upper breath; therefore when the light and heat in a man has dwindled, his senses retire into the mind and with these he departs into another birth.

The higher form of Energy, the upper Breath, is Light. What is being spoken of here is not the physical light (though symbolically it is true here as well) but the spiritual and supramental Light which is the Source of all Knowledge and Wisdom. In man it is represented as Intelligence. But this Light is also Power. It is the seed and source of all we know and do. When this withdraws then life itself withdraws, the force and will to live withdraws. When that begins to dwindle and the senses begin to lose hold and return to their parent Mind, then the time begins to approach towards departure from this birth and ready oneself to return into another. This is the parent cause, the rest is simply effects that follow. The failing function of organs and the general decline are due to this inner decline of vitality which in turn is due to the failing Light. It is this that causes a progressive diminution of health, old age and eventually death, though only to return again. Such is the doctrine of death and rebirth being revealed through this Upanishad.

This powerful image is almost like the setting sun wherein the Light returns to its source and there is night. But the Light returns again bringing in another day.

10. Whatsoever be the mind of a man, with that mind he seeks refuge with the breath when he dies, and the breath and the upper breath lead him with the Spirit within him to the world of his imaginings.

We have been told that it is the Mind that drives the breath. Likewise, the Energy within us can be directed downward or upward depending upon the direction in which our thought currents flow. Depending upon what we have predominantly dwelt upon in our thoughts and mind we are led naturally towards that state. When the mind dwells upon the Eternal, when the thoughts flow towards the Divine, when we remain engaged during our life with the divinity in things, then on departure too we are led to that state which we have always hoped and imagined and pined for. In other words, the state of consciousness of a man, during life as well as at the time of death is of great importance since it is this that carries the soul onward in its journey after death.

11. “The wise man that knows thus of the breath, his progeny wastes not and he becomes immortal. Whereof this is the Scripture:-

12. “By knowing the origin of the Breath, his coming and his staying

and his lordship in the five provinces, likewise his relation to the Spirit, one shall taste immortality.’ ”

He alone is wise who knows this subtle yet profound truth. Such a wise man directs all his energies in higher pursuits, in Godward aspiration and seeking for Truth and Light. Quite naturally at the moment of Death he departs to the solar world of Light and Truth and achieves immortality.

Not only he but also his progeny, not just biological children but offsprings of his thought and mind, extensions of his soul multiplying itself in many bodies, are touched by this Light he has been drawn towards. They too are carried upward in that mighty current. The energies such a wise one has released upon earth continue to help and succour those who get connected and linked through inner bonds and spiritual parenthood, and are thereby not wasted.

Even should he return he shall return a Master of the five sheaths and the corresponding worlds and resume his relationship to the eternal spirit. Nothing will be lost since he has arrived at immortality. Immortality is a state and not a condition of being. Once attained this state remains even if one is born again upon Earth. It is not a cessation from birth but a cessation from Ignorance, the ignorance of being falsely identified with the body, the ignorance that makes us believe that we are born and we die. Such is the great lore of the Scriptures, the Master affirms at the close of this chapter dealing with death and rebirth.

*

We see that this Upanishad is full of occult truths and uses ancient and now archaic language to express itself. Sri Aurobindo helps us in this regard revealing these ancient secrets now lost to our modern mind:

Mind is the principal agent of the lower or phenomenal consciousness; vital force or the life-breath, speech and the five senses of knowledge are the instruments of the mind. Prana, the life-force in the nervous system, is indeed the one main instrument of our mental consciousness; for it is that by which the mind receives the contacts of the physical world through the organs of knowledge, sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, and reacts upon its object by speech and the other four organs of action; all these senses are dependent upon the nervous Life-force for their functioning.....

*

Then there is the Life-force, the Prana, that works in our vital being and nervous system. The Upanishad speaks of it as the first or supreme Breath; elsewhere in the sacred writings it is spoken of as the chief Breath or the Breath of the mouth, *mukhya*, *asanya*; it is that which carries in it the Word, the creative expression. In the

body of man there are said to be five workings of the life-force called the five Pranas. One specially termed Prana moves in the upper part of the body and is pre-eminently the breath of life, because it brings the universal Life-force into the physical system and gives it there to be distributed. A second in the lower part of the trunk, termed Apana, is the breath of death; for it gives away the vital force out of the body. A third, the Samana, regulates the interchange of these two forces at their meeting-place, equalises them and is the most important agent in maintaining the equilibrium of the vital forces and their functions. A fourth, the Vyana, pervasive, distributes the vital energies throughout the body. A fifth, the Udana, moves upward from the body to the crown of the head and is a regular channel of communication between the physical life and the greater life of the spirit. None of these are the first or supreme Breath, although the Prana most nearly represents it; the Breath to which so much importance is given in the Upanishads, is the pure life-force itself, — first, because all the others are secondary to it, born from it and only exist as its special functions.....

*

The English word life does duty for many very different shades of meaning; but the word Prana familiar in the Upanishad and in the language of Yoga is restricted to the life-force whether viewed in itself or in its functionings. The popular significance of Prana was indeed the breath drawn into and thrown out from the lungs and so, in its most material and common sense, the life or the life-breath; but this is not the philosophic significance of the word as it is used in the Upanishads. The Prana of the Upanishads is the life-energy itself which was supposed to occupy and act in the body with a fivefold movement, each with its characteristic name and each quite as necessary to the functioning of the life of the body as the act of respiration. Respiration in fact is only one action of the chief movement of the life-energy, the first of the five, — the action which is most normally necessary and vital to the maintenance and distribution of the energy in the physical frame, but which can yet be suspended without the life being necessarily destroyed.....

*

What then is this Life of our life? It is the supreme Energy which is nothing but the infinite force in action of the supreme conscious Being in His own illumined self. The Self-existent is luminously aware of

Himself and full of His own delight; and that self-awareness is a timeless self-possession which in action reveals itself as a force of infinite consciousness omnipotent as well as omniscient; for it exists between two poles, one of eternal stillness and pure identity, the other of eternal energy and identity of All with itself, the stillness eternally supporting the energy. That is the true existence, the Life from which our life proceeds; that is the immortality, while what we cling to as life is “hunger that is death”. Therefore the object of the wise must be to pass in their illumined consciousness beyond the false and phenomenal terms of life and death to this immortality. Yet is this Life-force, however inferior its workings, instinct with the being, will, light of that which it represents, of that which transcends it; by That it is “led forward” on its paths to a goal which its own existence implies by the very imperfection of its movements and renderings. This death called life is not only a dark figure of that light, but it is the passage by which we pass through transmutation of our being from the death-sleep of Matter into the spirit’s infinite immortality.....

(CWSA 18: 18, 19, 63, 67)

Gitanuvachan

Third Series
(Chapters XVII & XVIII)

Srimat Anirvan

Question:

‘The embodied souls have three kinds of *sraddha* by nature (17/20). Would you please analyse them? Why is the Seventeenth Chapter of Gita named ‘*Sraddhatrayo Bibhag Yoga*?’ What is the significance of physical, verbal and mental askesis? Please clarify them.

Answer:

Let me go back to the beginning again. The third *shataka* of Gita started with the mystic aspects of the universe and life. In the Thirteenth Chapter, it was said that everything in the universe has been born from the unification between Prakriti and Purusha or *Kshetra* and *Kshetrajna*. It had also been said that that Prakriti has three gunas and Purusha is the Master of gunas as well as is beyond gunas. Chapter Fourteen gives us a clear picture of both from the perspective of gunas. In the Fifteenth Chapter we are introduced to the total and highest aspect of Purusha as the Purushottama. In the Sixteenth Chapter, we have the two aspects of Jiva — divine and demonic and also a detailed description of the diametrically opposite sides of the two. As self-control is at the root of following a divine life so is desire of the asuric life.

A scripture is a collection of methods and results of all experiments on self-control. People who have no inclination for self-control and follow the path of desire naturally do not abide by the Scriptures. It is the scriptures or it is a man’s adherence to idealism that tells him what he should do and what he should not (16/24). When a man forgets that, he lets the mind run wild, cannot discriminate between right and wrong and, falls a prey to confusion. Sri Krishna has said that as his work is never perfected, so is he deprived from all happiness and cannot attain the ultimate bliss (16/23).

Arjuna, here, raised a question. He asked when someone is motivated by desire and does not follow the scriptures, the Lord might call him *tamasic* and

blind to his own good (16/22). But when someone does not follow the scriptures out of ignorance but has inner faith and spirit of sacrifice, what would He call him, *sattwic*, *rajasic* or *tamasic* (17/1)?

The question is deeply suggestive. The Lord has already given that possible answer twice before. In the Second Chapter He had strongly criticised the dogmatic proponents of Veda and had said, ‘They are ignorant, desirous, attached to enjoyment and wealth and lacks one-pointed Intelligent Will’ (2/41- 44). Those who always discuss the Veda are definitely followers of the rules of scriptures, Yet they are despicable because of their strong attachments and desire. Therefore, following the rules of scriptures is no way the scale for measuring one’s spiritual achievement.

Again, in the Ninth Chapter Sri Krishna says, ‘Even if an extremely wrong-doer worships me with one-pointedness, know him to be a saintly person. He has attained the one-pointed Intelligent Will’ (9/30). An extremely wrong-doer definitely does not follow the rules of scripture but if he has that one-pointed Bhakti, he is still commendable. That bhakti can change the whole being of even a wrong-doer is amply illustrated in the lives of Bilwamangal or Jagai and Madhai.

Therefore, we see that for measuring the spiritual advancement, inner and not the outer propensities are to be taken into account. It is true that when the mind is full of desire, one does not want to follow the rules of scriptures, but at the same time, one with deep faith in his heart cannot be despised simply because he is unable to follow all the rules of scriptures. By the strength of faith eventually he becomes a holy man (9/31). The fundamental fact is that desire ignites vice and faith virtue. And everyone has faith or *sraddha*. According to inner attitude it varies to *sattwic*, *rajasic* or *tamasic* (17/2-3).

What is this *sraddha*? In the *Sraddha Sukta* of *Rik Samhita*, it is said that *sraddha* is the deep longing of heart, a craving to reach one’s own divinity. In the introduction, it is said that *sraddha* is ‘*Kamayani*’ — daughter of Desire. There are, of course, two kinds of desire — the worldly ‘*Purukama*’ or external demands and hankerings and ‘*Devakama*’ or wanting only the Divine by the seekers of immortality. It is needless to say that *sraddha* is the daughter of the latter desire.

Prasna Upanishad says that the Purusha with sixteen segments lives in our body and the first part is *sraddha*. Hence our life starts with *sraddha* (6/2,4). In *Kathopanishad* we find that at the dawn of realisation, Nachiketa’s adolescent mind was absorbed with *sraddha* or heavenly bliss (1/1/2). In *Chhandogya Upanishad* we find reference to worship in the forest based on

sraddha and *tapas*, introducing the two streams of Aryan sadhana — that of the Rishis and Munis. The Gita has synthesised both. In *Yogasutra*, *sraddha* is the origin of all faith which ultimately culminates in *prajna* (1/20). In short, *sraddha* can be termed as the radiant intuition in the awakened mind — like the dawn before sunrise. Shankaracharya has called it ‘Faith in Existence’ or the absolute certitude in Reality Beyond.

As Intelligence is an instrument for jnana so also is *sraddha* an instrument for bhakti (12/20). But we have to remember that jnana and bhakti are intertwined in the Gita. A person with *sraddha* receives knowledge and one with ignorance, without *sraddha* and with doubt perishes. This too is Gita’s teaching. (4/39-40).

Initially it has been said that the universe has evolved from the union of Purusha and Prakriti. As the characteristics of Purusha are Intelligence and Knowledge similarly the characteristics of Prakriti are *sraddha* and bhakti. Both together form the bedrock for advancement of consciousness in individual beings. From Chapter Thirteen till now (Ch.XVI), knowledge has been given more importance. As a complementary to that, in Chapter Seventeen we find the aspect of *sraddha*.

Though *sraddha* is the ‘Own Quality’ of the Higher Nature, but it is expressed in jiva through the gunas of Lower Nature. As a result, it evolves the three types of *sraddha* - *sattwic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic*. Since Purusha is absorbed in *sraddha*, so accordingly he also becomes *sattwic*, *rajasic* or *tamasic*.

As the *sraddha* is, so is the liking of a human being. Liking expresses itself particularly in diet. A purified diet purifies the being and a purified being will be liberated from all bondage, meaning he would be reborn in divine qualities from asuric ones (16/5). The Upanishad says so. Hence diet has taken the precedence while discussing the threefold *sraddha* (17/8-10). It is not totally meaningless that a lot of stress has been imposed on diet for the seekers of Truth in this country. The Upanishad says that human mind is influenced by whatever he eats. In other words, his mind develops according to his diet. In *rajasic* or *tamasic* intake, mind becomes Asuric or *rajasic* too. This very Chapter has given a description of the kind of food palatable to people of *sattwic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic sraddha* (17-8-10).

Another valuable injunction of Gita regarding diet is neither to over eat nor to starve but have ‘*yuktahara*’ — a measured intake (6/16-17). Buddha, too, used to say, ‘there should be a sense of limitation while partaking in food’. Actually the term ‘*Yukta*’ also means someone who has no desire and is drawn to one’s own self (6/18).

Action comes after diet. Sri Krishna has already said that there is a lot to understand regarding *Karma*, *Akarma* and *Vikarma*. Here, he has explicitly said about dutiful work and has not mentioned about *Akarma* or *Vikarma*. According to Him sacrifice, giving and askesis — these three should never be given up. These are everybody’s duties, because they purify a human being. But even all these good work should be performed without attachment and desire for results (18/5-6). Then only they will be inspired by *sattwic sraddha* (17/11,17). Otherwise with a different *sraddha* they would be ended up as *rajasic* or *tamasic* propensities (17/12-13;18-19;21-22). And then even the good works will fall to the category of *vikarma*.

Yajna or sacrifice aims towards the oneness with divinity. Sri Krishna has extended the concept of yajna far and wide as well as deep down within. According to Him all work performed with the object of reaching Brahman is yajna (4/32). A yajna culminates in perfection when there is the unification and total absorption between Brahman and Karma (7/23-25).

As offering of objects to gods is known as material sacrifice or *dravya yajna*, so also offering of objects to all beings is known as charity or *daan*. *Chhandogya Upanishad* has termed them as ‘shoulders of dharma’. Giving is the highest dharma for a human being. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* has told us that the injunction of Prajapati to all human beings is to be charitable. In *Bhagavatam* it is said that whoever hoards more than necessity is a thief and therefore punishable. The doctrine of equality in *sattwic* sense can surely be established on this kind of human goodwill. In modern times this side has been neglected and most of it has been instigated by *rajasic* or *tamasic* doctrine of equality.

As yajna and *daan* together are one ‘shoulder of dharma’, so is *tapas* the other. According to *Chhandogya*, yajna is the sadhana to reach the Divine and *tapas* is to reach Atman. There is this fine difference. But both are intertwined in the Gita. The Lord has described Himself as the ‘Partaker of all yajna and *tapas*’ (5/20).

The original meaning of *tapas* is to radiate. According to the Vedic concepts, the ideal radiant beings are Agni on earth and the Sun in the heaven. Therefore, the ultimate perfection of *tapas* is to kindle the fire within oneself and obtain a body ‘a body made of yogic Agni’ or become ‘sun skinned’ with the meditation on Surya like the Rishika Apala. In *Yoga Sutra*, it is said that the results of *tapas* is to purify body and senses by removing all impurities (2/43). Out of the three indispensable parts of *Kriya Yoga*, the first one is *tapas*.

In order to make it universally acceptable, all unnatural rigidities have been

eliminated from *tapas*. At the very beginning, Sri Krishna has said, ‘As the yajnas of *rajasic* and *tamasic* people are aimed towards the Yaksha-Rakshasa Spirits and eliminate the gods, similarly the *tapas* of asuric people is to pull hard the elements of the body and make Me suffer residing within. It could be a terrible penance but there is no such injunction in the scriptures to support it. The surge of desire and attachment, conceit and egoism are at the root of it (17/4-6). The motive is to get admiration and respect from others. This kind of *tapas* is performed either due to obstinacy or the evil desire to bring harm and destruction to another’ (17/18-19).

The true *tapas* is *sattwic tapas* which is performed in a healthy and natural way with the highest *sraddha*, without asking for any irrelevant results and done for the sake of *tapas* only (17/7). The aim is to cleanse the body, speech and mind from all impurities. Hence, there are three types of *tapas* — physical, verbal, and mental.

The physical *tapas* consists of celibacy, purity, non-violence and worship of gods, Brahmanas, gurus, and knowers of Higher Knowledge. To achieve that one needs to acquire straightforwardness or follow simplicity in dealing with people. In other words, to keep oneself free from the attack of desire and anger (5/23), to maintain the physical consciousness as pure as *Akash* (and that can be done by the practice of being always aware of *Akash*), never to bring any physical suffering to any creature and to employ the body to the service of gods and the great men — these constitute physical *tapas*. By practising that even the outward behaviour becomes easy, simple and natural and that is called straightforwardness (*arjavam*) which is a divine quality (16/1).

Next is verbal *tapas* which consists of always speaking the truth, never to utter something that is harmful or brings anxiety to others and always talk in a kindly fashion. These are the outward expressions of verbal *tapas*. Its real sadhana is to draw the speech inward and employ that in *japam* and meditation. This sadhana is somewhere in-between verbal and mental *tapas* because silence (17/16) is its chief means.

And mental *tapas* consists of silence, control in expression, bliss, purification of thoughts and serenity. Words express thoughts. Too much talking makes the mind restless. *Katha Upanishad* has said that a seeker of Higher Knowledge has, first of all, to gather speech into mind. Gradually he has to get used to speechless reflection or pure contemplation. This is called ‘Silence’. It is possible to bring oneself inside, which the Upanishad describes as merging mind in *Jnana Atman*. The inward mind then gets used to incessant thought of Self. This is

called ‘Awareness’ in the Upanishad. Elsewhere in the Gita it is said, ‘Mind is fickle and restless. Wherever it goes, it has to be pulled out of from there and stationed in the Atman. And that has to be done by the Intelligent Will. Eventually when the mind is stably stationed in the Atman, there will be no more worries’ (8/25/26). Mind, firmly established in Atman, would be propitious and experience the highest happiness (6/27). This is called ‘Bliss’, which is the ultimate end of *Buddhi Yoga* (2/64-65). Thus the thoughts are purified which amounts to the purification of whole being (16/1), mentioned earlier. The gathered thoughts thus channelise the different propensities to a single tune and create a purified emotion which does not have the thought waves but a continuous flow of perception. The result is serenity — a glow of *ananda* comes out from within in an easy and harmonious speech and behaviour.

Question:

The scriptures have mentioned three symbolic names of Brahman — *Om*, *Tat* and *Sat* (17/23). Please explain the mystic meanings of these three symbolic words as explained in the four slokas (24-27) of Seventeenth Chapter.

Answer:

According to Sri Krishna, one should never give up sacrifice, offering and askesis. These are to be performed by all with *sraddha*. But whom should they be directed to?

Prakriti does the actions — she is the real doer; and the results are enjoyed by the Purusha. He is the Enjoyer (13/20). This is the general rule. Then it can be easily said that *yajna*, *daan* and *tapas* — the best of all actions, since they purify even the great souls — are performed by the Higher Nature for the enjoyment of the Highest Purusha. This Purusha is called by different Names as Brahman, Paramatman and Purushottama, in short the Lord. All work should be performed for the Lord without being attached or instigated by any selfish motive. The Lord is the Enjoyer of all our *yajna*, *daan* and *tapas* (5/29). He himself has said, ‘Whatever you do, eat, offer, give or perform as askesis offer everything to Me’ (9/27).

Working in this spirit converts all work to self-offering to the Supreme. Work and Sacrifice become one. The three Mantras of Veda — *Om*, *Tat*, and *Sat* are the symbols of the One to whom this Sacrifice is offered. Therefore, before we do any work, we should proceed with uttering these three mantras together or separately and placing Him in our hearts. Then only work becomes worship (18/46).

Om is the symbol of Brahman. In Yoga it symbolises the Lord. *Om* is a non-identifiable sound assonant in the inner sky that does not carry any artificial hint

yet carries the natural perception 'I am He' and is automatically vibrated in all beings in the regulated rhythm of breathing. Sri Krishna has already advised to find it out within oneself with the help of in-drawn consciousness and while leaving the body, be under the protection of this Sonant (8/10-13).

*Om*kara is *Sabda Brahman*. The Upanishad has said that the *Om*kara is everything and so is Brahman. Our Atman is Brahman as well. Atman has four aspects, so has Brahman and so has *Om*kara. The three aspects of *Om*kara are revealed in whatever we feel in our waking, sleeping and dreamless sleep states and in its fourth state, the universe ceases to exist. There is only '*Shantam Shivam Adwaitam*'. That is the reality of *Akshar Brahman*.

The two mantras — *Tat* and *Sat* are its symbols. Whatever is present in our perception, the Veda has called that *Sat*. Whatever is beyond, apparently that is '*Asat*'. But we cannot say that nothing exists there. What that is we do not know, or understand or express, yet we cannot deny that inexplicable existence either. The Veda has called that *Tat*.

The Highest Reality has been termed in *Samhita* as both '*Ekam Sat*' and '*Ekam Tat*'. They are the obverse and reverse sides of the same Reality. Hence, the Upanishad calls Him '*Tat-Sat*' because in one Form He is *Sat* or universal and in another He is *Tat* or transcendental.

These are the thoughts that the Gita has asked us to implement in our actions or in the 'performance of *Yajna-Daan-Tapas*.' There is a slight variation in the application of the mantras though.

When the staunch followers of Brahman — those who are not merely busy with the arguments on and outward applications of the Veda — and would perform all actions according to the laws of the Veda, should concentrate on the *Om*kara. This system is coming down from ancient times. The Upanishad says that the three lower syllables of *Om*kara are mortal; hence one should take care in their reflection. The fourth syllable is 'Immortal, Eternal and Fearless.' If one can remain steadfast on that syllable while applying the other three in all actions, then only the application becomes perfect (*Prasna* 5/6-7).

Therefore, this might be a general rule to do all actions with the thought of *Om*kara. It is possible to do so by always remaining aware, be stationed in the Witness Self and by being conscious about the breathing.

The seekers of salvation (*moksha*) should perform all work as *Yajna-Daan-Tapas* with the thought of *Tat* and without asking for any results. That does not necessarily apply not to any particularly prescribed work but to any and every work that presents itself before the doer. It is like doing everything while 'being situated beyond' (9/9; 14/23) or by 'giving up all initiative' (12/16). The thought

of *Tat* is conducive to follow this practice.

The word *Sat* has two meanings — Existence and Good. It is an injunction of dharma that one should do 'good' work. Initially everybody should follow this rule. That helps one to be stable in *Yajna-Daan-Tapas*, develop devotion in them and by practice they become natural. The thought of *Sat* is helpful to this practice.

But the keynote is that whatever we do with *sattwic sraddha*, turns out to be a good work (17/4,8,11,17,20) and whatever is done without that is not good work and no good can come out of that here or hereafter.

But a time comes when there is no more any question of right or wrong. Then I feel that, the Lord, seated as the Performer of all actions in the core of my heart, is making me move like a machine (18/61). Only He knows which work is good and which is not. I am just an instrument to implement His work (11/33). At that point 'this is to be sacrificed' (17/11), 'this is to be offered' (17/20), 'this is to be performed as penance', — all the senses of action cease to exist. Whatever I do under the guidance of my Lord, seated in my heart, is done with the *sraddha* that is beyond the gunas. In the Upanishad, there are references of such work beyond sin and virtue. Only then is the great utterance '*Om Tat Sat*' is really fulfilled.

Question:

'*Yajna, daan and tapas* are not to be given up' (18/3). '*Yajna, daan and tapas* are actions that purify even persons who have attained Higher Knowledge' (18/5). What is the mystic significance of these slokas? Does one have to perform *yajna, daan* and *tapas* till death??

Answer:

The injunction of the Gita has started from Chapter Two and has been completed in Chapter Eighteen. The consistency between the beginning and the end is to be carefully noted. Though this injunction was for Savyasachi (ambidexterous) in Kurukshetra (the field of Work, it is extended all over life. We have to remember this. Kurukshetra is the 'field of dark and terrible work' (3/1). Our whole life is a veritable Kurukshetra with the fight between divine and demonic forces. We have to fulfil the teachings of Gita in this Kurukshetra, manifest the inner knowledge and devotion in outward action. In the Gita we find a unique synthesis of the three yogas. In Chapter Two, Action was judged from the standpoint of Knowledge. There the ideal work was the work of a *Sthitprajna Yogi*. In Chapter Eighteen, Bhakti is added to that Karma and with the unification of the three, the highest form of 'Perfection born of Karma' has been unveiled (18/45-46). After that, the same concept of synthesised Yoga has

been applied, with the view point of the three gunas of *Samkhya*, to form the ideal universal society (18/40-44). This way we find a complete ideal picture of human life.

Life is upheld by work. We have to transform Karma to *yajna* and add with it *daan*. Amity towards all creatures is at the root of that. In addition, we have to include *tapas* which would result in purification of thoughts through self-control. *Yajna*, *daan* and *tapas* are the ideal basis of work and the importance of performing these three has already been discussed in detail.

Yajna, *daan* and *tapas* are the natural propensities of divine characteristics. Whatever we are born with, we should inculcate that till the end. One should never give it up. Even renunciation can be *sattwic*, *rajasic* or *tamasic*. Renouncing out of ignorance is *tamasic* and renouncing due to fear of physical suffering is *rajasic*. *Sattwic* renunciation is giving up attachment to work as well as the desire for the fruits of the work (18/5, 7/-9).

Some say that all actions are tinged with impurity since any action is a cause of bondage. Therefore, all actions are to be given up. But this is not right. According to Sri Krishna, *yajna*, *daan* and *tapas* — none of these is to be given up (18/3). As mentioned earlier, all these are to be performed without attachment towards the action as well as for their results (18/4-6).

The term '*karma sannyasa*' is also known as '*naishkarma*' or giving up of all work. A certain school of thought holds the view that that brings ultimate attainment. But that, again, is not true. Salvation does not come by giving up action. It comes by giving up the desire for the results. Moreover, it is not possible to give up all actions by an embodied soul. It is Prakriti who makes everybody act accordingly. Hence one has to work without attachment and desire. Giving up any expectations of the results is the real renunciation (3/4-5; 18/2,11).

By and large, people perform most of the work with the desire to achieve an object. Some say that such work, with desire at its root, should be avoided. And that can be termed as '*karma sannyasa*' (18/2). But this theory does not go very deep. It is not a very big thing to do or not to do a certain action apparently. The real test is to give up desire for the fruit of the action. Whoever does his duties without any concern for the results is the real '*karma sannyasi*' and '*Karma Yogi*'. Neither one who does not perform any *yajna* and is '*niragni*' nor the '*Akriya*' or the one who does not do any work is a '*karma sannyasi*' (6/1).

Of course, both '*karma sannyasa*' and '*Karma Yoga*' are steps to reach the ultimate goal. Yet there are some special characteristics in Karma Yoga (5/2),

because Karma Yoga is a comprehensive philosophy of life. Sri Krishna himself has manifested that ideal in his life (3/20-24). The real *karma sannyasi* or renunciate is he who has no desire for the fruits of action, has no liking or disliking for any work (5/3), nor does he have inclination for work he is skilful at or hatred for work he is not. Such a person can be called '*nitya sannyasi*'. He is ever established in Reality. There he has gone deep into the reality of work and does not have any movement of doubt regarding Karma. He is above all dualities and easily free from the three aspects of Karmic results — good, bad or mixed (5/3;18/10,12).

Question:

What is the method of seeing eternity in all creation (18/20)? How to see the Indivisible in division? Please elucidate so that we have a clear conception.

Answer:

The knowledge that has been discussed here is the pivot of all action (18/18) as well as the stable foundation of all action (18/14). On one side there is the concept of steadfastness and on the other is the play of destiny in the performance of Karma and between these two is going on all the work of creation with help of the doer, the instruments and the efforts (18/13,14,18).

The initiation of all work comes from the original source ('From where come all propensities of beings' 18/46). Without knowing this reality, Karma Yoga cannot be attained. But since this knowledge reveals itself through gunas, hence it is shrouded with ignorance. Only if it comes through *sattwa guna*, it is conducive to success.

Knowledge becomes *sattwic* knowledge when the understanding of relationship between the Concept and Creation becomes clear and comprehensive. There is only one fundamental Concept which is known the Veda as '*Ekam Sat*' — Existence is One. The Gita has said too, 'By Whom all this is pervaded' (18/36;2/17). This singular existence has manifested Itself in innumerable existences. Wherever there is diversity, there arises differentiation. But if the sense of variation is held in the background of Oneness, there does not arise any misconception. Myriads of waves are rising and falling in the Ocean but in the depth of the Blue there is no ripple. Similarly, there is the variegated play of Creation-Existence-Dissolution of beings in world after world, but at the root exists only the One Imperishable Unchangeable Existence. This is the true vision. This knowledge is *sattwic* knowledge, *sattwic* knowledge perceives the One everywhere, *rajasic* knowledge sees many separately and the *tamasic* knowledge picks up one from many and magnifies that with one-pointed attention. The first one is steadfast and can see the whole. Its work is

also composed and united with the concept of One at the root of everything. Of the other two, one is restless and the other is stupid and ignorant and their work too belongs to the same category.

Question:

Could you please explain the symptoms of a *sattwic* doer? How can one become egoless? Always and in every work, there is the resonance of ‘I’ and ‘I’. How can one maintain inner equality in success and failure? Isn’t the *sattwic* doer an ideal for all?

Answer:

The Divine is the holder and supporter of the universal activities. ‘The Lord is stationed in the heart of all existences, O Arjuna, and turns them all round and round mounted on a machine by His Maya’ (*Essays on the Gita*, p. 545) (18/61). All beings are nothing but his instrument (slain by Me — 11/33). Moreover, the universal instinct of action has been originated from Him (18/46). Yes, there is no action without ‘I’. But my work is His work, my I-ness is His I-ness — whoever realises this does not become egotist like the Asuric being (16/13-15). In the depth of his heart, he knows that it does not matter what kind of work it might be — right or wrong — actually everything is done by the interaction between Purusha, the sustainer and Prakriti as the destiny. It is nothing but weaving of a net by the doer, the instruments and the efforts employed — there is nothing for him to be egoistic about (18/14,15,17). This egoless understanding comes from the *sattwic* concept of the Lord as the holder of All.

An egoless being does not have any partiality or attachment towards work or its results, He is free from attachment. At the same time he does not give up all work and incline towards the so-called perfection of *naishkarma* (3/4-5). He keeps on performing his regular work with discipline and does that with energy and enthusiasm. Whatever he has to do, he does that with devotion and skill and does not sulk at failure nor becomes exuberant with success. He knows that all a man can have is an estimated idea of possible results but he can never be certain of anything. If there is a direct connection with the guide and master of all work sitting in the cave of his heart, then the bliss attained by doing work as his instrument, of course, defeats all definitions of gain and becomes the ultimate reward. The outward results are controlled by Providence. Of course Providence, too, is nothing but the will of Purusha, but not always directly. Why not? That explanation is not necessarily given. Karma here is not a mechanical action in matter. It is a play of life and consciousness. Its laws and regulations are too complicated to understand by ordinary intelligence. Therefore, it is necessary to assess, the results of work not from apparent point of view but by

the degree of inner fulfilment. In other words, the object should be to evaluate how much higher knowledge has dawned in us by the performance of Karma. Even if we do not achieve what we craved for, we should not feel disheartened or dejected. This way one can become a *sattwic* doer by being equal to success or failure and yet remaining energetic and steadfast in one’s effort.

Of course being the *sattwic* doer is the ideal of life, who is firmly stationed on the concept of ‘Doer of Total Action’, who perceives inaction in action and action in inaction (4/18).

The work of a *sattwic* doer is also *sattwic*. His work is disciplined or well directed and pre-determined, without attachment and there is neither the duality of likes and dislikes nor the cravings for results (18/23).

Question:

In the 30th sloka of Chapter Eighteen, the *sattwic* Intelligence (*Buddhi*) has been mentioned. Please explain that sloka. What do we have to do to attain that Intelligence?

Answer:

The concept of ‘*Buddhi*’ is a unique aspect of Gita. The word has been derived from the root ‘*Budh*’ — which means ‘to wake up’. Agni is ‘*Usharbhut*’ — meaning he wakes up at the light of dawn. After that the sun rises cutting asunder the darkness and spreading the crimson glow all over the sky. The Sun is the symbol of Higher Knowledge as the Usha is of Light, *Sraddha* and Intuition. Agni signifies the effulgent Self-Consciousness. From this it is clear what is meant by awakening of Agni in the light of Usha.

Therefore, *buddhi* is as awakening of consciousness. This term has not been used by the older Upanishads, but has been notably used by *Kathopanishad*. There *buddhi* and *vijnana* are synonyms. *Vijnana* is beyond mind — it is more widely known in the Veda as *manisha* or wisdom. The senses can go up to mind (15/7) and *buddhi* is beyond that. So *buddhi* is ‘Beyond Senses’ (6/21). *Kenopanishad* has termed *buddhi* as ‘revelation’ (*pratibodha*) which is a distinctive means to attain *vidya* (Knowledge) and, again, is beyond mind. There is the use of a word ‘*Bodhinmana*’, or Intuitive Mind in the Veda with the same connotation. In the Gita the word *buddhi*, has the same meaning. *Buddhi* has been discussed in detail in Chapter Two, with reference to *Buddhi Yoga* (2/49,53,65-66). In Chapter Ten it has been said that *Buddhi Yoga* is a Divine Gift, which dispels darkness of ignorance with radiance of knowledge (10/10-11). It has also been suggested in this very Chapter to let the mind merge in divinity with the help of *buddhi* (18/57).

Needless to say, this *buddhi* or Intelligence, also known as *bodhi*,

pratibodha, *manisha* or *vijnana*, is a reality beyond *gunas*. This is the natural state of Purusha but in Prakriti it reveals through *gunas* and therefore at that state is tinged with *gunas*. That is what has been mentioned in the given sloka. This kind of *buddhi* comes through mind and brings a sense of understanding along with it. No more it is Intuitive nor a Revelation. Mind does not know Reality but wants to know and whenever it loses itself it takes refuge in *buddhi*.

Buddhi works with generalisation whereas mind with specification, which depends on the perceptions by senses. And *buddhi*'s works with convictions based on thought process. Mind looks at life in bits and pieces whereas *buddhi* sees the whole.

Based on the comprehensive approach of *buddhi*, we find two streams in the flow of Prakriti — one is *pravritti*, leading towards bondage through wrong deeds and the other is *nivritti*, leading towards liberation through right deeds. At the end of one is fear and death and the end of the other is fearlessness and immortality. Earlier, these two streams have been mentioned as streams of demonic and divine (16/5) propensities.

To choose the divine stream after a critical examination of both, is the work of *sattwic buddhi*. It tells the mind to draw inwards, to understand its natural disciplined work and to perform that without ego and desire for results and that way to free itself from the bondage of Karma (13/9;4/19,33,37;5/11)

The *rajasic buddhi* does not have this transparency of vision. It sees everything in a disorderly manner and the *tamasic buddhi* understands exactly the opposite of truth and reality (18/31-32). Needless to mention, that these two belong to the demonic characteristics.

In order to attain *sattwic buddhi*, one has to acquire divine qualities (16/1-3) which have been discussed in detail earlier.

Question:

The mental-vital-sensuous actions can be controlled by *sattwic dhriti* (retention) (18/33). Would you please analyse *sattwic dhriti*? Is there any method or practice to increase one's power of retention?

Answer:

Buddhi and *dhriti* are intertwined (*buddhi* held by *dhriti* — 6/25). Whatever we understand by *buddhi*, we hold onto that with *dhriti* and we hold on to only the things that we derive pleasure from. That, of course, depends on inclination, likings, *samskara*, habit and other propensities. *Dhriti* is a fundamental shakti in mental domain.

Like *buddhi*, *dhriti* also is accordingly affected by different *gunas* at the lower level. At the basis of *sattwic dhriti* is the *buddhi* of the same *guna* and

the primary symptom of that is *nivritti* or inwardness. This is a particular necessity for yoga as well. As enjoyment rushes outward following the stream of *pravritti*, similarly yoga merges inwards following the stream of *nivritti*. All the mental-vital-sensuous actions of yogi are always inwards. Of course, it is not easy to remain always inwards. For that one needs incessant practice, supported by *dhriti* for a very long time. Again, *dhriti* is nourished by *buddhi* and *buddhi* repeatedly reminds, 'not that way, this way'!

Dhriti, by nature, is obstinate. As the *sattwic dhriti* sticks to the path of yoga with enthusiasm and strong faith (6/23), the *rajasic dhriti* absorbs itself in enjoyment and *tamasic dhriti* in illusion (18/34-35). As the actions of *gunas* are always mixed ones, so *rajasic* and *tamasic dhritis* peep into the *sattwic* one too and the old habits again and again pull the mind downward. One of the methods to get rid of that is to follow the 'concept of yoga' (*yoga dharana*) or lock the mind in heart and move the flow of breath upward to mind (8/12). This practice belongs to the same category as the sixth stage of the Yoga of Patanjali. Initially this has to be practised sitting straight on *asana* (neck, torso and head in one straight line — 6/13) and along with the thought of the rays of the sun coming down through *sushumna*. One end of the sun's ray should be in the heart and the other should be in the Great Void and a stream of effulgence will go up and down between the two. Once this thought becomes strong by practice, mind does not want to come below the heart plexus. And then only *sattwic dhriti* becomes easy to attain.

Question:

What is meant by 'born of bliss of Self-Knowledge?' The happiness that is like poison at the beginning and like nectar at the end has been called the *sattwic* happiness (18/37). Please explain in detail.

Answer:

The present discussion started with the topic of Karma. Sri Krishna was saying that at all events, Karma has to be performed. It should never be given up — specially *yajna*, *daan* and *tapas*. But one has to perform any and all Karma with the knowledge of the One and without any craving for results. Then only the work would be *sattwic* work and the doer a *sattwic* doer. A *sattwic* work would lead to *sattwic buddhi* and along with that would come the *sattwic dhriti*, which is the basis of unflinching or eternal yoga (Ever Free — 9/14;12/2). This yoga culminates in state of supreme happiness devoid of all suffering (6/23.27) Here, we are told about that happiness which is the ultimate goal of our life.

Please note that though the term '*ananda*' has been used profusely in the

Upanishad but has never been used in the Gita. Instead we find ‘happiness’ and ‘bliss’. We are all familiar with the dualities, impermanence of happiness and the inevitable succession of sorrow and the Gita also has referred to them freely. To indicate the kind of happiness without sorrow or suffering, the Gita has used epithets like ‘eternal’, ‘excessive’, ‘ultimate’ or ‘the best’ (5/21;6/28,21,27). (Another name for that kind of unalloyed happiness is ‘bliss’. There is a beautiful description of that in Chapter Two (2/64-65). In the Upanishad, the happiness derived during dreamless sleep has been called ‘*samprasad*’ or total bliss’. These thoughts hint at a serene state like void beyond the oscillation between sorrow and happiness. That is the reality of Atman or Brahman. Like *buddhi*, happiness is also of two natures — beyond *gunas* and within *gunas*. *Sattwic* happiness is a glow or radiance of the happiness beyond *gunas*. It is not easily available. This can be acquired by vigilant practice and the sorrowless state can be attained only by that (18/36). Many may not like to go through that path of rigorous practice and that is why it is said that it might be bitter as poison at the beginning but would be sweet as nectar in the end. It emerges only when *buddhi* and Atman are blissful, meaning transparent as clear water. That is a simile used by the Upanishad. It has already been mentioned that the *sattwic buddhi* that sees the reality is always blissful. This is the *buddhi* that is steadfast and does swing back and forth between attachment and aversion even while moving amidst sense objects because the senses are, at that point, under the control of Atman (2/64). The 42nd sloka of Third Chapter further says that Mind is beyond senses, *buddhi* beyond mind and Atman beyond *buddhi*. Once *buddhi* is blissful, Atman, in its reality, reflects there (as in clear water) and the happiness that is derived at that state is the ‘happiness born of the bliss of Self-Knowledge.’

Question:

What is the significance of sloka 45 as well as of 46 of the Eighteenth Chapter? What shall I understand by perfection (*siddhi*)? How can work be termed as worship of God? What is to be understood by one’s ‘own work’ (*swakarma*)?

Answer:

Karma is *sadhana* (spiritual practice) and its culmination is in perfection or *siddhi*. This term has often been used in the Gita in reference to Karma (3/4; 4/12; 12/10; 16/23). But since in Gita, there is no conflict between Work and Knowledge, so there are references of ultimate perfection as the result of acquiring Higher Knowledge as well (14/1). Working without desire for fruits, one can reach the state of *sannyasa* and perfected *naishkarma*. And there is

a clear description of how to become one with Brahman being established in that state (18/49-53). This is the Highest Perfection and the successful completion of *yajna* of Life.

One’s own work is the work according to one’s nature. Elsewhere spirituality (*adhyatma*) has been termed as our nature (8/31). It has two interpretations. One is the nature of Self, when by nature is meant the higher nature (10/11); this is the true being of *jiva*. Again, when there is a specific manifestation or an expression of the Atman through the play of *gunas*, that is also nature or ‘*adhyatma*’. Earlier, in this country, the fourfold division of society was based on the nature and related Karma (4/13). Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra — their work could be decided depending on the *guna* that would express itself through their nature (18/41). Thus was revealed the ‘natural’ or ‘own work’ of each of the four divisions of the society. The Gita has given a very clear description of that too (18/42-44). There is no question of classifying any work as high or low. As the ‘own work’ of a Brahmin can take him to the highest perfection, so can the work of a Sudra, provided both can transform work to worship.

It has already been mentioned that life cannot continue without some kind of work or Karma. It is our responsibility to transform that Karma to *yajna*; otherwise, we will be bound by the net of Karma and the enjoyer of the *yajna* is the Lord himself. Therefore any work, performed as an offering to him is actually worshipping him. Never to have attachment or aversion in any work, to work without the thought of ‘I am the doer’, offer fruits of all work to the Lord, remain undisturbed in success or failure — if one can perform his disciplined natural work like this — that would be worshipping him through Karma Yoga. And the basis of all this is the knowledge that he is all-pervading and propensities of all work are originated from him. If one can work like this, Life would become a *tirtha* (a place for pilgrimage) at the confluence of the three sacred streams of Knowledge, Devotion and Work.

Question:

What is the significance of the Lord’s saying that one should not give up ‘natural’ work even if it is imperfect?

Answer:

All actions are urged by the three *gunas* of Prakriti. By and large, these *gunas*, while working, are mixed with and intertwined with one another. The actions of *gunas* move from *tamas* to *sattwa* or from darkness to light and again from light to darkness. Hence there is always an intermixture of both. Sri Krishna has given the example of fire and smoke (18/48). A smokeless flame

cannot be found in the area of the play of gunas — that can be found beyond. Therefore, no matter whatever we perform here, that is bound to be mixed with smoke. Elsewhere this smoke has been identified as desire and illusion and the flame as knowledge (3/38-40).

But it is not true either that all Prakriti wants to do is to cover up the radiance of light with darkness. Rather she is doing a hard penance in trying to bring light from the density of darkness because that is what is sanctioned by her sustainer, enjoyer and supreme Lord. And along the path of her journey to kindle the light is arranged the succession of all work performed according to the influence of gunas on the doer. This arrangement has a natural sequence which evolves in time and the sequence should not be interrupted.

Apart from that, there is something else too. All actions have two aspects — the inner and outer. The outer action comprises an implementation of certain set rules and conducts and the inner of the essential feelings. Judging from the outer aspects, my work might be a ‘low’ menial job but if I do the same work with the pure feelings of worship to my Lord, my insignificant work becomes divine. That trivial work becomes a bond between him and me. No matter how small, nothing is too insignificant for him. Besides, it is imperative as well to do all ‘lower’ jobs to maintain the smooth flow of the society. If he has chosen me to do that, I am blessed. That is why the Dharma Vyadha of the *Mahabharata* was still continuing his profession as a butcher while seated on the peak of highest realisation or *Brahma Jnana*.

To classify work as high or low from its apparent aspect is a sign of ignorance. The vision of Knowledge removes the distinction and all work transforms into divine work which is essentially Brahmic (4/24). When the divine seers and workers like Sri Krishna will take over the reins of society, then only the four *varnas* created by him according to guna and Karma would flower in their natural glory. Then Unity would control diversity, uprooting the poisonous influence of differentiation between man to man and the whole society would turn like a multicolour bouquet of many flowers. That is the hidden sadhana of Nature carried on by her great sons.

Question:

‘Thus knowing Me in reality, they enter in Me’ (18/55). Please explain the hidden meaning? How does ‘entering’ come after having complete knowledge?

Answer:

The highest means of attaining Perfection is to transform all actions of life into His worship, with the constant awareness of His Omnipresence and Omniscience (18/46). It is clearly understood that this kind of Perfection also

brings the culmination of the combined Yogas of Jnana , Bhakti and Karma without any conflict.

Those who preach that one cannot attain Knowledge without the state of inaction and the state of inaction without giving up all work, have, according to the Gita limited vision. One who is established in Knowledge and therefore void of all prejudice, has attachment neither in any work nor to the results of work, one who performs all actions with the feeling of sacrifice, gets rid of all shackles of Karma. For him everything is Brahman. Hence there is no difference between Brahman and Karman (4/22,24). This is the real giving up of all Karma or attaining the state of Inaction. Just by not doing any work, nobody can attain that state because nobody can live even for a moment without action (3/4-5). Doing work without attachment leads one to the ultimate state of Inaction and eventually to the Supreme Knowledge of Brahman. Sri Krishna has given an idea of attainment of Knowledge like this (18/51-54) :-

A man of Knowledge keeps his mind above the dualities of attachment and aversion. As a result, his mind is never touched by any outer objects (5/210). This is the real giving up of sense objects.

As a result of that he goes within himself effortlessly. This is ‘*Dhriti*’ or to hold oneself within one’s self and never let oneself fly off here and there. One who can control like this acquire purified and therefore higher intelligence (18/30).

The initial signs of renunciation are the ability of conquer attachment and desire for sense objects (13/8) and ability to organise mind (6/35). Detachment is one of the chief means of attaining Knowledge. It automatically draws mind towards Dhyana or Meditation.

The Rajasic disturbances die away in an inward mind. Therefore, desire, anger, ego, vanity, high-handedness, lust — all these asuric propensities cease to exist. A Jnani is void of I-ness. He does not have any illusion born out of attachment, which is nothing but the Tamasic quality of mind.

He is peaceful — void of all influences of *Rajas* and *Tamas*. He neither mourns nor craves for anything. His heart is filled to the brim with the happiness born of the realisation of Atman (18/37)

His inner being is reflected outward as well. He has complete control over his physical and mental personalities as well as over his speech; he loves to live by himself and eats in moderation (6/16-17).

This is the supreme application or attainment of Perfection of Knowledge (18/50) and takes the sadhaka to the acme of Bhakti.

One who sees the Brahman in Atman by going deep inside oneself in Samadhi

(6/18-20), verily sees Brahman and Atman everywhere and in every action in waking state (6/29-32). The ultimate expression of that vision is ‘*Sarvam Khalu Idam Brahman*’ (All this is verily Brahman) of the Upanishad and ‘*Vasudeva Sarvam*’ (All this is Vasudeva) of Gita (7/19). The other name of this is Equal Vision (5/18, 6/29).

To see Him or Oneself everywhere is the same as to love everyone which eventually leads to love Him in Completeness both in and out. This is the Love that teaches a Bhakta what He is in Reality in his heart as well as His Immensity in His outward manifestation (10/40-42). To know Him with Love is really to enter in Him which is deeper than the Knowledge of Reality because that way the Bhakta knows Him from every aspect by offering everything to Him. Then it is not only seeing Him with closed eyes but to see Him everywhere with open eyes as well. This is what the Vedic Rishis had termed as Conscient Perception or *Chinmoy Pratyaksha*.

Question:

‘Taking refuge in *Buddhi Yoga*, always attach your mind to Me’ (18/57). How can one fix his mind on God? What is the mystery of *Buddhi Yoga*? How can one grasp the concept of Divine Mind? Is an idea of Limitless Beneficial Qualities void of all inferior propensities somewhat the means of conceptualising Divine Mind?

Answer:

A complete indication of Divine Life — a combination of Jnana, Bhakti and Karma follows the given sloka.

Life is full of work. Existence is not possible without action even for a moment and there is no question of giving up work under any circumstance. All work has to be performed under His guidance, being His instrument and as His worship. Since I love Him, my heart elates while performing His work — a transparent ecstasy always fills my being. That is His bliss. My heart is reflecting nothing but His transparent Ananda which is like *Akash*. If I can perform even the most ordinary work of life with this kind of attitude, His Radiance, Ananda and Strength would light up every moment of my life. Then from here only I would attain that Eternal State — essentially the Ananda of *Akash* — as per the Veda the Supreme State of Vishnu (*Tad Vishnor Paramam Padam*) which is Beyond as well as All-Pervading.

As during the wedding ceremony, the groom says to the bride, ‘Let your heart follow mine’, similarly, sitting in the depth of my heart constantly He is saying, ‘Let your heart follow Mine’. If I love Him, can be totally devoted to Him, know nothing but Him, then all I have is Him only. All vibrations of action,

be it within or without, are nothing but vibrations of His Power — the manifested energy of Creation (8/3). Which one of any actions can I call mine? This is my renunciation of all actions (*Karma Sannyasa*), a unique merging of all my doership, instruments and actions in Him (4/23).

This way dedicating myself absolutely with love and unifying my heart naturally with Him I follow the Sadhana through Prakriti. *Sraddha Yoga* is at the root of it (chapter VII).

When I take refuge in *Buddhi Yoga*, that becomes a Sadhana through Purusha, which has been narrated in detail earlier, especially in Second Chapter (2/49-51). The Sadhana of *Buddhi Yoga* is primarily the Sadhana of *Sthithaprajna*. Though it comes from the concept of Purusha, yet this too comes as Divine Gift (10/10-11). It is also to be noted that here *Buddhi Yoga* is being closely connected with Bhakti Yoga.

To merge my heart in His through *Buddhi Yoga* means to merge my *Prajna* (Purified Knowledge) with His. The highest expression for that in Upanishad is ‘*Prajnanam Brahman*’ (Purified Knowledge is verily Brahman).

When I become one with Him following *Sraddha Yoga*, I feel my love is nothing but His Ananda, his Bliss and I feel, ‘I am beautiful with His Beauty,’ and when that comes by *Buddhi Yoga*, I feel that the lamp of Knowledge in the depth of my heart is nothing but a flame kindled by His own Hand from His Flame of Consciousness (10/11). And then, ‘I am proud with His Pride’. The two feelings are just the obverse and reverse sides of the same coin.

One of the Mantras to meditate on His *Chitta* (Mind) has been inserted in the Gita itself:

‘He is) the Seer, the Ancient, the Controller, the Smallest of the small...the Sustainer of All, the Unperceivable by senses and yet the Effulgent beyond all darkness’ (8/9).

Question:

‘Giving up all Dharma, take refuge in Me’ (18/66). Please explain the deep mystic meaning of this sloka. ‘I shall bestow liberation upon thee’ — who is this ‘I’? is that Manifested Brahman, Lord the Saviour or the Highest Guru?

Answer:

The injunction of the Gita is almost over. The similarity between the beginning and the ending is to be particularly noted. The injunction was delivered at Kurukshetra. Arjuna had cited a long speech on morality and eventually said, ‘I am not going to fight’. Sri Krishna has said, ‘that is your imbecility; your weakness. You are grieving over things not worthy of grief (2/11). It is only your vanity that makes you say that you are not going to fight. Nature will force

you to fight. You are bound by your natural Karma. Whatever you do not want to do now led by illusion, you will do all that by the force of nature. Remember, whatever the Prakriti does, she does by the will of God because Prakriti, intrinsically is His Nature (7/4-5). Verily, the Lord Himself, seated in the hearts of all and mounting each individual on the machine of Prakriti is making everybody rotate by the force of His Own Maya (Controlling my Own Prakriti, I manifest myself with the help of my own Maya, 4/6). Therefore, take refuge in Him in all respects. Unite your will with His and work as His instrument. If you take refuge in Him, no matter whatever you do, by His Grace you will overcome all perils and attain Supreme Peace and reach the Eternal State of Existence (18/56,58.62). Thus I explained to you the Knowledge that is Secret of the Secrets. Think it over deeply and do whatever you wish to do' (18/68).

The last sentence is superb and unique. Sri Krishna is the ideal Guru — a Guru of the Gurus. He had explained all the pros and cons from every aspect to His disciple and then said, 'do whatever you wish to do'. A *sadguru* would never impose his will on a reluctant disciple. He would leave everything on the action of nature and remain an indifferent Seer (5/14/15).

After that the Lord has said, 'Let me tell you again my most secret and the last word. I love you very dearly. Hence I am telling you whatever is best for you'.

This secret of secrets was uttered once before at the end of the Ninth Chapter, after disclosing His identity as the 'Supreme aspect of the Universal Lord in the Human Body' (9/10). That profound injunction is:

'*Manmana Bhava Mad Bhakta, Mad Yaji Mam Namaskartu*' — surrender your mind in Me, be my devotee, worship Me, offer your salutations to Me (18/65).

So long, there was a discussion of God indirectly. Now He exposed Himself directly as the Lord and said, 'Give up all other dharmas and take refuge only in Me. I will deliver you from all sins; do not grieve' (18/66). Now let me take the reverse course and go back to the First Chapter from the Eighteenth. The arguments that Arjuna presented for not fighting the battle was that it would be a heinous sin to kill one's own kith and kin out of greed for the enjoyment of a kingdom. The loss of the male members of the family would lead to uproot the age old values and dharma of the family and nation. As an inevitable consequence, the women would go astray and intermixture and impurity of caste system would follow. The war might bring an end to the legitimate children of the family which would deprive the deceased forefathers from their due oblations. Hence the only wise option is not to fight (1/36-45). It is even better to give up

all actions and embrace the life of a mendicant.

Elsewhere, Sri Krishna has given a very suggestive answer to Arjuna's apprehension of an impure society. He had said, 'When one performs the actions one has to without any attachment, one reaches the Supreme. As an ideal of the Kshatriya clan, you have to pay attention to the building up and maintenance of the society as a whole. Whatever the great men do, the commoners follow that. Look at Me. I do not have to do anything. Yet I am ever active. If I do not perform action, everybody would follow Me and the whole society would go down to total collapse. That would make way for all impurities of Dharma of which the intermixture of caste system that you are so concerned about is just an offshoot. In that case I would be the agent for ruining the whole human society'. (3/19-24).

This is a hint to the 'eternal' dharma referred to by Arjuna earlier, of family and nation in the expression of '*Sarva Dharma*.' Dharma of family and nation can never be eternal Dharma. Eternal Dharma is the Concept of Yajna (14/27). To transform all actions to sacrifice can be possible only with the feeling of that. All structures of healthy family or nation are supported by that strong foundation and family or nation are not above and beyond that. Family and nation are created by men and Varna by the Divine (4/13) on the basis of Guna and Karma.

The three Gunas are represented by the three colours or 'Varna' — *Sattwa* by white, *Rajas* by red and *Tamas* by black. I have already mentioned that this concept has a very close proximity with the daily event of sunrise. *Rajas* is in-between *Sattwa* and *Tamas* and that is why there are four *Varnas* (Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra) from the three Gunas. The *varnas* are actually a play of colours caused by the movement of Prakriti from light to darkness and darkness to light. Therefore the universal and eternal difference lies in difference of *Varna* in Prakriti; the distinction between nations or clans is just an offshoot of that.

Initially, by the term '*Sarva Dharma*', we have to understand the dharma of nation and family, at the thought of destruction of which, Arjuna had used the term 'sin' to denounce the battle, left his bow and sat down on the chariot in deep melancholy. Sri Krishna said, 'Give up the thought of uprooting dharma and take refuge in Me. No matter how much sin you incur by fighting, I will liberate you from all. Do not grieve'.

These words were uttered with such force that He no longer remained Yadava Krishna but changed to the *Purushottam* in the form of Vasudeva Krishna, the Eternal Being as the Knower of Everlasting Dharma (11/18) and

now present before Arjuna in the Human Form (9/11).

Therefore His injunctions are for eternity and it is universal. So by ‘*Sarva Dharma*’ is meant all imaginary dharmas born out of human ignorance that do not enlighten a man but make him deluded and never direct him towards ultimate good. But the good thing born of it is at that point, a human being has no other way but a complete surrender to the Lotus Feet.

At the very beginning, Arjuna has said that (2/7). But at that point he was not mature enough. Sri Krishna, as if, was not paying much importance to that. After delivering the Gita, He Himself made Arjuna’s surrender effective and complete and now is uttering the last injunction of Gita:

“Thus runs the secret of secrets, the highest most direct message of the Iswara. ‘Become my-minded, my lover and adorer, a sacrificer to me, bow thyself to me, to me thou shalt come, this is my pledge and promise to thee, for dear art thou to me. Abandon all dharmas and take refuge in me alone. I will deliver thee from all sins, do not grieve.’” (*Essays on the Gita*, p. 556)

Herein lies the end of Gita and the beginning of *Bhagavatam*.

Question:

‘Dispelled are all my illusions. I have regained my memory by Your Grace, O Achyuta!’ (18/73). What does Arjuna mean by ‘regained memory’? What is that eternal truth that ordinary people can not remember but the Sadhakas get back in their memory?

Answer:

The injunction of Gita is over. Now comes the imposition of discipline to protect its purity and the results of hearing such a great scripture. With extreme sweetness the Lord is asking Arjuna now, ‘Have you concentrated enough on whatever I was telling you? Whatever misconception you had about dharma at the beginning was, in reality, born out of ignorance. Have you gotten rid of all that now?’

The injunction of Gita started with ‘as if smiling’ — ‘Prahasanniva’ — (2/10). It seems the same smile has appeared in the countenance of Sri Krishna again. The same smile has been referred to in the *Bhagavatam* at various occasions. His smile is in creation as well as in dissolution. Nobody can fathom its mystery. That comes only out of His Grace.

Arjuna says, ‘You are Achyuta (Who does not abandon), Your Grace has dispelled all illusions and killed all doubts. I am established on a steady ground. Now I remember everything; whatever you have said, I will follow that’.

This remembrance does not relate to any memory of physical events. This is the direct knowledge of Eternal Truth. The remembrance of a physical event

might not be supported by evidence. But the evidence of the remembrance that Arjuna is referring to is the Highest of all. This is the memory that brings to the understanding who is He, who am I and what is He to me. This is the Knowledge of Reality and therefore eternal as the Memory is too.

And at the present situation the Memory works to remind Arjuna, ‘in Your present manifestation to uphold righteousness and save the virtuous while destroying the wrong doers, for which is happening the great event at Kurukshetra, I, Savyasachi, am your agent and instrument’ (4/7-8,11/33).

Question:

Sanjay had received the Yoga which is the secret of the secrets from none other than Sri Krishna. Is Sanjay blessed with the grace of Vyasa (18/75)? Is there any hint of the theory of Guru and disciple here? Sanjay had received the divine vision by Vyasa’s grace. Isn’t he the real Guru who bestows the divine vision?

Answer:

During the time of Kurukshetra, we find three Krishnas and one Krishna — Vasudeva Krishna, Dwaipayana Krishna, Pandava Krishna and Yajnaseni Krishna.

The first Krishna is the Purushottama Narayana, Who has been referred to in *Satapatha Brahmana* as ‘Purusha Narayana’ and the Veda has given a detailed description of Him in the *Purusha Sukta*. He is verily the Guru even before Time and not affected by time. His Supreme Prakriti has been divided into two as Panadava Krishna and Yajnaseni Krishna. Pandava Krishna is the ‘Best among men’ and Yajnaseni Krishna is the divine Female mentioned in the Gita (10/34). This couple of Male and Female is the Divine instrument for the battle of Kurukshetra.

The colloquy of Dharma (18/70) at Kurukshetra or the Gita is the same as the eternal *Vak* accepted in the Veda. The manifestation of Narayana and the events at Kurukshetra took place under the shelter of that Divine *Vak* in order to re-establish the long forgotten Dharma.

The responsibility of propagating that *Vak* in the human world was given to Dwaipayana Krishna, the great guru of Bharata. He transformed Sanjay to an instrument for narrating the teachings of Gita to Dhritarashtra by bestowing on him divine vision and divine hearing. As if the flow of Alakananda came down from Heaven to Haridwar and later was worshipped by all.

As Krishna and Dhananjay are preceptor and pupil so are Vyas and Sanjay. Note the similarity in sound between the two names of Dhananjay and Sanjay; in addition, the Lord had addressed Arjuna for the last time in Gita as Dhananjaya

too (18/72). But Vyasa is not the direct Guru here. Actually, Krishna, the Lord of Yoga is here the direct Guru of Sanjaya through Vyasa (18/75).

The message of Gita first came to Dhritarashtra. Many think that Dhritarashtra symbolises human mind. He is the king of life but blind. His hundred sons are the ten propensities of each of the ten senses. Gita came down to the blind mind. As if a seed of consciousness is thrown into the deep density of material darkness. From there it would sprout, have new leaves and twigs, would flower and bear fruits. Nobody would be deprived from the Divine Grace. Gita is the Rescuer of all.

This is also to be noted that Dhritarashtra represents *Tamas*, Duryodhana and Duhshashana *Rajas* and Arjuna *Sattwa*. In the Kurukshetra of Life the intense conflict of the three Gunas should lead us to the eventual victory of *Sattwa*. We can remember that the other names of Arjuna are Vijay and Jishnu.

Question:

‘Wherever is Krishna, the Lord of Yoga and Partha, the holder of Gandiva’ (18/78) — what is the significance of this sloka? What are *Sree* (beauty), *Vijay* (victory) and *Bhuti* (manifestation)? Does not the term ‘Krishna-Arjuna’ indicate the Lord and His devotee? Neither the Lord nor His devotee is complete without the other. The union is needed. Is the essence of Bhakta eternal like that of the Lord’s? Does the devotee take birth out of that essence?

Answer:

That the Divine has entered in humanity — His highest expression is in the form of a man — is already there in the Upanishad (*Aitereya* 1/2/3). Because the Divine has come down in mankind, man wants to be Divine. Yoga is nothing but the sadhana to fulfil his desire to be divine. During the time of Kurukshetra, Krishna, the Lord of Yoga was the founder and propagator of this Yoga. But this introduction to or propagation of Yoga is an ‘eternal ethics’ or eternal law (8/1-3). Vasudeva-Arjuna, Nara-Narayana, Indra-Kutsa, Vashishta-Varuna — through the medium of all these the play of uplifting of human consciousness has been revealed from age to age and is still being done through the relationship between an aspirant and a liberated one.

The ultimate result of such play is to reach both material and spiritual apex. Reaching material heights denotes success in **manifested** world and **beauty** stands for the spiritual achievement. The practice of both brings out the fighting spirit (*Jujutsu* 1/1) in man. His battle against the Asuric forces ultimately leads to the **victory** of the Divine power.

Nara and Narayana, Jiva and Brahman, Bhakta and Bhagawan, Krishna and Arjuna all are the twin petals of the One. ‘Only God’ or ‘only devotee’ is

imaginary. In the manifested world Jiva is the eternal part of God (15/7). Beyond manifestation there is neither universe nor any Jiva, but the Lord is there and His Supreme Prakriti — inseparable from Him — in Inconceivable Diversity in Unity

This is the end of Q/A on Chapter XVII (*Sraddhatrayo Bibhag Yoga*) and Chapter XVIII (*Moksha Yoga*) in the *Gitanuvachan*.

End of the translation of *Gitanuvachan*
Sri Krishnarpanmostu

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

Sri Aurobindo: The Ideal Teacher

Prema Nandakumar

4. Divinity as Women: Usha, Saraswati

We have heard it said a million times. The position of woman was near-perfect in the Vedic period. Women were educated, had equal rights, held elevated status and were considered sacred. Oh yes, there were even women who were rishis and were referred to as rishikas. Contrary to the generally held belief that the Vedas were received only by men (hence women were not even allowed to learn and recite it since medieval times), women had an important part even in receiving the messages from the eternal and channelising them into significant poetry. At the dawn of Indian civilisation, women were able to spread and teach Vedas and were called Brahnavadinis. Swamini Saraswati Atmaprajnananda has pointed out that there were twenty-five seer-poets like Godha, Lopamudra, Vagambhrini and Sauci Paulomi in the Vedic canon.

Godha was a Brahnavadini. Her voice records the typical maternal anxiety that applied correctives to the society even in those days, for the Vedas took care of heaven and earth as an integral whole:

“Relax that mortal’s stubborn strength
Whose heart is bent on wickedness.
Trample him down beneath thy feet
Who watches for, and aims at us.
The Goddess Mother brought you forth,
The Blessed Mother gave you life.”¹

Apparently there were no hereditary rights to become a rishi. At that distant past, each one had to remain engaged in spiritual practices and receive the mantra. A son or daughter could be known as a rishi or rishika only when he or she undertook the arduous discipline.

“A person performs special spiritual practices, including *tapas*, to become a *r̥ṣi*. There is no specific procedure for becoming a *R̥ṣi*. One can only become a *R̥ṣi* by the grace of the cosmic powers or the *devatas*.”²

Hence the Upanishadic dictum: *tapah prabhavaat deva prasaadaascha*. An intense aspiration would definitely draw to it the answering grace. Thus a rishi is born, *yasya vakyam sa r̥ṣi*. Naturally, the Divine Power was also seen as the female. These and other thoughts besiege us when we take up Sri Aurobindo’s interpretation of some Vedic hymns which was originally published in *Arya* and later issued as *On the Veda*. It gave me no end of joy to watch Sri Aurobindo give tremendous importance to three female deities in the Vedas. Usha who has descended everywhere in Sri Aurobindo’s poetry; Saraswati who has kindled our interest in our past because of the controversy over the very existence of the river named Saraswati; and of course the terrible beauty of the conception of the divinity, Sarama.

Usha is very familiar to us because she is quite, quite visible. Day after day, the miracle occurs without fail to announce the coming of day. With her, there is no confusion of categories, as we are able to hold on to the physical vision, firmly and with joy. Sri Aurobindo says:

“Throughout the Veda Usha, daughter of Heaven, has always the same function. She is the medium of the awakening, the activity and the growth of the other gods; she is the first condition of the Vedic realisation. By her increasing illumination the whole nature of man is clarified; through her he arrives at the Truth, through her he enjoys the Beatitude. The divine dawn of the Rishis is the advent of the divine Light throwing off veil after veil and revealing in man’s activities the luminous godhead. In that light the Work is done, the sacrifice offered and its desirable fruits gathered by humanity.”

There is a surpassing beauty about the very term, and she shows so many shades in colours till she merges into the brilliant, sheer whiteness of Ahana. At the same time, the Vedic rishis used these colours to veil her inner truth which they had realised in their deep meditation. However, occasionally the deeper truth comes to the front. According to Sri Aurobindo, Rishi Viswamitra’s hymn gives us a good chance to look into the psychological symbolism of the Vedas.

“Dawn, richly stored with substance, conscious cleave to the affirmation of him who expresses thee, O thou of the plenitudes. Goddess, ancient, yet ever young thou movest many-thoughted following the law of thy activities, O bearer of every boon.

Dawn divine, shine out immortal in thy car of happy light sending forth the pleasant voices of the Truth. May steeds well-guided bear thee here who are golden-brilliant of hue and wide their might.”

Sri Aurobindo relates the terms *prachetas* and *vichetas* in the hymns to Usha as expressing thoughts identical to the later Sanskrit terms, *prajnana* and *vijnana*. The former is the consciousness of our ordinary mind which

observes objects as they are; but the rishi's mind sees more for it penetrates into the very root-source of things seen and observed. The latter, *viññana*, is the "comprehensive knowledge" that is limitless and is able to correlate and reach to meaningful conclusions from not only available data but also intuition. Usha is the power of Knowledge who leads the thinker, the rishi, the *tapasvin* who never deviates from truth. When Usha is there, one does not lack knowledge for she is illumination who makes the mind illumined, everything is aplenty:

"The affirmation, it is suggested, will be full and ample; for Usha is *vajena vajini*, *maghoni*; rich is the store of her substance; she has all the plenitudes."

Such is our teacher of the Vedas. He will not be satisfied by parrot-like repetitions of what the earlier commentators have said. It was after reading Sri Aurobindo's essays on the Vedas that I turned to know something about the traditional commentators. There have been many and Sayana leads them all. Among others are Yaska who has written a Vedic dictionary known as *Nirukta* and the great Panini. However, it was clear from what others have written about these commentators and translations that they are very traditional and not easily comprehensible to one whose training had not reached out anywhere near those forbidding tomes. But Sri Aurobindo sounded easy of approach; and through him one glided into the Sanskrit originals as well.

Since the Vedas needed such elaborate and pointed commentaries that went into the minutiae of their content, it is obvious Vedic Sanskrit seems now to be difficult for the common reader and often even for the experienced scholar. Again, in course of time, the words and the Vedic hymns have lost their significations due to mechanical repetitions by the *kartā*. Apart from indicating the good of an orderly material life, the Rishis had also more to convey in terms of spiritual growth and transformation. Before the entire range of the transcendent experiences of the Rishis was wholly lost to posterity due to our obsession with ritualism, the Time Spirit stepped in as Madhvacharya (13th century) and later Raghavendra Swami who said that the hymns have significances apart from their surface meanings. Madhvacharya is hailed as the forerunner in the intuitive interpretation of the Vedic hymns.

"Though the Adhyatmic line of interpretation is alluded to occasionally, in the older traditional commentaries, there was no systematic attempt at its elaboration till the days of Madhva. He was undoubtedly the pioneer of this movement. Handsome tributes have been paid to Madhva and his commentators for this new lead in Vedic interpretation, in the new edition of the *Rig Veda Samhita* published by the Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. As is well known Aurobindo has carried the *aarsha* tradition of Vedic interpretation to the utmost limit and achieved remarkable results at it ..."³

Early in the twentieth century Swami Dayananda Saraswati took up the Vedas for study and found that one had to strike out on new paths to get at the significance of most of the hymns. Sri Aurobindo began studying the Swami's writings, and was soon inspired by Swami Dayananda's intuitive interpretation of the Vedas. In an early article, he dwelt at length on Dayananda's approach to our scriptures. The opening arrests us:

"Dayananda accepted the Veda as his rock of firm foundation, he took it for his guiding view of life, his rule of inner existence and his inspiration for external work, but he regarded it as even more, the word of eternal Truth on which man's knowledge of God and his relations with the Divine Being and with his fellows can be rightly and securely founded."

Sri Aurobindo frowns upon the critics of Dayananda, be they traditionalists or the European scholars and their yesmen among Indian scholars. While the former is no less than "a monument of arbitrarily erudite ingenuity, of great learning divorced, as great learning too often is, from sound judgment and sure taste and a faithful critical and comparative observation, from direct seeing and often even from plainest common sense", the latter is "a toil of interpretation in which the loosest rein has been given to an ingenious speculation, in which doubtful indications have been snatched at as certain proofs, in which the boldest conclusions have been insisted upon with the scantiest justification". He defends Dayananda as retelling the Vedic truth: *Ekam sat, vipraah bahudaa vadanti*: "One existent, sages speak of in many ways, as Indra, as Yama, as Matariswan, as agni". A true soldier of the spirit, Sri Aurobindo took up the task of interpreting the Veda with the help of personal experiences arrived at by a systematic, meditative study of the hymns. Kapali Sastri who has translated the *Agni Sukthas* into Tamil and written a Sanskrit commentary on the first *Ashtaka* of the *Rig Veda* quotes Yaska as saying that only those who do tapasya can understand the meaning of the mantra.

For me who had not the self-confidence to do tapasya, the best thing to do was to settle comfortably in the welcome shade of Sri Aurobindo's interpretation. It has been an enriching association for a lifetime. The Vedic hymns to Usha are very much there in many of Sri Aurobindo's poems. His narrative poems (complete as well as those left unfinished) enjoy opening with a description of dawn. Always the same wonderment but never a repetitive line. Thus Pururavas watching the coming of dawn in '*Urvasie*':

"Watching that birth of day, as if a line
Of some great poem out of dimness grew,
Slowly unfolding into perfect speech.
The grey lucidity and pearliness

Bloomed more and more, and over earth chaste again
 The freshness of the primal dawn returned,
 Life coming with a virginal sharp strength,
 Renewed as from the streams of Paradise.
 Nearer it drew now to him and he saw
 Out of the widening glory move a face
 Of dawn, a body fresh from mystery,
 Enveloped with a prophecy of light
 More rich than perfect splendours. It was she,
 The golden virgin, Usha, mother of life,
 yet virgin.”

There is the gracious *Ahana*, a long poem in quantitative hexameters which takes us to the Vedic deity again, but now as ‘*Ahas*’, the brilliant white light that covers earth as Usha withdraws her colours. This withdrawal of Usha is portrayed in sublime accents in the opening canto of Savitri. Aptly titled ‘The Symbol Dawn’, the canto takes us through the entire span of the coming of Ushas, inspiring the mortals to take up their tasks for the day and withdrawing quickly, almost imperceptibly, leaving the field to Ahas.

“Here too the vision and prophetic gleam
 Lit into miracles common meaningless shapes;
 Then the divine afflatus, spent, withdrew,
 Unwanted, fading from the mortal's range.
 A sacred yearning lingered in its trace,
 The worship of a Presence and a Power
 Too perfect to be held by death-bound hearts,
 The prescience of a marvellous birth to come.
 Only a little the god-light can stay:
 Spiritual beauty illumining human sight
 Lines with its passion and mystery Matter's mask
 And squanders eternity on a beat of Time.”

Thus the great teacher held our hand and showed us the daily glory of a physical dawn and also the spiritual dawn that can come and would also surely stay with us during our lifetime. Reading him, we could build a bridge to walk back in time to the Vedic times when this same Usha was hailed by the Rishi: *ṛtasya budhna usasaam isanyan*:

“Putting forth his impulsions in the foundation of the Truth, in the foundation of the Dawns, their Lord enters the Vastness of the firmaments. Vast the wisdom of Varuna, of Mitra, as in a happy brightness, orders multitudinously the Light.”

Saraswati in the Vedas was another gift of Sri Aurobindo to the growing mind engaged in studies. Sri Aurobindo finds that “the symbolism of the Veda betrays itself with the greatest clearness in the figure of the goddess Saraswati.” She is a river who had once streamed through ancient India. She is a deity who “flows on” like knowledge. She is the inspiration that brings out the truth in us even as the waters of the river bring out the riches in earth as greenery. The Veda says:

“Sarasvati, mighty ocean,
 She rouses up with her light
 And brightens all intellects.”

Like the flowing river Saraswati, the rishis of old evoked the forceful flow of inspiration. Such meditation upon the goddess who is described as ‘*chodayitri sunrutaanaam*’ helped to rouse the noble-minded. Sage Vasishta speaks of Saraswati as firm like an iron fort though she is moving fast with waters that bear everything. When true inspiration takes hold of the visionary, it gives the ability to draw all the other activities of the creator into its fold and elevate them to achieve sublime results.

The Vedas have other names also to this Saraswati power. They explain the various planes from which Saraswati works: Vak, Bharati, Ila, Mahi. Medhatithi Kanva prays for the coming of these goddesses to bless his sacrifice. They should come and occupy the (*darbha*) seat, these goddesses (Ila, Mahi, Saraswati) who are *mayobhavah*, deities who give bliss. Sri Aurobindo’s explanation:

“The epithet means, I think, they in whom there is no false movement with its evil consequences, *duritam*, no stumbling into pitfalls of sin and error.”

Though the Vedas do give a variety of significances for Saraswati, in the later days we see her exclusively associated with knowledge as Vak. There is even an autobiographical hymn by Vak, generally known as the *Devi Suktam*. During the Puranic times there was plenty of recordation about Saraswati as the river. The *Salya Parva* of the *Mahabharata* brings to us Balarama who stands apart from the Kurukshetra war and goes on a pilgrimage towards the Saraswati river where he spends quite some time performing rituals and charities. The banks of the river were rich with holy places and sacred ghats. Thus, beginning with Sri Aurobindo’s *On the Veda*, I travelled in many worlds guided by him in several *bhasha* literatures. Even English literature was no exception.

Apart from his analysis of the Vedic hymns on Saraswati, Sri Aurobindo connects the idea as the Word with poetic creation when writing about modern English poetry in his book, *The Future Poetry*. He finds the Elizabethan period as directly inspired by *Vagdevi* as also latter-day poets like A.E. and W.B. Yeats.

However, the Saraswati power is not exclusive to poetry. The Mahasaraswati ideal for Sri Aurobindo is a total view, a complete vision of the Supreme Mother in action everywhere and in all things, the inspirer as well as the deliverer, the mother who grants immortality to her votaries and is constantly on guard for his sake. He sees her as “the Mother’s power of Work and her spirit of perfection and order.” If with intense sincerity we invoke her to be always with us, where then is any need for fear, depression and hopelessness even in the worst of scenarios? So we have the sterling pronouncement of Sri Aurobindo, a guardian amulet in all our endeavours on earth for Mahasaraswati is with us always. Such is the promise:

“A mother to our wants, a friend in our difficulties, a persistent and tranquil counsellor and mentor, chasing away with her radiant smile the clouds of gloom and fretfulness and depression, reminding always of the ever-present help, pointing to the eternal sunshine, she is firm, quiet and persevering in the deep and continuous urge that drives us towards the integrality of the higher nature. All the work of the other Powers leans on her for its completeness; for she assures the material foundation, elaborates the stuff of detail and erects and rivets the armour of the structure.”

1. Rsikas of the Rgveda (2013), p.17
2. Ibid., p. 2
3. B.N.K. Sharma, Sri Madhva’s Teachings in his own Words (1961), p. 161

Sri Aurobindo as a World Philosopher

Indra Sen

As the world tends to become a self-conscious unity and evolves a life of its own in commerce, science, literature, and social relations, the question of a world philosophy becomes more and more insistent and urgent. But what do we really mean by world philosophy? Has philosophy not always been universal? Undoubtedly, *it* has. The subject-matter of physics is universal, and so are its laws. In the same manner, philosophers in Greece or India or China or modern Europe or America have reflected on the same life and existence, and their answers as representations of truth on the matter must have a universal validity. This is also borne out by the experience of students of one country seeking to understand the philosophy of another country or of one cultural epoch trying to understand that of another cultural epoch. Indian students and scholars are able to appreciate and benefit from the study of Greek philosophers, and Western students are able to appreciate and benefit from the thought of India and China.

And yet, the philosophies of Greece, India, China, and the modern West have strong distinctive characteristics. They all, no doubt, deal with the same life and existence, but life and existence are complex, vast, and variable, and, therefore, the philosophies also have been different and divergent. The life-experience of a nation or people naturally becomes limited and qualified by its external situation, its temperament, the process of its historical growth, and the quality of its great personalities. In consequence, the exact subject-matter of philosophy in life-experience becomes a distinctive fact. Further, even when the experiences are similar, the approaches can be different. Thus, there is clearly a sense in which the philosophies of these different countries must be considered national, or as belonging to one cultural field or territorial area. However, *it* is possible to distinguish between problems of essential existence and those of cultural life as such. It is also possible to conceive that in regard to

problems of essential existence a philosopher might pursue his research in great independence of the predilections of character and intellect created in him by his cultural upbringing. Here, in contemplation, we have the rational nature and the spiritual faculty of man, and so far as these are able to function in purity the philosophical affirmations must evidently possess the highest universality and impersonality. But in regard to these, too, the form of expression will tend to be governed by national usage, and, in consequence, a great deal of the universal in the philosophies of all countries will not be easily recognised as such.

Now, when the world tends to become a self-conscious unity, national character and experience grow wider everywhere, and the philosopher can easily afford to have the world-experience as the subject of his philosophising. In a way, this is being increasingly forced upon him. The problems, particularly those of the cultural life, are so interconnected internationally that they can best be attacked when they are consciously faced as problems of humanity. Further, because of growing co-operation and unification in the manifold relations of life, even culturally the philosopher grows up, more or less, as a participant in the life and culture of the world. World philosophy is, therefore, an inevitable development of the future, and the cultural stage is being quickly built up for *it*. However, if the stage we build does not adequately represent the distinctive cultural gains of different countries, world philosophy, too, will lack in richness and variety of content. We will then have a world philosophy which will reflect broadly only one quality of experience. World philosophy should not mean the suppression of the individual characteristic standpoints of cultures and persons, but our pursuit of them should be guided by an explicit awareness of the full extent and variety of human experience and the essential unity of human nature and ultimate reality. This is becoming increasingly true today and, therefore, philosophy, too, tends naturally to become universal in a sense *it* has not known before.

Philosophy has a special difficulty, however, in acquiring this character. Science deals with physical phenomena, and its judgments admit of easier verification. In other words, the experience which science deals with is relatively simple and can be externally checked. This facilitates the achievement of universality in this area. Besides, practical utility is an added help to its pursuit and verification. Thus, science tends to be universal as a matter of course. Its subject-matter as well as its methods, which are determined by its subject-matter, command an easier agreement.

But the case is different with philosophy. Its subject-matter is the entire human experience, whose full extent and depth cannot be stated with definiteness and exactness. The experience of external physical phenomena, with which

science is concerned, the experience of the rational process, the moral experience, the aesthetic experience, and the religious and spiritual experience are some of the forms and qualities of experience known and recognised by man. Among some of these there are further grades and differences. Under the spiritual, for example, Sri Aurobindo identifies many distinct experiences of which he mentions the Supramental as of special philosophical significance, since, in the light of *it*, some of the most difficult and insoluble problems of philosophy appear simple and intelligible. If human experience as a whole possesses a unity, as it must, then it should be possible to correlate and integrate all of its different forms, qualities, and grades. And, if such a conspectus were evolved, world philosophy would discover its first premise and then tend to become a dynamic pursuit of the human spirit. Today we have many philosophies, even within the same country and cultural life, and we cannot easily relate them to each other and place them accurately in life, since we have no conception of the integral experience of man. If we had such an experience, the scientific, moral, aesthetic, religious, and spiritual experiences of all grades could be seen in that totality and therefore understood. That would discourage the development of exclusive philosophies, which tend to become unrelatable.

So far we have been considering primarily the concept of world philosophy as such, its inevitable growth in the present circumstances of humanity, and the concept of the integral experience of man as its first premise. However, world philosophy, if it is to make a proper start and become a trend and a living tradition, must, at the very first instance, be born in the mind and soul of a particular philosopher. This has already happened — world philosophy has taken a start and is fast becoming a trend — and at least one philosopher in whose mind and soul it has taken birth and who has given it a start is Sri Aurobindo.

In order to recognise Sri Aurobindo as one who has formulated a world philosophy, we must look into his personality as well as consider his philosophy. His personality combined in itself the influences of the East and the West in a rich and abundant manner. He had his education from boyhood in England. He studied Latin and Greek, immersed himself deeply in the classics, and sought to understand and appreciate modern European life and culture. He also had a strong instinct for spiritual life and its possibilities. Thus, in the make-up of his personality the East and the West entered into an intimate combination. Further, in the last decade of the nineteenth century he foresaw that great changes were going to come upon humanity, and he personally felt called to prepare himself for them. The essential change, he foresaw, was that of a radical revaluation of values, a deep crisis of our civilisation and the birth of a new one, the crash of materialism, and the dawn of the intrinsic values of the spirit. The last few decades have already witnessed

the repudiation of nineteenth-century materialism and the relative prevalence of dynamic energism as explanation of nature and history. There has also been a steady growth of the psychological view in life and literature. But Sri Aurobindo had seen the necessity of the birth of the spiritual standpoint out of the crises precipitated by the dominance of materialism. However, the spiritual standpoint of his conception was not exclusive of life and the world but inclusive. The spiritual was for him, in fact, a term of evolutionary progression to appear necessarily in succession to the mental, — which was the present general level of human living. To explore and realise the spiritual, therefore, became to him the call of humanity, and the one proper solution of the ills that attend its civilisation. In time, this call became overwhelming and irresistible, and he withdrew from active life and gave himself up entirely to exploring the profundities of his soul. This exploration yielded a unique experience, the experience of all-oneness, rich and varied integrality, of the many-in-one, of the Supra-mental consciousness. And this experience, by virtue of its supreme vividness and reality, became his most original motive of life, and has shown in his hands a great power in reconciling and integrating different kinds of human experiences. An integral experience, an integral personality, and integral reality were the three great fruits of this unique experience, and when, after his prolonged inner exploration and growth, they had been achieved in full maturity, he proceeded to realise them in wider life through his practical spiritual work. His thought was built upon the same basic concepts, and it shows that, through the comprehensive scheme of these ideas, different views, divergent and contradictory, can be reconciled and appreciated as complementary.¹

Among the three basic concepts mentioned above, that of integral personality is methodologically the first. On *it* depends that of integral experience, and on the latter depends the knowledge of integral reality. Sri Aurobindo sought to know the integral personality and, having known *it* to his best satisfaction, he gave an elaborate map of its main parts. These are the body, life, mind, and soul. Each has a characteristic plane of experience, carrying with it its own system of values. Alternatively, he talks of the planes of the conscious, the subconscious, and the superconscious. The conscious is the plane of normal experience, involving the activity of rational thought and a self set against a not-self. The subconscious is chiefly the realm of uncoordinated egoistic impulses. The superconscious is marked by an essential wholeness. Sri Aurobindo distinguishes many successive levels in it and assigns to them progressive degrees of integration, the Supermind being the one possessing perfect integrality.

Body, life, mind, and soul (or spirit) are the four main parts of human personality; the conscious, the subconscious, and the superconscious are the three

main dimensions of its conscious existence. The individual, the universal, and the transcendental are the three philosophical terms applicable to human personality, as well as the total reality, which Sri Aurobindo employs to explain these dimensions. Human personality has an individual part, a universal part, and a transcendental part. The conscious in personality is the normal “ego” individuality. The subliminal in man is an additional dimension through which the individual participates in the universal and which gives him a direct experience of it. The superconscious is the transcendental in him.²

Now, if we had a clear appreciation of the distinctive experiences of these different parts and planes of human personality and then tried to consider the different philosophies of nations and individuals, we could arrive at some enlightening clarities. For example, the modern philosophy of Europe is essentially a “thinking consideration of things.” It relies on reason for a view of reality. Evidently, the nature of the rational process, its relation to language, and the possibility of an unconscious action of instinct on reason will qualify reality as known through it. Further, *it* will be a representative knowledge of reality, not direct experience of it. Such philosophy will be an “adventure of ideas.”

If we are able to recognise that the spirit has a unique instrumentation of knowledge and also admit that philosophy essentially seeks a knowledge of reality or whole existence, then we will find it relatively easy to admit, and differentiate between, philosophies that are mental and rational, on the one hand, and, on the other, those that are primarily based on spiritual experiences of reality. Indian philosophies, for the most part, have a foundational spiritual experience. Reason plays a secondary role in substantiating this spiritual experience, through evidence, argument, and proper exposition. The spiritual experience of *nirvana*, of the absolute cessation of the flux of mental process, is foundational to Buddhist philosophy. The vast body of this thought is the elaboration of reason intended to satisfy and convince the common mind of man of the truth and applications of nirvanic experience. Similarly, the experience of the sole and exclusive reality of *Brahman* is the central truth of Sankara’s Advaitism, and the vast structure of thought in this system is the work of logical reason.

If we identify ourselves too exclusively with the standpoint of modern Western philosophy, we will naturally feel inclined to regard Indian philosophy almost as no philosophy. We will find in it a combination of philosophy and religion, which will militate against the Western idea of the theoretical discipline of philosophy. But the spiritual perception in its nature involves a greater unity between knowledge and will; in it, what is seen as true is also felt as the object of pursuit. Hence, philosophies based upon such perceptions will not conform to

the standards of a philosophy which relies upon mental consideration of things.

This is a great clarity, perhaps, in the way of understanding and reconciling two major types of philosophies, philosophies that are essentially mental and those that rest upon spiritual perceptions. By following the same standard of considering philosophies with reference to the planes of experience involved, we can also discover reconciliations among different mental philosophies and spiritual philosophies themselves. Now, the mental philosophies are all subject to the limitations of the nature of the rational process, the conditions of verbal expression, and the representative character of ideas. The influence of the “irrational” upon reason is a further factor that can play a part in these philosophies. A possible intrusion, conscious or unconscious, of the spiritual influence must also be admitted. Creativity in the field of these philosophies is governed and limited by these factors, and if we can appreciate them and their working we will not be surprised that these philosophies have been creative only in a limited manner. This framework of thought can make possible a reconciliation and mutual understanding of the different mental philosophies, however divergent and different they may be.

The different spiritual philosophies, it has usually been found, are more difficult to reconcile. But Sri Aurobindo in his experience of integral personality has found that the spirit has a greater variety and richness than the mind. Just as the mind can have many possible ways of ideationally considering an object — and these ways can be as many as the combinations of ideas permitted by the situation — so the human spirit can have an indefinite number of perceptions of reality, which is absolute in nature. These perceptions represent different truths of the absolute reality and in a conception of integral reality assume an understandable relation to one another.

Thus mental and spiritual philosophies acquire a *rapprochement* and understanding between themselves as also among the many variant forms of either of them. A precise evaluation of them in terms of the planes of personality and experience involved is a task for the future. But Sri Aurobindo has taken this approach and demonstrated its value in a substantial degree and has thereby revealed the possibility of an understanding and appreciation among all the different adventures and pursuits of philosophy and of their co-operation in a comprehensive adventure of integral philosophy.³

The attempt to reconcile philosophies by relating them to the planes of experience and the parts of personality that they seem to be connected with is sure to appear as a subjectivist approach, undermining the objectivity of knowledge that philosophy seeks and affirms. But a critical examination of the matter will show that our experience implies and refers to different orders of objectivity.

Sense-experience, rational consideration, and spiritual experience all possess objectivity and necessity of their own, so that a reference to subjective planes of experience is itself an evidence of the correlative objectivity that they carry. Hence, this approach does not undermine the objectivity of philosophy, but, in fact, offers a convenient methodology for the determination of that objectivity.

Religion presents an even more difficult field for reconciliation, since each positive form claims absoluteness for its perception of the truth. The philosophy of religion has now established that each religion consists of two parts, one the institutional and ceremonial and the other the experiential. The former is instrumental to the latter. Thus the experiential in a religion is its true essence. Now, Sri Aurobindo points out that each religion normally represents one quality of contact with and experience of God, truth, or reality, and that this has a unique place in the integral experience. If religion is, then, conceived as a pursuit of the integral experience of the divine, each denominational form of it would become a contributory factor.⁴

A similar reconciliation of the different cultures of man is also possible. Each culture is a characteristic expression of the total life of a people and represents a pattern of the cultivation of personality. The Greeks, for example, sought a cultivation of life under the guidance of the ideals of truth, beauty, and goodness. They represented a high standard of mental culture. Modern Europe has, on the other hand, primarily sought an organisation of life, of its wants and their satisfactions, through science and technology. This has resulted in the improvement of the general standard of living. Ancient Indian culture made spirit its chief interest and shaped itself primarily on that basis. Evidently, these three great cultures of the world have sought a distinct part of human personality and developed it specially: the Greeks the mind, modern Europe the body and life, and ancient India the spirit. In a conception of integral culture of man they all have a unique contribution to make, and those who seek the most perfect expression of cultural life will heartily cherish them all. Similarly, it can be shown that each culture that man has evolved has had some distinctive excellence which must constitute a contribution to the total culture of man.

Thus, Sri Aurobindo, by virtue of his education, endowment, and interest, was well qualified to face the world situation in these times and to present a world philosophy. We have also shown how through his discovery of the quality of integral experience, called by him the Supermind, he was led on to his conception of integral personality, and how this can give a method of reconciliation and understanding among the philosophies, religions, and cultures of the world.

But a world philosophy must not merely reconcile. In dynamic existence it must also provide conditions for a continued growth and enrichment. If world

philosophy is to mean uniformity in thought and perception, it will impoverish creativity. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, fortunately, through the same concepts of integral experience, integral personality, and integral reality, provides for and encourages distinctive and unique seekings and developments. Unity involves variety of content, and in a creative existence it must be an evolving fact, that is to say, it must progressively enrich itself. Thus, if we are aware of the true character of reality and of the integral scope of personality and experience, philosophy and culture can always be creative. It is only when we lose that awareness or voluntarily subject ourselves to some mechanical limitations that they become uncreative.

We have referred to ancient India, ancient China, ancient Greece, and modern Europe as the great homes of philosophical creations. Each one of them has contributed a unique quality which is a permanent asset for world philosophy. But each of them has also its own limitations. If considered in relation to the integral thought of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, they seem to acquire the sense of a part rightly seen in relation to the whole and of a functioning and a growing part in a living whole. One is able to see what is true in each as also what its future trends must be if it is to fulfil itself.

If we now take Indian philosophy first, we can say that after Sankara, Ramanuja, Vallabha, and Madhva, the greatest *Acaryas* of Vedantic philosophy, Sri Aurobindo once again presents an original integral system of Vedanta. Indian philosophy, after several centuries of more or less uncreative existence, received rejuvenation at his hands. And the new system boldly confronts the whole modern world and its complex and vast experience, and offers an explanation of it all. The world is heartily accepted by *it*, as the field of the evolving manifestation of *Brahman*. Science and technology, too, are accepted as the means of the organisation of external life, but they are only means. The end is the unfoldment of the spirit, and the spirit here is a term of evolution, which is to follow mind, as the mind had in its turn followed life and matter, as a general quality of human existence. The individual, too, is no longer a complete integer, and his exclusive salvation is no longer the goal. The universal is an essential aspect of the individual and, if the race does not progress, the individual remains essentially imperfect. Perfection of the race is the goal, and individual liberation is a means in the process. The social life of man thus receives its much-needed philosophical justification. Renunciation, *karma*, and rebirth all undergo an interesting modification. Indian philosophy thus becomes fresh and creative, confident of itself *vis-à-vis* the present-day world and entirely hopeful of a future greater than the past. It also becomes conscious of its world context. It recognises the problems that confront the world as a whole. It is appreciative of other ap-

proaches to these problems, but, with confidence in its own characteristic approach, it seeks to offer its unique solutions of them.

Western philosophy, in the light of the integral thought of Sri Aurobindo, appears in a new form. Its dominant notes of rationalism and empiricism acquire a fresh justification and extension of meaning. Mysticism in the East and the West has usually decried reason. But Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, while being spiritualist, upholds reason.⁵ It regards reason, for the present evolutionary stage of man, as an indispensable instrument of organisation and action. Without it we cannot organise our external situation nor act in it in an orderly manner. Reason arranges and organises our ideas and gives them a systematic form, and that means effective communication, understanding, and action. But it works upon the data of superficial qualities of things supplied to it by the senses and proceeds laboriously piecemeal trying to construct inferential knowledge of facts beyond the superficial qualities. It has no direct access to the essences or true nature of things.

This is clearly a justification of reason as well as a demonstration of its limitation and an indication of other instruments of knowledge which would make *rapprochement* of Western rationalist philosophy with other philosophies easier and also show to it a possible line for its own further development.

The empiricism of Western philosophy receives, surprisingly enough, even a stronger support from Sri Aurobindo. His thought is fundamentally determined by the yogic approach. He says, in a particular context, "Our way of knowing must be appropriate to that which is to be known."⁶ That means that our senses and reason are adapted to the knowledge of the external world of finite things. But if we wish to know the inner truths of infinite existence then obviously other instruments of knowledge are called for, and these must be developed and cultivated. Direct experience is the only satisfactory way of knowledge, but this experience is not limited to the objects of the senses. There are faculties of knowledge in man to which ultimate realities, too, can be objects of direct experience. The empirical habit of mind of the West and science which has established *it* thus become a great asset, since in their extension lies the true solution of the problems of existence.

In a more positive way, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy would suggest to Western philosophy the need for the recognition of the fact of the spirit besides that of mind and a full utilisation of it in considering personality and existence. It would thus seek to give to Western philosophy *its* own orientation of wider experience, and this can mean to Western philosophy the prospect of continuous growth and increasing contribution of its own unique quality to world philosophy.

Chinese philosophy has been characteristically marked by a social or sociological approach to problems of life and existence. “Man in society” is the fact that interested the Chinese mind most, and this has constituted an abiding basis of its thought and reflection. “Man in society” is a great and obvious truth of life, and this must stand as a permanent contribution of Chinese thought to world philosophy. Now, this truth receives an interesting philosophical support in Sri Aurobindo’s system. The particular is an individuation and instrumentation of the universal. It lives in and through the universal.⁷ Therefore, the individual man can never cut himself off from society. He is determined by his race and society, evolutionally and culturally, and he owes a duty to them, because it is through him that they grow and advance in their nature and character.⁸ But Sri Aurobindo would add that growth means transcendence, achievement of what is beyond and above the actual. Therefore, the individual and the universal involve also the transcendental. This is an interesting elucidation and elaboration of the essential standpoint of Chinese thought. But the full impact of the integral thought of Sri Aurobindo would invite and urge Chinese philosophy to pursue to the farthest limit these three terms in their implications and elaborations. That would open up to it a foundation of ultimate reality which could offer to Chinese thought an indefinite field of creation in harmony with its own line and approach.

We have been concerned in this paper with the issue of world philosophy, and we have affirmed that as the world tends to become one a world philosophy is sure to come into existence. But if it is not to be merely an eclectic system of different philosophies, it must have an essential perception and unity of its own. This perception and unity, we have felt persuaded to affirm, must be of integral personality and integral experience, and these results would, therefore, constitute the essential prerequisites of world philosophy.

Just now world philosophy is emerging on our mental horizon as a problem, and we inquire into its conditions and possibilities. We hardly look for a representative of it, since we feel that it is too soon to expect one. But we see in Sri Aurobindo a real creator of world philosophy. His education and natural endowment seem to have given him wide appreciation of different philosophies and ways and views of life and existence. Then his deep interest in integrality, whether in regard to personality or experience or reality, leading to the discovery of the true quality of integral experience, called by him the Supermind, enabled him to create such a broad-based philosophy as presents the model of a world philosophy. This philosophy not only reconciles and explains different continental and racial philosophies, but gives them the perspective of a unity and affords to each assured room for richer growth along its own characteristic

line. A world philosophy must first supply a sense of the whole which gives to each part a better feeling of its due place, as also wider room for future existence. Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy does that for all philosophies. It seems, therefore, to be a fortunate inauguration of the era of world philosophy.

References

- (a) “To see things steadily and see them whole is not possible to the mind; but it is the very nature of the transcendent Supermind.” *The Life Divine* (New York: The Greystone Press, American Edition, 1949), p.126.

(b) Supermind “is in its foundation a unitarian and integralising and harmonic consciousness” *Ibid.*, p.861.

Regarding integral personality:

(a) “We are not only what we know of ourselves but an immense more which we do not know; our momentary personality is only a bubble on the ocean of our existence.” *Ibid.*, p.496.

(b) “If our self-knowledge is thus made complete in all its essentials, our practical ignorance which in its extreme figures itself as wrong-doing, suffering, falsehood, error and is the cause of all life’s confusions and discords, will yield its place to the right will of self-knowledge and its false or imperfect values recede before the divine values of the true Consciousness-Force and Ananda.” *Ibid.*, p.660.

Regarding integral reality:

(a) “. . . all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony. They arise from the perception of an unsolved discord and the instinct of an undiscovered agreement or unity.” *Ibid.*, p.4.

(b) “An integral knowledge presupposes an integral Reality . . .” *Ibid.*, p. 566.
- (a) For a detailed account of integral personality, see *ibid.*, chap. XI (Book II), pp.496-502. (b) “The nodus of Life is the relation between three general forms of consciousness, the individual, the universal and the transcendent or supracosmic.” *Ibid.*, p.37.
- “A diversity in oneness is the law of the manifestation; the supramental unification and integration must harmonise these diversities, but to abolish them is not the intention of the Spirit in Nature.” *Ibid.*, p.790.
- “A unity behind diversity and discord is the secret of the variety of human religions and philosophies; for they all get at some image or some side clue, touch some portion of the one Truth or envisage some one of its myriad aspects.” *Ibid.*, pp.623-24.
- “Our theory of the integral knowledge admits Mind as a creative principle, a power of the Being, and assigns it its place in the manifestation . . .” *Ibid.*, p.592.

6. "Our way of knowing must be appropriate to that which is to be known." Ibid., p.293.
7. "... the finite is a circumstance and not a contradiction of the infinite; the individual is a self-expression of the universal and the transcendent, — it is not a contradiction or something quite other than it, it is the universal concentrated and selective, it is one with the Transcendent in its essence of being and its essence of nature." Ibid., p. 425.
8. "... the liberated soul extends its perception of unity horizontally as well as vertically. Its unity with the transcendent One is incomplete without its unity with the cosmic Many." Ibid., p.40.

(Reproduced with thanks and acknowledgement from *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 7, No. 3/4 (Oct., 1957 - Jan., 1958), pp. 131-141. Published by: University of Hawai'i Press and also with the consent of Aster Patel, daughter of the late Indrasen)

Glimpses of the Mother's Supramental Manifestation

Larry Seidlitz

This essay is about the latter part of the Mother's life, and in particular about the latter stages of her sadhana as recorded in the 13 volume work, *Mother's Agenda*. The Agenda primarily consists of a series transcribed conversations of the Mother with a disciple, Satprem, that span the years 1956 to 1973, the year of the Mother's passing. It also includes some correspondence between the two as well as some statements by the Mother dating back to 1951. The experiences recorded in the *Agenda* pertain to a great extent to the supramental transformation of the body, or we could say, a divinisation of the body. Whereas in principle the body is already divine, because the Divine is all that is, physical matter as it is presently is not consciously divine, and because it is not fully conscious, it is open to all kinds of limitation and falsehood. In particular, the body is subject to pain, illness, and death. According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, in order to be truly divinised it must be transformed by the supramental consciousness, which is a particularly high level of divine consciousness that carries the full, divine power. For this transformation to occur, one must first inwardly ascend in the consciousness to this supramental level, and then it must be brought down first into the mind and life energies and then into the physical body itself. By the time these conversations were recorded, the Mother's mind and vital had been largely supramentalised, though a complete supramentalisation of these also requires a supramentalisation of the body. The conversations in the *Agenda* that I will highlight pertain to the action of the supramental consciousness in the body.

Spiritual significance: Beginning of the supramental realisation.

It should be emphasised that the processes to be discussed were primarily the result of a working of a divine consciousness and force on the body, and not

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

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

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

“The fundamental nature of this supermind is that all its knowledge is originally a knowledge by identity and oneness... The Spirit is one everywhere and it knows all things as itself and in itself, so sees them always and therefore knows them intimately, completely, in their reality as well as their appearance, in their truth, their law, the entire spirit and sense and figure of their nature and their workings.” (SABCL, vol.21, p.757).

He also said that the supermind is

“not only a direct truth-consciousness, but an illumined, direct and spontaneous truth-will. There is not and cannot be in the will of the self-knowing spirit any contradiction, division or difference between its will and its knowledge. The spiritual will is the Tapas or enlightened force of the conscious being of the spirit effecting infallibly what is there within it...” (Ibid, p.761) “The supramental will and action are therefore a will and action of the spontaneous self-fulfilling truth of the spirit, the right and at the highest the infallible movement of a direct and total knowledge.” (Ibid, p.763)

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

“This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you. I had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine. As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that “the time has come,” and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces. Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow.” (*Mother's Agenda*, Vol. 1, p.69)

When the Mother said that this consciousness manifested in the earth consciousness on February 29th 1956, she meant that this Truth-consciousness and Force began to act here on a terrestrial scale, seeking and preparing instruments for its manifestation in the evolutionary formula. It began its work to prepare the field and to prepare the new species that would manifest this consciousness and replace humanity as the leader of the earth evolution.

Moreover, human beings could cooperate with this new Light and Force in the manifestation of its higher possibilities in the human formula, and thereby create a transitional being between ordinary mental humanity and the full supramental species.

Just 20 days after the supramental manifestation, on March 19th, 1956, the Mother wrote a brief statement about a personal experience she had (a straightening of her bent vertebrae) which she attributed to the influence of this descent of the supramental consciousness into her body. At the top of that written statement, she put the heading, “Agenda of the Supramental Action on Earth,” thus giving the name that eventually became the 13 volume *Mother's Agenda*.

Although Satprem used the title *Mother's Agenda* on the cover, on the first page inside the cover the full title is given. In October 17 of 1957, she commented

more at length on these effects in her body. She said,

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

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

“It is not something that comes from a higher Will, not a higher consciousness that imposes itself upon the body: it is the body itself awakening in its cells, a freedom of the cells themselves, an absolutely new vibration that sets disorders right.... this is a gradual process, but ...little by little this new consciousness will grow, gain ground and victoriously resist the old forces of destruction and annihilation, and this Fatality we believed to be so inexorable.” (Ibid)

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

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

She said,

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

She then goes on to relate the experience in detail, which involved an immense ship that had just arrived at the shore of the supramental world. On this ship

were people whom she knew, whose forms were in various stages of transformation. Those whose substance had been sufficiently supramentalised were disembarking, and there were other supramental beings on shore waiting to receive them. The Mother herself, who had a supramental substance, and a bright sun for a head, was directing the whole operation.

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

On October 6, 1959, she said,

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

She indicated that shortly before August 15th, she had had an experience that exemplified this. First she had felt the supramental light entering directly into her body without passing through the inner beings. It entered through the feet and rose towards the head, and as it rose a fever also rose because the body was unaccustomed to the intensity. As it neared the head she thought she would burst and that the experience would have to be stopped, but she called down calm and peace and widened the body consciousness so it could contain the supramental light. Suddenly there was a second of fainting, and then, she said,

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

“You see, it’s not as if this world of Truth had to be created from nothing: it is fully ready, it is there, like a lining of our own present world. Everything is there, EVERYTHING is there. Sri Aurobindo gave me two days of this — total bliss. But all the same, by the end of the second day I realised that I could not continue to remain there, for the work was not advancing. The work must be done in the body; the realisation must be attained here in this physical world, for otherwise it is not complete. So I withdrew from that world and set to work here again. And yet, it would take little, very little, to pass from this world to the other, or for the other to become the real world. A little click would be enough, or rather a little reversal in the inner attitude.” (Ibid)

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

“It’s a sort of spinelessness ... which accepts a general, impersonal law: On the other side, there is ... the sense of the true attitude, which in the cells is expressed with great simplicity: ‘There is the Lord, who is the all-powerful Master.... It depends entirely on Him.’ ... for the cells it’s not sentences ... that expresses itself by repeating the mantra: ... ‘May Your Will be done,’ ... and a tranquillity — a luminous tranquillity.” And she wondered, “What I don’t know yet, what’s not very clear, is... what will be the fate of this residue? To people’s ordinary thought, it’s what they call ‘death,’ that is to say, the rejection of the cells that weren’t able to enter this plastic state of consciousness. But the way the work is being done, there is no categorical division [into groups of conscious or unconscious cells in Mother’s body]: there are imperceptible (almost) states of variations between the different parts of the being.” (Ibid, June 15, 1968)

She seems to mean that some cells lag behind, have difficulty taking the proper attitude, so it takes longer.

The next year she received from within an answer to her dilemma. She reframed the question this way:

“All this work of the transformation of the cells, of consciousness in the

cells, with the ordinary way [of dying], won’t it be wasted since the body is going to disintegrate?” And then she said, “Then there came in a very precise, almost concrete done manner: ‘there is a way, which is, before dying, to prepare within oneself a body with all the transformed, illumined, conscious cells, to collect them together and form a body with the maximum number of conscious cells; then, when the work is over, the full consciousness enters it and the other body can dissolve, it no longer matters.’” (Ibid, March 19, 1969)

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

“I was walking around naked, but DELIBERATELY naked from here to there (gesture from the top of the chest to the thighs); here (above), there may have been clothes. I was DELIBERATELY showing myself to certain people.... Ah, and that part I was showing was sexless, that is to say, neither man nor woman: there was nothing; and its colour was ... a little like Auroville’s colour [orange], like that, but vibrant, that is, as if ... not luminous, but with a sort of luminosity.” In the experience, someone was with her whom she called “the physical Mother,” and in another place she called “Nature.” Nature was wearing a dress of the same orange colour, and said, “See, I’ve put on your dress, I’ve put it on to tell you that it’s accepted — I’ve put on your dress.” Mother explained, “It means that material Nature has adopted the new creation.” (Ibid, May 9, 1970)

On July 1, 1970 Mother had another experience in which she discovered another important aspect of the transformation, that “It is the psychic being that is to become the supramental being.” (Ibid, July 1, 1970) She had this experience when a disciple had come to her and was kneeling in front of her. And she saw this disciple’s psychic being towering above her, about eight inches taller. And it was a sexless being: neither man nor woman, that had features of both combined. It exceeded her on every side by about eight inches. And its colour was, if it became very material, would be Auroville’s colour.

“It was softer, as if behind a veil, it wasn’t absolutely precise, but it was this colour.” ... And she said, “I found it very interesting, because that being seemed to tell me, ‘You’re wondering what the supramental being will be — here it is! Here it is, this is it.’” (Ibid)

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

“I don’t know whether it’s the supramental body or (what shall I say?) a transitional body, but I had a completely new body, in the sense that it was

sexless: it was neither woman nor man. It was very white. But that could be because I have white skin, I don't know. It was very slender. (gesture) Really lovely, a truly harmonious form." And two days later she said, "Yes, I WAS like that. It was me; I didn't look at myself in a mirror, I saw myself like this (Mother bends her head to look at her body), I was .. I just was like that." ... Satprem asked her, "But this form is in the subtle physical, isn't it?" She answered, "It must be already like that in the subtle physical." (Ibid, March 24/25, 1972)

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

"The whole subconscious is .. (gesture of something rising up en masse). And then ... it's a certitude — a certitude in the perception — that Bliss is there ... right there, WAITING FOR US, but a whole world of contradictions that have been repressed in the subconscious keeps rising up from the subconscious to prevent us from feeling it. So ... you could say it's a battlefield, but in a perfect calm. It's impossible to describe. When I remain still and enter that Consciousness, time flies with fantastic speed, in a kind of ... luminous calm. But the slightest thing that pulls me out of it seems to pull me into hell. Exactly. The discomfort is so great one feels one couldn't last a minute or a few minutes like that. So one ... one calls the Divine ... You feel like curling up in the Divine. And then it goes well." (Ibid, Nov.4, 1972)

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

Another important recurring theme was that the supramental world, the supramental truth was here, already established, and the work was really in

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

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

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

The Mother's primary mission was to bring down the supramental consciousness on earth, to establish it as a new principle in the evolving terrestrial consciousness. This she did, with Sri Aurobindo's help, in 1956. For the next 17

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

(Reproduced with thanks and acknowledgement from *New Race*, vol / xii – iv, Nov. 2011)

The Greatness of the Rishi Tradition of India

Sampadananda Mishra

॥ इदं नमः ऋषिभ्यः पूर्वजैभ्यः पूर्वेभ्यः पथिकृद्भ्यः ॥
||idam namaḥ ṛṣibhyaḥ pūrvajebhyaḥ purvebhyaḥ pathikṛdbhyaḥ ||
(*Rigveda*, 10.14.15)

“We offer our obeisance to the Rishis, born of old, the ancients, the path-makers.”

Introduction

India, indeed, is the land of the Rishis. Therefore, the culture of India is often called as the culture of the Rishis. The tradition of the Rishis in India seems to be perennially flowing, like a stream, to enrich the mind and imagination of her common people. So, in India, the Rishis are revered as supreme personalities. Living a true life was to be learnt from the Rishis.

A Rishi is the one through whom the secret words of the Vedas are revealed,¹ the one who has the inner sight to see the Mantra. Therefore, the Rishis are known as the seers (*ṛṣirdarśanāt*) of the Mantra — *ṛṣayah mantradraṣṭā rah*.² Sri Aurobindo says that a Rishi ,sees or discovers an inner truth and puts it into self-effective language — the Mantra.³ He further elucidates that a Rishi is the seer. He has seen the Mantras (*mantradraṣṭā*). According to Sri Aurobindo, “The Rishi was not the individual composer of the hymns but the seer (*draṣṭā*,) of an eternal truth and an impersonal knowledge.”⁴ He does not merely see, he also hears. He possesses a supernatural faculty of hearing. To his inner audience, the divine word came vibrating out of the Infinite. So he is called *Kavi satyaśruta*, the hearer of Truth. He is the possessor of great spiritual and occult knowledge, the complete inner knowledge. The Rishis, were seers as well as sages, they were men of vision who saw things in their meditation in images, often symbolic images, which might precede an experience and put it in a concrete form. ‘So it was possible for the Rishis, “to see at once the inner

experience and in image its symbolic happenings”.⁵ In the words of Yaskacharya, “the Mantra came to the Rishis who were doing tapas, therefore they became Rishis, in that lies the Rishihood of the Rishis.” *tadenān tapasyamānān brahama svayamabhyānāṣat | tadṛṣayo'bhavan| tadṛṣiṇām ṛṣitvam*⁶ Elsewhere he observes that the purport of the Mantras, “has to be reached by *tapas* alone”,⁷ *tasyāstapasā pāramipsītavyam*. Shaunaka supports Yaskacharya's viewpoint when he says in his *Bṛhaddevata*, “The Mantra is not perceptible to one who is not a Rishi”⁸ *na pratyakṣamanṛṣiṇāmasti mantram*. He further declares, “He knows the gods who knows the *Riks*. The Mantras to be approached through Yoga with self-control and skill, understanding, general knowledge and above all *tapasya*.”⁹

Rishis are the possessors of great spiritual and occult knowledge, the complete inner knowledge. They are men of vision who during their meditation see images and put these in a concrete form. So it is possible for the Rishis to experience at the same time the inner Truth as well as see in image its symbolic happenings.

The Rishis, the seers of the Mantra devoted to a life of Spirit, discover a certain line of development beyond the range of sensory perception by means of their strength of self-discipline and achieve a many-sided inner progress.

The word ‘Rishi’ comes from the root ‘*Rish*’ which in Sanskrit means, ‘to go’, ‘to move’ and ‘to flow’. Thus, a Rishi is the ‘one who flows or moves or is in tune with the rhythmic flow or movement of the universe’. He is one with the movement. He vibrates with the vibration of the movement. He knows the truth of the whole of the movement.

A Rishi is also known as *kavi*, the poet; *satyadṛṣṭā*, the seer of the truth; *satyaśrotā*, the hearer of the truth; *krāntadarśī*, of transcendental vision; *mantradṛṣṭā*, the seer of the Mantra *krāntadarśī*, of transcendental vision; *mantradṛṣṭā*, the seer of the Mantra. In India, Rishis have always been given the highest reverence. Their words always held an authority greater than those of kings and other leaders of the society. Throughout the ages India has thrown up a long line of seers and sages of various orders and there is hardly any period in her history where there have not been at least a few seers and sages.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“Ours is the eternal land, the eternal people, the eternal religion, whose strength, greatness, holiness may be overclouded but never, even for a moment, utterly cease. The hero, the Rishi, the saint, are the natural fruits of our Indian soil; and there has been no age in which they have not been born... The Rishi is different from the saint. His life may not have been distinguished by superior holiness nor his character by an ideal beauty. He is

not great by what he was himself but by what he has expressed. A great and vivifying message had to be given to a nation or to humanity; and God has chosen this mouth on which to shape the words of the message. A momentous vision had to be revealed; and it is his eyes which the Almighty first unseals. The message which he has received, the vision which has been vouchsafed to him, he declares to the world with all the strength that is in him, and in one supreme moment of inspiration expresses it in words which have merely to be uttered to stir men’s inmost natures, clarify their minds, seize their hearts and impel them to things which would have been impossible to them in their ordinary moments. Those words are the mantra which he was born to reveal and of that mantra he is the seer.”¹⁰

In India, the Rishi was always, recognised, as it is even now, as the real teacher, the guru. He is all powerful to intervene between the seeker and the highest object of seeking. He knows right word of instruction and right mantra of initiation. He himself is the living example of the ideal that he places before the seeker. His power flows directly from within to the inmost being of the seeker.

The Rishis devoted maximum time of their life to self-study, composition of various literary works, imparting knowledge to the disciples, propagating knowledge to the masses and doing *tapas* for the good of the world. The Rishi is the friend of all and does good to all. His message is oneness in which he lives all the times and he knows nothing of division. In the words of Sri Aurobindo,

The seer, the freed & illuminated soul hates none, condemns nothing but loves all and helps all; he is *sarvabhutāhite rataḥ*, his occupation & delight are to do good to all creatures. He is the Self seeing the Self in all, loving the Self in all, enjoying the Self in all, helping the Self in all. That is the ethics & morality of the Vedanta.¹¹

Rishis of the Veda

The Rishis of the Veda were great mystics whose first concern was spiritual — not the spiritual as divorced from the temporal and the secular, but as both the high point and sustaining base of all that is in the universe.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the Rishis, the poet-seers of the Veda, were men

“...with a great spiritual and occult knowledge not shared by ordinary human beings, men who handed down this knowledge and their powers by a secret initiation to their descendant and chosen disciples”.¹²

The contributions of the Rishis can be experienced/observed through the verses of the four Vedas, of which the Rig Veda is considered the oldest. The Rigveda has ten mandalas or sections. Out of the ten sections, the first and the

last were the contributions of various Rishis. From 2nd to the 9th each section is the contribution of the Rishis of a particular family. In Rigveda the 2nd Mandala is credited to the family of Bhrigu; the 3rd Mandala is to the family of Vishvamitra; the fourth to the family of Gautama and the fifth to the family of Atri; while the sixth Mandala is by the family of Bharadvaja the seventh is accredited to the family of Vasishtha; the seers of the eighth Mandala belong to the family of Kanva and the ninth Mandala to the family of Angirasas.

It must not be understood that all those who lived in the Vedic age were Rishis, or all the Rishis and common people of that time had attained an all round prosperity – spiritual and material. Rather it has to be understood thus: The Rishis, the seers of the Mantra, devoted to a life of Spirit, discovered a certain line of development beyond the range of sensory perception by means of their strength of self-discipline and achieved a many-sided inner progress. Whatever they achieved by their tapasya they then cast into a veiled language which they called Mantra.

Types of Rishis

These Rishis of Vedic period were of two types: those who perceived the Mantras directly by the power of their *tapas* and the others who were incapable of direct perception but had an intense aspiration to go deep into the Mantras perceived by the superior Rishis. The first kind of Rishis were called *sākṣātka-tadharmā* and the second type of Rishis were called *asākṣatkātādharmā*.¹³ Later the sense of the term Rishi got expanded and we come across several types of Rishis mentioned in our Shastras: *ṣrutarṣi*, *kāṇarṣi*, *taparṣi*, *satyarṣi*, *devarṣi*, *maharṣi*, *paramarṣi*, *brahmarṣi*, *rajarṣi*, *janarṣi* etc.¹⁴ The role of the Rishis as seers is prominent in the Vedic literature, while their role as teachers is emphasised in the epics and *Puranas*. In the epics we find mention about various categories of these Rishis: the Rishis who were householders (*gr̥hasthāśramis*), Rishis who had no wives and children or never thought of women (*ūrdhvaretās*), Rishis who were hermit dwellers (*āśramavāsins*), Rishis who were continuous wanderers (*yāyāvaras*), Rishis engaged in priestly duties (*purohitas*), Rishis constantly engaged in imparting sacred knowledge to the disciples (*śāstrādhyāpakas*), Rishis engaged in imparting training in warfare (*śāstradhyapakas*), Rishis who were constantly engaged in intense tapas (*ugratapasvins*) etc.

When we look at the lives of these Rishis we find that majority of the Rishis were householders. They lived in their hermitages with their families, chanted Vedic hymns, imparted sacred knowledge to the disciples, practised *tapas*, performed daily rituals and other sacrifices.

Rishikas or the Women Seers

In the Vedas as well as in the other Vedic scriptures we find mention about several women seers. These women seers or *Rishikas* were mostly the family members of the Rishis, either wives or daughters. In the *Rigveda* we find mention about twenty-one *Rishikas*. During the Vedic period the women were free to live the life of a *brahmacharini* or *sannyasini*. We find mention in our scriptures about Shrutavati, a daughter of Rishi Bhardwaj who remained a *brahmacharini* all her life and entered into deep study of the Vedas; Shrimati, a daughter of Shandilya, who led a similar life; Sulabha who was an authority on the Vedas and entered into Vedic arguments with King Janaka; and about many other women who were given entirely to the study of the Vedas.

The wives and daughters of the Rishis were not just Veda learners but many of them were seers of mantras. So, we see Lopamudra (*Rigveda*, 1:179), Romasha (*Rigveda*, 1:126:7), Aditi (*Rigveda*, 4:18:7), Nadya (*Rigveda*, 3:33), Ghosha (*Rigveda*, 10:39), Apala (*Rigveda*, 8:91.1 to 7), Visvavara (*Rigveda*, 5:28), Indrani (*Rigveda*, 10: 86 and 145), Godha (*Rigveda*, 10:134:6,7) and few others like Shraddha, Maitreyi, Urvashi, Vagambhrini and Gargi.

We find in the *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* (Chapter 3, section 6) Gargi questioning to Yajnyavalkya. This shows the *Rishikas* were actively participating in the various conferences on *brahmavidyā*. We see Maitreyi's aspiration for attaining immortality.

The kings and princes of the Vedic age preferred to marry the daughters of the Rishis in order to bring home the most illumined persons as their spouses. At the same time we see that many princesses, deeply interested to lead spiritual life, married to the Rishis and lived in the Ashrams.

Conclusion

Since time immemorial, we see a long line of the tradition of Rishis in India. They “were creators, educators, guides of men and the life of the Indian people in ancient times was largely developed and directed by their shaping influence”.¹⁵ It is important to note that there has always been a continuity of this tradition of Rishis and there has not been any time when the Rishis have not taken birth in this land. If India had a glorious past it was because of the seers and sages and saints of this land.

Though engaged primarily in a *tapasya* of knowledge and self-discipline, the Rishis always did good to the world. The following words of Swami Sivananda Saraswati, the founder of Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, which he wrote in the introduction to his book on the *Lives of Saints of India*, present the magnanimous nature of the seers, saints and sages of India:

“Saints and sages are a blessing to the world at large. They are the custodians

of superior divine wisdom, spiritual powers and inexhaustible spiritual wealth... Their very existence inspires others and goads them to become like them and attain the same state of bliss achieved by them... Their glory is indescribable. Their wisdom is unfathomable. They are deep like the ocean, steady like the Himalayas, pure like the Himalayan snow, effulgent like the sun... To be in their company is the highest education. To love them is the highest happiness. To be near them is real education.”

But, instead of merely singing the glories of the past by remembering the names of the Rishis and worshipping them is not going to do any good to the humanity and its future. What is demanded of every human being is to rise above to attain to the state of Rishihood. In the words of Swami Vivekananda: He further says:

“In ancient times there were, no doubt, many Rishis and Maharshis who came face to face with Truth. But if this recalling of our ancient greatness is to be of real benefit, we too must become Rishis like them. Ay, not only that, but it is my firm conviction that we shall be even greater Rishis than any that our history presents to us.”¹⁶

References

1. *tathaivam vedānṛṣayastapasā pratipedire* (Mahabharata, Shantiparva 155.2)
2. See *Nirukta* of Yaskacharya Naigamakanda, 2.11
3. *The Future Poetry*, SABCL, Vol. 9, P. 517
4. *The Secret of the Veda*, SABCL, Vol. 10, P. 8
5. *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, Vol. 11, p. 12
6. *Nirukta* of Yaska 2.11
7. *Nirukta* of Yaska 13.13
8. *Brihaddevata* of Shaunaka 8.129
9. *Brihaddevata* of Shaunaka 8.130 *yogena dāksyeṇa damena buddhyā bāhuś-rutyena tapasā niyogaih | upāsyāstah kṛtsnaso devatāyā ṛco ha yo veda sa veda devān |*
10. Sri Aurobindo, CWSA, vol.1, pg. 637
11. Sri Aurobindo, CWSA vol.17, pg 411
12. Sri Aurobindo, CWSA vol.16, pp 6-7
13. *Nirukta* of Yaskacharya, 1.20
14. Those who received the Mantras from their teachers were called *śrutarṣis*. Those who were experts in different sections of the Vedas were called *kāṇḍarṣis*. Those who performed severe penances were called *taparṣis*. Those who were given to truth and were truthful learners were called *satyarṣis*. Those who were in communion with the Gods were called *devarṣis*. Those who enjoyed a great and exalted position among the Rishis because of their contributions were called *maharṣis* or *paramarṣis*.

Those who realised the Brahman, lived the truth of the Brahman and ultimately became the Brahman were called *brahmarṣis*. Those who had attained the Rishihood and at the same time ruled the kingdoms as kings were known as *rājarṣis*. A common man possessing the qualities of a Rishi was called *janarṣi*. (*Baudhayana Dharmasutra*, 2.9.14)

15. Sri Aurobindo, CWSA Volume 13, p. 525
16. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume 3, p.371

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Indian Nationalism and Sri Aurobindo

– Part II

(Continued from the previous issue)

Sabita Triapthy, Nanda Kishore Mishra

Sri Aurobindo, a nationalist leader, made original contributions to the concept of nationalism. Like Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore, his was a mighty voice of the Renascent India. How much he loved his motherland could be understood from his letter to his wife, Mrinalini Devi, wherein he revealed his heart's urge for his three types of madness:

My third madness is that while others look upon their country as an inert piece of matter – a few meadows and fields, forests and hills and rivers – I look upon my country as the Mother. I adore Her; I worship Her as the Mother. What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother's breast and started sucking her blood? Would he quietly sit down to his dinner, amuse himself with his wife and children, or would he rush out to deliver his mother? I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race...God sent me to earth to accomplish this great mission. (qtd. in Purani, 82)

In his intuitive vision he visualised 'the motherhood of God in the country,' a concept worked out in the novel *Anandamath* of Bankim Chandra Chatterji. Sri Aurobindo believed that love has a place in politics, but it is the love of one's country, — for one's countrymen and for the service of the motherland.

Appearing in an age of political turmoil when the nation was evolving in India, Sri Aurobindo gave a new dimension to the concept of nationalism not only to the Indians but to the world. His concept was neither political nor mechanical, but moral and spiritual. He wanted to show a new path to the world. For him, the essence of nationalism was the ideal of human unity. Like the Western theorists he was of the view that nationality in India did not depend on the "unity of language, unity of religion and life, unity of race." He was a staunch critique of the ideas expressed by N. N. Ghosh in an article "Indian Nation" that diversity of race, religion, and language in India prohibited the

possibility of creation of nationality. Sri Aurobindo pointed out that though Ghosh cited the example of the English nation that had been built out of various races, he forgot that these races even in those days kept their distinct individuality; and one of them tenaciously clung to its language. In a reference to the case of Switzerland, he said, there were distinct racial strains: people spoke different languages and practised various religions, yet they belonged to one nation without sacrificing their diversities. Austria is a congeries of races and languages. Sri Aurobindo supported the views of Herder, Anthony Smith, and Ramsay Muir, the Western theorists, that race, language and religion are helpful to the growth of nationality, but these are not the essential elements for formation of a nation. In this context he put forth the case of the Roman Empire that had created a common language, a common religion and life, and had crushed all types of racial diversities but failed to make a great nation.

In an article, "*The Foundations of Nationality*," Sri Aurobindo (1997: 505-07) fully supported Ernest Renan's contention already discussed earlier that the will of the people, the common interest, the psychic bond among them and the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories are the essential elements that constitute nationality. The most essential ingredients that help to form a nation are a common enthusiasm and a common interest:

....there are certain essential conditions, geographical unity, a common past, a powerful common interest impelling towards unity and certain favourable political conditions which enable the impulse to realise itself in an organised government expressing the nationality and perpetuating its single and united existence. This may be provided by a part of the nation, a race or community, uniting the others under its leadership or domination, or by a united resistance to a common pressure from outside or within. A common enthusiasm coalescing with a common interest is the most powerful fosterer of nationality. (SABCL, vol.1,p. 507)

In awakening of the sense of nationalism in India he could perceive these elements present in ample measure even in the country's peculiar diversity. While making a historical analysis, he assured people that inspired by a common enthusiasm and ideal, the whole history of India, the rich legacy of India, was a preparation for the formation of a united nationality. He further proceeded on to present an account of things that were not in the heart of nationalism. Extremism in the sense of "unreasoning violence of spirit" as a desperate method was avoided, because a true nationalist did not believe in lawlessness. This declaration of Sri Aurobindo abjured him from the charges levelled against him of being a terrorist. In his view, observation of law to build up a nation was required as it helped in building up national life. A nationalist considered that

law was made for man and not man was made for law. The function of law was to safeguard and to foster the growth and health of national life. A nationalist does not accept 'Extremism' and 'Fanaticism' for its own sake. Out of a desire to live as free men in a free country, out of a courageous acceptance of natural love for the country, he became determined to risk his life, "ready to pay the toll for freedom with his own blood," the blood of his children "to manufacture the soil with the tears of its women and the bodies of its sons." Sri Aurobindo did not completely rule out the place of suffering and anarchy on the path of nationalism. If the need for suffering arose as a necessary step for freedom, a nationalist was to willingly accept these difficult paths:

The Nationalist does not love anarchy and suffering for their own sake, but if anarchy and suffering are the necessary passage to the great consummation he seeks, he is ready to bear them himself, to expose others to them till the end is reached. They will embrace suffering of their children, and embrace suffering as a lover and clasp the hand of anarchy like that of a trusted friend. (Ibid, p.909).

Being himself a patriot, Sri Aurobindo truly voiced the concern of a nationalist. A nationalist knows what he asked from fate and the price he had to pay for it. He is to drag the nation with him into the "valley of the shadow of death." He is, at times, possessed by a frenzy of patriotic feeling that is misunderstood by the people. Very often in their bitterness of suffering, the people raise their hand to stone him to death. Nationalism gave a call to the people of India not to allow them to acquiesce in their subjection to foreign rule. Sri Aurobindo compared foreign rule with the death-sleep of a nation. To the unnatural condition of foreign rule, he resisted tooth and nail to cure the "previous unnatural condition of insufficient cohesiveness."

While taking part in the struggle for getting rid of colonial domination over India in his youth, Sri Aurobindo (Ibid, pp.300-01) undauntedly criticised a major section of the politicians of India who upheld the British rule over India as a boon:

In this country, however, there is a class of wise men who regard the rule of the British bureaucracy as a dispensation of Providence, not only to create unity but to preserve it. They preach therefore a gospel of faith in the foreigner, distrust of our countrymen and acquiescence in alien rule as a godsend from on high and an indispensable condition for peace and prosperity.

Satirising the intellectual folly of such a group of politicians, he considered that these people had failed to embrace Nationalism with their whole heart. They ingenuously contrived intermediate condition in which "the blessings of freedom will be harmoniously wedded with the blessings of subjection." They

created a condition of government to which they gave the name of "Colonial Self-Government." Directly critiquing the opposite stand of the Moderates in Congress, Sri Aurobindo branded these people as a hybrid species who were "emotionally nationalist, intellectual loyalist." He accused their dual nature that had generated "infinite power of mischief" in them. He minutely analysed the political belief of the New School and their activities within the Congress Party. He found two to three parties in the Congress – the Loyalists, the Moderates, and the Nationalists with their varying attitudes to British rule in India. The Loyalists were satisfied with good Government by British rulers and a limited share in the administration. The Moderates desired Self-Government within the British Empire and were willing "to wait for it infinitely." But the Nationalists could be satisfied with nothing except complete independence from British rule. Sri Aurobindo boldly declared that if India was not to perish as a nation, it must bestir itself and could not wait any longer. The Nationalists threw open challenges to the British Government that Indians were as capable of freedom as any subject nation, and by making their will strong they would win independence. As a Nationalist, he professed that the fated hour for Indian unification and freedom would no longer be delayed.

Under the British rule a peculiar kind of uniformity was attained. Brahmin, Sudra, aristocrats and peasants, Hindus and Muslims, all were brought under the British rule by equal inferiority. The differences among the various castes were trivially compared with the enormous difference between all of them and colonial ruler at the top. When the superiority of the foreigners was accepted as fate-ordained, the mind of the subject people became engaged in minor differences among them. This precisely, what Sri Aurobindo observed, happened in India under British rule. This sort of disorganisation was the inevitable result of foreign rule. Consciously or unconsciously the external power broke all existing organs of life. The Mogul rule did not have this tendency because it had naturalised itself in India. The British rule dominantly had this marked tendency because it had no sense of belonging to India.

Sri Aurobindo showed how the British policies were ingeniously designed to make the organisation of national life in India very weak. According to him there were three centres of organised strength in Pre-British India: the supreme ruler, Peshwa or Raja or Nawab reposing strength on the Zamindars or Jagirdars; the Zamindars reposing strength on his retainers or tenants; and the village community, an independent body. The colonial ruler consistently broke up the powers of the local rulers, Zamindars, and the village community. They broke up the powers of the Zamindars with the help of a new class which they created for their own purposes – the bourgeois or the middle class. The British

statesmanship finally set about to nullify the power of the bourgeois, it had earlier established, in order to destroy the “sole remaining centre of national strength.” Thus, the British policies were either to tame, bribe or limit its expansion to impede the process of disorganisation: “the intention was to create a disorganised crowd with no centre of strength or means of resistance.” For a long span of time the rulers succeeded in their endeavours.

Against such a background, the awakening of nationalism in Bengal had a unique place in the history of India. Sri Aurobindo heaped praises for Bengal where the bourgeois was most developed and self-conscious. It was Bengal that could give a rude shock and dangerous blows to the invincible British power in India. Shrewdly, Lord Curzon had implemented a policy to suppress the middle class. Through various legislative measures, the Press was intimidated; the Municipalities and Universities were officialised. Finally, the Partition Act of Bengal 1905 sought to kill with one blow the remnants of the Zamindar’s power, to weaken the middle class of Bengal. But Sri Aurobindo viewed the historical fact from the opposite direction. To him, the Bengal Partition opened the eyes of the middle class to the nature of the British attack. The middle class became the awakeners and leaders of the nation. So the policy of the dissolution of the subject population into a disorganised crowd was counteracted by the middle class in Bengal.

In an article “*Shall India be Free?*” published in April 29, 1907, Sri Aurobindo (Ibid, pp.314-18) discussed the probability of national development under foreign rule. The Loyalist group in favour of a British administration argued that “foreign rule is a Providential dispensation or a Provision of Nature” to train the imperfectly developed people in the methods of civilisation and the arts of self-government. This, of course, was a modern theory to replace the old principle of might is right. So that the people could develop their trade, commerce, become educated and enlightened, reform their society; and grow fit for self-administration. If a government could not do good to a nation or serve the purposes of national life, develop all national activities and capacities, it certainly proved fatal to the nation. Foreign rule in this regard was harmful and hazardous to the nation. It crushed national activities and capacities in the “interest of its continued existence.” The subject nation had to become dependent and disorganised. It is precisely because of this reason that national independence was absolutely necessary to national growth. Sri Aurobindo assertively declared that “there cannot be national development without national liberty.”

Moreover, if there was absence of individual liberty of the citizens, nationalism would suffer. Invariably, all colonial governments denied individual scope and liberty to “cramp the healthy development of the nation.” As individual liberty

was needed for complete and full development of national strength, self-government was also necessary. If certain classes were dominant over others, it meant the denial of the potential strength of the depressed classes to the sum of national strength. In this connection Sri Aurobindo cited the case of the Moghuls who lost India to the British but it was not from the people of India that their motherland was lost. Shivaji and Guru Govind Singh could bring the whole nation to a “fighting field.” Only when a nation becomes politically conscious, colonial domination becomes doomed. Sri Aurobindo viewed that for the subject people to expect that foreign rule would automatically concede independence was to run after a mirage.

Foreign rule is naturally opposed to the development of the subject nation as a separate organism. If a nation were an artificial product, then it would be possible for one nation to make another. As per Sri Aurobindo’s views a nation could not be made because it is an organism “which grows under the stress of a principle of life within.” He emphatically said (Ibid, pp.309) that nation builders embody a national force that in an opportune moment it expresses itself:

The nation-builder, Cavour or Bismarck, is merely the incarnation of a national force which has found its hour and its opportunity, — of an inner will which has awakened under the stress of shaping circumstances. A nation is indeed the outward expression of a community of sentiment, whether it be the sentiment of a common blood or the sentiment of a common religion or the sentiment of a common interest or any or all of these sentiments combined.

Once this sentiment grows strong enough to develop into a will towards unity, it will overcome all obstacles and make use of favourable circumstances. Then the development of the nation becomes inevitable; it will crush down all opposing powers. Since it is a natural process, it cannot be manufactured.

On principle the colonial force of Imperialism in India was directly in conflict with the forces of Nationalism. Sri Aurobindo (Ibid, pp.351) professed that the antagonism between the British bureaucracy and the principle of Nationalism must come to an end:

In India politics is a conflict of principles and of mutually destructive forces, the principle of bureaucracy against the principle of democracy, the alien force of Imperialism against the indigenous force of Nationalism. Our relations with our rulers are not those of protector and protected, but of eater and of eaten. As man and the tiger cannot live together in the same circle of habitation, so Indian Nationalism and bureaucratic despotism cannot divide India between them or dwell together in peace. One of them must go.

He drew the attention of the people to the folly of the bureaucrats who had hoped to crush Nationalism by implementing a policy of deportation of Lala

Lajpat Rai. Moreover, all measures of intimidation were used to strike at the root of Nationalism. But Sri Aurobindo read a different meaning to these stringent measures of British administrative tactics. In his accredited opinion the new element of deportation had facilitated the work of Nationalism. Under Nationalistic imperatives he accepted the suffering and sacrifice of a great leader because “a higher Power is active in a great upheaval, no individual is indispensable.” It brought the leader as well as ‘the rank and the file to the touchstone of peril where their value will be tested.’ In India national regeneration would have been an uphill task had the colonial bureaucracy continued its actual sympathy with the subject nation. Sri Aurobindo indicated that the increasing militant attitude of the bureaucracy, instead of dissuading, had been helping the Nationalist: “Nationalism is a creed of faith, love, and knowledge” and the whole of India was turning Nationalist by the hasty acts of bureaucratic repression. The Risley Circular was one of the acts of bureaucratic weapon to strike at the very root of the *Swadeshi* movement. Sri Aurobindo found out the hidden intention of the British bureaucracy in issuing the Risley Circular that aims at crushing down the spirit of Nationalism in students and prohibiting the teachers to teach lessons on patriotism. The colonial government knew well enough the tornadic force of patriotism in the young mass. Sri Aurobindo made the elites of India aware that a mere intellectual habit of patriotism untranslated into action had no consequence in after-life. A country had to fill the mind of the young ones with the idea of patriotism from the very childhood and make their young life a lesson in the virtues of a patriot and a good citizen. Without such discipline nationalism and patriotism could not thrive on the fertile soil. He alerted us that mere academic teaching on the habit of patriotism would make the entry of patriotism into our very bone and blood difficult. Based on this sort of sound reasoning, the Nationalist Party welcomed the involvement of students in political activities for propagation and actual practice of *Swadeshi*. The association of students with *Swadeshi* was a promise of a new generation of Indians who could take patriotism earnestly in life as a thing to live and die for. This political doctrine of student’s participation in politics was used as a potent weapon by M. K. Gandhi in India later on.

Though it may sound too grandiose with the little accomplishment that was made, Sri Aurobindo declared the 7th of August 1907 as India’s Independence Day. He considered this day as the birthday of Indian Nationalism because on this day Bengal discovered for India the idea of Indian independence as a living reality, and not a distant Utopia. According to him (Ibid, pp.494) the day of independence of a nation ought to be:

The day of a nation’s independence is not the day when the administrative

charges are made which complete the outward realisation of its independence but the day when it realises in its soul that it is free and must be free. For it is the self-sufficing separateness of a nation that is its independence, and when that separateness is realised and recorded as a determined thing in ourselves, the outward realisation is only a question of time.

For him “Indian Nationalism” meant: “the self-consecration to the gospel of national freedom and the practice of independence.” Boycott, in his opinion, was the practice of independence. It was on this day that Sri Aurobindo and other nationalists consecrated the declaration of the Programme of Boycott. It is an attempt to be separate and self-sufficient economically with a view to be free in every other function of a nation’s life. It is on this day that India discovers to her soul her own freedom, when people of India set their feet on the path of unity.

Sri Aurobindo shows vigorous reaction to an item of news published in London *Times* with a malicious intent that accuses the Nationalist movement as an outcome of racial hatred. It is further alleged by the paper that ‘the creation and fermentation of that racial hatred has been the sole object of Indian agitators’ in their speeches and writings. To these unfounded allegations, Sri Aurobindo (Ibid, p.499) counteracts befittingly:

The restoration of our country to her separate existence as a nation among the nations, her exaltation to a greatness, splendour, strength, magnificence equalling and surpassing her ancient glories is the goal of our endeavours: and we have undertaken this arduous task in which we as individuals risk everything, ease, wealth, liberty, life itself it may be, not out of hatred and hostility to other nations, but in the firm conviction that we are working as much in the interests of all humanity including England herself as in those of our own posterity and nation.

He opposed through the columns of *The Bande Mataram* consistently to the rule of three hundred millions of Indians by a colonial bureaucracy which was not responsible to the nation it rules. When people of India would be convinced of this injustice meted out to them, it might bring temporary strife, misunderstanding and hostility between the Nationalists and the British bureaucracy. He made it clear that the building of Indian nation did not intend destruction of another. If England obstructed it by unjust, violent or despotic means, she should rather be branded as the aggressor and be held “guilty of exciting hatred and ill-feeling.”

Unity among people was the catchword of nationalism. This unity in India was marred by intense caste-feelings. In an article “*The UnHindu Spirit of Caste Rigidity*” Sri Aurobindo (1997: 533-35) welcomed the pronouncement

of Bal Gangadhar Tilak on the caste system in India that was working immense evil in widening the social inequality. The former envisioned in the ideals of Nationalism equality between man and man, between caste and caste, between class and class because the basic spirit of Hinduism sees one indivisible divinity in every individual being. He (Ibid, p.533) emphasised the cardinal element of Divine Unity in Indian Nationalism:

Nationalism is simply the passionate aspiration for the realisation of that Divine Unity in the nation, a unity in which all the component individuals, however various and apparently unequal their functions as political, social or economic factors, are yet really and fundamentally one and equal.

He condemned the modern distortion of the caste system because it denied in society the essential equality between man and man. In the nationality of the future there should be no monopoly, racial or hereditary. Indian Nationalism should, in Sri Aurobindo's conception, insist on removal of illogical, arbitrary distinctions and inequalities.

The essential precondition of National realisation was the ideal of self-rule in every part of our country. It was necessary to train the moral consciousness of our people to refuse to tolerate at all the rule of the few over the many in India. We must foster the growth of love for liberty. The real problem for India was that majority of educated Indians were absorbed in Government or quasi-government services where the growth of liberty was naturally inhibited. He regretted that majority of educated Indians were debarred from patriotic work in the most fruitful period of their lives. So he suggested the creation of a "rival source of employment" for educated people to become free to take up patriotic work in life. The only means opened for India was the industrial development of the country that could generate more attractive and promising avenues of employment to provide educated Indians an independent living and save them from slavish mentality under the British rule. Through the rise of "a numerous industrial class" he hoped to create "invaluable strength to the political interest" of the country. To preserve the dignity of every educated Indian under foreign rule, he (Ibid, p.582) suggested certain measures:

We must strain every nerve to fill the whole country with trained industrial ability, we must send our young men in hundreds and thousands all over the world to learn the scientific methods of production so that India may in a very few years be covered with a network of industrial centres that will supply work to hundreds of thousands of our educated men, and rescue them from the inanition of a living death in Government service.

Like the upbringing of Lord Krishna, the growth of Nationalism in India, Sri Aurobindo wrote, was in the obscure and despised homes of the poor and

ignorant. It grew up in the "cave of the Sanyasin, under the garb of Fakir, in the hearts of young men and boys who could not speak a word of English." This sundry mass would dare to sacrifice for their motherland. Nationalism was born of oppression. The British employed various tricks to check the growth of Nationalism in India. As a nasty trick, they encouraged Mahomedans to buy their hostility to the Hindus. The bureaucracy broke the strength of the landed aristocracy with the help of the newly created middle class. They enlisted the support of the Loyalist-cum-Moderate Party on the Congress. To add to their problem, the Extremists turned out to be Nationalists.

Sri Aurobindo unravelled the secret of the complete Minto-Morley pact that aimed at the demolition of Nationalism by various means. The rulers expected to dominate over the masses by a "carefully-conceived primary education" and partly by decentralising their administration.

In view of the arrangements made for the Surat Congress Sri Aurobindo made an appeal in the *Bande Mataram* of December 13, 1907 to hold the Conference of the Nationalists with an agenda of organising Nationalism all over India. Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai, fresh from exile, were determined to attend the Surat Congress to spread Nationalist principles and practice all over India. Nationalism depended for its success on the awakening and organising strength of the nation. The great mass of the neglected Hindus and Muslims could not be neglected and omitted. Sri Aurobindo enlisted the drawbacks of the old Congress in its failure to bring them under the fold of Nationalism. For him, vitally important for Nationalism were the politically backward classes who should be brought into current political activities. The shopkeepers, the artisan class, the illiterate and ignorant peasants, the wild tribes and races, in their life should stir to dispel passivity. Not only backward communities but also backward provinces should be awakened into political life to put up a brave fight against the British rule. In this connection he expected the Surat Congress to provide opportunities to make Gujarat Nationalism a powerful and organising force. As the Nationalists were at loggerheads with the Moderates and the Loyalists on certain political issues, it was resolved to fight out the battle between the two factions in the Congress pandal (stage).

Sri Aurobindo wanted that Nationalism ought not to be "merely a political creed but a religious aspiration and a moral attitude." He declared openly: "Nationalism is a religion that has come from God". In his political speeches, he assured people that Nationalism had come to Bengal as a religion and people had accepted it. Analysing the then political condition of India, he brought people's attention to forces against Hindu religion that were trying to crush the rising strength of Nationalism. He admonished people not to lose heart because when

God is going to be born, when a new religion is preached, adverse forces do raise their heads with various weapons to crush it. Since Nationalism was a God-oriented movement in India, he assured (Ibid, p.653) the people that Nationalism would survive in the strength of God whatever weapons were used against it:

Nationalism is immortal; Nationalism cannot die; because it is no human thing, it is God who is working in Bengal. God cannot be killed, God cannot be sent to jail... Is it God that is born in you? ... You are merely instruments of God for the work of the Almighty.

In those days Sri Aurobindo and the other Nationalists desired India to turn back “on her eternal self, the restoration of her splendour, greatness, triumphant Asiatic supremacy.” Since Nationalism was ‘a creed and religion’, to be a Nationalist meant to pick up the cause of the nation in a religious spirit and to see oneself as an instrument of God. He disapproved the desire of Indians to model themselves as Europeans. Europeans did not consider nationalism as a religion. To Sri Aurobindo, a Nationalist in the European sense meant “in a purely materialistic sense, that is to say, if you want to replace dominion of the foreigners by the dominion of somebody else, it is a purely material change; it is not a religion, it is not that you feel for the three hundred millions of your countrymen, that you want to raise them up, that you want to make them all free and happy” (Ibid, p.662). He knew the uphill task of the motherland treating Nationalism as a political programme divorced of religious sentimentality. What India needed was to replace the rule of foreigners by the rule of her people. On this arduous path a time of trial might come to put the strength of the people to test. People needed real courage to face such a great ordeal. Courage would come from the source of a higher idea. The concept of higher idea was explained by Sri Aurobindo (Ibid, p.663) as a spiritual source:

“But when you have a higher idea, when you have realised that you have nothing, that you are nothing, and that the hundred millions of people of this country are God in the Nation, something which cannot be measured by so much of land, or by so much money, or by so many lives, you will then realise that it is something immortal...that it is an immortal Power which is working in you. All other attachments are nothing.”

He believed that God has a work for this great and ancient land. Therefore, He is revealing Himself in people. The people are “the instruments of God to save the Light, to save the spirit of India from lasting obscurity and abasement” (Ibid, p.653). Like a religious preacher strengthening people’s faith in God, Sri Aurobindo tried to drive home the idea that God was doing everything. God Himself was the worker and the work. He Himself was behind people in their

struggle for national liberation.

Gautam Neogi in an article “*A Stormy Petrel of Indian Nationalism: A Study in the Political Ideas and Activities of Sri Aurobindo (1893-1910)*” strongly argued in favour of dispelling the wrong notion of Sri Aurobindo’s religious nationalism. Actually, his concept of nationalism is spiritual, neither parochial nor sectarian, nor communal. The criticism levelled against him that he was a Hindu nationalist might be put forever to rest. No doubt his concept of nationalism was based not on *Hindutva*, but on *Sanatana Dharma*, which is eternal and universal. His was a composite nationalism shared by his compatriot B. C. Pal. He elaborated his concept of *Sanatana Dharma* in his “*Uttarpara Speech*” which he delivered at Uttarpara, Bengal on 30 May 1909. The truth about the Hindu religion he had come to realise in Alipore jail with a new and wider meaning. In the opinion of A. V. Sastri, Sri Aurobindo makes a reorientation in nationalism in the light of his realisation:

There is a reorientation of nationalism in the light of this realisation whereby nationalism, instead of being an end in itself, becomes auxiliary to Sanatan Dharma which now gives it whole meaning. (174)

Sri Aurobindo pointed out that the Sanatan Dharma in its wider appeal is not a national religion but is international in its ambit as it embraces all human beings:

It (Sanatan Dharma) is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it, because in this Peninsula it grew up in the seclusion of the sea and the Himalayas, because in this sacred and ancient land it was given as a charge to the Aryan race to preserve through the ages.... it (Hindu religion) is the universal religion which embraces all others... It is the one religion which impresses on mankind the closeness of God to us and embraces in its compass all the possible means by which man can approach God. (2005: 83-4)

While focusing on the superiority of *Sanatana Dharma* on many counts, Sri Aurobindo focused our attention on this religion which “insists every moment on the truth which all religions acknowledge.” The truth it embodies pertains to God “in all men and all things and that in Him we move and have our being.” Only this religion declares that the world is the *lila* of Vasudeva and people have to play their part in this *lila*, and accept “its subtlest rules and noblest laws.” In this religion solely life “in any smallest detail is never separated from the religion.” He could boldly preach such a spiritual message after his strong realisation of God in the prison of Alipore. The authenticity of his God-realisation he revealed in his speech at Uttarpara: “This is the word that has been put into my mouth.” He modified his earlier stand of nationalism as “a creed, a religion,

a faith”, to “it is the Sanatan Dharma which for us is nationalism.” His concept of nationalism (2005: 83) indeed embraced internationalism:

When you go forth, speak to your nation always this word that it is for the Sanatan Dharma that they arise, it is for the world and not for themselves that they arise...When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall expand and extend itself over the world. In his opinion if a religion is not universal, it cannot be eternal; because a narrow religion, a sectarian religion could live for a limited period of time. The Sanatan Dharma is the one religion, in his conviction, “that can triumph over materialism by including and anticipating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy” (2005: 84).

The movement of Nationalism created after Bengal Partition of 1905 was not guided by any self-interest. It was based on spiritualism. Sri Aurobindo assured people that it was a religion which the leaders were trying to realise God in the nation, in the country’s fellowmen. Nationalism came to the people as a religion because the Nationalists were working for God’s work. With Bipin Chandra Pal he equivocally declared that Nationalism in India was God’s movement, and not theirs: “men are nothing; there is One who directs and controls all their movements.” In a lecture “*The Present Situation*” delivered at Mahajan Wadi on 19 January 1908 Sri Aurobindo. (Ibid, p.653) assured people:

Nationalism survives in the strength of God and it is not possible to crush it, whatever weapons are brought against it, Nationalism is immortal; Nationalism cannot die, because it is no human thing. It is God who is working in Bengal. God cannot be killed, God cannot be sent to jail.

Even though passivity of people in India was continuing over centuries, he could foresee better prospects for Nationalism that would stir them up in the emergence of India as a strong nation:

This peaceful and inert nation is going to be rudely awakened from a century of passivity and flung into a world-shaking turmoil out of which it will come transformed, strengthened and purified (Ibid, pp.729-30.)

In order to become Nationalist people had to avail themselves of the opportunity and accordingly prepare themselves. A Nationalist should possess the qualities of courage, sacrifice, love and comradeship. Linking Nationalism with moral and religious attitude, Sri Aurobindo prescribed the following attributes of a Nationalist:

Nationalism is or ought to be not merely a political creed but a religious aspiration and a moral attitude. Its business is to build up Indian character by educating it to heroic self-sacrifice and magnificent ambitions, to restore the tone of nobility which it has lost and bring back the ideals of the ancient

Aryan gentleman (Ibid, p.797).

Chidambaram Pillai received Sri Aurobindo’s encomium for showing the first complete example of an Aryan reborn as a true Nationalist in his refusal to move out of jail on bail “if his fellow workers were left behind.”

In an article “*Spirituality and Nationalism*” Sri Aurobindo (1997: 799-801) spelled out the spiritual mission of India, the pith and kernel of his nascent nationalism. He claimed that the East alone had the truth of the secret of spirituality. 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. He foresaw the then outbreak of political movement to end in a spiritual consummation. B. C. Pal too supported Sri Aurobindo’s idea of India as the saviour of Europe.

Sri Aurobindo explained that the work of Nationalism in India was to bring about a *Swadeshi Swaraj*, to stir vigorously *Swadeshi* sentiment directed against all foreign goods, education, dress and manners so as to restore the people to the complete fold of their civilisation. He warned in case India continued to become an intellectual province of Europe, she would never “attain to her natural greatness.” She would miserably fail to fulfil the potential possibilities within her. Therefore, success of the Nationalist movement was necessary for both India and Europe. In the teeth of vehement opposition to the boycott programme by the Moderates and Loyalist Party, Sri Aurobindo (1997: 866) declared assertively the necessity of adopting the programme in toto:

No Indian in his heart of hearts can fail to sympathise with the boycott and even when he has not the patriotism or the selflessness to practise it himself; for boycott is the first expression of our national individuality, the first condition for the success of *Swadeshi* and the standing evidence of National revival.

While giving a spiritual dimension to Indian Nationalism, Sri Aurobindo analysed in depth the subconscious of the Indian psyche which is rooted in religious fervour. As we know, India has survived the onslaughts of innumerable races and cultures over hundreds and thousands of years tenaciously holding to her religious beliefs, customs and traditions. Sri Aurobindo aptly perceived it easy for the mind of Indian masses to be moulded with religious sentiments rather than they could be inspired to make sacrifices purely on a political ground. Our first National movement was not a terrorist movement but the movement initiated by the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj, etc. Our first leaders were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rama Krishna Paramhansa, Swami Dayananda and Swami Vivekananda who had tried hard to save the spirit of India. In the backdrop of such a spiritual awakening, Sri Aurobindo believed that the Nationalism in India was not a political movement but a religion, our *Dharma*. It is led by God

and the leader of the movement was chosen by Him. It was in this spiritually fertile soil that he desired the *Sanatan Dharma* to shine forth and not “be dimmed by the clouds of western ideas and rationalism.” His conviction was based on the philosophical assumption that the cosmic spirit moving towards the realisation of an all-embracing world-religion could have its basis in the wider Hinduism. The *Sanatan Dharma* signified the eternal truths and principles of human life and cosmos; and India had always been the guardian and missionary of this body of knowledge. This *Dharma* was cherished in ancient India for salvation of mankind. The flexibility of *Sanatan Dharma* rested in its capacity to approach God by all possible means. One must understand what attributes Sri Aurobindo (2005: 78) found in the *Sanatan Dharma*:

Other religions are preponderatingly religions of faith and profession, but the Sanatan Dharma is life itself; it is a thing that has not so much to be believed as lived. This is the Dharma that for the salvation of humanity was cherished in the seclusion of this peninsula from of old. It is to give this religion that India is rising. She does not rise as other countries do, for self or when she is strong, to trample on the weak. She is rising to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world.

Sri Aurobindo made a vital claim on the spiritual contribution India had made to the world. She had always existed for humanity. It is not for herself but for the humanity that India must be great.

Though Sri Aurobindo spent his childhood and student career in England, yet he was proud of India because God had chosen to manifest Himself in the people. As per ancient Indian culture and belief, he reposed faith in the divine motherhood of the nation. The nation was only a stage for the divine fulfilment of the individual. The nation and the individuals are both aspects of the same divine being.

With a firm conviction Sri Aurobindo integrates politics with spirituality in his political activities, writings and speeches. With his movement from Calcutta to Pondicherry, the tempo of his political activities suddenly ceased and a new chapter of leading a spiritual life opened in his life. After his release from Alipore prison, politics became subservient to spiritualism. The new conception of *Sanatan Dharma* was strongly suffused with elements of messianism. His theory of the nation-soul and the concept of the nation as the self-evolution of the cosmic spirit bear lines of similarities with the concept of nationalism developed by Fichte and Hegel. In the *Encyclopaedia of Eminent Thinkers: The Political Thought of Aurobindo* (1998: 81-2) K. S. Bharathi traces some lines of similarities between Sri Aurobindo and Hegel:

Both Aurobindo and Hegel are similar to the extent that they accept the

manifestation of the WeltGeist in the historical process of the evolution of the nation. They accept that the spirit or the Geist provides the central dynamic force to the other diverse activities of the nation.

He accepted the spiritual concept of the realisation of God in the nation and also, beyond the nation, in humanity. He conceived of nationalism as a pure *Sattwic* religion; so he stressed the necessity of spiritual and moral discipline both for the leaders and the followers.

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(Concluded)

Knowledge Management in the Light of Sri Aurobindo's Vision

Anurag Banerjee

Knowledge management is one of those modern concepts whose development has ushered in a new era in business management. It can be defined as the process through which an enterprise collects, organises, shares and evaluates its knowledge for the successful accomplishment of its objectives. Through the acquisition and utilisation of knowledge-resources, an environment is created in which information is made accessible to individuals who share and utilise it to further develop their own knowledge and use it for the benefit of the organisation. Companies give substantial importance to Knowledge Management because it has been observed that the skills and knowledge possessed by its employees are essential requisites to gain competitive advantage in today's world. Organisations where Knowledge Management plays a pivotal role are called "Knowledge Organisations". Multinational companies like British Petroleum, Walmart and Tata Consultancy Services are reputed for their commitment to Knowledge Management. Such companies invest to develop knowledge in key areas of core competency (like processes of product development or improving customer satisfaction), improve the value chain continuously and develop ability to adopt new technologies. Knowledge Management also has a significant impact on the organisational culture; after all, it is the organisational culture which bridges the gap between the provision of information and technology and their effective use by knowledge-employees for the benefit of the organisation. Thus, the intellectual capital — which is the collective knowledge the employees have about the organisation's products and services, systems as well as intellectual properties like copyrights, trademarks and patents) — of the organisation is enriched. Three elements are involved in intellectual capital: (1) Human Capital which refers to the skills, capabilities and expertise of employees in an organisation, (2) Structural Capital which refers to the enterprise's ability to

meet the requirements of the market and (3) Customer Capital which is the extent and intensity of the organisation's relationship with its customers. And according to a survey made in recent times, it has been observed that Knowledge — instead of capital — is on its way to emerge as the main source and resource of wealth.

It is important to remember that mere acquisition of knowledge is not sufficient in Knowledge Management. The development of the faculties of knowledge and understanding is even more significant. So how can the faculties of knowledge within an individual be developed? The answer has been provided by Sri Aurobindo in his book *The Synthesis of Yoga* which was written more than a hundred years ago.

Though the word 'understanding' is used quite frequently, we tend to exclude from it a number of important factors like 'the action of the sense mind' which records all perceptions without any distinction, 'mass of confused conception' which is bereft of the higher principles of judgment and discrimination and renders the indiscriminating perceptions, 'constant leaping current of habitual thought' which is nothing but a continuous repetition of 'habitual associations, desires, prejudices, prejudgments, received or inherited preferences' and renders 'duty for understanding' in the mind of the 'average unthinking man'. Sri Aurobindo has admitted that such an understanding has been useful in the evolution of mankind but it is subservient to habits, desires and senses, hence, it becomes useless in the quest for scientific, philosophical or spiritual knowledge. Therefore, such an understanding is impure in nature. Its purification can be brought about only by 'dismissing', 'silencing' or 'transmuting' the same 'into the true understanding'.

What is this true understanding that Sri Aurobindo refers to? According to him, true understanding 'perceives', 'judges' and 'discriminates'; it does not remain subservient to senses, desires or habits but strives for mastery and knowledge in its own right. Since this pure intellectual understanding is characterised by disinterested observation, reasoning and judgment, the reason of man stands back from the object, observes disinterestedly and puts it

'in its right place in the whole by force of comparison, contrast, analogy, reason from its rightly observed data by deduction, induction, inference and holding all its gains in memory and supplementing them by a chastened and rightly-guided imagination view all in the light of a trained and disciplined judgment.'

So far we have dealt with intellectual understanding. But there is something beyond this intellectual understanding which also plays a pivotal role in Knowledge Management. We are referring to 'vision' which Sri Aurobindo has termed as

'an over-standing in knowledge'. Vision does not have to strive to seek and attain knowledge because it already possesses the truth and expresses it as a 'revelatory and intuitional thought'. However it is not easy to reach this stage of truth-conscious knowledge. Sri Aurobindo writes that an 'imperfect action of illumined finding' which takes place when

'there is a great stress of thought and the intellect electrified by constant discharges from behind the veil and yielding to a higher enthusiasm admits a considerable instreaming from the intuitive and inspired faculty of knowledge.'

The faculty of intuition present in individuals receives and channelises the said instreamings. But one should remember that though the action of intuition and inspiration emerges due to the labours and struggles of the heart and intellect, by the time they enter the conscious mind they get affected by the thoughts and aspirations they come across; therefore, they lose their perfection and become intermittent in action. Once the action of intuition enters the conscious mind, it is seized, dissipated and fragmented by the intellectual understanding to fit it with the imperfect intellectual knowledge. Not only the conscious mind but the heart also performs the aforementioned functions to remould the inspiration and intuition to suit one's emotional longings, preferences and passions.

But if true or pure understanding is kept free from the interference of the mind and heart, what would be its outcome? First of all, it would be able to express the pure forms of the truth. Secondly, observation — which is a mental activity — would be replaced or dominated by a vision which would be free from subservient dependence on the senses. Thirdly, 'self-assured inspiration of truth' will replace imagination; similarly, 'spontaneous discernment of relations' would replace reasoning. Fourthly, intuition and thought-vision will replace 'conclusion from reasoning' and 'judgment' respectively. Finally, truth will be revealed in its unmasked glory and memory will cease to remain

'a paltry selection from the store gained by the individual in his present life, but rather the all-recording knowledge which secretly holds and constantly gives from itself... a knowledge which includes the future no less than the past.'

It is also important to remember that to attain right knowledge, its faculties have to undergo a process of purification. Here a query arises: what are the causes of impurity in understanding? The first cause is the intermixture of desire in the functions of thinking. Sri Aurobindo explains that due to the interference of emotional desires, perceptions of the thought-function become subservient to the desires and eventually lose their purity. Therefore the vital and emotional desires have to be tranquilised and mastered to save understanding from errors, ignorance and perversions. The purification of understanding leads

to 'an entire equality of the nervous being and the heart' for equality 'is the first word of the path of knowledge.'

The second cause of impurity is the intermixture of the sense-mind in the functions of thinking as well as the illusion of the senses. Sri Aurobindo explains it in the following words:

'No knowledge can be true knowledge which subjects itself to the senses or uses them otherwise than as first indices whose data have constantly to be corrected and overpassed. The beginning of Science is the examination of the truths of the world-force that underlie its apparent workings such as our senses represent them to be; the beginning of philosophy is the examination of the principles of things which the senses mistranslate to us; the beginning of spiritual knowledge is the refusal to accept the limitations of the sense-life or to take the visible and sensible as anything more than phenomenon of the Reality.

'Equally must the sense-mind be stilled and taught to leave the function of thought to the mind that judges and understands. When the understanding in us stands back from the action of the sense-mind and repels its intermixture, the latter detaches itself from the understanding and can be watched in its separate action. It then reveals itself as a constantly swirling and eddying undercurrent of habitual concepts, associations, perceptions, desires without any real sequence, order or principle of light. It is a constant repetition in a circle unintelligent and unfruitful. Ordinarily the human understanding accepts this undercurrent and tries to reduce it to a partial order and sequence; but by so doing it becomes itself subject to it and partakes of that disorder, restlessness, unintelligent subjection to habit and blind purposeless repetition which makes the ordinary human reason a misleading, limited and even frivolous and futile instrument. There is nothing to be done with this fickle, restless, violent and disturbing factor but to get rid of it whether by detaching it and then reducing it to stillness or by giving a concentration and singleness to the thought by which it will of itself reject this alien and confusing element.'

The third cause of impurity of understanding originates in the understanding itself and consists of the will to know in an improper action. Preference and unequal reaching after knowledge leads to biasness and attachment as a result of which the intellect clings to certain views and ideas with an obstinate will and ignores the truth in other ideas and views. It also rejects all other knowledge which it does not agree with. Sri Aurobindo writes about the remedial measure of such an impurity:

'The remedy lies in a perfect equality of the mind, in the cultivation of an entire intellectual rectitude and in the perfection of mental disinterestedness.

The purified understanding as it will not lend itself to any desire or craving, so will not lend itself either to any predilection or distaste for any particular idea or truth, and will refuse to be attached even to those ideas of which it is most certain or to lay on them such an undue stress as is likely to disturb the balance of truth and depreciate the values of other elements of a complete and perfect knowledge.'

Due to the presence of the aforementioned impurities, the attainment of real knowledge becomes somewhat difficult because the obstacles and distortions disable the acquisition of the truths of the Self and the universe. We must not forget that intellectual thought suffers from various inadequacies because the mind — which is governed by intellectual habits — tends to mentalise intuitive inspirations and distort them. Therefore, for the necessary flowering of the intuitive mind, one must: (1) train the intellect to recognise true intuition (2) differentiate between true and false intuition, (3) enable intellect to get used to true intuition. Once the intuition derives a conclusion or intellectual perception, it must refer the message to the divine principle and wait in perfect silence to receive the light of guidance from the higher layers of consciousness. Thus, Sri Aurobindo remarks, a great part of an individual's intellectual thinking can be transmuted into the luminous truth-conscious vision and obtain the conscious force of the 'ideal knowledge working behind the intellect.'

It is noteworthy that Sri Aurobindo had discussed Knowledge Management as well as its various features more than a century ago whereas the very concept of Knowledge Management was developed a few years ago. While modern Knowledge Management focuses mostly on the external organisation of knowledge-resources, Sri Aurobindo has taken a step further and provided a yogic approach to Knowledge Management focusing on the inner organisation of knowledge-resources in an individual. No wonder he belongs not to the past or present but to eternity.

Something Rich and Strange: Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)

Murali Sivaramakrishnan

There is something naturally *rich and strange* ^[1] about the extremely intelligent creatures on earth — they never tread the trodden path. *Earthly Paths* are definitely for the common mortals, for the uncommon there is the sky, water, fire and ether!

At the very outset we may recognise the epical dimensions of these two giants in Indian literary and aesthetic spheres — and their unique positions in contributing to the process of Indian Renaissance – however, this shouldn't deter us from taking a closer look at each and also together. They lived with their ideals as we would live with our everyday realities. They lived at a time of great change, historically, temporally and culturally. They are products of their history and they have wrought great changes in history after them. Perhaps it may not be easy for us in the postcolonial, post-industrial present to comprehend the profundity of their thought, the largesse of their vision, and the depth of their historical anguish. Both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo aestheticised their political and ideological wills and their work endures as open invitations for any sensitive reader to experience their travails and traumas on their own. They have passed on the legacy of a struggle: for difference and meaning, for resistance and understanding. What follows is an exploration of these issues in terms of poetry and thought of Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo.

Rabindranath Tagore was a poet and painter who early in life dropped out of regular school only later to found a near-perfect alternative school of his own; Sri Aurobindo was a firebrand patriot, groomed up in alien surroundings and foreign customs, who dropped out of political action to withdraw into himself and spend forty years of his mature life in isolation in Pondicherry, refusing to step out ever after! Tagore's vision of a school was without restraints and

grounded on his philosophy of creative freedom; Sri Aurobindo's practice of Yoga was aimed at total liberation and complete transformation. No two people could be so alike and yet be as completely different as these two extraordinarily brilliant and creative Indian minds of the last century. Indians to the core in their insightful thinking and yet profoundly universal and cosmic in their critical outlook, there is so much paradox in the life, thought, and creative output of these kindred souls.

This essay is an attempt to reflect on the uniqueness and similarity in the life and thought of these two Indian poets — it will examine, for the most, their ideas and ideals of education, the politics of difference and nationalism that each upheld, their notions of nationalism *and* internationalism, individual effort, experience and their characteristically cosmic and oceanic experience, and, finally of course their poetry and poetics. All these might appear such large issues which cannot be normally contained within the apparent word and spatial limit of a short essay, however, as I shall argue, these issues constitute a sort of organic whole of these two visionary giants.

Both Rabindranath and Sri Aurobindo were brought up in an atmosphere of colonial opulence, although the former on account of his family lineage had the privilege of home tuition and the creative environment of a sprawling family villa, while the latter, on account of his Anglophile paternal legacy was tutored by Irish nuns during early childhood and schooled later in Cambridge in the European classical heritage (perhaps a little less in terms of opulence but well-made up for by the colonial aura). Each were unique intellectuals revealing their poetic identities much early in life. Perhaps it was the oppressive burden of a westernised education which deprived the young Aurobindo of his native connectivity which a little later in life would pave the way for his obsessive search for a national identity. This compulsive desire for an alternate identity was the lynch pin of both, albeit with necessary variations on account of their historical situations. The life histories of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo are so very well known to all readers for needless repetition here. Although Sri Aurobindo's life has been set forth by scholars into three clear-cut phases – the early *Europeanised* boyhood and youth, the return to Indian Nationalism, and the retreat into Yoga (for further details see Iyengar), Rabindranath was fortunate enough to have had a not so disruptive a cultural experience; nevertheless both had to undergo the traumatic experience of a colonial educational burden. While Aurobindo's transformation from *Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose* through *Aurobindo Ghose* into *Sri Aurobindo*, corresponding to the geographical, political and cultural changes in his historical life's tempo are a little too obvious manifestations of his many avatars, Tagore's changes are not too obvious but

subtly revealed in his creative efforts and endeavours. It is in their ideas and attitudes to educational systems and methodologies that we start to see the emergence of a distinct cultural consciousness.

Rabindranath relates his own views and inspirations toward the setting up of a school thus:

I was brought up in an atmosphere of aspiration, aspiration for the expansion of the human spirit. We in our home sought freedom of power in our language, freedom of imagination in our literature, freedom of soul in our religious creeds and that of mind in our social environment. Such an opportunity has given me confidence in the power of education which is one with life and only which can give us real freedom, the highest that is claimed for man, his freedom of moral communion in the human world.... I try to assert in my words and works that education has its only meaning and object in freedom – freedom from ignorance about the laws of the universe, and freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world. In my institution I have attempted to create an atmosphere of naturalness in our relationship with strangers, and the spirit of hospitality which is the first virtue in men that made civilisation possible. I invited thinkers and scholars from foreign lands to let our boys know how easy it is to realise our common fellowship, when we deal with those who are great, and that it is the puny who with their petty vanities set up barriers between man and man^[2].

Tagore's grandfather, Prince Dwarkanath, was a close associate of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and his father Maharshi Debendranath, was the power behind the Brahmo Samaj for some time. Hence with such lineage it is little surprise that Tagore thought in the lines he did on education. The point worth noting is the insistence on the soul's aspiration and its urge toward human freedom and expansion that underlies the inspiration to rebuild existing educational systems. This is fairly close to what later Sri Aurobindo would envision as the ultimate possibilities of education. There is idealism here, a combination of the Platonic and European Renaissance models; however, more than anything this is grounded on the Upanishadic ideals as we shall see eventually.

"We must recognise," Tagore once declared, "that it is providential that the West has come to India, and yet someone must show the East to the West, and convince the West that the East has her contribution to make to the history of civilisation. India is no beggar to the West. And yet even though the West may think she is, I am not for thrusting off Western civilisation and becoming segregated in our independence. Let us have a deep association."^[3]

Perhaps there is here a facile marking off of the West and the East, however, the point worth looking into is the insistence on not forcing a separatist attitude

but a call for a unique integration and understanding that comes from a deeper profundity of purposive harmony. Here both Tagore and the later Aurobindo would see eye to eye. Despite being a hard-core activist and an extremist involved in the Nationalist politics with Balgangadhar Tilak and others, Sri Aurobindo too was equally aware of a need toward a synthetic vision which could take all humanity a little forward step by tiny step. From Nationalism to internationalism; from patriotism to liberal humanism; from hard-core activism toward the ideal of human unity — such is the trace of the arc of both Tagore's and Sri Aurobindo's thinking. This constitutes also the ground of their thinking on education and human awakening toward greater possibilities. Sri Aurobindo, the clearer thinker of the two, marks it off like this:

Let us begin then with our initial statement, as to which I think there can be no great dispute that there are three things which have to be taken into account in a true and living education, the man, the individual in his commonness and in his uniqueness, the nation or people and universal humanity. It follows that that alone will be a true and living education which helps to bring out to full advantage, makes ready for the full purpose and scope of human life all that is in the individual man, and which at the same time helps him to enter into his right relation with the life, mind and soul of the people to which he belongs and with that great total life, mind and soul of humanity of which he himself is a unit and his people or nation a living, a separate and yet inseparable member. It is by considering the whole question in the light of this large and entire principle that we can best arrive at a clear idea of what we would have our education to be and what we shall strive to accomplish by a national education. Most is this largeness of view and foundation needed here and now in India, the whole energy of whose life purpose must be at this critical turning of her destinies directed to her one great need, to find and rebuild her true self in individual and in people and to take again, thus repossessed of her inner greatness, her due and natural portion and station in the life of the human race^[4].

Herein lies Sri Aurobindo's universal vision. He talks about the three separate entities in the human being: the essential self, the self in relation to its own national selfhood, and finally the cosmic being. It is only in consideration of this tripartite integration can one design a system of education. Not in the mere accumulation of information, not in the acculturation to what is the now of knowledge, but in the realisation of the full potential of what it means to be human and the same time more-than-human. In Tagore's words, while the child "hungers for the Epic we supply him with chronicles of facts and dates."

In all, education was a desired framework required for the active seeker of

the essential self that is cosmic and universal for both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. They saw nationalist politics as just the tip of the submerged iceberg; the larger portion was the desire for the ideal selfhood that was transcendental. Hence both these poets could not bear to be trapped in their little political selves for long; they shook free and delved into a “*beyonding*.” Tagore noted for his wanderings returned more often to Santiniketan for regathering himself as a poet and recluse. Sri Aurobindo’s own trajectory is too very well known — from the timid Cambridge graduate, through the firebrand revolutionary, to the reclusive saint at Pondicherry: herein too one can discern the overarching desire to retrieve the self that is oceanic and boundless. This larger self as Sri Aurobindo saw it was the Spiritual, which was immanent and transcendent at the same time.

Amartya Sen^[5] has pointed out that Tagore greatly admired Gandhi but he had many disagreements with him on a variety of subjects, including nationalism, patriotism, the importance of cultural exchange, the role of rationality and of science, and the nature of economic and social development. Even in his powerful indictment of British rule in India in 1941, in a lecture which he gave on his last birthday, and which was later published as a pamphlet under the title *Crisis in Civilisation*, he strains hard to maintain the distinction between opposing Western imperialism and rejecting Western civilisation. While he saw India as having been “smothered under the dead weight of British administration” (adding “another great and ancient civilisation for whose recent tragic history the British cannot disclaim responsibility is China”), Tagore recalls what India has gained from “discussions centred upon Shakespeare’s drama and Byron’s poetry and above all...the large-hearted liberalism of nineteenth-century English politics.”

In the case of Sri Aurobindo, there too is clear evidence that he sought to instil in the dying soul of India with the inspiring sparks of what he held to be Western enthusiasm for manifest action in the world. As he envisioned it, spirituality is an all-transforming dynamic not a stultifying wet rag. There is a dire need for both to meet and integrate their essential dharma.

The two continents [Asia and Europe] are two sides of the integral orb of humanity and until they meet and fuse, each must move to whatever progress or culmination the spirit in humanity seeks, by the law of its being, its own proper Dharma^[6].

But what is most intriguing is the characteristic prophetic eye that observes further:

A one-sided world would have been the poorer for its uniformity and the monotone of a single culture; there is a need of divergent lines of advance

until we can raise our heads into that infinity of the spirit in which there is a light broad enough to draw together and reconcile all, highest ways of thinking, feeling and living. That is a truth which the violent Indian assailant of a materialistic Europe or the contemptuous enemy or cold disparager of Asiatic or Indian culture agree to ignore. There is here no real question between barbarism and civilisation, for all masses of men are barbarians labouring to civilise themselves. There is only one of the dynamic differences necessary for the completeness of the growing orb of human culture.^[7]

This is definitely an intriguing observation that argues for diversity and difference in world cultures and one which resists the homogenising vision of a globalising market economy that marks our post-capitalist present that intends to mask out all differences into a monoculture (read *Americanisation* or even *Cocacolonisation*!)

Now both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo were essentially poets and whatever their other preoccupations they kept up their poetic spirits. Perhaps in the final analysis they realised that only as a poetic experience could the diversities of the world be resolved. I have often felt that both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo held paradoxically their own other in themselves. This double voice becomes recognisable in many places, at the level of the treatment of themes, approaches to the narratives as well as even at the semantic and stylistic levels.

One characteristic that sets Tagore’s educational theory apart is his approach to education as a poet. “At Santiniketan,” writes Kathleen M. O’Connell, “he stated, his goal was to create a poem ‘in a medium other than words.’ It was this poetic vision that enabled him to fashion a scheme of education which was all-inclusive, and to devise a unique programme for education in nature and creative self-expression in a learning climate congenial to global cultural exchange.”^[8]

One hears the great echo of the early Romantic poet, William Blake here:
To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour. [*Fragments from “Auguries of Innocence”*]

Perhaps Tagore was essentially a lyric poet never even attempting to rise on the great wings of the epic song, as, on the contrary, Sri Aurobindo was: his *Savitri* — the longest epic in the English language — was a legend and a symbol that almost grew up with him. Sri Aurobindo worked on this epic poem over a long period and has perhaps enshrined in it the struggles and traumas of an entire generation. As with the late nineteenth century here and elsewhere, the general concerns of both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo was with beauty, love,

truth. Thematically this triad would encompass the entire oeuvre of both poets. While Tagore drew sustenance and inspiration from the folk and the rural, Sri Aurobindo hastened to the Vedic and the Puranic, for myth, metaphor and substance. Tagore's songs and poems address the instant and the here and now while reaching into the beyond in a transcendental gesture of word and idea. Sri Aurobindo traces the immanence of the eternal and the spiritual in the here and now. Transcendence does not mean the same for both poets alike: like the Dark God — Krishna — seemingly dancing with a million Gopis at the same time, Tagore's transcendental spirit hovers and disappears at will, forever elusive, forever charming, forever enduring. While for Sri Aurobindo the dance of Siva is an ever present *avastha*, a state of being and becoming at once. As he traces this emanation philosophically through matter, life, mind and psyche (see *The Life Divine*) he is like a graphic artist taking the elusive line out for a walk in the infinite reaches of human experience. There is a definite purpose behind and within all life as the Master Yogi visualises it — and that is transcendence and transformation. There is no exclusivity as he envisions it — nothing — not even the lowly amoeba — is excluded from this divine *Lila*. All life has a purpose and the realisation of this becomes their very purpose. In fact, in Sri Aurobindo's vision all this spiritual evolution is essentially natural and will take place whether one wills it or not, however, as he himself notes, to hasten this long-drawn purpose of nature is the creative function of Integral Yoga. Yoga is thus the inspiration for the natural evolution or unfolding of the Divine Spirit in all and everything. Sri Aurobindo's vision is thus a future-oriented vision, and one that recognises the multiplicity and dynamics of all life. His world is thus a *multiverse* of *happening* not a universe of limiting. Towards this end he strove to build a contact and connection. This forms his major contributions *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*. However, it is my contention that it is through his poetry that Sri Aurobindo resolves the paradox of all life. As I have been arguing throughout the course of this essay, whatever other vocations Tagore and Sri Aurobindo went through they were poets, and their major vision is essentially poetic. Tagore explored song, short fiction, novel, drama and a variety of other forms, even resorting to visual arts toward the midpoint of his life, but his essential self revolves round the poetic.

Kalpana Bardhan who has done extensive research in this field, has translated a number of songs under the headings: *Love, Nature, and Devotion*. Here's one that is *metapoetic*:

When through a song I see the world
Then I recognise it, then I understand.
Then its own language of light fills the sky with delight,

Then a sublime message wakes up in its dust.
Then it leaves the outside, in my soul it comes,
Then my heart trembles in the blades of its grass.
In streams of the song's *rasa*, the lines of beauty lose own boundaries;
Then I find all with each other in close touch^[9].

As Kalpana Bardhan notes in her *Introduction*: “In Rabindranath's songs, unlike in vocal classical Hindustani and Carnatic music, words are not secondary to melody. They are of equal or greater significance — the lyrics are no less than verbal, subtle delineations of complex emotions, miniatures in metaphors and images. (p.x)” There is also a variant version of this original in Bengali that goes like this:

Poet, Singer
Through music the world as I see,
I know it, reveals its intimacy.
Language of its light
Fills sky in loving delight;
Its dust speaks the innate
Divine words ultimate;
Ceases to be external
In my soul melodies to spell;
On its grass
My heart's throbs pass;
Beauty shapes up, flows the nectar
My own bounds to blur;
With all then I see
My camaraderie.^[10]

Little wonder that that Tagore's vision is unique: it is this uniqueness of what in Keats's terms would be “negative capability” — the ability to extinguish one's self and reappear in the other, a high modern “escape from personality!” Tagore's vision is universal, and in Sanskrit aesthetic terms this process could be seen as *sādhāranikaraṇa* — universalisation. Let's now take up an early sonnet from Sri Aurobindo “*My Life is Wasted*” written in his late twenties.^[11]

My life is wasted like a lamp ablaze
Within a solitary house unused,
My life is wasted and by Love men praise
For sweet and kind. How often have I mused
What lovely thing were love and much repined
At my cold bosom moved not by that flame.

'Tis kindled; lo, my dreadful being twined
 Round one whom to myself I dare not name.
 I cannot quench the fire I did not light
 And he that lit it will not; I cannot even
 Drive out the guest I never did invite;
 Although the soul he dwells with loses heaven.
 I burn and know not why; I sink to hell
 Fruitlessly and am forbidden to rebel. [Baroda, c. 1898 – 1902]

We sense herein a deep anguish — the times were terrible, the idea of a nation was in the process of becoming real and the pressures of a growing self-awareness and the touch of immortal spirit all invoking the poet who struggles within “to quench the fire I did not light!” We can also sense a certain linguistic and semantic freedom in this early poem that slowly is releasing itself from the clutches of a burdened coloniality. Until now the poet could freely resort to the nineteenth century English clichéd phrases, which are still visible in lines like: “What lovely thing were love and much repined/At my cold bosom moved not by that flame.” However toward the close the touch of the greater poet becomes largely evident:

I cannot quench the fire I did not light
 And he that lit it will not; I cannot even
 Drive out the guest I never did invite;
 Although the soul he dwells with loses heaven.
 I burn and know not why; I sink to hell
 Fruitlessly and am forbidden to rebel.

Once the poet has commenced sensing the touch of the divine, or better still, once the poet has permitted the greater self-awareness to emerge freely into play, the vision affords the greater craftsman to yoke together revelation and inspiration (two key terms in Sri Aurobindo’s poetics the coming together of which lead toward the rendering of what he considers as the *most unique poetic*: the *mantra*). Sri Aurobindo’s poetic corpus reveals the graph of an early Europeanised Romantic/Victorian decadent verse evolving self-reflexively into an envisioned epic stature. Of course all his lyric and narrative efforts lead naturally toward *Savitri*, nevertheless the shorter poems do really require greater attention as enfolding the bounty of his diverse moods and perceptions. They may not be as visually imaginative as those of Tagore’s, nor would they be musical like those penned by Gurudev, but they are endeavours of a suffering soul that sees and senses and experiences the world in all its manifold sensibilities. Their honesty and sincerity cannot be challenged, nor can their ability to move the reader, given that the reader becomes a *sahṛdaya* — of like-heart! If in the

case of Tagore it is the smaller aspects of life the simple things and ordinary joys and sorrows that undergo poetic manifestations into *something rich and strange*, in the case of Sri Aurobindo it is the profounder insight into the larger dimensions behind all simple being that poetically get transformed. It may be commonplace to state that both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo were essentially poets, for its their unique poetic sensibilities which afforded them the visionary eye when it came to philosophise. However, both never held themselves to be academic or systematic in their philosophising; neither would accept the appellation of a philosopher too. Their vision is of the lineage of the Vedas and Upanishads — simple, sensitive, impassioned, natural, and non-intellectual far from ratiocinative. While Tagore has left his legacy integrated with the rural, the folk, the commonsensical and the imaginative, closely tied to life in all its innocence and freshness, Sri Aurobindo has envisioned an entire universe conceived in poetic meaning and imaginative aspiration — a way of transformation that calls for a heightened poetic sensibility. In the final analysis it is poetry that answers to the vision of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. And only in poetry could their worlds be resolved. A world of paradox and contradiction, a world of suffering and resistance, a world devoid of any sense while under the throes of a colonial burden — all this becomes beautiful and transformed into *something rich and strange* when the touch of rhythm and resonance announces the presence of the divine within and without. Any Spiritual Vision could appear amoral or even ridiculously romantic once taken out of context. But once seen in perspective everything falls into place.

The perspective that both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo afford is the simple truth of being: what was plain and apparent to the visionary eye of the poet – it is for us to shift and readjust our perspectives to catch a glimpse at least of their greater vision. Tagore and Sri Aurobindo desired to build a world where harmony and understanding reigned over hatred and hostility. They were acutely sensitive to the dangerous ideologies of their own times which were leading the world in a trajectory of crisis and catastrophe; their anxiety is revealed in their thoughts and narratives — be it through songs, sonnets, poems, letters, fiction, drama, speeches or treatises. Of course their approach was certainly individual and different — while Tagore worked alongside people working and singing in their midst, Sri Aurobindo chose to work alone away from all in the isolation of an Ashram that came up around him (But we must remember he continued to publish his work so as to ensure it reached the public at large). It is in their single-mindedness that we perceive their unity. A commitment to humanity in the larger sense.

Rabindranath Tagore’s final lines dictated about a week before his passing

are very well known.

The first day's sun had asked
at the manifestation of new being – who are you?
No answer came.

Year after year went by
The last sun of the day the last question utters
on the western sea shores
in the silent evening –
Who are you?

He gets no answer.

This unquenchable desire to see into the heart of things is what marks off this redoubtable visionary poet. In a voice that counters the depressed voice of the early sonnet quoted a little while ago, Sri Aurobindo writes (again in his mid twenties, perhaps):^[12]

I have a hundred lives before me yet
To grasp thee in, O Spirit ethereal,
Be sure I will with heart insatiate
Pursue thee like a hunter through them all.
Thou yet shalt turn back on the eternal way
And with awakened vision watch me come
Smiling a little at errors past, and lay
Thy eager hand in mine, its proper home.
Meanwhile made happy by thy happiness
I shall approach thee in things and people dear,
And in thy spirit's motions half-possess,
Loving what thou hast loved, shall feel thee near,
Until I lay my hands on thee indeed
Somewhere among the stars, as 'twas decreed.

Despite its strait-jacket form and perhaps a little over-strained narration, this sonnet does convey more than its desired intent. The image of the hunter pursuing his quarry is striking but once the quarry, the spirit ethereal, turns and lays its *eager hand* on the hunter, he learns to see things afresh:

Meanwhile made happy by thy happiness
I shall approach thee in things and people dear,
And in thy spirit's motions half-possess,
Loving what thou hast loved, shall feel thee near...

And having seen and felt that *sun's rays* on his eternal self the tireless will of the poet still pursues the spirit, never giving up till it is reached. Although this sonnet does not reveal all of Sri Aurobindo's philosophical inquiring, it does

presage an unsettled poetic psyche a relentless soul that tirelessly worked to transform all earthly being into a spiritual becoming. If in this sonnet the poet-narrator seeks solace "somewhere among the stars, as 'twas decreed," the final resolution was never to be elsewhere for the yogi. As Sri Aurobindo envisioned it, the involuted Spirit had to reach through Matter, Life, and Mind into the various planes and parts of Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition and Overmind, until it finally united itself with the Supermind in an all transforming unity and integrity. His Integral Yoga was a recognition of the higher than mental life and a step ladder toward its achievement.

In the final analysis Tagore and Sri Aurobindo stood at two different extremities, perceived life in unique angles, thought and wrote differently, but, however, in their most subtle of perceptions they did not differ much. That desire for the harmonious, for the virtuous, for the beautiful perfection, held them on diverse paths in the same direction. Their journey as we have seen was never on foot on well-trodden paths but over time and space in air, water, fire and ether. And whatever they touched they transformed into something rich and strange!

It is the propensity and capability for being sensitive to the overpowering vision and revelation of strong feelings, to be able to withstand their onslaught and internalise them into levels of profound poetic experience that makes the life and works of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo contemporary and relevant to us in these *irreverential and desacralised* days of market capitalism. When the youth of India as elsewhere are driven away from their own interior realms from even the minus-one days of their existence by the lures of the playing fields of technology and the tinsel establishments of commercial contrabands, trapped and interpellated in the clutches of a morbid educational system, conditioned into mistaking what they profess as their virtual existence as the real *real*, the poetic voice of the bard seldom reaches them from the other shores of time. What Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore stood for might appear so far removed from our own everyday existence and their struggles seen to be mere wrestling in the dark to no avail. If only the thin veils of our own deception were to fall off for a fraction of a second we could see their golden boats for what they are worth. The true calling of poetry is the revelation of the real. And only when the mind's eye is open can we see and hear properly. Until such times the complete worth and the significance of the struggles of these two visionaries might be condemned to remain in the dark.

References:

[1] The phrase of course is from the well known song sung by Ariel in William

- Shakespeare's *The Tempest*! But the context is altered suitably and conveniently, retaining only the rich texture of the phrase with no connotations intended.
- [2] Rabindranath Tagore 1929:73-74) "Ideals of Education", *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly* (April-July), pp.73-4.
 - [3] Iyengar, Sreenivasa K.R. *Indian Writing in English*, 5th Edition (New Delhi: Sterling, 1985), p.101
 - [4] Sri Aurobindo, A Preface on National Education, Two articles in the "Arya" (Nov-Dec 1920 and January 1921) <http://intyoga.online.fr/preface.htm>
 - [5] Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity* (London: Penguin, 2005) 92ff.
 - [6] Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, p.81
 - [7] (ibid p 81)
 - [8] Kathleen M O'Connell, *Rabindranath Tagore on Education*. <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/tagore.htm>
 - [9] Bardhan, Kalpana. *Of Love, Nature, and Devotion: Selected Songs of Rabindranath Tagore* (New Delhi: OUP, 2008) p. 218.
 - [10] See also <http://globaldiplomat.blogspot.com/2009/03/song-of-tagore.html>
 - [11] *Complete Poems*, Volume 2 — *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, p.178.
 - [12] Op cit p. 180 – Baroda, c. 1898 – 1902

Notes On Authors

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

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