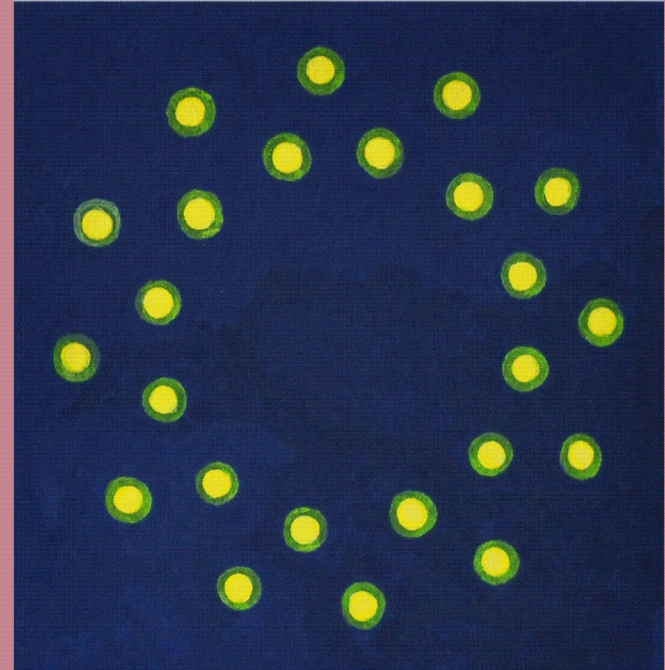


ISSN 2278-2117

# Śraddhā श्रद्धा



Śraddhā



श्रद्धा



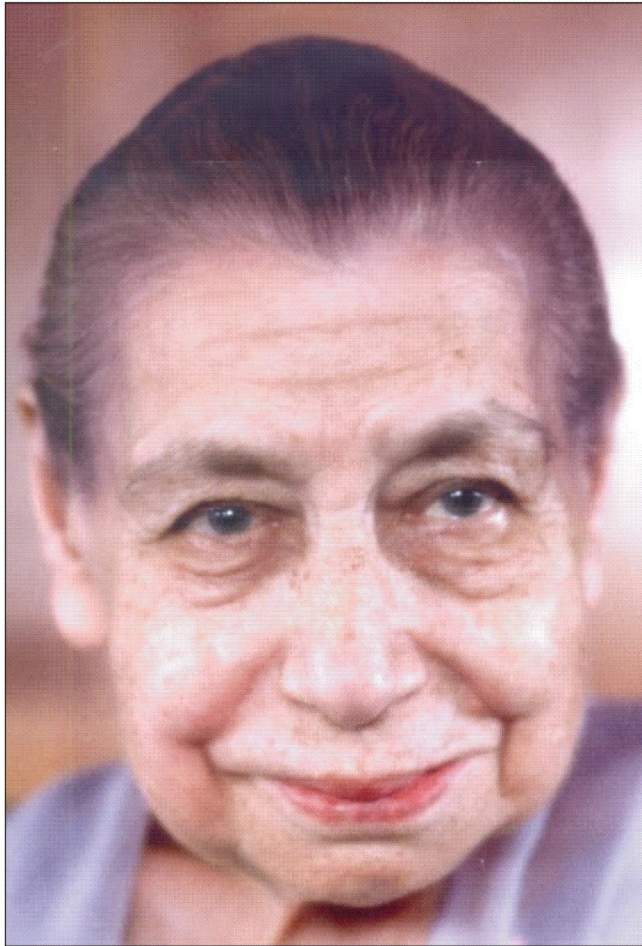
(Vol. 8 No.3)

21 February 2017

Courtesy : Nirmal Sethia Charitable Trust

21 February 2017





...two tranquil eyes of boundless thought  
Looked into man's and saw the god to come.  
— *Savitri*

# Śraddhā

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

**Vol.8 No.3**

21 February, 2017



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  
Sri Aurobindo Bhavan  
8 Shakespeare Sarani  
Kolkata 700071  
Phone : 2282 3057, 2282 2162, 2282 1819

Printed by  
Basab Chattopadhyaya  
**Shilalipi**  
16 A Tamer Lane  
Kolkata 700 009  
Phone 0336540 5390 / 98360 37601



## Editorial

Here's an interesting tale of a conversation between two friends that I was privy to overhear.

First friend: What would you say was the lasting contribution of Sri Aurobindo?

Second friend: Integral Yoga

First friend remained still for a while and then slowly, very slowly said: Not quite. Try again.

Second friend: Supramental Yoga or the supramental consciousness

First friend nodded his head for a few seconds and replied: You are getting closer, but can you be a little more specific?

Second friend thought he had explored all options and finally threw up his hands saying: I can't think of anything else.

First friend looked up and choosing his words carefully answered: To me personally – you may or may not agree with this – I think the single most important, lasting and significant contribution of Sri Aurobindo has been to bring to the fore, in the eyes of the world, the Mother as the physical embodiment and living incarnation of the Divine Conscious Force, which is the ultimate source of absolute Power, Light, Knowledge, Bliss, Ananda, the Supreme one and original Truth-Consciousness, '... the divine Conscious Force that dominates all existence' ... '... who bears in her eternal consciousness the Supreme Divine' – (Sri Aurobindo: *The Mother*), without whose Grace nothing moves in the manifestation and no permanent change can ever be effected in the upward evolution of the human race. '... nothing can take shape except what she moved by the Supreme perceives and forms after casting it into seed in her creating Ananda' (Ibid). Then pausing for a while he continued "You see even after nearly 70 years since Sri Aurobindo left his body, there are still many who view his departure from Chandernagore to Pondicherry as a mere excuse to leave politics. But man, most ignorant of what he is most assured, cares not in the least to read his explicit statement where he states unambiguously"

I may also say that I did not leave politics because I felt I could do nothing more there; such an idea was very far from me. I came away because I did not want anything to interfere with my yoga and because I got a very distinct *ādes'a* in the matter. I have cut connection entirely with politics, but before



I did so I knew from within that the work I had begun there was destined to be carried forward, on lines I had foreseen, by others, and that the ultimate triumph of the movement I had initiated was sure without my personal action or presence. There was not the least motive of despair or sense of futility behind my withdrawal. (Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, vol.26, p.55).

“If this be the case, then I wonder how many centuries will have to pass before humanity accepts in all humility this prophetic utterance of Sri Aurobindo about the Mother. The sooner it does the better, otherwise man will only move around in a circle, forgetful of his mighty destiny, that he is ‘A link between the demigod and the beast’ (Sri Aurobindo: *Savitri*, 4th rev.ed, 1993, p.337). But those who have committed themselves to the ideals and vision of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo should once again on this solemn and auspicious occasion rededicate themselves joyously to ‘the One whom we adore as the Mother, the Conscious Force of the supreme Divine’ ”(*The Mother*).

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the following for allowing us to reproduce the following in our publication

- Auromaa.org* for the article by Alok Pandey which was put up on its website

- Editor, *Arts Illustrated*, for the article by Anuradha Majumdar which was first published in its journal in Issue 4, vol.2, Aug. 2016

- RY Deshpande for his article which appeared on his website *Mirror of Tomorrow* (now discontinued) long ago

- Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for excerpts taken from *CWM*, vol.3, *Mother's Agenda*, Feb 1961, quotes from Sri Aurobindo's *The Mother* and *Letters on Yoga*, vol.26, *Savitri*, and the photograph of The Mother taken from the Ashram Photo catalogue.

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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Cover : Painting by Giles Herdman

श्रद्धाबाँल्लभते ज्ञानं  
Śraddhāvāṃl labhate jñānaṃ

*Who has faith. ....he attains knowledge*

—Gita IV. 39



# How to rise above the ordinary life?

Mother

[Compiler, Sandeep Joshi's note: It is a question we may ask ourselves at times "Why don't we progress spiritually faster?" Because we may meditate for fifteen minutes but, psychologically, the rest of our life remains untransformed. The way we eat, the way we talk, the friends we keep, the desires we nurture – none of these really change. As long as life does not deliver any adversities which throw us off-track, we let things continue and allow ourselves to languish. These are a couple of conversations by the Mother on how to rise above the ordinary life that we find ourselves in.]

"The *unexamined life* is not worth living" (Socrates)

## First talk

The ordinary life is a round of various desires and greeds. As long as one is preoccupied with them, there can be no lasting progress. A way out of the round must be discovered. Take, as an instance, that commonest preoccupation of ordinary life — the constant thinking by people of what they will eat and when they will eat and whether they are eating enough. To conquer the greed for food an equanimity in the being must be developed such that you are perfectly indifferent towards food. If food is given you, you eat it; if not, it does not worry you in the least; above all, you do not keep thinking about food. And the thinking must not be negative, either. To be absorbed in devising methods and means of abstinence as the *sannyasis* do is to be almost as preoccupied with food as to be absorbed in dreaming of it greedily. Have an attitude of indifference towards it: that is the main thing. *Get the idea of food out of your consciousness*, do not attach the slightest importance to it.

This will be very easy to do once you get into contact with your psychic being, the true soul deep within you. Then you will feel immediately how very unimportant these things are and that the sole thing that matters is the Divine. To dwell in the psychic is to be lifted above all greed. You will have no hankering,

no worry, no feverish desire. And you will feel also that whatever happens, happens for the best. Do not misunderstand me to imply that you must always think that everything is for the best. Everything is not for the best so long as you are in the ordinary consciousness. You may be misled into utterly wrong channels when you are not in the right state of consciousness. But once you are poised in the psychic and have made your self-offering to the Divine, all that happens will happen for the best, for everything, however disguised, will be a definite divine response to you.

Indeed the very act of genuine self-giving is its own immediate reward – it brings with it such happiness, such confidence, such security as nothing else can give. But till the self-giving is firmly psychic there will be disturbances, the interval of dark moments between bright ones. It is only the psychic that keeps on progressing in an unbroken line, its movement a continuous ascension. All other movements are broken and discontinuous. And it is not till the psychic is felt as yourself that you can be an individual even; for it is the true self in you. Before the true self is known, you are a public place, not a being. There are so many clashing forces working in you; hence, if you wish to make real progress, know your own being which is in constant union with the Divine. Then alone will transformation be possible. All the other parts of your nature are ignorant: the mind, for instance, often commits the mistake of thinking that every brilliant idea is also a luminous idea. It can with equal vigour trump up arguments for and against God: it has no infallible sense of the truth. The vital is generally impressed by any show of power and is willing to see in it the Godlike. It is only the psychic which has a just discrimination: it is directly aware of the supreme Presence, it infallibly distinguishes between the divine and the undivine. If you have even for a moment contacted it, you will carry with you a conviction about the Divine which nothing will shake.

How, you ask me, are we to know our true being? Ask for it, aspire after it, want it as you want nothing else. Most of you here are influenced by it, but it should be more than an influence, you should be able to feel identified with it. All urge for perfection comes from it, but you are unaware of the source, you are not collaborating with it knowingly, you are not in identification with its light. Do not think I refer to the emotional part of you when I speak of the psychic. Emotion belongs to the higher vital, not to the pure psychic. The psychic is a steady flame that burns in you, soaring towards the Divine and carrying with it a sense of strength which breaks down all oppositions. When you are identified with it you have the feeling of the divine truth – then you cannot help feeling also that the whole world is ignorantly walking on its head with its feet in the air!



You must learn to unite what you call your individual self with your true psychic individuality. Your present individuality is a very mixed thing, a series of changes which yet preserves a certain continuity, a certain sameness or identity of vibration in the midst of all flux. It is almost like a river which is never the same and yet has a certain definiteness and persistence of its own. Your normal self is merely a shadow of your true individuality which you will realise only when this normal individual which is differently poised at different times, now in the mental, then in the vital, at other times in the physical, gets into contact with the psychic and feels it as its real being. Then you will be one, nothing will shake or disturb you, you will make steady and lasting progress and be above such petty things as greed for food. (Mother, CWM, *Questions and Answers*, Vol.3, *The Ordinary Life and the True Soul*)

### **Second talk**

You ask me what you must do. It would be better to ask what you must be, because the circumstances and activities in life have not much importance. What is important is our way of reacting towards them.

Human nature is such that when you concentrate on your body you fall ill; when you concentrate on your heart and feelings you become unhappy; when you concentrate on the mind you get bewildered. And it's absolutely true!

There are two ways of getting out of this precarious condition. One is very arduous: it is a severe and continuous *tapasya*. It is the way of the strong who are predestined for it.

The other is to find something worth concentrating upon that diverts your attention from your small, personal self. The most effective is a big ideal, but there are innumerable things that enter into this category. Most commonly, people choose marriage, because it is the most easily available (*Mother laughs*). To love somebody and to love children makes you busy and compels you to forget your own self a little. But it is rarely successful, because love is not a common thing.

Others turn to art, others to science; some choose a social or a political life, etc., etc. But here also, all depends on the sincerity and the endurance with which the chosen path is followed. Because here also, there are difficulties and obstacles to surmount.

So, in life, nothing comes without an effort and a struggle. And if you are not ready for the effort and the struggle, then it is better to accept the fact that life will be dull and unsatisfactory, and submit quietly to this fact. That's for the complainers.

And it's absolutely true – true at each stage, on all levels. Whatever level you have attained, even the very highest, if you concentrate on that [the body],

it is finished! And all the difficulties begin, you know, with that very concentration that tries to draw down Light and Power – yogic concentration itself.

So it would seem ... that if one wants to use his individuality, his body, to transform the whole – that is, if one wants to use his bodily presence to act upon the universal corporeal substance – there's no end to it. No end to the difficulties, no end to the battle ... BATTLE!

Those who try to lead a spiritual life have always been compared to warriors (there are classic writings on this subject), and one must truly be a fighter – 'fighter' is more exact than 'warrior' because you wage war against no one: everything wages war against you! Everything ... (*Mother makes a gesture like an avalanche falling upon her*) and with such savage opposition! ...

You see, as long as there are currents swirling within you – swirling in the mind or the vital – you tell yourself that these currents are the cause of all the difficulties. But when there is nothing any longer? ... When there is a serene and immutable peace ... but still you are relentlessly hounded – oh, with such ferocity! ... You cannot imagine. (*Mother's Agenda*, Feb 7, 1961)

# ***Purusha Sukta: An Aurobindonian Interpretation — The Fourfold Order and the Four Powers of the Divine Mother***

R Y Deshpande

*Purusha Sukta* in the *Rig Veda* (X: 90) celebrates famously the Sacrifice of the Purusha performed by the Gods, the Rishis and the Sadhyas, the accomplished celestial beings. All is established in the Sacrifice and therefore Sacrifice is the best means of achieving whatever has to be achieved, asserts a scriptural text. What did these sacrificers intend to achieve by performing the difficult sacrifice? the cosmic order, the possibility for growth, conquest, expansion, winning new grounds, making the law of the higher truth-existence operational in the universal functioning, instituting the dharma? Indeed, it was for that, and only by it could they themselves ascend to greater realms of immortality. It is in the Sacrifice of the Purusha, the Holocaust of the primal Being, Yajna of the Great Person that the incomparable deed was carried out. In an enterprising act, by making an offering of this Purusha himself, the Male who is the begetter of things in all the worlds was this Yajna completed. Its jubilation in the *Rig Veda* is a forceful triumph-song of the Creator poised for Cosmic Action,—“a profound composition,” as Sri Aurobindo says about it.

Cosmic activity got initiated in the performance of this Yajna. It is said that Brahma remained inactive “because of not knowing” and he was advised, as we have in the *Sakalya Bramhana*, to perform a Yajna. “From your sacrificed body you shall create bodies for all living creatures, as you have done in Kalpas before this, in the earlier Eras.” The recommended Yajna was the *Sarvahuta Yajna*, the Offering of All, presented in the *Purusha Sukta*. In it Male the Begetter was the *Ahuti*, the sacrificial offering to the Mystic Fire; Spring and Autumn and Summer in the completeness of cyclic Time were the elements for the offering; the Gods, Sadhyas the accomplished beings, and the Rishis were



the *Ritviks*, the priests performing the Yajna; in it all Nature was the *Barhisha*, the Altar. And what was the yield of the Yajna? It consisted of clarified butter mixed with white curd, and the birds and the beasts, the Sun, the Moon, the Wind-God, and Indra and Agni, and the Metres and the Hymns and the Chants, and the realms of bright dwelling, and the Ordinances of the Truth, the Directives of the Dharma. To establish all this, the sacrifice was performed; in it Sacrifice itself became a sacrifice in greatness of the cosmic working. Thus in it the Gods ascended to heaven, opening the path of immortality.

We shall first go through the text with a free rendering, more in terms of its swift intuitive-perceptive sense than the exact literary phrasing or contents, in the suppleness of the meaning and the shades the roots of the words bear. This is more an interpretative trans-creation than the strict analytic-discursive argument presented about the process of this cosmic functioning. In fact the *Sukta* is a small beautiful poem in sixteen, a well-structured, well-argued well-presented significant thesis in poetry extending to universal dimensions. Such indeed is the power of all genuine mystic speech which has found the original expression, an expression that springs up from the depths of luminous silence. Its metaphor is bold, such as the transcendental Purusha being a four-footed creature, like Vamadeva's Agni the Bull with four horns; its lyricism is dense and classical, functional as well as suggestive; its symbolism is vibrant with the life of the object that it represents; its image is Keatsian, and minute and sharp, the sight behind it making the invisible at once visible, tangible; its lines, coming from infinity, have the power to carry us to the infinity to which they go, to which they belong. They bring the knowledge they possess in such abundance and in such exaltation. And yet we must appreciate that the language of the *Purusha Sukta* is essentially ritualistic. To the modern mind it might appear archaic and it will be difficult for it to fully or enthusiastically comprehend it; but it is a highly charged expression. There is also the difficulty that its idiom belonging to the classical Sanskrit can be taken in several ways, both literal and symbolic, aspects whose deeper psychological connotations we have lost in the intervening centuries. However, there is something astonishing also about the hymn. Though it is a composition belonging to the Vedic period, it is unusually fresh even today. What is necessary is to know how to enter into its living spirit and move in its dynamism which is powerful as well as felicitous.

From a psycho-spiritual point of view we can prepare ourselves to enter into its richness, into its contents and meaning by absorbing what Sri Aurobindo has written in the *Essays on the Gita*: "All this manifold universe comes into birth and is constantly maintained by God's giving of himself and his powers and the lavish outflow of his self and spirit into all these existences; universal being,

says the Veda, is the sacrifice of the Purusha. All the action of the perfected soul will be even such a constant divine giving of itself and its powers, an outflowing of the knowledge, light, strength, love, joy, helpful shakti which it possesses in the Divine.” But first let us hurriedly run through the Purusha Sukta.

The Sukta-text as we have in the Tenth Mandala of the *Rig Veda*, consisting of sixteen, is reproduced in the following. A possible interpretative-suggestive rendering is also presented; the intention is not only to get some general feel of what it is trying to convey, but also to have an idea of its charged ambiance so as to move in its vibrancy.

**सहस्रशीर्षा पुरुषः सहस्राक्षः सहस्रपात् ।**

**स भूमिं विश्वतो वृत्वात्यतिष्ठदशङ्गुलम् ॥१॥**

*sahasra śīrṣā puruṣaḥ sahasrākṣaḥ sahasrapāt |*

*sa bhūmim vishvato vṛtvātyatiṣṭhad daśāṅgulam ||1||*

Purusha the Cosmic Being has a thousand heads, and he has a thousand eyes and a thousand feet to walk; he has chosen this *bhumi* the Earth for his growth, for increase, to extend himself, to widen; while doing so, he stands apart by the width of ten fingers, far seeming yet close to this chosen place.

**पुरुष एवेदं सर्वं यद्भूतं यच्च भव्यम् ।**

**उतामृतत्वस्येशानो यदन्नेनातिरोहति ॥२॥**

*puruṣa évédam sarvam yadbhutam yaccha bhavyam |*

*utāmṛtatvasyēśāno yadannēnātirohati ||2||*

This Purusha alone, and none else, is all what had been and what shall be, that which existed in the extreme past, and that which shall appear in the times to come; truly, he is the Lord of the immortal realms, excellent, and reigning over the worlds, Ishan, and also of that which grows abundantly by food, in the richness of matter.

**एतावानस्य महिमातो ज्यायैश्च पूरुषः ।**

**पादोऽस्य विश्वा भूतानि त्रिपादस्यामृतं दिवि ॥३॥**

*étāvānasya mahimāto jyāyāmccha pūruṣaḥ |*

*pādosya vishvā bhūtāni tripādasyāmṛtam divi ||3||*

All that is here, that is visible, that indeed is his greatness, but much more is the glory and greatness, the distinction of the Purusha; this, what is seen is, just

one-fourth of him, one leg of the creature, the other three, invisible, being in the heaven of immortality.

त्रिपादूर्ध्व उदैत्पूरुषः पादोऽस्येहामवत्पुनः ।  
ततो विष्वङ् व्यक्रामत्साशनानशने अभि ॥४॥  
*tripādūrdhva udaitpuruṣa pādosaśyēhābhavat punah |*  
*tato viṣvaṅ vyakrāmatsāśanānaśané abhi ||4||*

With those other three parts this great Purusha ascended above, went up to the heaven of immortality; one alone remained here, this one becoming again and again, and from this came, extending over every side, sentient and insentient objects, objects and beings, those eat and those eat not.

तस्माद्विराजजायत विराजो अधि पूरुषः ।  
स जातो अत्यरिच्यत पश्चाद्भूमिमथो पुरः ॥५॥  
*tasmādvirājajāyata virājo adhi pūruṣaḥ |*  
*sa jāto atyarichyata paschādbhūmimatho purah ||5||*

Thence was born *Viraj*, the Splendid, the Excellent, the King, and in this birth of *Viraj* came things concerning the Purusha; thus born, he grew at once large, exceedingly large, eastward and westward, extending beyond the Earth, both behind and in the front.

यत्पुरुषेण हविषा देवा यज्ञमतन्वत ।  
वसन्तो अस्यासीदाज्यं ग्रीष्म इध्मः शरद्धविः ॥६॥  
*yatpuruṣeṇa haviṣā dévā yajnamatanvata |*  
*vasanto asyāsīdājyam grīṣma idhmah śaraddhaviḥ ||6||*

Even as the Gods performed the Yajna, this Purusha himself was made a sacrificial offering, an oblation to the great Mystic Fire. The Spring became the clarified butter, and the Summer the Fire-wood, and the Autumn the burnt offering to the Yajna.

यत्पुरुषेण हविषा देवा यज्ञमतन्वत ।  
वसन्तो अस्यासीदाज्यं ग्रीष्म इध्मः शरद्धविः ॥६॥  
*yatpuruṣeṇa haviṣā dévā yajnamatanvata |*  
*vasanto asyāsīdājyam grīṣma idhmah śaraddhaviḥ ||6||*

That splendid Being, Purusha, who was born before the beginning of things, ahead of everything, the earliest, they made him the oblation in the Yajna; on the seat of sacred grass they sprinkled on him the consecrated water, the



Accomplished and the Seers and the Gods performed the sacrifice.

तस्माद्यज्ञात्सर्वहुतः सम्भृतं पृषदाज्यम् ।

पशून्ताँश्चक्रे वायव्यानारण्यान् ग्राम्याश्च ये ॥८॥

*tasmādyajñāt sarvahutah sambhṛtam pṛṣadājyam |*

*paśūn tāmschakrē vāyavyānāraṇyān grāmāścha yé ||8||*

This was the *Sarvahuta Yajna*, Offering of the All, made by them, and from it was obtained clarified butter mixed with coagulated milk; from it winged forth birds flying in the air, and beasts in the wild woods, and the meek ones of the small villages.

तस्माद्यज्ञात्सर्वहुत ऋचः सामानि जज्ञिरे ।

छन्दांसि जज्ञिरे तस्माद्यजुस्तस्मादजायत ॥९॥

*tasmādyajñāt sarvahutah ṛchah sāmāni jajñiré |*

*chhandhāmsi jajñiré tasmādyajustasmādajāyata ||9||*

From that *Sarvahuta Yajna* in which the Cosmic Being was sacrificed came the hymns of the *Rig Veda*, and the songs of praise, the chants of the *Sama Veda*, the *Riks* and the *Samans*; in them were born the Metres that govern the movements of the things in the universe, and soon the conduct of the rites, the sacrificial formulae of the *Yajur Veda*.

तस्मादश्वा अजायन्त ये के चोभयादतः ।

गावोः ह जज्ञिरे तस्मात् तस्माज्जाता अजावयः ॥१०॥

*tasmādashvā ajāyanta yé ké chobhayādatah |*

*gāvo ha jajñiré tasmāt tasmājjātā ajāvayah ||10||*

Horses, and creatures with only one row of teeth, and with two rows one in each jaw, and the cattle of the pasteur, the kine, and the goats, and the sheep were born in that sacrifice.

यत्पुरुषं व्यदधुः कतिधा व्यकल्पयन् ।

मुखं किमस्य कौ बाहू का ऊरु पादा उच्येते ॥११॥

*yatpuruṣam vyadadhuh katidhā vyakalpayan |*

*mukham kimasya kau bāhū kā urū pādā uchyéte ||11||*

When this Purusha was dismembered, in how many parts did they do so? and how did they specify these parts? in what forms they shaped him? What became of his mouth, and by what do they call his arms, his thighs, and his feet,

how are these named?

ब्राह्मणोऽस्य मुखमासीद् बाहू राजन्यः कृतः ।

ऊरु तदस्य यद्वैश्यः पद्भ्यां शूद्रो अजायत ॥१२॥

*brāhmaṇosya mukhamāśīdbāhū rājanyah kṛtah |*

*urū tadasya yadvaiśyah padbhyām śudro ajāyata ||12||*

His head is the Brahmin, the wise and the learned, and his arms became Rajanya, the king, the man of valour; what were his thighs they were made into Vaishya, the man of transaction, the tradesman and the dealer and the agriculturist, even as his two feet turned into Shudra, the labourer and the artisan and the doer of perfect works.

चन्द्रमा मनसो जातश्चक्षोः सूर्यो अजायत ।

मुखादिन्द्रश्चाग्निश्च प्राणाद्वायुरजायत ॥१३॥

*chandramā manaso jātashchakṣoḥ sūryo ajāyata |*

*mukhādindraschāgnischa prāṇādvāyurajāyata ||13||*

From his mind was born the Moon, and the Sun had the birth in his two eyes; from the mouth came Indra and Agni, and from his breath issued forth the Wind-God, Vayu.

नाभ्या आसीदन्तरिक्षं शीर्ष्णो द्यौः समवर्तत ।

पद्भ्या भूमौ देशः श्रोत्रात्तथा लोकोऽकल्पयन् ॥१४॥

*nābhyā āśīdantarikṣam śīrṣṇo dyauh samavartata |*

*padbhyām bhūmirdiśah srotrāttathā lokāmm akalpayan ||14||*

From the navel of this Purusha appeared the mid-region, and from the crown of his head spanned out celestial realms, and Bhumi the Earth from his feet, and from the ears the ten directions; by the sheer power of formulation came into existence organised worlds.

सप्तास्यासन् परिधयस्त्रिः सप्त समिधः कृताः ।

देवा यद्यज्ञं तन्वाना अबध्नन्पुरुषं पशुम् ॥१५॥

*saptāsyāsan paridhayastrīḥ sapta samidhah kṛtāḥ |*

*dēvā yadyajñam tanvānā abadhnan puruṣam paśum ||15||*

Seven were the pieces of the fuel-wood laid around the Fire, and were used three times seven the fuel sticks, samidhah; in this Yajna, in which the Gods are the performers of the rite, they tied this Purusha in the manner of a sacrificial animal.

यज्ञेन यज्ञमयजन्त देवास्तानि धर्माणि प्रथमान्यासन् ।

त ह नाक महिमानः सचन्त यत्र पूर्वे साध्याः सन्ति देवाः ॥१६॥

*yajñena yajnamayajanta dévāstāni dharmāṇi prathamānyāsan |*

*té ha nākam mahimānah sachanta pūrvé sādhyāḥ santi dévāḥ ||16||*

By the Yajna did the Gods perform the Yajna, Sacrifice in the sacrifice as a sacrifice, and in it were established the first associated Ordinances of the Truth; such in their excellence and in their glory did in them the Gods ascend to heaven, there where they were the earlier Gods and the Achievers, the Claimers of the Truth everywhere.

The language of the hymn is at once revelatory and powerful; it has mantric force in it: its inspired diction carries the intention of the sacrificers to their desired fulfilment. The theandric aspect in which the Gods and the Rishis and the Sadhyas are involved has in it the full merit of accomplishing what is proposed to be accomplished. Out of the body of the Cosmic Purusha, the one-fourth who remained here, the Beast who had his one leg dangling down in the cosmic sphere, the Purusha whom the sacrificers sacrificed in the Yajna, *Viraj* the first divine emanation in the immense operation, arose the realms of grandeur, and the powers and divinities in several functionings, and the rhythms of the ever-increasing truth and the formulations of the righteous conduct, and the fourfold order of society that presently governs all the movements and operations of the earthly world. The focal point in this Sacrifice of the Purusha is *Bhumi*, the Earth for his growth, for propagation, for riches, prosperity, to extend himself in ten directions of the creation. This sacrifice indeed is the Transcendent's own willing and felicitous sacrifice, a wise and judicious rewarding investment in the Cosmos, showing also his great concern for the creation. By Yajna the process was set into motion; by Yoga it will be fulfilled.

In the *Bhagavata Purana* there is an elaborate discourse given by Brahma himself to the sage Narad. Narad wanted to understand the essence of the truth in the universe, wisdom which makes one realise the Principles of the Spirit, *Atmatatva*. The Creator concedes that it is actually Vasudeva himself who is the Begetter of the Worlds and their inhabitants. "The macrocosm in the form of an egg lay on the causal waters in a lifeless condition for a thousand years. With the help of Time as well as of the Destiny and innate disposition of the individual souls, however, at the end of this period the Lord infused life into this egg. Bursting out from that cosmic egg, emerged the same Cosmic Being with thousands of thighs, feet, arms, and eyes and thousands of faces, and heads too. It is in his limbs that the wise locate the various worlds comprised in

this universe — the seven lower spheres below his waist and the seven higher spheres above his hips and loins. The Brahmin represents the mouth of this Cosmic Being, and the Kshatriya his arms. The Vaishya emanated from the Lord's thighs and the Shudra from his feet." The Purana describes the result but does not give the process, except by saying that it was the Will of the Lord and the agent to effect it was Time, Kala. Purusha Sukta provides the details.

It is said that *Purusha Sukta* "speaks of the restoration of the divinity of creation by the supreme holocaust of the Divine. It is this sacrifice that distributes the divinity among the Gods, the Prajas, and the whole of the universe enabling them to move jointly and integrally toward Immortality." But what seems to be presented in the Sukta is only one particular aspect of the Creation; it is an important aspect, an episode no doubt, but it is just an episode in the sequence of countless and recondite operations that go in making this great and meaningful involutionary-evolutionary Becoming. We must understand that the author of the hymn was not setting himself to write a modern thesis or treatise giving the details of the creation or its processes, an exhaustive document with its prolegomenon and epilogue; instead, what is given is the dense but luminous esoteric knowledge of the things, with one aspect in view, one particular window opened out for seeing them. It was written in a milieu in which the alert and perceptive receiver at once got in contact with the reality from which it had originated; it had taken for granted the common knowledge of the tradition and it is this knowledge which was further extended or enriched by such explorative-creative presentations. It was in fact the mode of establishing a new power of the spirit in the ready consciousness of the race. It contributed to progress in knowledge. There are a number of aspects present in the Sukta: the transcendental Absolute poised for manifestation, its necessary projection in the cosmic field, holding back its own glory and majesty, its *aishwarya*, its Ishwarahood in order that multiplicity might become possible, putting into operation Four Qualities, Four Powers of the divine Person in the universal play, return of the Gods to their earlier status, — these are astounding events narrated by it. And these have been established by doing Yajna, the Path of Progress charted out by the Vedic Rishis.

About Yajna or Sacrifice, Sri Aurobindo writes: "The law of sacrifice is the common divine action that was thrown out into the world in its beginning as a symbol of the solidarity of the universe. It is by the attraction of this law that a divinising principle, a saving power descends to limit and correct and gradually to eliminate the errors of an egoistic and self-divided creation. This descent, this sacrifice of the Purusha, the Divine Soul submitting itself to Force and Matter so that it may inform and illuminate them, is the seed of redemption of



this world of Inconscience and Ignorance. ‘For with sacrifice as their companion,’ says the Gita, ‘the All-Father created these peoples.’” In the Gita we have: “From food creatures come into being, from rain is the birth of food, from sacrifice comes into being the rain, sacrifice is born of work; work know to be born of Brahman, Brahman is born of the Immutable; therefore is the all-pervading Brahman established in the sacrifice.” And again: “Brahman is the giving, Brahman is the food-offering, by Brahman it is offered into the Brahman-fire, Brahman is that which is to be attained by samadhi in Brahman-action.” In *Savitri* there is a situation when the God of Death just refuses to yield to the demands of Savitri, she claiming the soul of Satyavan back. In fact it is a kind of deadlock. The stubborn irredeemable God has snatched the soul of her lover and husband, the divine Soul, and she does not see any prospect of its release from the noose. But she is intent upon her silent will and, in her meditation’s house, she summons her “spirit’s flame of conscient force”. There she observes

Imperishable, a tongue of sacrifice,  
[Flaming] unquenched upon the central hearth  
Where burns for the high houselord and his mate  
The homestead’s sentinel and witness fire

From which the altars of the gods are lit. (*Savitri*, 4th rev.ed, 1993, p.639)

Ishwara and Ishwari themselves are doing together the Yajna in the heart of *Savitri*, and the result at once is that she becomes the controller of events in the occult battle against the God of Death. Such is the efficacy of the Vedic Yajna.

The power and preeminence of the supreme Purusha are indescribable, the *mahima* of the Non-manifest is incomprehensible; even as luminous being he indeed is with a form that cannot be figured out, *divyam purusam achintya rupam*, as the Gita would say. But when turned towards transcendental manifestation he becomes fourfold, a Beast with Four Legs, a Bull with Vamadeva’s Four Mystic Horns, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss-Knowledge, *Sat-Chit-Ananda-Vijnan*. There he is the Primal God, *Adi Deva*, the Ancient or *Purana Purusha*, there the supreme Abode, *Param Nidhan* wherein all abide. He as *Vijnan Purusha*, the Creator of the Worlds projects himself into cosmic working. He sacrifices his royalty, his greatness, his splendour and wealth, his *vaibhava*, and assumes the limitations for the purposes of world manifestation. While in the transcendent, he has all the riches, and has all its luminous dynamism; but here in the projected sphere he acts through his delegate, the Overmind Purusha in the greatness of multiplicity of every kind, with a thousand heads and a thousand eyes and a thousand feet. It is he who can perhaps be identified with the Vedic Vishvakarman or with *Viraj* of the *Purusha Sukta*. About *Vishvakarman* the maker of the worlds, we have the

following description in the *Rig Veda*: he has his eyes on all sides, a mouth on all sides, arms and feet in all sides, he who has given rise to earth and heaven, he the one who gives commands to them all.

We could perhaps appreciate it better in the modern language as we have in *The Essays on the Gita*: “Vasudeva, the eternal Being, is all, says the Gita. He is the Brahman, consciously supports and originates all from his higher spiritual nature, consciously here becomes all things in a nature of intelligence, mind, life and sense and objective phenomenon of material existence. The Jiva is he in that spiritual nature of the Eternal, his eternal multiplicity, his self-vision from many centres of conscious self-power. God, Nature and Jiva are the three terms of existence, and these three are one being. How does this Being manifest himself in cosmos? First as the immutable timeless self omnipresent and all-supporting which is in its eternity being and not becoming. Then, held in that being there is an essential power or spiritual principle of self-becoming, *swabhava*, through which by spiritual self-vision it determines and expresses, creates by liberation all that is latent or contained in its own existence. The power or the energy of that self-becoming looses forth into universal action, Karma, all that is thus determined in the spirit. All creation is this action, is this working of the essential nature, is Karma. But it is developed here in a mutable Nature of intelligence, mind, life, sense and form-objectivity of material phenomenon actually cut off from the absolute light and limited by the Ignorance. All its workings become there a sacrifice of the soul in Nature to the supreme Soul secret within her, and the supreme Godhead dwells therefore in all as the Master of their sacrifice, whose presence and power govern it and whose self-knowledge and delight of being receive it. To know this is to have the right knowledge of the universe and the vision of God in the cosmos... .”

The sense of the root *pr* from which the word Purusha comes is: to fill, to place, set, fix, direct, cast; to cause to work; to protect, maintain, sustain; to promote, advance; and the root *sa?* means: he; it is ‘he who is complete’, or ‘who is everywhere’. Purusha has also the connotation of the seven divine or active principles of which the universe was formed. Purusha is not only the individual and the cosmic Man; he is also the personal aspect of the whole reality, they all having an essential internal relationship. Everything that is, is a member of the one and unique Purusha. Such could be the connection with the *Dashangula Purusha* the Sukta speaks of, the Purusha who stands just ten-finger-width away from us. And what a fine symbolism this! In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo speaks of the three poises of the Non-Manifest Supreme, the *Avyakta*, the first Nothingness of *Savitri*. In the *Philosophy of the Upanishads* he writes about Parabrahman in the course of evolving phenomena as follows:

“The first condition is called *avyakta*, the state previous to manifestation, in which all things are involved, but in which nothing is expressed or imaged, the state of ideality, undifferentiated but pregnant of differentiation...” Beyond them all, beyond Parabrahman is the utter Unknowable about which it is pointless to speak. But what is profitable to speak of is the Infinite of the *Chhandogya Upanishad*. Sanatkumar tells Narad that, which is Infinite is the plenum and is alone Happiness, *tatsukham*. The Rishi calls it *Bhuma*. The concept of *Bhuma* is something very rich indeed. In the pure Infinite all aspects such as Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, Knowledge, Power, everything are kind of frozen entities, they do not grow, expand; they do not gather richnesses; it is the aspect of the static Brahman. But that is what *Bhuma* does; he brings in the dynamism of growth, advance, progress, increase, evolution. The root meaning of the word is “to grow”; its feminine is *Bhumi*, who upholds growth. And this *Bhumi* is our Earth, the precious little Earth where alone growth is possible, growth by the process of evolution. That makes Earth a “significant centre” of the universe, upholding the spiritual geo-centricity, an indisputable fact. No wonder, our central being got attracted by it and opted for the adventure of the Strange, with the confidence of finding a joy that is new and ever-growing, ever-widening. It wanted to discover new wealth and hence it came here, kind of plunged into the obscure unknown. The triple poise of the Supreme is described, in the language of the Gita, in terms of *Kshara-Akshara-Uttama Purusha*. In the metaphysical description these are the aspects of one and single indivisible Reality, the Transcendental-Universal-Individual, the Absolute poised for manifestation. “This triple aspect of the reality must be included in the total truth of the soul and of the cosmic manifestation, and this necessity must determine the ultimate trend of the process of evolutionary Nature,” writes Sri Aurobindo. Of this triple aspect of Reality, of the three poises the *Purusha Sukta* is chiefly concerned with the Cosmic Poise, the Cosmic Being. In it the concept of *Dashangula Purusha* becomes felicitous indeed, in the warmth of immanence of the Divine. If we have to quote Paul Éluard that, “there is another world, but it is in this one,” then “in this one” refers to *Bhumi* the Earth with the “another world” entering into it, — because of the Sacrifice of the *Purusha*.

The other important idea, and a very daring idea certainly, the *Sukta* has introduced is of the dismemberment of the Sacrificial Being, *Viraj*, an idea which is not found anywhere else in the early Vedic revelations. While the Supreme Being who stands beyond all that is, beyond everything and whose majesty and preeminence, whose mahima cannot be described there are, apart from transcendental aspects, aspects of manifestation also. It is in that specific context, of the manifestation, that the *Sukta*, which is in a way the hymn of cosmic organisation and functioning, celebrates exultantly the Sacrifice of the

Purusha. The Purusha in his cosmic poise has given up his sovereignty of the transcendental existence and accepted the travail of the lower working, Purusha subjecting himself to Prakriti. That indisputably is *tyaga*; but much more than *tyaga* or abandonment or renunciation it is the sacrifice, a willing sacrifice made by the Purusha, subjecting himself to be victimised; he has offered himself to be consumed in the Mystic Fire for the purposes of creation. “Brahman is the giving, Brahman is the food-offering, by Brahman it is offered into the Brahman-fire.” If Yajna is a mechanism, a means to initiate a certain cosmic operation, then the readiness of the Purusha to offer himself in sacrifice becomes a splendid act indeed, absolutely a worthy and creditable act which can be taken up only by such a being. But it seems that it has also to be prompted by somebody else. “From your sacrificed body, you shall create bodies for all living creatures, as you have done in Kalpas before this, in the earlier Eras,”— that was the advice given to Brahma before he undertook the performance of the *Sarvahuta Yajna*. The desire, the urge, the impulse, the goodwill of the Gods and the Rishis and the Sadhyas compelled him to accept the proposal, seeing that thus alone could the cosmic operation get going. It is in his consent that the fiery Yajna was performed, with Purusha himself becoming the Fire-offering, *Ahuti*. Only when Brahma agreed to sacrifice his body, and when the sacrifice was performed, that new bodies could be created. In the Vedic terminology, it is the Purusha who has been made the ritualistic food prepared for sacrifice, food to be given to the Yajna-Purusha; he responded to the invocation of the contemplators and doers of the sacrifice and offered himself voluntarily for the purpose. But what kind of bodies came out of this *Sarvahuta Yajna*? These were bodies subject to decay-disintegration-death. These bodies are subject to the laws of the mortal world; progress in life here becomes possible by accepting death as an efficient mechanism, a necessary mechanism also in the present mode of growth. That is the scope of the Vedic *Sarvahuta Yajna*. If there has to be progress in the truth-dynamism of immortality then another kind of Yajna will have to be performed. Wasn’t that the work the Mother and Sri Aurobindo doing? We shall see it separately.

But as far as the *Sarvahuta Yajna* is concerned, the deed was done. But how was the Purusha dismembered? He was cut up into four parts, head-arms-thighs-legs, and offered in the Yajna. The names given to these four parts are: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra, names which essentially connote four qualities that have entered into the cosmic scheme, four qualities, four *swabhavas*, the fourfold soul-force operational in the present working. About it Sri Aurobindo writes as follows: “...in the soul-force in man this Godhead in Nature represents itself as a fourfold effective Power, *catur-vyuha*, a Power for knowledge, a Power for strength, a Power for mutuality and active



and productive relation and interchange, a Power for works and labour and service, and its presence casts all human life into a nexus and inner and outer operation of these four things. The ancient thought of India conscious of this fourfold type of active human personality and nature built out of it the four types of the Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, each with its spiritual turn, ethical ideal, suitable upbringing, fixed function in society and place in the evolutionary scale of the spirit. As always tends to be the case when we too much externalise and mechanise the more subtle truths of our nature, this became a hard and fast system inconsistent with the freedom and variability and complexity of the finer developing spirit in man. Nevertheless the truth behind it exists and is one of some considerable importance in the perfection of our power of nature; but we have to take it in its inner aspects, first, personality, character, temperament, soul-type, then the soul-force which lies behind them and wears these forms, and lastly the play of the free spiritual Shakti in which they find their culmination and unity beyond all modes. For the crude external idea that a man is born as a Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya or Shudra and that alone, is not a psychological truth of our being. The psychological fact is that there are these four active powers and tendencies of the Spirit and its executive Shakti within us and the predominance of one or the other in the more well-formed part of our personality gives us our main tendencies, dominant qualities and capacities, effective turn in action and life. But they are more or less present in all men, here manifest, there latent, here developed, there subdued and depressed or subordinate, and in the perfect man will be raised up to a fullness and harmony which in the spiritual freedom will burst out into the free play of the infinite quality of the spirit in the inner and outer life and in the self-enjoying creative play of the Purusha with his and the world's Nature-Power.”

In the Gita, Krishna also asserts this fourfold order, this *caturvarna*, as created by him, created according to the divisions of quality and active function. Indeed, this *caturvarna* is present everywhere, in all the societies and during all the periods of time. Plato and Kant and Einstein were Brahmins, Julius Caesar and Eisenhower and Alexander the Great were Kshatriyas, Henri Ford and DuPont or the present-day Bill Gates make the Vaishyas, the factory worker and the smith and the bank employee and the government servant including the highest secretary are Shudras. That is the eternal *caturvarna*. In the Indian social organisation, however, *caturvarna* later became four castes. That was the Great Fall which is unfortunate, speaking of the decadent nature of the society; but the more unfortunate result is that the original *caturvarna* got much maligned in the process. Its justification nor disownment rests with the dead society. What is necessary is that, the maligned system has to be redeemed by breathing the spiritual fire into it — as fire is the purifier of everything, *Agni*

*Pavaka* as the Veda speaks of Agni the Mystic Fire. This has got to be corrected, this crude distortion of *caturvarna* removed; original *caturvarna* needs to be recovered in its true sense. Perhaps another *Sarvahuta Yajna* needs be performed again.

It is interesting to note how Sri Aurobindo looks at *caturvarna* from the point of view of the Vaishnava experience. It is as follows: Vishnu as the Sustainer of the Creation has four forms: Mahavira, Balarama, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha. Mahavira is the Brahmin possessing Knowledge and Light and Awareness; Balarama embodies Kshatriya quality of Force and Dynamism; Pradyumna the Vaishya is one who expresses the quality of Love and Beauty; Aniruddha is Shudra with competent service, and with the quality of organisation and execution in details; it was he who had prompted Brahma to do the *Sarvahuta Yajna* when Brahma had remained inactive. If this is a spirituality reality and not a mythology, if such is the origin of the four qualities, then how can these be disputed anywhere or at any time? In fact, their truth is present in all the four, in varying degrees in all the individuals and in all societies or functioning groups, including the corporate organisations.

Vivekananda brings out the yogic aspect of the *caturvarna* in another beautiful manner, in a forceful manner indeed. When he speaks of Jnana Yoga, Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and Karma Yoga he is also suggesting the methods available for the Divine's realisation for the corresponding type or quality or cast of the soul present in this manifestation. That is the marvellous truth of *caturvarna*, founded in the Sacrifice of the Purusha. These four are the Yogas for the four types of the soul, the fourfold soul-qualities, *swabhava*, Jnana for the Brahmin, Raja for the Kshatriya, Bhakti for the Vaishya, and Karma for the Shudra. Each one of them being a process for the realisation of the self, there is nothing inferior or superior of one over the other.

The Vedic *Purusha Sukta* thus becomes very meaningful because of the fundamentals it provides to us in its suggestive-intuitive but spiritually loaded language in the context of the collective working. The appearance of the four aspects is only the beginning in the process of cosmic manifestation, and only when these four have founded their harmony and freedom can other aspects, the higher powers descend into it. At a deeper level, it is the impregnation of the material existence that is spoken of by it. God seems to become greater by the sacrifice, by relinquishment without ceding anything, by the fall to initiate from timelessness the works of Time.

The Mother explains the aspect of Sacrifice of the Purusha as follows:

“The Divine has sacrificed Himself in Matter to awaken consciousness in Matter, which had become inconscient. And it is this sacrifice, this giving of the Divine in Matter, that is to say, His dispersion in Matter, which justifies the

sacrifice of Matter to the Divine and makes it obligatory; for it is one and the same reciprocal movement. It is because the Divine has given Himself in Matter and scattered Himself everywhere in Matter to awaken it to the divine consciousness, that Matter is automatically under the obligation to give itself to the Divine. It is a mutual and reciprocal sacrifice. And this is the great secret of the Gita: the affirmation of the divine Presence in the very heart of Matter. And that is why, Matter must sacrifice itself to the Divine, automatically, even unconsciously — whether one wants it or not, this is what happens.”

The Sacrifice of the Purusha is a Vedic image. It is the Being who is projecting himself in the Cosmic and Individual play of manifestation. What is understood in it is that he is doing it by the power of his own Purushahood, Consciousness-Force inherently present in the Truth-Existence, in the uncleavable oneness of the Presence-and-Power the Presence acting because of his self-potency, of the full executive Power resting in him, by resort to his own nature, *prakṛti.m svam*, as the Gita would say.

Sri Aurobindo views this Holocaust of the Divine Soul not in terms of the Being but in terms of the Consciousness-Force, the creation of the worlds and beings being the task of the Divine Shakti, the responsible executrix She, the Mother of all that is here and that shall be here, in this universe and other universes.

Our life is a holocaust of the Supreme.

The great World-Mother by her sacrifice

Has made her soul the body of our state;

Accepting sorrow and unconsciousness

Divinity's lapse from its own splendours wove

The many-patterned ground of all we are. (Ibid, p.99)

He says, “...this is the great sacrifice called sometimes the sacrifice of the Purusha, but much more deeply the holocaust of Prakriti, the sacrifice of the Divine Mother.” She has left her royalty, her *aishwarya*, her *vaibhava*, her glory, majesty, and accepted the conditions of Ignorance. The higher or transcendental Nature, Para Prakriti operating in the field of unyielding Ignorance, Apra Prakriti, Consciousness-Force in the lower Nature under the governance of the Inconscient Self and the Somnambulist Force.

About the “holocaust of Prakriti”, Sri Aurobindo mentions both the impersonal and personal aspects of the Sacrifice:

“The Mother not only governs all from above but she descends into this lesser triple universe. Impersonally, all things here, even the movements of the Ignorance, are herself in veiled power and her creations in diminished substance, her Nature-body and Nature-force, and they exist because, moved by the mysterious fiat of the Supreme to work out something that was there

in the possibilities of the Infinite, she has consented to the great sacrifice and has put on like a mask the soul and forms of the Ignorance. But personally too she has stooped to descend here into the Darkness that she may lead it to the Light, into the Falsehood and Error that she may convert it to the Truth, into this Death that she may turn it to godlike Life, into this world-pain and its obstinate sorrow and suffering that she may end it in the transforming ecstasy of her sublime Ananda.”

The three poises of the Consciousness-Force, of Creatrix, the Divine Mother are: the Transcendental as the original supreme Shakti standing above the worlds and linking the creation to the ever unmanifest mystery of the Supreme; the Universal, the cosmic Mahashakti creating all these beings and these worlds, containing and entering, supporting and conducting all these million processes and forces; the Individual, she embodying the power of these two vaster ways of her existence, making them living and near to us and mediating between human personality and the divine Nature. It is all her work, extension and expansion of her dynamism. The Mahashakti, the universal Mother works out whatever is transmitted to her by the Supreme. Each of the worlds is one play of the Mahashakti, her *cid-vilasa*. At the summit of this manifestation there are worlds of infinite existence, consciousness, force and bliss over which the Mother stands as the unveiled eternal Power. Nearer to us are the worlds of the supramental creation in which the Mother is the supramental Mahashakti, a Power of divine omniscient Will and omnipotent Knowledge always apparent in its unfailing works and spontaneously perfect in every process. But here are the worlds of the Ignorance, worlds of mind and life and body separated in consciousness from her source, of which the earth is a significant centre and its evolution a crucial process. This too is upheld by the Universal Mother, guided to its secret aim by the Mahashakti. This is what we have in Sri Aurobindo’s little Masterpiece *The Mother*.

The Mother’s powers and personalities here are for a cosmic work. Sri Aurobindo described four of them in his letter to Kapali Shastri which was included afterwards in that little Masterpiece. These four powers in the cosmic working are: Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, and Mahasaraswati, they respectively having the qualities of Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, and Perfection. These four powers of the Mother are the fourfold Soul’s forces and they operate variously in the cosmic scheme of things. It is because of them that the present cosmic order is functioning.

The equivalence of the terms Wisdom-Strength-Harmony-Perfection of The Mother and Brahmin-Kshatriya-Vaishya-Shudra of the *Purusha Sukta* is striking. In fact, both are the same: the Vedic phraseology based on the Purusha-principle as the Creator and the other viewing it as *cid-vilasa*, the presentation



of Consciousness-Force as the Executive She — both are one and the same. If the work of the highest Consciousness-Force, the Divine Mother, the supreme Shakti is the work of manifestation, then that manifestation in the universe is through her four great timeless powers as four aspects of the Shakti or the Mother, Maheshwari-Mahakali-Mahalakshmi-Mahasaraswati. The Shakti formulation given to us by Sri Aurobindo is practically absent in the *Veda*; but that does not mean that it does not recognise the aspect of manifestation through the creative power of the Being or Purusha. Essentially, both are describing the same reality. At a deeper level, the Will of the Purusha is put into action by the Prakriti: he wills; she executes, his is *samkalpa* and hers the *karya* — that is the formula describing the entire design or system of operation. “His soul, silent, supports the world and her,” and “She through his witness sight and motion of might unrolls the material of her cosmic act.” Thus Omnipotence and Omnipresence go together in this manifestation.

We may therefore with some justification use both the Purusha and Prakriti formulations interchangeably. Out of the Holocaust of Prakriti got established the Four Powers: Maheshwari-Mahakali-Mahalakshmi-Mahasaraswati. Out of the Sacrifice of the Purusha arose the Four Qualities: Brahmin-Kshatriya-Vaishya-Shudra. In the *Sarvahuta Yajna* the Gods and the Rishis and the Sadhyas willed their appearance, brought about from the body of the sacrificed Purusha this cosmic creation. If the holocaust of the Prakriti is also the result of a similarly willed action, then the extent and the scope of work of the Four Powers are then necessarily governed by that will. No doubt, they are great Presences, and that the “human nature bounded, egoistic and obscure is inapt to support their mighty action.” But there are also “other great Personalities of the Divine Mother, but they were more difficult to bring down.” *Sarvahuta Yajna* is not adequate to bring them down in the cosmic functioning. The will of the Gods and the Rishis and the Sadhyas falls short of it.

What does that mean? Let us put it in the manner of the following question: Is the Sacrifice of the Purusha a Divine Will that is constantly streaming into the Avidya and driving the evolutionary process? Or is the sacrifice the “beginning”, an Involution and the expectation of a “Return”, or an entry by miracle but not a continuing entry? Firstly, the Sacrifice of the Purusha is not happening directly as a result of the Divine Will; it was willed by the Gods and the Rishis and the Sadhyas. Therefore the aspect of constant streaming of the Divine Will must be seen in the context of the evolutionary progress that has so far been made and is not always automatic, it cannot be taken for granted; there has to be the invocation from below and there has to be the needed spiritual support, adhara, for the action to take place here. It is quite important to recognise the fact that invocation for the divine descent or the sacrifice is not

just a one-time affair, that things will keep on happening afterwards. Evolution or Divine Manifestation upon Earth is not a linear process, a Newtonian-Cartesian formulation, a mechanical chain of events; there are strands cutting into strands or woven into strands, and there are wheels within wheels making it a multi-parametric business, with known and unknown factors interlocked into it. The basic line, its fundamental *raison d'être* is understandable and recognisable; it is also enviable and attractive, but the details remain complex and uncertain. Call it Yoga, call it *tapasya*, call it Yajna, there has to be a call from below, an ardent aspiration, invocation, and then only can the answering Grace descend. The Four Powers appeared in response to a call.

“There are,” writes Sri Aurobindo, “other great Personalities of the Divine Mother, but they were more difficult to bring down and have not stood out in front with so much prominence in the evolution of the earth spirit.” But these Four Powers — Wisdom-Strength-Harmony-Perfection or Maheshwari-Mahakali-Mahalakshmi-Mahasaraswati — were brought down, if we go by the *Purusha Sukta* description, by the Gods, the Rishis, and the Sadhyas, they performing the *Sarvahuta Yajna* and making their appearance here possible. But this Yajna, as we have seen, seems to prove inadequate to bring down other great Personalities of the Divine Mother, Personalities whose presence is indispensable if evolution has to step from Ignorance into Knowledge. In Sri Aurobindo we have the following:

“There are among them Presences indispensable for the supramental realisation, — most of all one who is her Personality of that mysterious and powerful ecstasy and Ananda which flows from a supreme divine Love, the Ananda that alone can heal the gulf between the highest heights of the supramental spirit and the lowest abysses of Matter, the Ananda that holds the key of a wonderful divinest Life and even now supports from its secrecies the work of all the other Powers of the universe...”

But then he adds, importantly:

“Only when the Four have founded their harmony and freedom of movement in the transformed mind and life and body, can those other rarer Powers manifest in the earth movement and the supramental action become possible.”

If there are “Presences indispensable for the supramental realisation,” the question is: What is that Yajna that can bring down those indispensable Presences, particularly that Personality of Ecstasy and Ananda? and who is going to do that Yajna? That leads to another subsidiary issue: Are we ready to receive her? Indeed, only when the Four have founded their harmony and freedom can she come down. Our collective life here at the moment does not meet that demand and therefore the work which we have to do is to establish the life which is based on Wisdom-Strength-Harmony-Perfection. They are there in

the cosmic field, and they are working also constantly; but they have to become a part of our being, individual and collective, they have to enter in our body and life and mind and soul and the spirit. This is the aspect that must be addressed to by an enlightened social scientist, one who has to be a seer himself. The fact of well-organised collective life for the higher creation, preparing for the race of the gnostic beings, is greatly dependent upon it.

But long before that Personality of Ecstasy and Ananda can come, someone else has to come here first. The ground for her coming has to be prepared. The dark foreboding mind of Night standing across the path of the divine Event has to be transformed, made receptive to the descending Light and Power, the obstacle on the evolutionary course removed, the massive golden door shutting this earth from the Divine smashed with a golden hammer. The divine Shakti must incarnate herself here. Will she come of her own? As a matter of concern for this creation will she come of her own.

An answer to this question is available to us in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo's epic based on the ancient tale of Savitri given in the Mahabharata. In the story, Aswapati performs the Savitri-Yajna for long and difficult eighteen years and, in response to it, receives a boon from the Goddess Savitri. She tells him that soon a radiant daughter, *kanya tejasvini*, will be born to him, she who will bring fulfilment by winning a victory over Yama, the stiff God of Death. Aswapati was assured that one shall descend, descend bearing Wisdom in her voiceless bosom, and that she shall possess strength of a conqueror's sword; she shall come with Jnana and Shakti. She was born and, in honour of the Boon-giver Goddess, was named Savitri.

Connected with "one shall descend", we have in Savitri the following: "A world's desire compelled her mortal birth" and

Answering earth's yearning and her cry for bliss,

A greatness from our other countries came. (Ibid, p.353)

Aswapati carried the "world's desire" to the Divine Mother and, in answer to that earth's yearning, Savitri came from our other countries. But when did she come? "Savitri is represented in the poem," writes Sri Aurobindo in a letter, "as an incarnation of the Divine Mother. This incarnation is supposed to have taken place in far past times when the whole thing had to be opened, so as to 'hew the ways of Immortality'." It was the Yoga-Yajna of Aswapati that brought her down as an incarnation. She accepted mortal birth. She accepted "to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death." That was the New Yajna performed by him.

If the *Sarvahuta Yajna* of the *Purusha Sukta*, performed by the Gods and the Rishis and the Sadhyas, established the Four Powers of the Divine Mother here in the Cosmos, the Savitri-Yajna, performed by Aswapati, compelled the

Goddess' mortal birth on Earth. But there is a difference between the two, a difference of capital importance. The Four Powers are basically typical; Savitri's is an incarnation, a mortal birth, she passing through the portals of the birth that is a death. She is present here in the evolutionary process all the while, she executing the Will of the Supreme in Evolution. Indeed she does the Yoga of Surrender to the Supreme and in his Will identifies her will to shape the destiny of the world. Only the incarnation that took place in the far past times can do it and not other powers and personalities or embodiments of the Divine Mother, the Consciousness-Force of the Divine, who have another role to play in the Cosmos. Savitri's surrender to the Supreme is the surety of the success in reaching the set goal. That is the perfection, of total Surrender to the Supreme, which she alone can possess, which the other powers and personalities or embodiments are incapable of possessing. That is the "greatness" Savitri, she who was "sent forth of old beneath the stars" of the dark Night.

The phrase "portals of the birth that is a death" is a beautiful description of this world of ours, of our mortal lot, our mortal state, of the conditions in which we make progress through them both together; in just a few words we have here an accurate picture of this mortal world, *mṛtyuloka*. Its poetic enchantment is such that the fright, the obscurity and darkness and falsehood in which we live become their opposites. What we have in this mortal world is "the birth that is a death". From the prayers of the Mother, we might get some idea as how that "greatness" suffered while accepting such a birth. They are revelations indeed of her travail. Thus:

My Lord, my sweet Master, for the accomplishment of Thy work I have sunk down into the unfathomable depths of Matter, I have touched with my finger the horror of the falsehood and the inconscience, I have reached the seat of oblivion and a supreme obscurity. But in my heart was the Remembrance, from my heart there leaped the call which could arrive to Thee: "Lord, Lord, everywhere Thy enemies appear triumphant; falsehood is the monarch of the world; life without Thee is a death, a perpetual hell; doubt has usurped the place of Hope and revolt has pushed out Submission; Faith is spent, Gratitude is not born; blind passions and murderous instincts and a guilty weakness have covered and stifled Thy sweet law of love. Lord, wilt Thou permit Thy enemies to prevail, falsehood and ugliness and suffering to triumph? Lord, give the command to conquer and victory will be there. I know we are unworthy, I know the world is not yet ready. But I cry to Thee with an absolute faith in Thy Grace and I know that Thy Grace will save." Thus, my prayer rushed up towards Thee; and, from the depths of the abyss, I beheld Thee in Thy radiant splendour; Thou didst appear and Thou saidst to me: "Lose not courage, be firm, be confident, — I COME."



Such intensity of anguish! Such totality of commitment to do the work the Lord gave her to do! She is prepared to bear the assaults of the adversary force, the extreme of pain and suffering. Hers is the work connected with the evolutionary soul of the earth into which she has entered, and no hardship she discounts in making it progress towards the Divine. It is for that purpose she passes through the portals of the life that is a death. Other powers of the Divine Mother don't do that; nor perhaps do they experience the same distress and agony. They have, no doubt, left their luminous realms of Truth and Light and Joy and Power and accepted their stations in the field of Ignorance; but they do not pass through the portals of the life that is a death, they are essentially non-evolutionary in character. There are goddesses and goddesses, but Savitri is someone else, with a psychic soul.

What were the gifts received as a result of doing the *Sarvahuta Yajna*, the offering of the All, the Yajna of the *Purusha Sukta*? Out of the sacrifice emerged, among many splendid things, Indra and Vayu and Agni. But who are they, these Gods? These are the Gods connected with Mind and Life and Matter, the mental, the vital, and the physical worlds, the Divine Mind, the Lord of Life, and the Seer-Will in Matter. In *The Secret of the Veda* Sri Aurobindo writes:

“The sons of the Infinite have a twofold birth. They are born above in the divine 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.”

They are here in the cosmos, and they are here amidst us, helping us on the journey towards Truth-Light and Strength and Beauty and Excellence in work, founded in the Four Powers brought down by the Yajna of the *Purusha Sukta*. Their birth is the necessary foundation of the greater life; but the greater birth that is yet to come, the birth of the life divine, is in Aswapati's Yoga-Yajna invoking the descent of the divine Savitri. She has incarnated and it is she who is executing in this creation the Will of the Supreme, executing it to give birth to that new world.

*Sarvahuta Yajna* of the *Purusha Sukta* and Aswapati's *yoga-tapasya* in carrying the world's desire to the supreme Goddess are two marvellous events pertaining to the cosmic manifestation of the manifesting Spirit. But here a question might arise.

Let us put it in the following manner: Is the sacrifice of the Purusha a divine Will that is constantly streaming into this field of Ignorance and it driving the evolutionary process constantly, at every instance? Or is that sacrifice something which marks the “Beginning”, a stage of the involution, with the expectation of a “return”, it just an entry which has somehow happened, a desirable miracle with the waving of the wand by the wizard, and is not going to be a continuing

entry, it taking place repeatedly? Firstly, one thing is clear: the sacrifice of the Purusha is not happening directly as a result of the divine Will; it was willed by the Gods and the rishis and the sadhyas.

Since the cosmic order is willed by the Gods, the rishis and the sadhyas and the Purusha is sacrificed in the great sacrifice, how were these Gods, the rishis and the sadhyas born from the Purusha? Who made it possible? Their presence is prior to the sacrifice itself. How did that happen? The question could be understood only by remembering that *Purusha Sukta's* Sacrifice is but one episode in the sequence of this multi-meaningful creation.

How were the gods born? What can one say about that? Nothing. It certainly is beyond the reach of the modern analytical mind, the rational mind. *Vishnu Purana* and *Bhagavat Purana* do describe the genealogy, but for our suspecting and wise incisive generation it will look mythology and maybe we could just avoid stepping into that domain. We simply don't have any perceptive spiritual contact with the reality to which they belonged. There are gods and gods in the transcendental, and elsewhere, and there are rishis, and there are the cycles of time, the aeons, the *manvantaras* and Manus, and Manas-Putras, and we are not aware of them. But as far as the *Purusha Sukta* is concerned what is presented in it is only one occurrence: the Sukta is not a thesis or a treatise or a textbook on creation, a professional account the way a present-day academician would like to have. It is describing, rather celebrating, one specific event in the cosmic manifestation. The Sukta is triumph song also.

If we have to raise a question in the same vein then, what about the opening line of *Savitri*, that most wonderful line with suggestions and shades of revelation? It was the hour before the Gods awake, — how rich it is! But do the Gods awake by themselves or they are woken up by someone else, woken up by beating a drum or by blowing an occult mysterious horn? The temple gong goes out at 4 O'clock in the morning and the gods awake, at *brahma-muhurta*. And this happens everyday, and with it begins the day for the Gods to do their work.

However, one thing is definite: nothing seems to stream down or happen by itself. There has to be a call, yearning, willing, invocation, prayer. Nothing comes out without yoga or tapasya or yajna. It was in response to something from the earth that life entered into matter, that is, *pranamaya purusha* became the leader of *prana* and *sharira*, Life and Body, *prana-sarira-nêta*, and later came in a similar way the *manomaya murusha*. Here is a vivid description in *Savitri* about the entry of Life on the material scene; she heard a call from the young gods helplessly locked within matter, and volunteered to make an adventurous move:

In the crude beginnings of this mortal world

Life was not nor mind's play nor heart's desire.  
When earth was built in the unconscious Void  
And nothing was save a material scene,  
Identified with sea and sky and stone  
Her young gods yearned for the release of souls  
Asleep in objects, vague, inanimate.  
In that desolate grandeur, in that beauty bare,  
In the deaf stillness, mid the unheeded sounds,  
Heavy was the uncommunicated load  
Of Godhead in a world that had no needs;  
For none was there to feel or to receive.  
This solid mass which brooked no throb of sense  
Could not contain their vast creative urge:  
Immersed no more in Matter's harmony,  
The Spirit lost its statuesque repose.  
In the uncaring trance it groped for sight,  
Passioned for the movements of a conscious heart,  
Famishing for speech and thought and joy and love,  
In the dumb insensitive wheeling day and night  
Hungered for the beat of yearning and response.  
The poised inconscience shaken with a touch,  
The intuitive silence trembling with a name,  
They cried to Life to invade the senseless mould  
And in brute forms awake divinity.  
A voice was heard on the mute rolling globe,  
A murmur moaned in the unlistening Void.  
A being seemed to breathe where once was none:  
Something pent up in dead insentient depths,  
Denied conscious existence, lost to joy,  
Turned as if one asleep since dateless time.  
Aware of its own buried reality,  
Remembering its forgotten self and right,  
It yearned to know, to aspire, to enjoy, to live.  
Life heard the call and left her native light.  
Overflowing from her bright magnificent plane  
On the rigid coil and sprawl of mortal space,  
Here too the gracious great-winged Angel poured  
Her splendour and her sweetness and her bliss,  
Hoping to fill a fair new world with joy.  
As comes a goddess to a mortal's breast

And fills his days with her celestial clasp,  
 She stooped to make her home in transient shapes;  
 In Matter's womb she cast the Immortal's fire,  
 In the unfeeling Vast woke thought and hope,  
 Smote with her charm and beauty flesh and nerve  
 And forced delight on earth's insensible frame.  
 Alive and clad with trees and herbs and flowers  
 Earth's great brown body smiled towards the skies,  
 Azure replied to azure in the sea's laugh;  
 New sentient creatures filled the unseen depths,  
 Life's glory and swiftness ran in the beauty of beasts,  
 Man dared and thought and met with his soul the world.  
 But while the magic breath was on its way,  
 Before her gifts could reach our prisoned hearts,  
 A dark ambiguous Presence questioned all.  
 The secret Will that robes itself with Night  
 And offers to spirit the ordeal of the flesh,  
 Imposed a mystic mask of death and pain.  
 Interned now in the slow and suffering years  
 Sojourns the winged and wonderful wayfarer  
 And can no more recall her happier state,  
 But must obey the inert Inconscient's law,  
 Insensible foundation of a world  
 In which blind limits are on beauty laid  
 And sorrow and joy as struggling comrades live.  
 A dim and dreadful muteness fell on her:  
 Abolished was her subtle mighty spirit  
 And slain her boon of child-god happiness,  
 And all her glory into littleness turned  
 And all her sweetness into a maimed desire.  
 To feed death with her works is here life's doom.  
 So veiled was her immortality that she seemed,  
 Inflicting consciousness on unconscious things,  
 An episode in an eternal death,  
 A myth of being that must for ever cease.  
 Such was the evil mystery of her change. (Ibid, pp.129-131)

Here was an invocation from the gods present in the inanimate physical objects; Life heard the call; she made herself bold to step into the material unknown, least minding the hazard; she poured her gifts on them; but that itself brought a dire questioning Presence, dark and terrible, setting to nought all that

she was trying to do — appeared Death. But the point is, she would not have come of her own had there not be that call from the young gods in the material world.

There is a luminous aspect of this invocation when in identification with the Supreme's Will is the will of the aspiring individual. When the Mother says to the Lord "What thou willest, what thou willest", she herself, in a certain sense, is proposing, even willing, something, and leaving the rest to the Lord. She has worked out a certain possibility but whether it is realistic or not, opportune or not, that she is leaving to the Lord.

Equivalence of the four great cosmic powers as Maheshwari-Mahakali-Mahalakshmi-Mahasaraswati with the four soul-qualities or *swabhavas* as we have in the ancient revelations such as the *Purusha Sukta* or the Gita is unmistakable; *caturvarna* as it is called is a spiritual order working in the occult domain of Nature or Prakriti. If we go by the account of the *Purusha Sukta* then these powers were brought down more or less easily by the efficacy of the *Sarvahuta Yajna*, the sacrifice of the All; the descent of other powers indispensable for the supramental manifestation fall outside its scope. We may look into it by going through the story recounted by the Mother. It is as follows. She is cautious also to say that it should be taken rather as a succinct story:

When the Supreme decided to exteriorise Himself in order to be able to see Himself, the first thing in Himself which He exteriorised was the Knowledge of the world and the Power to create it. This Knowledge-Consciousness and Force began its work; and in the supreme Will there was a plan, and the first principle of this plan was the expression of both the essential Joy and the essential Freedom, which seemed to be the most interesting feature of this creation. So intermediaries were needed to express this Joy and Freedom in forms. And at first four Beings were emanated to start this universal development which was to be the progressive objectivisation of all that is potentially contained in the Supreme. These Beings were, in the principle of their existence: Consciousness and Light, Life, Bliss and Love, and Truth. You can easily imagine that they had a sense of great power, great strength, of something tremendous, for they were essentially the very principle of these things. Besides, they had full freedom of choice, for this creation was to be Freedom itself... As soon as they set to work — they had their own conception of how it had to be done — being totally free, they chose to do it independently. Instead of taking the attitude of servant and instrument... they naturally took the attitude of the master, and this mistake — as I may call it — was the first cause, the essential cause of all the disorder in the universe. As soon as there was separation—for that is the essential cause, separation — as soon as there was separation between the Supreme and



what had been emanated, Consciousness changed into inconscience, Light into darkness, Love into hatred, Bliss into suffering, Life into death and Truth into falsehood. And they proceeded with their creations independently, in separation and disorder. The result is the world as we see it. It was made progressively, stage by stage, and it would truly take a little too long to tell you all that, but finally, the consummation is Matter — obscure, inconscient, miserable.... The creative Force which had emanated these four Beings, essentially for the creation of the world, witnessed what was happening, and turning to the Supreme she prayed for the remedy and the cure of the evil that had been done. Then she was given the command to precipitate her Consciousness into this inconscience, her Love into this suffering, and her Truth into this falsehood. And a greater consciousness, a more total love, a more perfect truth than what had been emanated at first, plunged, so to say, into the horror of Matter in order to awaken in it consciousness, love and truth, and to begin the movement of Redemption which was to bring the material universe back to its supreme origin. So, there have been what might be called ‘successive involutions’ in Matter, and a history of these involutions. The present result of these involutions is the appearance of the Supermind emerging from the inconscience; but there is nothing to indicate that after this appearance there will be no others... for the Supreme is inexhaustible and will always create new worlds. That is my story.

We may discern the following sequence in this narrative by the Mother: the Supreme’s wish to objectivise himself; the emanation of four beings to start the universal development; their separation from the Origin in the joy and freedom they had; the result due to separation from the divine Origin is the world as presently is; the creative Force which had emanated these four Beings is stunned on seeing what had happened; she turns to the Supreme and prays for the remedy; she is given a command to precipitate her Consciousness into this Inconscience, her Love into this suffering, and her Truth into this falsehood. That is the great sacrifice she has made, the Holocaust of the Divine Mother.

Is this holocaust the same as the holocaust of the *Purusha Sukta*? Not exactly so. The holocaust described by the Mother is the beginning of the whole creative-manifestive movement; the sacrifice of the *Purusha Sukta* is one of the movements of the process.

While it is the Consciousness-Force or Prakriti who creates the worlds and upholds the world-movements, for that to happen it is the Being of Truth, the *Sat Purusha*, who has to provide the needed support or *adhara*. The *Sat Purusha* has to do the sacrifice; it is the *Purusha-Yajna* that enables the appearance of these worlds, these countless worlds each characteristic of a particular plane with its appropriate expression. In that sense the creation of

different worlds by Purusha or Prakriti is an inseparable act.

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* celebrates the Yajna of New Creation. It begins at the beginning of things. It opens with action in the Transcendental and the entire concern is for the Evolutionary Soul of the Earth. It has by now emerged out of the darkness of Inconscience and stepped into the half-light of knowledge, of mental awareness. But it is an awareness bordering at best on the spiritual and obviously this partial attainment cannot be the culmination of its growth. Beyond the worlds of ignorance, there are the worlds of luminous possibilities and they must become a part of the earth's life. This can happen only when a radical change takes place in its character and quality. The imperative is that the hesitant path turn into a path of progress in Superconscience. There is however a formidable and frightening existential impediment standing across it and unless that is removed nothing divinely worthwhile can be achieved. The difficult problem of transition from Ignorance into the richly growing domains of Knowledge assumes an altogether new proportion as compared with the growth that until so far was taking place in the cosmic Ignorance.

It is a problem connected with response and receptivity of the physical Nature, with its stiffly formed Inconscient will difficult to change. Locked in that will is the inflexible Law of Death which sprang up when Life entered into Matter. It is indispensable that the law of growing immortality replaces this regime of mortal existence. Right now the grave impediment is in the nature of the mind of the physical. If we go to the root of the cause, we see that this mind was built by the powers of darkness as an aspect of necessity, and has remained all along subject to them; the necessity was to give to whatever form had appeared out of the void a power to withstand the tendency of it being swallowed by that void itself. It has now become the mind of Night standing as an obstacle across the path of the cherished event. If the mind of the physical receiving the supramental is the mind of Light, then we can say that the mind of the physical receiving the Inconscient is the mind of Night. This physical mind, the mind of the obstinate physical, because it has already taken a form seems to be more tenacious, more ominous and threatening also than a certain kind of plasticity that is otherwise there in the infinite Nothingness. Not the spirit of Night, the Purusha of the Inconscience, but the grimly formed mind of Night with its refusal to change is what is to be recognized as the real occult difficulty. This also means that it is inherently a difficulty of Nature, a material and not a spiritual difficulty. This mind of Night must open to the wonderful powers of Truth and Consciousness and Bliss and become the mind of Light. The way is long towards it but it must be taken. That is the immediate purport of the yogic Savitri. In it is set the problem and in it is given the solution also.

But the mind of Night cannot transform into mind of Night by itself. It is

obdurate and enduring and bears the stamp of inconscience, of sticking to what it is. The change in the evolutionary course cannot happen of its own, although it does possess all the possibilities of the Spirit in it. Therefore there has to be a direct operative involvement of the Supreme in it, an involvement that should be twofold. Which means that, the Supreme should incarnate himself as a full-bodied Avatar and do *yoga-tapasya* in the physical. The Vedic rishis spoke of the body as an unbaked earthen vessel or *atapta tanu* in which so far no *tapas* has been done. In their marvellous pursuit they had arrived at this stage but got stuck because it is the descent of the Supermind that alone can bring about the miracle. The key for the descent of the Supermind in the physical was not available to them and therefore the issue remained unresolved. Now the supramental Avatar comes here as Aswapati and does *tapasya* in the physical, makes ready the desired *tapta tanu*. By his *yoga-tapasya* is prepared, in the field of ignorant and stumbling Nature, the ground for his Executive's world-action. She shall then as Savitri take the mortal birth in the Will of the Supreme and do Shakti Yoga. With this double yoga accomplished, in its siddhi shall the soul of the Earth step into the regions of Knowledge. A new and authentic felicity shall thus be established.

*Savitri* begins with the announcement of the death of Satyavan. This looks very dramatic, giving an impression that the poet is plunging without delay into the midst of the great cosmic action. In Narad's revelation in the Book of Fate also we have the assertion that Satyavan's death is a decreed death and that he must die. There is no ambiguity or indefiniteness in his pronouncement; in fact he is very categorical about it. Which means that, in that decision, are present the Transcendent's both will and action, *samkalpa* and *kriya*. In it Satyavan shall die to the past and abandon the paths of the old stumbling Nature. For this to happen on earth, the incarnate with the help of the Gods must climb up the new peaks of ascent. But the gods are still asleep and unless they awake this night's darkness cannot end; but it cannot end when the doom stands there as her guard.

The gods are the powers of the Divine promoting in cosmic action slow growth of the earth's soul and therefore they must fulfillingly participate in it. If Reality in the truth of movement has set into motion this enterprise, then it must as well grow in it. An aspect of that transcendental Reality as manifesting Rtam in the dynamics of Becoming has also to emerge in the great rhythms of Time. Behind this creation is that Transcendent's *samkalpa*, the Will to be. This Will is the Cosmic Yajna upholding the vast cosmic action. But this Yajna cannot be performed when the divine forces are still asleep. Therefore the first task of the divine Being, *Sat Purusha*, is to kindle this fire of sacrifice in the primordial darkness; for, it is he who performs it for the sempiternal good of this

creation. That hour, *brahma-muhurta*, to initiate the sacrifice has now arrived and the offering or ahuti of the Inconscient past in the yajna can be made. The boons of this yajna shall be the plenitudes of immortality. That is how yajna in its root sense becomes the dynamic creativity with the dawn, the sun, the wind, the year, the sky, the directions, the earth, the stars, animals and birds and men and the great gods participating in it.

Under the old Nature's sway Satyavan, the Divine incarnate as the soul of the earth, remained all along helpless and bound. He could not step into the eternal day, into the splendours of Superconscience. At times something did stir on the remote border of dream and awareness, *swapna* and *susupti*, but too feeble was the movement. Many wide-shining dawns of the Veda had since then come and returned without fulfilling the promise they had brought with them. The inflexible Night with all her antagonism yet prevailed and the effort had to begin once again. The daughter of the Sun, the transforming Might rising from golden flames of the Supreme's cosmic yajna must effectively deal with it. She must take the mortal birth, but even in that mortal birth she must possess the conqueror's power that knows no defeat. Now the moment has arrived and the goddess incarnates herself as Savitri. Divine Savitri accepts the mortal's lot that has been always full of pain and suffering; she accepts the challenge of Satyavan's death, the challenge posed to her by Yama the embodied Nothingness. The heroic undertaking is that this incorrigible and severe Yama's incumbency be terminated. Presently the soul of the Earth, the divine soul is in his possession and Savitri must claim it from him. This can happen only in the utter inevitability of the death of Satyavan, her consort in the heavenly creation on earth. After one year of their association in the cycles of Time he must die to it. The result shall be the transformation of the immortal God of Death into the supreme Benefactor of this mortal creation, this *mrtyuloka* to which we belong.

When this is done a new yajna shall be kindled. This shall be the yajna of New Creation. In it not the early Purusha and Prakriti but Satyavan and Savitri shall tend the leaping golden flames. These shall bear the expression of the True. The luminous gods and goddesses shall attend the ceremony and receive a share of the offerings in the yajna. In it then shall be born the Sun-God, Savitr. Savitri who in the Transcendental is the daughter of Savitr, of the Sun-God, shall as a result prove on Earth the mother of that Sun-God himself. The daughter thus becomes, somewhat paradoxically in the manner of the *Puranas*, the mother of her father. When this happens there is the beginning of the new creation. In it is the endowment, the boon of the yajna. That is the glory of the great Savitri-Yajna, and we should be thankful to Aswapati for performing it. The fruit of this yajna is the New Creation.

# Upanishads – I

Debashish Banerji

In the last instalment, we looked at Vedic literature, its genesis and symbolism. We have also dabbled in its historicity. In any case, a probable scenario, based on current understanding is that by about 10th or 11th c. BCE, Vedic literature had become stratified so as to serve two social-psychological needs: the authorisation of a symbolic society in which roles were defined through ritual; and individual praxis, whether through the external (*bahya*) performance of ritual (*puja*) or based on a praxical interpretation of the symbolism (*sadhana*). As happens with any society that tries to embody a symbol, this violates reality's law of radical plurality and tends to become a fascism. In the case of late Vedic society, the caste system had hardened and the collusive mutual authorisation of priesthood (brahmin) and royalty (kshatriya) dominated the rest of society. Access to the divine was mediated by priests. As a response to this kind of use of the Veda, the schools of internal praxis began expressing themselves keeping in mind the corruption of the symbol. To safeguard against this, they developed a new vocabulary and a new style of speech. These were used to express what seemed to be new concepts and new forms of praxis, but were in most cases a critique and revisionary formulation of Vedic ideas. All this was geared towards a keeping open of the infinity of the system in objective and subjective terms. The philosopher Gilles Deleuze has called these kinds of revolutions "new images of thought."

## Historicity of the Upanishads

Later, there was an organisation of Hindu canonical literature into *shruti* (heard/revealed literature) and *smriti* (remembered literature). Related to this, is the set of texts classed under Vedic literature. These are the *Samhitas*, the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads*, the last of which became known as *Vedanta*, which means end of the Veda. It is most possible that the addition of the Upanishads to this corpus came well after the other three. Those three (*Samhita*, *Brahmana* and *Aranyaka*) bear evidence of an early version



of the ashrama (and perhaps purushartha) system, the *Samhitas* being taught in the *gurukula* during *brahmacharya* (student phase); the Brahmanas used for rituals sacralising and organising the symbolic society during *grihastya* (householder phase) and the *Aranyakas* forming interpretations and practices during *vanaprastha* (forest dwelling retreat phase) (ChU II.23). It could be that the Upanishads were tied as an independent genre to this system at a later period (probably during the Hindu synthesis 4th c. BCE – 5th c. CE) because, from the earliest Upanishads, there is critique and satire against the ritualisation and socialisation of the Veda, at the same time as there is some validation through reinterpretation of Vedic elements. Perhaps by the period (4th – 6th c.) in which the imperial Guptas and their allies helped to normalise what we now know as puranic Hinduism, the Upanishads were appended to this Vedic family of texts and were classified, along with the *samhitas*, as canonical revealed literature (*sruti*). In this context, the Upanishads were classed as *jnana kanda*, wisdom texts while the *samhitas* were called *karma kanda*, ritual texts. The addition of a fourth ashrama, *sannyasa*, following *vanaprastha*, and meant for the fulfilment of *moksha*, may also have arisen at this time, since neither the shramanic traditions of wandering mendicants nor the hermitage (ashrama) traditions seem to have been socialised earlier in terms of entree's age. It is interesting to note that the Upanishads themselves, seen as a body of text spread over a long period, include both *jivanmukti* (liberation in life) and a world-negating *moksha* as their goals.

Shankaracharya (8th c.) interpreted 10 Upanishads, which thenceforth became the core of the main (*mukhya*) Upanishads and mandatory as one of three textual sources (*prasthanaya traya*) for new schools of Indian metaphysics (*darshan*) to interpret. Later three more Upanishads were added to this set, to make up “13 principal Upanishads,” while the larger canon of Upanishads is supposed to contain 108. As part of the organisation of Vedic literature, these Upanishads are associated with specific *samhitas*. The relations may be summarised as follows:

| Samhita                      | Upanishad                                      |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Rig</i>                   | <i>Aitareya</i>                                |
| <i>Yajur</i>                 | <i>Brihadaranyaka, Isha, Taittiriya, Katha</i> |
| <i>Sama</i>                  | <i>Chandogya, Kena</i>                         |
| <i>Atharva</i>               | <i>Mandukya, Mundaka, Prashna</i>              |
| Other “principal Upanishads” | <i>Shvetashvatara, Kaushitaki, Maitrayani</i>  |

The *Chandogya* and *Brihadaranyaka Upanishads* are the oldest of these, belonging to a period of approximately 8th c. BCE, and share a family resemblance in being compendiums of a variety of texts, evidently edited and classed as Upanishads. There is some overlap in the texts belonging to these two Upanishads, attesting to the fact of an emerging literature with commonalities of idea, which became the core of the genre. As may be seen in the name *Brihadaranyaka*, this emerging body of literature was originally integrated into the existing system of Vedic literature, in this case as an *aranyaka* related to the White (*Shukla*) *Yajur Veda* and a part of the *Satapatha Brahmana*, while the *Chandogya* remains part of the Brahmana related to the *Sama Veda*. Later Upanishads developed a distinct character and grew in terms of the corpus, so that the body of texts was considered an independent genre related to the *samhitās*.

### ***Chandogya Upanishad***

Thus a perusal of the *Chandogya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads* foregrounds many of the themes and ideas common to this body of texts. As mentioned earlier, these texts evidence a culture privileging contemplation and internal praxis over ritual maintenance of a symbolic Vedic society. The term “Upanishad” occurs within the *Chandogya Upanishad* itself. Etymologically, it means “to sit near” (*upa* = *near*, *nishat* = sit), and has been understood to mean, socially, the dialogic method of intimate teaching characteristic of ashrama *gurukulas*; and practically, “secret doctrine,” a kind of intuitive language use, that “sits near” to the truth. The themes of the *Chandogya* form a bridge between the Veda and the later Upanishads. Since the Veda was considered revealed utterance (*mantra*), it deals in a variety of ways with the notion of mantra. As with several later Upanishads, it privileges the syllabic (*bija*) mantra *Om*, as well as several others. But unlike the prevailing doctrine of unthinking repetition of verses, it enjoins focused contemplation on the mantra, on what it means and the experience it brings. In this context, it satirises unthinking repetition through a parable of the dogs that go to a teacher in a group, each holding another’s tail in its mouth and howling “Om, let us eat! Om, let us drink! Lord of food, bring hither food, bring it! Om!” [ChU I.12.1-5]

### **Towards a Science of Mantra**

Thus, through the equation/reduction of Vedic ritual chanting to contemplative *bija* mantra practice, particularly on the *Om* (*udgitha*) and the correspondences between life-activities and vibration and rhythm (ChU I.13, II.1-7), the *Chandogya Upanishad* opens up the area of mantra shastra, a science of mantra, never elaborated before and leading to later elaborations in texts of yoga and tantra. Similarly, in dealing with other Vedic matters also, there is a

displacement to individual inner practices, evidently prevalent at the time, or being introduced as new forms. It is most probable that one such prevalent practice being privileged here (as in other early Upanishads) is the practice of breath as related to the life-energy (*prana*). Eyes, ears, speech, mind and life are the faculties/instruments of the individual that are enumerated and of these, the life-force (*prana*) is declared to be the most primal, hence becoming the principle handle through which to approach the mantra and all spiritual realisation (ChU I.2, V.1). Elsewhere a more insubstantial medium, *akasha* (space) is affirmed as being the most primal element (ChU I.8-9). In terms of the science of mantra, we can see how vibration and idea are the two components of the mantra, as of all reality, that the *Chandogya* prioritises, related respectively to the life-force (*prana*) and idea-space of consciousness (*akasha*).

### **Brahman and Atman**

Apart from the power of mantra and rhythm, the most important introduction of this very early Upanishad is the concept of Brahman and its identity at the individual level with Atman. A subtle connection with the Veda can be seen here as well, since though Brahman is not mentioned explicitly in the Veda, the god *Brahmanaspati* (later Brahma) is the Lord of the Creative Word. Given the primacy of the Divine Word of mantra in the *Chandogya* (*chhanda* = rhythm) Upanishad, the introduction of Brahman in this context may be expected. Brahman in this Upanishad, however, assumes much greater proportions than that of the Divine Word. In fact, it is the totality of Conscious Reality itself, Conscious Being, a definition that will be carried into the entire corpus of the Upanishads. This indeed becomes the primary monistic principle, corresponding to the solar godhead of the Veda, that the Upanishads affirm and build their philosophy around. It becomes the central objective of the individual to realise, not only desirable but mandatory as a fulfilment of the meaning of one's existence, since it is affirmed that Brahman has become the cosmos and all things in it. It resides at the centre of all beings, individualised as the atman, hence the realisation of atman and its equation with Brahman become the goal of the Upanishad (eg. ChU III.14). It makes its points about the ubiquity, infinity, consciousness and bliss of Brahman through a number of parables, which have now become famous, involving figures such as Shvetaketu, Raikva and Satyakama Jabala.

### **Revision of Casteism**

From this also springs the *Chandogya Upanishad's* revisionary gesture towards Vedic caste, where it attaches the etymological meaning of Brahmana (brahmin) as a knower of Brahman. The story of Satyakama Jabala, a bastard who tells the truth about his birth and is accepted by the master Upakosala as a Brahmin, fit for knowledge of Brahman is one of the most well known in this

context (ChU IV.4-9). Another is the story of Janasruti the king and Raikva the cart puller (ChU IV.1-3). Janasruti, though a pious king, lacks Brahman knowledge while Raikva, a poor cart-puller possesses Brahman knowledge and teaches it to Janasruti. Raikva is referred to as a Brahmin and Janasruti as a Sudra.

### **Krishna Devakiputra**

The *Chandogya* is thus populated with a varied cast of ancient characters from all walks of life, who in various ways, receive or grant the knowledge of Brahman. Repeatedly, the form of this transmission is presented in contrast with informational knowledge. The teacher often asks the student, who has studied in the gurukula, what he has learnt and pushes further to ask if he has knowledge of Brahman? He then proceeds to teach ideas and forms of contemplation leading to Brahman knowledge. One of these characters in the *Chandogya* is Krishna Devakiputra (ChU III.17.6), Krishna the son of Devaki, who becomes such a major divine personality in later Hindu religion. In the *Chandogya*, Krishna is mentioned as one who heard three sentences from his guru, Rishi Ghora Angirasa, and became instantly enlightened. The mantra he heard was:

*Akshitamasi* (you are indestructible)

*Achyutamasi* (you are inseparable)

*Pranasamsitamasi* (you are the essence of Life)

Identity of Macrocosm and Microcosm

In equating atman and Brahman, the *Chandogya* also follows a general principle repeated in all the Upanishads, the correspondence and identity between macrocosm and microcosm. The solar symbolism of the Veda is also invoked by this Upanishad in this same context, indicating the sun as the physical manifestation of the Brahman, and also the essence of the Veda (ChU III.1-11). Its essential quality is given as madhu, honey or bliss. Regarding the question of the two goals we have touched on earlier, if anything, the *Chandogya* seems to affirm the desirable goal as a cessation from rebirth and an exclusive identity with Brahman. This it does in its discussion of the two paths — the path of the fathers (*pitriyana*) and the path of the gods (*devayana*) (ChU V.3-10). The path of the fathers is followed through the performance of Vedic rituals and good deeds in life, while the path of the gods is followed by seeking Brahman knowledge. The goal of the first is a good afterlife and rebirth on earth; while the goal of the other is identity with Brahman and cessation from rebirth. One can infer a variety of things from this discussion – reincarnation and karma are being affirmed here and are being connected with ancestor worship and Vedic ritual; these were the normal practices of the “dharmik” individual of the time.

Alternatively, identity with Brahman and consequent cessation from rebirth is being presented as a more desirable goal, something new introduced by the Upanishad.

### ***Brihadaranyaka Upanishad***

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* revolves around the enigmatic figure of an Upanishadic seer, Yajnavalkya. It is attributed to him and features a number of dialogues between him and others, such as the king Janaka, the female scholar and seeker of wisdom, Gargi and his wife Maitreyi. He is a knower of Brahman, even while having two wives, many cows and wealth. At a certain juncture, he felt the need to renounce his family life and go solitary to the forest. This initiates the famous dialogue between him and one of his wives, Maitreyi, in which he teaches her that the wife is dear to one not for the sake of the wife but for the sake of the self (BU II.4). This profound statement exemplifies one of the literary strategies of the Upanishads as wisdom literature – that of *double entendre*. At the level of the ego, this statement pertains to human projection and ego gratification, an insight worthy of Freud, but at another level, it pertains to the true Self, Atman, which is the primary and only object of true relation, to which all others are subsumed. The conjugal relation here becomes one of mutual help in the realisation of the Self. The analogy of union with the wife and union with the Self is raised in a different context again later in the Upanishad:

That is his form beyond desires, free from evils, and fearless. As a man, fully embraced by his beloved wife, does not know anything at all, either external or internal, so does this infinite being (atman), fully embraced by the Supreme Self, not know anything at all, either external or internal. That is his form in which all objects of desire have been attained and are but the Self, and which is free from desires and devoid of grief. (BU: IV.3.21)

As with the *Chandogya*, the *Brihadaranyaka* dwells extensively on the Brahman, its primal qualities, its manifestations and expressions and its existence as a principle of bliss, harmony and inter-mediation in the cosmos (*madhu*) (BU: II.5); and its self-presentation as transcendence and immanence in the macrocosm and the microcosm. This complexity in its treatment of Brahman has made this Upanishad amenable to all the different schools of later Vedantic interpretation.

### **Transitional Between Veda and Later Upanishads**

The *Brihadarnayaka* introduces a number of other ideas which are repeated in the later Upanishads. One of these is of the waking and dreaming states of existence (*avasthas*) as different forms of the self-experience of the Brahman (BU II: 1-3). A later Upanishad, the *Mandukya*, makes this, along with the



primacy of the *Om* as *Sabda Brahman* (Brahman in the form of the Word) its central theme. Similarly, it opens up the question of what happens after death and addresses the theory of individual soul, reincarnation and karma (BU: IV.2). These questions are elaborated further in the *Katha Upanishad*. The *Brihadaranyaka* also forms a transition between the ideas of the Veda and that of the later Upanishads. For example, in one of his debates in the court of Janaka, Yajnavalkya is asked how many gods there are (BU: III.9). Yajnavalkya answers repeatedly giving different figures in sequence, three thousand and three, three hundred and three, thirty three, six, three, two, one and a half and one. Each of these sets pertains to a numerology originating in the Veda, where the cosmic powers are differentiated in the form of groups of gods serving specific functions. Yajnavalkya reduced these sets progressively leading to one, a monism characteristic of the Upanishads. This One which is Brahman is identified by Yajnavalkya, first as indescribable and arrived at only through a process of negation (*neti-neti*); and then as Knowledge and Bliss (*Vijnanam-Anandam*) which is also responsible for reincarnation (IBU: III.9.28).

### **Contemplative Praxis**

In the dialogue with Maitreyi, Yajnavalkya also explicitly outlines the contemplative praxis of the Upanishads, which is hinted at in the *Chandogya*. This is the triple formula of *shravana-manana-nidhidhyasana*, listening, cogitating and entering into intimate union (BU: II.4.5). *Shravana* (listening, receptivity) highlights the status of mystic utterance (*sruti*) assigned to itself by the Upanishads; but even more, the need to go beyond obvious surface meanings in the seeking for wisdom. *Manana* emphasises cogitation or mental contemplation as a means of arriving at agency and identity in the Upanishads, in reaction to the unthinking repetition of formulas or dependence on priests which had become normative in the late Vedic period. It also exemplifies the ancient Indian attitude to the mind. Though the mind cannot “give” knowledge, it is not to be rejected either. Its place is to serve as a means of focusing the attention, bringing it into closer intimacy with the object of concentration with the aim of eventual thoughtless identity in consciousness. As one cogitates upon the object of identity, the presence of the Self behind its constituent parts becomes living to one’s inner sense. Indeed, it is the Self (atman) in oneself that recognises the Self (atman) in another. This recognition is beyond analysis or content, a state of thoughtless wonder (*adbhuta*) and experienced identity. Yet it cannot be overemphasised that for this, the activity of the mind (*manana*) has to be yoked to the intent of identity (*nidhidhyasana*); other than this, if the mind seeks knowledge through independent analysis, it remains in ignorance and becomes only a distraction.

The place of mind as subservient to Brahman knowledge is highlighted in other ways as well in this text. Erudition for acclaim is discouraged as a path that leads away from true knowledge. Instead, a progression of the mind leading to questions of profundity, increasing silence, simplicity of life, observation and contemplation is held out as the path to freedom from frustration and sorrow found in the discovery of the Self of all things (BU: III.5).

This triple formula of praxis is assumed in the study of all the Upanishads. Firstly, as mentioned above, this would be the way to dwell on the verses of the Upanishads; secondly, each Upanishad features one or more statements which are like idea-formulae encapsulating a truth to be contemplated. Some of these are later called mahavakyani or “great sayings.” We encounter this literary device from the inception, in the *Chandogya* and *Brihadarnyaka Upanishads* – for example, the *Chandogya*, in its story of Svetaketu, repeats the famous line *Tat twam asi* (Thou art that) and elsewhere it fields the line *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma* (All this is indeed the Brahman) (ChU III.14); the *Brihadarnyaka* introduces the idea *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am the Brahman). Mahavakyas from other Upanishads include *Ayam Atma Brahma* (Atman and Brahman are one) from the *Mandukya Upanishad*, *Nityo'nityanam* (The eternal in transient things) and *Chetanaschetananam* (The conscious being in conscious things) from the *Katha Upanishad*, and *Prajnanam Brahma* (Brahman is Knowledge) in the *Aiteraya Upanishad*. Thirdly, there are longer stanzas which contain exemplary ideas for meditation, often used to preface later Upanishads. Two such verses from the *Brihadarnyaka Upanishad* are:

1 *pūrṇam adah, pūrṇam idam, pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate*  
*pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate.* (BU: V.1)

That is the whole; this is the whole. From the whole the whole emerges.  
 Subtracting the whole from the whole, verily the whole remains.

1 *Asato ma sadgamaya*  
*tamaso ma jyotirgamaya*  
*mṛtyōrmā amṛtaṁ gamaya*  
 Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ (BU: I.3.28)  
 From untruth lead me to truth  
 From darkness lead me to light  
 From death lead me to immortality  
 Om Peace Peace Peace

Fourthly and particularly in later Upanishads, such as the *Isha*, there are paradoxical verses, which cannot be understood logically but force a supralogical experience upon contemplation. Finally, the structure of the Upanishad is itself meaningful and leads to reinforced understandings.

In several of his dialogues, Yajnavalkya outlines another mental praxis, which could be called the central method of the *Brihadanranyaka* and becomes later one of the cornerstones of a yoga of knowledge (*jnana yoga*). It is the apophatic or negative way (*via negativa*) of bringing different components of one's existence to one's attention (self-study, *swadhyaya*) and negating them as not one's true self, leaving eventually an irreducible remainder, the Subject or Self (atman). In a formulaic fashion, this method is referred to in the Upanishad as *neti-neti* (BU: II.3, III.7, IV.2). It is interesting to note that in his second sermon at Sarnath, this method is attributed to the Buddha in his analysis of the non-self (*anatman*) nature of constituents of existence such as body, will, affect or mind, leaving any remainder unspoken. Indeed, if one studies early Buddhist literature in the light of the Upanishads, one can see how both share many things in common. In later times, the founder of Advaita Vedanta, Shankaracharya, has been sometimes been called a crypto-Buddhist, but it may be more fair to call the Buddha a crypto-Vedantin. Both Buddhism and Jainism as well as all later Indic philosophies, including schools of Indian Sufism, particularly of the Chisti school, are profoundly indebted to the Upanishads.

### Later Upanishads

According to current ideas, pre-Buddhist Upanishads that succeed the *Chandogya* and *Brihadaranyaka* are the *Taittiriya*, *Aitareya*, *Kaushitaki*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Isha*, *Mundaka*, and *Prasna Upanishads*. Of these the first three (*Taittiriya*, *Aitareya*, *Kaushitaki*) are in prose and seem to pre-date the rest, while the others are in verse.

These later Upanishads could be said to amplify or nuance many of the ideas introduced in the *Chandogya* and *Brihadaranyaka*. Primary, of course, is the discourse on Brahman. Brahman is the One indivisible reality (*ekamevaadvitiam*). Brahman is All that Is. (*sarvam khaluvidam brahma*) There is nothing other than Brahman. I am That (*So'ham*). Repeatedly we come across these assertions. Thus all things can be seen as formulations of Brahman and the Upanishads throw light on various aspects of the Brahman. Is Brahman then God? We could call it God but to the Upanishads it is more than whatever we might call God. God implies the idea of a Being, which has the power to experience, and thus Someone or Something (*sat*) we can enter into conscious relation with. But Brahman, while being this, is also something radically transcendent and indescribable (*anirvacaniya*), in other words: nothing that we can call a something. It includes the idea of God as a Person (*purusha*). It includes the idea of an impersonal principle (*tat*). It includes the idea of something that goes beyond all conceivable categories and therefore, that can

be experienced as Non-Being (*asat*) out of which Being (*sat*) may arise.

### ***Taittiriya Upanishad***

Each of these Upanishads has a distinctive character and contribution. The *Taittiriya* introduces the idea of Brahman manifest in the form of a spectrum of Consciousness in two of its three chapters (*Bhrigu Valli* and *Ananda Valli*). Prior to these two, the *Siksha Valli* (Teaching Chapter), following the model introduced in several sections of the *Chandogya*, foregrounds education as taught in the *gurukula* during *brahmacharya*. After introducing several aspects of this kind of education, it launches into a treatment of Brahman knowledge and prepares the ground for the next two chapters. These two, *Ananda* and *Bhrigu Vallis* are organised to demonstrate a relationship of critical importance to Indian philosophy. The *Ananda Valli* lays the theoretical ground which is exemplified through the life-narrative of practice in the *Bhrigu Valli*. This arrangement presents the inseparable relationship between metaphysics (*darshan*) and praxis (*yoga*) in Indian philosophy. Metaphysics (*darshan*) lays out the provisional map which is to be verified in experience through praxis (*yoga*).

The *Ananda Valli* presents manifest reality in terms of five distinct and discontinuous layers of consciousness – *Annam* (Matter), *Prana* (Life), *Manah* (Mind), *Vijnana* (Supermind) and *Ananda* (Bliss). All these forms of Consciousness are affirmed as forms of Brahman, but it is only in *Vijnana* (Supermind) that the freedom and integrality of Brahman become realised. Finally, crossing beyond into the Bliss Consciousness (*Ananda*) one knows the true foundation of Brahman. This layout of Consciousness, carries implicit in it the division into *Vidya* (Knowledge) and *Avidya* (Ignorance) further developed in later Upanishads, such as the *Isha*.

The *Bhrigu Valli* following this, is presented in a form not dissimilar to parts of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. It tells the story of Bhrigu, the son of Varuna, whose father asks him repeatedly to answer the question What is Brahman? Bhrigu, from successive meditations responds that Matter (*Annam*), Life (*Prana*), Mind (*Manah*), Knowledge-Consciousness (*Vijanna*) and Bliss (*Ananda*) is Brahman. Thus he realises in experience what is asserted in theory in the *Ananda Valli*.

These chapters contain some of the most famous assertions of the Upanishads, which place them as a textual body in contrast to Buddhism, which came later – i.e. Bliss as the foundation of Reality, rather than Suffering as in the case of Buddhism. This is asserted in a pithy form conducive to meditation (*dhyana*) in the *Bhrigu Valli*:

*Anando brahmeti vyajanat. ananda-dhyeva khalvimani bhutani jayante. anandena jatani jivanti. anandam prayantyaabhisnavishantiti (TU: III.6)*

He realised that Bliss (*Ananda*) is Brahman; for from Bliss, verily, are these beings born; by bliss, when born, do they live; into bliss, at the time of dissolution, do they enter, do they merge.

The previous chapter, *Brahmananda Valli* features another oft-quoted verse which assumed vast importance in the cultural life of India. It equates Brahman with the manifestation of Ananda through aesthetic sense (*rasa*) and points to the experience of *rasa* as a means to union with the Ananda consciousness of Brahman. The idea was made the cornerstone by the sage Bharata in his *Natyashastra* in the 2nd c. BCE and further elaborated in the 11th c. by the spiritual adept and philosopher of Kashmir Shaivism, Abhinavagupta:

*Raso vai sah. rasam hyevayam labdhva anandim bhavati. ko hyevanyat kah pranyat yad esha akasha anando na syat (TU: II.7)*

He is *rasa* itself. Obtaining indeed this *rasa* one becomes bliss. Who indeed could have lived, who could have breathed if this sky of bliss did not exist.

1. The verse mentions only *brahmacharya* explicitly, but its terms bear evidence of *grihastya* and *vanaprastha* as well. Brahman knowledge (*brahmasamstha*) is privileged over these but not necessarily through *sannyasa* seen as a stage of life.
2. This trend continues in the Gita, which is considered to be a much later text (c. 2nd c. BCE), but self-identifies with the Upanishads.
3. Sri Aurobindo practised meditation on this line in the Alipur Jail to normalise his realisation of Brahman in all things.

(To be Continued)



# The Mother and the Legacy of Spiritual Feminism

Madhumita Dutta

India has had many a compelling and inspiring narrative to unfold in matters spiritual, from its ancient days through intervening centuries the spiritualism saga has continued to the present times. Spiritualism, the basis of our civilisation, of our religion and philosophy, has been in theory and practice, the path to God-realisation, and thus accessible to all sincere aspirants. And surprisingly, or not so surprisingly, there were no discriminations on gender issues in spiritual practices; women had been an integral part of any discourse on spiritualism, they were never relegated to any marginalised position in any socio-religious set up. In fact, women even became the focal point of certain spiritualist cults, for instance, the Tantric philosophy — where spiritual feminism perhaps finds its fullest expression — which considers woman as the very body of the universe. As Sri Aurobindo observed:

The Shakta texts are an uncompromising declaration of the divinity of woman completing the Vedantic declaration of the concealed divinity in man which we are apt to treat in practice as if it applied only in the masculine. (CWSA, 1:571)

A brief look back at the history of Indian religious thought points to the foundations of a matrifocal framework of society, a tradition of woman-worship proclaiming the woman as Devi or Goddess. The feminist tradition of seeing the woman as a reflection of the Great Goddess goes a long way into the past. The ancient religious texts exhibit ample evidence of Shakti-worship, the woman being equated with Shakti or Power. All major philosophies in India regard the woman as the primordial, supreme Power — *Adya Shakti*. These pre-patriarchal thoughts hardly attempt to prove the superiority of the Woman; they take it as a given. They hail the ideal of religio-spiritual feminism, with their leaning on the Shakti aspect of the manifestation. According to modern psychologists the images

of woman that reside in the human subconscious, the psychic images are associated with 'wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason, all that is benign, all that sustains, fosters growth and fertility.' Indian philosophy has been one of worshipping the Woman, knowing that the universal spiritual potential is in her. The pivotal point of this philosophy is the equating of ultimate reality with the female in her cosmic, transcendental and universal dimensions, the sense being that 'wherever the feminine principle is found in the living personality, we have the entire presence of the world-supporting maternal soul of the Divinity.' (CWSA, 1:571)

Here we have the concept of the empowered female, the Absolute Woman. The Goddess symbolises transcendental consciousness, female independence, self-agency of the woman and presents a liberating model of femininity. Our ancient tradition never failed to recognise the spiritual abilities of women. We have valorised the Woman as goddess, we have offered a panegyric to the all-powerful divine woman, but this

'attempt could not get itself translated into social practice... to elevate woman and make her an object of profound respect and worship. We put away in silence, ... the perfect equality in difference of the double manifestation.' (CWSA, 1:571)

This is of course, the negative trait of a culture which has been a highly tolerant one, at least spiritually, and this is reflected in the wide socio-cultural displacement in the position of the woman and her roles. Parameters of femininity were once defined by religious philosophy; later on there were deconstructions due to many reasons, so that the Indian imaging of the woman has reached polar extremes. The Mother has rightly observed:

India remains on this point...the land of violent and conflicting contrasts. In India we find the most intense adoration, the most complete veneration of the Supreme Mother, creator of the universe... and in India the most radical condemnation, the uttermost contempt for the feminine principle,... Maya... cause of every fall and misery,... nature that deceives, defiles and lures away from the Divine. (Cent. ed. Vol. 7, pp.157-8)

It is true that these diverse and conflicting views have brought down the woman from the high position of spiritual leader and adept to helpless roles of subordinates and victims of social and political injustice, sexual abuse and economic dependence. The prevalent patriarchal order and existing social practices are certainly at odds with our ancient theology. Our present gender-conscious society only reinforces the inferior position of women. Degenerative practices over centuries have almost swept away the original idea of the primacy and supremacy of the Woman, and tried to negate the values of the pro-feminist

theology of India which offered a major challenge to all norms of patriarchy. In the woman-centric religio-spiritual culture, woman's self-hood is recognised, and there is no subservience of the female self to any external power. That is verily the concept of the Divine Feminine, the power that patriarchy has been trying to suppress with all means. But not for long can this be suppressed — the power that is in the individual soul, the Divine Shakti — by stale customs and oppressive conventions. *Brahmavadins* have appeared from time to time, embodying in themselves those values which help to raise not only one's own self, but all humanity into the divine status, and armed with the power of such knowledge that gives spiritual liberation to all.

The contemporary picture of the status of Indian women thus, is quite misleading when seen in relation to the matriarchal tradition of our religio-philosophical historicity, the true Indian tradition of revering the woman as the Divine Feminine. Today, matriarchal culture may have been replaced by an all-pervasive patriarchy, marginalising the woman socially and politically, yet remnants of the cult of worshiping the woman as Goddess remains. This tradition, of spiritual feminism, is not all past; time and again have appeared on the Indian front, spiritually virile women, who embody the ideals, values and strength of the Divine. Even in the heyday of modern materialist civilisation, India witnessed the advent of powerful women in whom the mighty stream of spirituality flowed, bridging the ancient ideal of *Shakti* and emancipatory feminism of modern times. True to the process of history, the volcanic energy of the Divine (as) Woman manifested once more in the emergence of spiritually virile women in modern India, answering to the need of the affirmation of feminine power in degenerate times. Mirra Alfassa, better known as the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, was one among such Divine women, the material embodiment of the Absolute, the Spirit. Originally from France, she came to India which became her 'true mother country' rather than an adopted one. Inculcating in herself all the lofty ideals of womanhood — nobility, chastity, valour, heroism, wisdom, fortitude, spiritual power — she lived to guide humanity towards the Godward path and helped especially women to reconnect to their latent divinity.

Revered as Mother, she was a spiritual leader, showing how to liberate the well-being of power within us, and in the process reviving the latent cult of divine femininity, unleashing a new idea of the Self, where in women regained their inner strength, their sacredness. Her advent on the socio-cultural arena meant a return to the Shakti cult which aims at both the social and spiritual liberation of women. The Mother heralded the advent of true spiritual power — not the franchise spirituality of modern times. She initiated a period of energetic

progress on all fronts. Verily the manifestation of the Goddess, the Mother presented a dynamic, radiant personality, with tremendous force of character and extraordinary spiritual attainments. The super-human make-up of her character was evident in both her outward activities of life from her very childhood. As recorded by biographers, and also from her autobiographical writings, we know she had had unusual psychic and spiritual experiences as a child, the ascetic energy glowing forth in her person. All those who came in contact with her, both during her pre-Pondicherry days, and after, could not but feel the ‘immeasurable power’ exuding from her. She was deeply spiritual, yet thoroughly practical and scientific in her approach to life. She was an efficient organiser and manager of worldly affairs, being in charge of the Ashram for several decades, as well as a loving guide for spiritual seekers. Her spiritual ministry of the Ashramites involved lessons in harmonious communal life, and integral living by perfecting the physical, vital, mental and psychic instruments of one’s multi-dimensional being. Among her selfless contributions is the founding of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education and the township of Auroville, unique achievements in the socio-spiritual sphere. This was her conception of a place which was to be free from all kinds of rivalries — national, political, racial, social. The gospel of Aurobindonian Integralism envisioned a ‘cultured humanity’ of the future, when man, now ‘a modern civilised barbarian’, shall build a relation of spiritual comradeship with his fellow beings and achieve a ‘real’ and not only an ‘ideal’ unity. The Mother worked towards realising that ideal herself and gave the spiritual seekers practical lessons in integral living. In her there was no discrimination on grounds of gender. In fact, she proved how a woman can be a great achiever in both the material and spiritual field, and liberate not only her own being, but help others to find their salvation too.

Her words of practical wisdom benefit the layman and spiritual aspirant alike. She did not believe in ‘religion’ as such, that is narrow religionism was alien to her philosophical thinking. She felt that the ‘time for religions was over and the future belonged to spirituality’. As an embodiment of Divine Power, the Mother showed the way to stretch one’s consciousness beyond the conventional, and especially to women to rely on their own inherent strength. The ideal of feminine power, autonomy and independence is revitalised in all its glory by the advent of the Divine Mother upon the social scene. She was certainly the power behind Sri Aurobindo, the Mahayogi, the great spiritual stalwart of modern India. Bridging the ancient and modern ideals of womanhood, her practical wisdom points the way to emancipatory feminism, to liberation from all bondages. The yogic way of awakening the Goddess within, as the Mother taught, reveals the universal spiritual potential that *is* and *in* the Woman. According to the Mother,

true spirituality did not mean the renunciation of life, it was ‘to make life perfect with the Divine Perfection’. She showed how this can be achieved, by her words and actions. A being of rare capacity indeed she was one who could meditate, practise Yoga and play tennis at the same time. This was part of her demonstration of integral living, which was the basis of her system of educational programme. It also showed the importance she laid on ‘physical culture’. To the women especially was her message to become master of the body and not remain its ‘impotent slave’. She felt that our body should be ‘capable of receiving and expressing the new force which seeks to manifest upon earth’. And she said that women were better equipped as ‘constructive creators’, as they know how to ‘handle the power of truth’. Through her own life’s activities the Mother showed how to develop the possibilities of the human body — ‘possibilities of harmony, strength, plasticity, cleverness, agility, endurance,’ ... and ‘to make of the body a perfect instrument at the disposal of a conscious will’. This message was especially directed to the woman, because after all, the future ‘Superman’ must be born of the Woman. As she said:

‘The true domain of women is the spiritual. We forget it but too often.’  
(*Words of long ago*, vol.2: 153)

One of her unique achievements in the spiritual field was the attempt at the physical transformation of her body. This was an experiment in the yet unattempted Yogic process of the Transformation of the body, and to bring into the world a new type of human individual, by opening to the Supramental Truth Consciousness.

To the modern woman the Mother advised: ‘...do not be submissive to men. It is you who have the power of execution.’ (*Words of long ago*, CWM, vol.14, p.310) This is in line with the authentic legacy of Indian spiritual thought which makes of woman the executing power, the Conscious Force of the manifested world. And she certainly felt that women ought to believe in their own power and free themselves from all ties to baser animality. She declared that ‘no law can liberate women unless they liberate themselves’. And it is at this point that spiritualism and feminism coalesce, being governed by the ideal of freedom. Both are philosophies of liberation.

Thus the re-emergence of spiritual femininity in modern India was not surprising. In modern times, with the emergence of women, like the Mother, there was once again the revival of goddess consciousness, and the world was bound to pay homage in recognition of her prowess as spiritual being. To all who understand the significance of her manifestation, she stands as a positive image of woman power, a radical symbol of women empowerment. And the life she lived in Pondicherry, gains added significance when related to and studied in the context



of the vast spiritual revivalism of 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century India, as a part of the de-colonisation process. And yet, her contribution in the field of spirituality, or spiritual feminism, transcends its parochial or local character and assumes world significance, as her message is universal, eternal and for all mankind. Sister Nivedita, one of Swami Vivekananda's Western disciples, had once wondered whether the coming of spiritual women like Sarada Devi is the beginning of a new order or the last of an old. To this we may say that this order of spiritual femininity was never at an end, can never be destroyed, though may be latent, only to emerge from time to time, especially in acute civilisational crisis, to redirect mankind towards the lost Divine path. It is neither the beginning nor the end, in any conventional sense, but part of the ongoing psychicisation process of human history, and in the context of feminism, revival of the cult of the Great Goddess with renewed vigour.

# Sri Aurobindo: The Ideal Teacher

Prema Nandakumar

## 5. The Divine is Everywhere!

The first time I read Sri Aurobindo's *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, it was nothing short of a revelation. Here was a scholar who gave prime importance to the Vedas and refused to reject them as simply a worship of nature in its physical manifestations. According to him, this was not just ritualism to propitiate the unseen deities who bring down their wrath as devastating floods, lightning and thunder. Having underlined the need for a deeper reading of the Vedic suktas, it was a natural turn towards Vedanta, verily the crown of the Vedas.

Western scholars have quite often given the starting point of Indian philosophy to the Upanishads. It is not as though there is no ritualism here or nature imagery, but somehow it was the Upanishads that attracted the Indologists from the west when they began discovering India. The best of them could still think of the Vedas as lucubrations on pantheism. But Sri Aurobindo consistently began with the Vedas when dealing with Indian culture and literature. A point which has been underlined by Prof. Gabriel Monod-Herzen in a talk to the students of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in 1972:

“Sri Aurobindo never depreciated the past in order to give value to the future — which is the goal of his action. On the contrary, he has sought as far as possible the eternal truth. For India he rediscovered it in the secret of the Veda, followed its evolution through the Upanishads up to the epics, then in the spiritual expansion that ensued, guided mostly by the Gita, until the appearance and magnificent development of the cult of the Divine Mother which characterises our era and gives the key to the future, a future entirely different from the past.”<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo makes this quite clear in his book, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*.

“The Upanishads are not a revolutionary departure from the Vedic mind and its temperament and fundamental ideas, but a continuation and development and to a certain extent an enlarging transformation in the sense of bringing out into open expression all that was held covered in the symbolic Vedic speech as a mystery and a secret. It begins by taking up the imagery and the ritual symbols of the Veda and the Brahmanas and turning them in such a way as to bring out an inner and a mystic sense which will serve as a sort of psychical starting-point for its own more highly evolved and more purely spiritual philosophy.”

In his typical mode of a perfect teacher, he repeats points, analyses terms and gives helpful leads so that the student can go on his own adventure of discovering the contents in the Upanishads. He gives an example from the *Taittiriya Upanishad* where we see Indra as “the godhead of the divine mind” as clearly descended from “the Bull of the Vedas of the universal form, he who was born in the sacred rhythms from the Immortal” and pray to him for the powers of the mind. Sri Aurobindo also draws our attention to the *Isha Upanishad* where the Vedic god Surya is invoked as a power who can bring together our mental levels with the “oneness of the Spirit.” *Isha Upanishad*, the pellucid scripture which opens with a definite declaration: *isavasyamidamsarvam!* Nothing can keep us away from this Upanishad after reading Sri Aurobindo.

Somehow, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, the Upanishads seemed less of a frightening group of ancient scriptures, not just Vedanta meant for only students of philosophy. It was also exciting to know that we Indians, had influenced and inspired the philosophers of the West.

“...at first through Pythagoras and other Greek philosophers, then through Buddhism working into Essene, Gnostic and Roman Christianity and once again in our own times through German metaphysics, Theosophy, and a hundred strange and irregular channels. One can open few books now at all in the latest stream of thought without seeing the old Vedantism busy at its work of moulding and broadening the European mind, sometimes by direct and conscious impact as a force, more often by an unacknowledged and impalpable pressure as an atmosphere. This potent influence [in] modern times of a way of thinking many thousands of years old, is due to [a] singular parallelism between the fundamental positions arrived [at by] ancient Vedantism and modern Science.”

Now no one can challenge us that we have not had a scientific approach to life, thanks to this brilliant comparative criticism of the philosophies of the East and the West. Once the initial hesitancy was removed by the Master Teacher, it was time to explore these worlds too, however cursorily. The shortest and

most inviting was, of course, the *Isha Upanishad*. In Sri Aurobindo's translation, the study improved one's Sanskrit as well as English! The Rishi goes straight to the subject:

"All this is for habitationi by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy; lust not after any man's possession."

Sri Aurobindo has gone into Adi Sankara's commentary with an eagle's eye as it were, and each word and its commentary is weighed with care. "Habitation" is taken up and Sri Aurobindo explains why he prefers the term 'habitation' instead of 'garment' as seen by Sankara.

"There are three possible senses of *vasyam*, "to be clothed", "to be worn as a garment" and "to be inhabited". The first is the ordinarily accepted meaning. Shankara explains it in this significance, that we must lose the sense of this unreal objective universe in the sole perception of the pure Brahman. So explained the first line becomes a contradiction of the whole thought of the Upanishad which teaches the reconciliation, by the perception of essential Unity, of the apparently incompatible opposites, God and the World, Renunciation and Enjoyment, Action and internal Freedom, the One and the Many, Being and its Becomings, the passive divine Impersonality and the active divine Personality, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, the Becoming and the Not-Becoming, Life on earth and beyond and the supreme Immortality. The image is of the world either as a garment or as a dwelling-place for the informing and governing Spirit. The latter significance agrees better with the thought of the Upanishad."

From now onwards there is no looking back for us. After watching the thirty SABCL volumes for forty-four years by now<sup>3</sup>, and having read the contents repeatedly, most of us dare not brush aside this world as unreal. *The Life Divine* is real, *The Synthesis of Yoga* is real, *Savitri* is real! We nod in agreement with the teacher's analysis and then move forward. The second verse is pure common sense. Be a perfect karmayogin! "Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years." The advice remains burningly contemporaneous. Today, the world is once again caught up in world-wide terrorism and the fear in the heart of the common man is not unlike the dread that enfogged people during the two World Wars. But depression, rejection of life and the urge to act as lemmings and commit suicide will not do. As one learns from the Mother's 1915 entry in *Prayers and Meditations*, written when she was in wartime Paris:

"For the last two days the earth seems to have been going through a decisive crisis; it seems the great formidable contest between material resistances

and spiritual powers is nearing its conclusion ...”

Such lambent faith in those dark days! Faith in the Divine, watching the Divine’s hand at work even at the most disastrous occurrence. Just see the Divine present everywhere, all this terror and the coming glory are His garments!

How to get mentally strong and gain the urge to live a purposeful life for the Vedic span of one hundred years? The answer is simple: by realising the Divine everywhere and so very close to us also, guarding, sustaining, directing our moves, our destiny. No one really grows old when the Divine is near you all the time! Verses 6-7 make this clear:

“But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught.

He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness ?”

The more I have read Indian philosophy, I have come to realise that almost all of them take a cue from these verses. Consider all as Brahman or all as Narayana. Your job to gain realisation is done! There are so many philosophies with their attendant theology in India. Advaita does not stop with Adi Sankara. There are innumerable versions of Advaita. For instance, after Adi Sankara spent sometime in Kashmir, his Advaita was nurtured in that area from 9th century onwards. However, the Kashmir philosophers did not accept the Maya theory, though. Within a few centuries, Kashmir Saivism grew many wings. One of them was *Trika Saivism*. Though difficult to follow, comparative philosophy like comparative religion, can be extremely interesting and not unoften illuminating. Thus *Trika Saivism*, though non-dualistic, yet steers away from the passive Brahman of Sankara’s Advaita, and says the Supreme is in a state of spandana, or constant movement.

“According to this doctrine, the Absolute is inherently of the nature of pulsation, which is to say that reality, being kinetic, is not so passive and inactive as in the Brahman of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara...It is on the basis of this conceptual thinking that the *Trika* has made use of such philosophical terms as would establish the dynamic character of the Absolute – and the terms that express this idea are *prakasa* and *vimarsa*.”

Of course, one is immediately reminded of the dance of Shiva, thanks to Fritjof Capra. In the eighties we were ecstatic with his *The Tao of Physics* for it placed the cultural icon of India on the world map in a trice:

“In Hinduism, Shiva the Cosmic Dancer, is perhaps the most perfect personification of the dynamic universe. Through his dance, Shiva sustains the manifold phenomena in the world, unifying all things by immersing them



in his rhythm and making them participate in the dance — a magnificent image of the dynamic unity of the Universe.”

CERN. The European Council for Nuclear Research in Geneva, is perhaps the foremost organisation in the world engaged in fundamental physics research. There is a magnificent statue of Nataraja which can be seen in the square between buildings 39 and 40 in the vast complex. Many other eminent scientists have also been drawn to the symbol of Shiva’s dance. Carl Sagan in particular, for I came across this quote by him when reading his biography. Sagan says in his book *Cosmos* (1980) which made me quite, quite proud:

"The Hindu religion is the only one of the world's great faiths dedicated to the idea that the Cosmos itself undergoes an immense, indeed an infinite, number of deaths and rebirths. It is the only religion in which the time scales correspond, to those of modern scientific cosmology. Its cycles run from our ordinary day and night to a day and night of Brahma, 8.64 billion years long. Longer than the age of the Earth or the Sun and about half the time since the Big Bang. And there are much longer time scales still."

Hence, there is no part of creation which does not have the Divine in it. How wise the rishi who perhaps sat in an almost inaccessible jungle in his Ashrama surrounded by half a dozen disciples and explained the first line of his Upanishad: *Isha vasyamidamsarvam!* A short Upanishad, with each verse drawing us away into new spaces and bringing us back again to the Upanishad. The whole turn of the Upanishadic literature is towards making students think and acquire knowledge. But the Rishi cautions us too: knowledge is not all! It might make one’s head a waste-paper basket or make one so clever as to reach out into darkness. The 9th verse says:

“Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.”

As we squirm and struggle in the technological mire today and watch helplessly each new bit of knowledge turned into an engine of destruction, we find ourselves automatically following Aswapati into the Night:

“Night is their refuge and strategic base.

Against the sword of Flame, the luminous Eye,

Bastioned they live in massive forts of gloom,

Calm and secure in sunless privacy:

No wandering ray of Heaven can enter there.

Armoured, protected by their lethal masks,

As in a studio of creative Death

The giant sons of Darkness sit and plan

The drama of the earth, their tragic stage.”

Where then is refuge for us but in the Divine? And turn where you will, the Divine is there to calm you down, to protect, inspiring you to go ahead with life and work on hand. For, “All this is for habitation by the Lord”. The Upanishads had been increasingly locked up as Vedantic texts and away from everyday life. Sri Aurobindo retrieved them for us who came to our ancient texts through the English language. When we learnt that Sri Aurobindo had mastered Sanskrit after his English studies abroad, some of us began to play the sedulous ape and learnt some of this language of the gods. No matter many of us cannot reel away Sanskrit texts but even “a little of dharma saves us from great fear” (says Krishna in the Gita), and so a line here and a line there from the original in *Isha Upanishad* followed by the inspired commentary of Sri Aurobindo in inspirational English guards us from great ignorance! We would do best to conclude this causerie with the 15th verse, *hiranmayenapaatrena* ...

“The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid; that do thou remove, O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for sight.”

In a detailed footnote Sri Aurobindo explains that the Veda Surya, the Sun-God is the Fosterer (Pushan):

“He is the Fosterer or Increaser, for he enlarges and opens man’s dark and limited being into a luminous and infinite consciousness. He is the sole Seer, Seer of Oneness and Knower of the Self, and leads him to the highest Sight...His rays are the thoughts that proceed luminously from the Truth, the Vast, but become deflected and distorted, broken up and disordered in the reflecting and dividing principle, Mind. They form there the golden lid which covers the face of the Truth. The Seer prays to Surya to cast them into right order and relation and then draw them together into the unity of revealed truth. The result of this inner process is the perception of the oneness of all beings in the divine soul of the Universe.”  
*Ishavasyamidamsarvam*

- 1 <https://overmanfoundation.wordpress.com/2016/05/21/reminiscences-of-sri-aurobindo-by-professor-gabriel-monod-herzen/>
- 2 CWSA, vol. 18. (2001), p.345
- 3 Now the number of volumes has increased with fresh (hitherto unpublished) inputs and so we have 37 volumes.)

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- i. MotiLal Pandit, , *The Transcendental Non-Dualism of Trika Saivism* (2015), p.3
  - ii. *The Tao of Physics* (1975),p.211
  - iii. *Savitri*, Book II, canto viii, pp.226-27

# **The Yoga of a Nation Called India**

Alok Pandey

## **The Paradox called India**

It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help but it cannot be said that the danger is not there. Sri Aurobindo – 26: p.412

These are times of transition when we are moving from one Age to another or to put it more succinctly from the Age of Kali to the Age of Satya. The gift of Kali was man's discovery of the secrets of our material existence. It was an Age when all else was veiled as if by a thick iron curtain except our physical self. As a deft surgeon working upon one part of our body covers up the rest with a thick clean sheet so that his vision and mind are not distracted so did the operations of Kali draped our with the thick sheet of Ignorance so that nothing was visible to us except our physical bodies. Our mind was anaesthetised or rather hypnotised into believing that there was nought else save our material universe and its forces and man's sole business was to survive and protect himself physically against the threat of other forms of physical life and of course by physical means. But as we walk into the New cycle where a greater Truth dawns upon man, we wake up slowly from our swoon to a New Light and with it to new seekings and a renewed labour. Therefore we have today very clearly two seemingly opposite and conflicting tendencies driving man or rather pulling him in apparently different directions though albeit towards the same end of a grand synthesis of human existence itself. These two tendencies can be broadly considered for want of a better term, – the material and the spiritual. The material pull and attraction for physical betterment, comfort, etc is the remnant of our immediate past. It is the strong hold of Kali rooting our consciousness into the very physical stuff of things. On the one side this rooting into the physical has grounded us well into the body preventing an easy exit out of the physical universe, testing and retesting everything on the crucible of the physical and its power to change the physical world even as turning our gaze to earth and

terrestrial aims providing a strong foothold on material life and material things. To make its task perfect and easier, in this Age of Kali that we leave behind us a veil is put upon the mother of wisdom, Mother India, so that the world is not blinded by her intense Light and leaving the work upon earth too soon and incomplete vanish into some beyond of Nirvana and Bliss. But the side-effect of this prolonged engagement with matter is that we have been led into a state of hypnosis that fails to see or recognise anything but matter and judges everything by material appearances alone. But on the other side we are being slowly pulled out of our slumber with new openings and new discoveries and new powers waking up out of matter's sleep. There is an increasing interest the world over in powers of life as is evident in the emergent systems of alternate energy healing such as Reiki, in powers of mind with biofeedback, guided imagery, creative visualisation, mind-body medicine, psycho-neuroimmunology coming into the forefront of human play. The authentic spiritual powers are yet waiting in the dusk of transition while their mental and vital dupes are being sold in marts of an imitative spirituality. That India has a great role to play in this new emergence is beyond question since it is India that has traditionally been the guardian of the keys to the doors of the Spirit. But whether India will take the definitive lead in this matter and instead of being continuously hypnotised with the physical and vital aspects of existence that Kali magnified no end, it will dehypnotise itself and the world and show once more the ways of the Spirit, or else throw away this golden chance and opportunity and go the way the rest of the world goes tumbling on its head towards a progressive sinking into the oblivion of the atomic void is the still unanswered question.

When we look at the surface the appearances are no doubt dismal. What problem of the world has not been given as more than fair share of India's destiny? Its very rebirth in modern times has been a fractured one. And then the two important aspects that are necessary for a nation's outer growth, – wealth and power have been usurped by the Asura in man. Cutting across party lines the managers of the nation stand united in corruption and legalised loot. Of deception they have made a decent profession and falsehood lurks in every corridor of the high and mighty where decisions of crucial importance are being taken. The forces of division still continue to divide us along lines of language, caste, religion and all the rest and are even craftily hidden under cover of acceptable names such as social justice, equality, secularism, tradition, and all the rest that men use as a shield to hide their evil intentions. This combined with the unconscious masses driven blindly by the whip of fear and passion, while the rest loathing with greed and given to crudity in every form

makes an ugly sight to watch. It is as if the devil had adopted its most diabolic strategy to subvert the truth that is to join its bandwagon as a helper and loot it on the way rather than openly oppose it.

Injustice justified by firm decrees  
The sovereign weights of Error's legalised trade,  
But all the weights were false and none the same;

.....  
In high professions wrapped self-will walked wide  
And licence stalked prating of order and right:  
There was no altar raised to Liberty;  
True freedom was abhorred and hunted down:  
Harmony and tolerance nowhere could be seen;  
Each group proclaimed its dire and naked Law.  
A frame of ethics knobbed with scriptural rules  
Or a theory passionately believed and praised  
A table seemed of high Heaven's sacred code.  
A formal practice mailed and iron-shod  
Gave to a rude and ruthless warrior kind  
Drawn from the savage bowels of the earth  
A proud stern poise of harsh nobility,  
A civic posture rigid and formidable.  
But all their private acts belied the pose:  
Power and utility were their Truth and Right,

.....  
Inconscient traders in bundles of contraries,  
They did what in others they would persecute;  
When their eyes looked upon their fellow's vice,  
An indignation flamed, a virtuous wrath;  
Oblivious of their own deep-hid offence,

.....  
A zealot fervour pushed their ruthless cults,  
All faith not theirs bled scourged as heresy;  
They questioned, captived, tortured, burned or smote  
And forced the soul to abandon right or die.  
Amid her clashing creeds and warring sects  
Religion sat upon a blood-stained throne.  
A hundred tyrannies oppressed and slew  
And founded unity upon fraud and force.

.....  
A lie was there the truth and truth a lie. *Savitri*, SABCL 28-29, pp. 209

Not to speak of poverty and population and a host of illnesses and natural disasters. It is as if the spirit of Time had collected the bundle of unsolved problems of the human race since man's quest and struggle began beneath the stars. It is as if the great and ancient adversary force met the "burdened great" to test its strength to suffer and to save. It is as if the gods sanctioned the paradox that the bringer of Light must be thrust into the densest darkness to heal the abyss and the valleys of death with the deathless Light and the flowers of an unfailing courage and faith. It is as if the child of an adverse fate questioned the great mother to reveal her wisdom to the world not just theoretically but practically. It is as if the body and mind of the mighty nation called India had become the field of the world's inner conflicts and its deepest afflictions for so alone could a cure be found.

But these are appearances and one can see behind them the deeper forces that work through contraries to hasten the ultimate fulfilment. It is indeed a distortion of the work of these deeper forces as their action and push rises to the surface and is mistranslated by our outer mind. The forces of destruction work in the depths to remove the accretions of the past and its errors and conditioning and forms that have become lifeless and empty and we see on the surface wanton rage and destruction and rebel and revolt and disbelief and cynicism a loss of faith in the sacred sense of things. The forces of preservation work in the depths to keep safe the essential spirit and deep foundations of truth on which India has to be rebuilt and we see on the surface a blind clinging to traditions and conventions and religious formulas of old that have become a lifeless ritual. The forces of creation work in the depths to release new powers for growth and progress and we see on the surface the search for novelty and attraction for fashion and new age experimentations in every sphere of life and action. It is indeed a veritable yoga of the nation going on. But in India it has taken a very different hue and dimension. For, to begin with India's great and glorious past is at once an advantage and a disadvantage. It is an advantage because the inner being of India is largely prepared to undertake the hardships that one needs to take for a high and difficult path. It has so to say the necessary inner qualities such as trust, faith in the Divine, devotion, surrender, and an innate ability to sense and feel spiritual things. It has a natural spiritual bent so to say. But the disadvantage is that over the past few centuries India has been following a very different form of Yoga. It had engaged itself in a very world-negating spiritual endeavour and that has somehow seeped very deep into the India psyche. It has neglected the outer life in a terrible way, and therefore it finds itself miserable almost helpless when dealing with outer life and mundane problems of existence. It has hardly a hold over matter and the impulse of life to



flow through earth and enrich its floors and cut its way through mire and stone. Its streams turn upward or else as a reaction downward. Yet this is no permanent disadvantage since it is not a native Indian temperament but an encrustation, something superimposed upon it or perhaps deliberately accepted by it as a defence against an excess influence of the Age of Kali. The native Indian temperament is however as much attached to earth as anywhere else. And that is what creates an imbalance in the India temperament. The Indian suffers a greater conflict than any other because it experiences both the spiritual hunger and the material hunger much more intensely. He feels his sorrows and his passions, his emotions and his impulses much more intensely. This in itself would not be so much of a problem but the difficulty is that the Indian whatever and wherever he may be, also feels the spiritual impulse much more acutely and strongly in him. But his mind unable to integrate these diverse elements finds itself in a quandary. He finds it difficult to focus fully either on the material or on the spiritual aspect of life. The result is that an average Indian becomes a hypocrite adopting two standards, one for his private life and another for his public posture.

The other difficulty is that the Indian experiment has been largely a collective one. The importance given to collective life and its lesser child social life is much more than to the individual. Everything here has been organised into groups, beginning from family lineages to religious sects. And we have entered an Age of individualism when each one must find his own truth. This kind of individualism is not natural to the Indian temperament. And yet the sad truth is that what India most lacks in its outer life is the sense of collective discipline. This paradox has been created partly because the sense of a national identity has not yet fully dawned upon the Indian mind which is so used to living in smaller groups such as clans, castes, religious groups. But the deeper reason for this paradox is again the neglect of the physical life. For when it comes to psychological aspects the Indian can be fairly disciplined and even austere in his approach but when it comes to the physical he is most neglectful and wasteful. Therefore a contact with the western spirit and even its strong influence is perhaps necessary for the moment and part of Nature's plan that is going to benefit both. The Indian Diaspora migrating to the West is infusing the Indian Spirit and awakening the soul of nations while coming in contact with the west it is learning some lessons in material life and organising outer existence as well as something of the value of an individual. This is an important preparation for all since we are fast entering an Age when spirituality will involve the entire earth and it will by its nature integrate the material life and outer existence. For this very reason it is important for nations across the world to keep a living contact and a healthy interchange

with India since it is by such a contact that the spiritual impulse can awaken in other parts of the world. This is so very evident when we travel round the globe that one can easily say without any exaggeration that the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. And in return for this priceless gift the soul of India is learning to accommodate matter and deal with physical things.

But there is yet another reason for this dichotomy between India's inner being and its outer life. Because of its rich diversity and immense complexity, because of its past experience in spirituality as well as in organising collective life on a spiritual basis, India is especially suitable to be the priest of the sacrifice in this New Yoga of transformation that is being given to the world. But precisely for this reason the normal ordinary means of organising national life are unlikely to succeed here. If insisted by short sighted politicians then the deeper possibility of India and with it of the world may well get frustrated and stifled. The ordinary mental and moral methods, the normal means of regulating and perfecting outer life through an increasing mechanisation, law and governmental machinery would not work here. The inner being of this nation is far too complex for any oversimplistic solution as some impatient well-wishers would suggest. Its solutions for life problems cannot come from the mind, from the level of the thinker but from the very fount of life, from deeper feelings, from the soul of the nation. The cut and dried formulas of a rational system do not work because something higher than reason and more durable than mind has to be found and it is not easy. Yet India can find it and if India cannot then perhaps no nation in the world can. But this need not happen. Already we can see the first beginnings. The offshoots of Indian spirituality are beginning to find world over application in the field of management, health, science, art-forms, mathematics etc. In the field of education there is an increasing recognition to touch some deeper core of the child. Law and administration and politics and business though are yet far from yielding.

### **The Yoga of a Nation called India**

What India needs most is not just a national reconstruction but a national yoga. For along what lines are we going to construct a new India if we have not the vision to reconstruct, — along the lines of western polity and science that revels in well-polished external surfaces and a crafty manipulation of outward things while the inner being remains hollow, lacklustre, struggles and suffers since stifled by appearances or along the lines of our own native genius that built such a mighty nation once by the ancient power of yoga, that it has resisted millennia of shocks, invasions, subjugation and calamities? True, its centuries of struggle, especially in the past few hundred years have made it weary and tired. Its resistance against foreign invasions and influences has hardened into

fixed tradition its own fluid adaptability to evolutionary forces. But these are momentary lapses and temporary setbacks. The Indian genius will bounce back and rediscover the splendours of the spirit and restore the true glory of life by connecting it to its divine origin. That is India's unique and difficult and dangerous task fulfilling which it will fulfil its highest destiny. And failing which it will frustrate itself and frustrate the world in its attempt to create a new world order.

The national yoga of India had indeed started in 1905 when goaded by the forces of division the cry of '*Bande Mataram*' rang through India's heart. It was an invocation not only to the Soul of India but also to the World-Mother, Shakti of the Supreme, to come and manifest in the land of India, to liberate it from error, falsehood and division; to awaken it out of its *tamas* and darkness in which it had sunk deep. This was and still is the initiating mantra of this nation. Its aspiration, — '*poorna swaraj*', a perfect self-conquest, self-mastery, self-rule; its path, — '*satyameva jayate*', victory to the Truth, a constant choice of the growing Truth over the falsehoods of our mental, vital, physical nature. The World-Mother did arrive in India, in her physical embodiment, but few recognised her. Her coming from the western world towards the east was itself a clear indication that while the drama of the previous millennium, the Age of rational enlightenment, was played out with Europe as its centre, the next Act of Her creative play would be played out in the east with India as the main stage. The path of Truth, *satya pantha* did open up and the boon of *poorna swaraj* brought close to our trembling hands but our limbs were weak to receive it. India responded to the descending Light of Truth first with a flurry of rajasic activity engaged in acts of petty violence driven often by a blind sentimental patriotic fervour. As was inevitable, this force soon spent and exhausted, the nation lapsed into *tamoguna* again with the few elements embodying the sattwic impulse and the spirit of authentic sacrifice carrying the flag further. That freedom came still was a boon and a grace, indeed the result of a silent *tapasya* of Sri Aurobindo who had indeed initiated the nation and awakened its aspiration. But as happens, the sattwic and rajasic elements took the credit and went on to glorifying their own greatness refusing to see the Hand of the Eternal, refusing to listen to the voice of the prophet of Life Divine and the true progenitor of Indian nationalism. The story of Pandavas believing themselves to be the cause of the victory, the story of the gods narrated in the *Kena Upanishad* believing theirs is the victory was repeated again. And once again the Eternal had to break our sattwic and rajasic egoism so that kneaded as dough by the divine Hands we may become supple and pliant to the Light that has dawned and is already active upon earth.

A long period of preparation must now intervene, the period when Pandavas are repeatedly exiled from the Kingdom and the Kauravas loot the nation and enjoy the booty. Yet this too is grace for when we refuse to wake up to the call of the flute and rush to join the dance of Krishna, then we need to hear the world-shaking, world-destroying laughter of Kali. For the purification must be as thorough as the crown of victory that we seek. Therefore we see broken again like helpless reeds even the strong and the mighty, slain with their dreams buried under their eyelids. For these are dreams of men who wish to see in India only a show of military strength, political power, and the rupee swaying the world market in a swoon of luxury and comfort. But wherefore is her greatness born only for these perishable gifts. These boons of the vital gods creating an imitation of heaven upon earth, luring us with false glimmers towards a blinding abyss are not for India. These boons are for lesser hearts, for nerves that tire too soon, minds that are entrapped in the hedge of the senses, and its charmed fragrances. India has asked for more and therefore India must meet with a much greater challenge. For it is subtle law of life that the difficulties we meet are in proportion to our capacities and the scope of our destiny. India has lived through the ages to deliver a greater Light to the world and therefore greater must be the darkness that it must slay and deeper the abyss that it must fill with the Light and heal. For this too is a subtle law of life that the higher the prize we demand the greater must be our endurance and the obstacles to conquer. India lives to deliver not only itself but the world, therefore must India be riddled with all the problems and must become symbolic of all the representative difficulties of the world. For this too is a subtle law of our growth that the wider we grow in our consciousness, our own being begins to take a more and more universal character, both in terms of the possibilities and also in terms of the difficulties. The little pool of clear reflecting water with a garden around it may be an idler's dream to rest and relax but mighty spirits born to tame the sea must be prepared to meet the whales and the sharks, to rise with the billowing waves and fall into the blue deeps till one day they make the storms their companions and delight in the strong piercing gaze of the sun-god, and the tossing manes of the wind-gods. That which lesser hearts dread and fear, the strong must meet and conquer and bear.

This rather long period of preparatory purification is a threefold process. First is the period when the nation must confront its unique as well as universal problems. It must come face to face and acknowledge not only problems of the present moment but those buried deep into its own and the earth's subconscious memory. Next, it must try the various physical, vital, mental ways to solve them and, needless to add, fail. Finally as a result of the growing pressure within and

outside it must perforce seek its own true identity and in the process end up finding its national soul. The first part of this process is nearly over, the next is going on even as we are beginning to have the first few glimpses of the third. It is interesting to note that the question of a national identity is being raised before the Indian nation through various means and circumstances. And during the first anniversary of India's spiritual new birth, that is the year 2005 (the anniversary of *Bande Mataram*) it was made clear that the issue of our national identity is far from being settled. True, our impatient hearts may find this long period of preparation painful and indeed it is long compared to human lifespan. But truth cannot be seen by impatient eyes, *tamatmasthan yenu pasyanti dheera*, nor felt by nerves that succumb under duress and shatter under pressure of adverse circumstances. And what are fifty years or even a hundred and a five hundred years but its growth from childhood into adolescence moving into youth? Those would serve India's interest best who can thus grow vast, who can look beyond the immediate gains into the deeper forces that are at work and the Light that is slowly but steadily emerging from its depths.

We must therefore understand that the task of reconstructing India is not an easy one and there are no quick-fix solutions as our childish minds may rush to suggest. Firstly India is not a new nation. It had many lives and as happens with souls that have lived many a lives, the Indian temperament has become exceedingly complex. This happens because several layers of states of consciousness and memories pile up in its subconscious and subliminal layers with complex knots of karmic energies that need to be disentangled, worked out, discover each their own truth, reintegrated with the whole in the Light of a greater Truth. This is no easy task even for an individual what to speak of a nation. Unlike other nations, the Indian psyche is very complex and lives at many levels at the same time. It is reflected even in its physical components. The Space Age mingles here with the Stone Age, the jet aircraft and the bullock cart exist in the same city and, the Vedas are recited in the same quarters as where the complex atomic problems are being tackled in the light of the discoveries of modern physics. Deep inside India is always spiritual, it has an innate intelligence that is subtle and plastic but there has also gathered as a result of its recent past experiences the rule-book mind and the school-master mentality. Such a method cannot work with India; its nature is too complex to accept it. The impersonal law, the dictat of a faceless government is too unimaginative to the Indian mind that has peopled its inner worlds with gods and demons. It is much more likely to observe a religious authority, obey the command of a spiritual master, even do an extraordinary sacrifice in a fit of emotional and religious fervour, or else logically analyse and think out for itself what it should

do or should not do in a certain situation than simply follow a rule because some government made it legal. This applies for simple things like observing traffic rules to filing I.T. returns truthfully and honestly. The sense of government, the idea of legal binding and political unity of the kind practised in the world are difficult to take root here. The Indian will readily unite for sentimental, religious, cultural and social reasons than for the sake of law and administration for its own sake. He acts either because he is moved by some vital interest or deep emotion or a logical thought or else a soul motivation. In either case, as is true for most complex beings, he must find his *locus standi* inside.

This complexity of the Indian temperament creates another difficulty. His being is like a melting pot of many things, — sacred and profane. He is moved by passion, struck by emotions, haunted by logicising and philosophising reason, attracted by vital charm yet long periods of asceticism create in him a poor hold on outer life. He is drawn to soul depths, yet holds parleys with the demons at night. The gods and the djinns both visit him in his dreams and therefore the Indian often experiences more internal conflict, becomes less focused not because of any deficiency of concentration but rather because he has too many internal things to handle which prevent him from being one-pointed. He has many simultaneous goals that are often self-contradictory, from making a quick and huge buck to solving his family problems and emotional issues to satisfying his social expectations, enjoying a quiet time with friends as well as spending time in isolated contemplation on cosmic problems that may not concern him at all. He loses a lot of creative energy in internal conflicts and therefore takes a long time to succeed outwardly in anything. But once he has worked out a path through the complex maze of his inner nature, his victory is much more complete, stable and enduring. And he arrives at this stability and victory by finding his spiritual reference point. The Light of a Buddha, the word of Krishna, the call of Vivekananda, the cry of the Vedas, the myths and legends of the Puranic literature, the fascination of Sanskrit and many such high achievements have not only endured but continue to grow and inspire mankind. The greatest of Indian empires were built and governed in a spiritual mood; its greatest works of art and science and polity and law inspired by its spiritual genius. Even as many empires fell and vanished, great traditions collapsed or are on their decline and in the passing, the Indian shine still endures and its light though covered with the dust of centuries still attracts and illumines. By his very nature and temperament the Indian lives in large spaces of time. He is more subjective, imaginative, and personal than objective, concretely real and impersonal. Therefore he lacks the killer instinct though not for that matter the survival instinct. In fact the latter is more developed, the adaptability to foreign



atmospheres much more, the ability to take defeat as a passage rather than a permanent failure, — the resilience factor, quite developed. On the one hand it snatches away from him the do-or-die mentality and the sense of urgency and expediency or for that matter a thing as simple as punctuality. But in return it arms him with an endurance and forbearing perseverance that is useful in the long run. The yoga of the Indian nation has to carve its way through this uniqueness of the Indian temperament; it cannot be otherwise.

There are, however, two more difficulties that the national soul must tackle which are like the obverse and reverse side of a single problem before it can be fit for national yoga. It comes from its more recent past of a couple of thousand years whence India lost the original Vedas in its heart and replaced it with a dubious script of other-worldly salvation, *moksha*, *mukti*, *nirvana* as the primary goal and the abrupt closing end of the creative delight of God. This has led to a loss of hold over physical reality and the world of concrete matter. But almost as a counterbalancing force, centuries of asceticism have suddenly led to a return of the suppressed elements and impulses with a vengeance. It is necessary for India to come to grips with these things. When God wants us to make a lasting progress He brings us face-to-face with that which must be truly conquered and not simply escaped from, bypassed or suppressed. This we see happening today. The quarrel of the castes, the disputes of sects, the dogmas of religion, the hidden attraction to the lower vital impulses, the roots of division and falsehood and unconsciousness buried deep into the subconscious parts are suddenly emerging before the nation's waking mind and taking the form of one problem or the other. These problems are not unique to India but their intensity is felt most acutely here. For the role of India is to be the spiritual guru of the world and to befit this role as a true spiritual leader it must carry upon its shoulders not only its own but the cross of the world. The unsolved or partially or temporarily solved problems do not vanish with our lifetime. They change forms and appearances, the ghost of our buried and bygone self raises its head again in the present to pull us back. Old ideas return, slain past survives, forgotten memories resurface and prolong the drama and adventure of life upon earth. This is as much true of an individual as for a nation. And there is no way but to go through it, with patience and perseverance, with courage and faith and hope in our hearts, and if possible to strive and ask for the vision that can pierce through the clouds and see behind appearances.

Indeed the entire line of our national yoga has not only been laid down but is also being conducted from behind the scenes by Sri Aurobindo. He has not only foreseen the destiny of India but has also kept it safe in the subtle atmosphere of the earth. Sri Aurobindo has already laid the foundations of the national

yoga. Firstly, he awakened the national soul from its torpor and initiated it into the yoga of the new world. He brought back to its surface consciousness the memory of its past spiritual efforts, recovered the lost Vedas in its full and original glory and splendour, *vedanudharte*, connected them through the unbroken thread of spiritual continuity down the Ages of the Upanishads, the Gita, Tantras and the Purana, the lineage of the great rishis and avatars (of which he is surely one) and finally linked it to our very own modern times. By doing this he was not only delivering the fully formed psychic being of India but also connecting it once again with the life and body of the nation. Secondly, he laid the broad lines for reshaping the inner being of India along the lines of its *swadharma* so that India can find its true place and become a conscious instrument of the divine design in this universe. The inner being of a nation is represented by its culture, its highest and noblest thoughts and feelings and aspirations; its output in terms of art and literature and media. And finally, it has an outer body and this too has been formed and kept safe in the Mother's divine hands as the spiritual map of united India. And having inwardly attempted and achieved all for us, Sri Aurobindo is preparing us to deserve these boons. And as is characteristic of Sri Aurobindo, he is leading us from within outwards, handling and manipulating the play of forces in such a way that we are compelled to make a choice. There is a constant subtle pressure upon India that it cannot rest. A power is acting upon it from the heights.

Lastly, we come to the crucial issue, — can we and how are we to participate in this national yoga, to facilitate the speedy and smooth realisation of Sri Aurobindo's dream of a new India? For one thing is sure that doubt and distrust do not help in the least. Nor does cynicism, complaining and grumbling help. As in individual yoga, these things add to the pool of negative energies just as faith, trust, and hope help to increase the pool of positive forces. We must also be clear that since India is meant to express the “psychic law” therefore other methods are not going to work much except as a temporary stopgap measure. The old methods are fast losing their validity the world over. Punishment and fear, for example, are becoming counter-productive in holding down anything for long. The human consciousness has certainly moved beyond that. Above all, one must not hope and expect too much from the government machinery. It is very doubtful that the nation will change with a change in political parties. What is much more likely is that politics and the parties will be forced to change because of an uprising in the national consciousness. And things are fast reaching a boiling point when a little ferment at an opportune moment may precipitate a chain reaction of the kind we never expected. Indeed the sense of unexpected is clearly shaping the world much more than the planned execution of calculated

ideas. This is another sign that the divine is behind this play and is forcing the change upon us by the power of crashing circumstances. Politics will perhaps be the last thing to change, more out of compulsion than choice. The major effort of national regeneration should therefore be directed towards this spiritual awakening and for this the most powerful tool is not politics but education. That is where the stress of the nation should be. That is also the instrument through which the Time-Spirit is working most swiftly. Instead of changing old-fashioned politicians and old-fashioned parents, it is changing the children! And they are changing very fast. Can we imagine a child born today or after another ten years carry such a religious or regional identity as a generation before us did? Even his national identity will be more fluid and plastic, something not sentimental and political but temperamental. Already the first signs are appearing and the new generation is unlikely to carry the vendetta, the unfinished agenda of hatred and revenge beyond the history books, except perhaps in a few pockets of strong resistance. What we need is not the repair of the old lamps but to replace new lamps for the old ones.

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# **Sri Aurobindo: The Prophet of Nationalism – Pt I**

Anurag Banerjee

## **Early Life**

Sri Aurobindo was born as Aravinda Acroyd Ghose<sup>1</sup> to Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose (1844 —1892) and Swarnalata Devi (1852 —1915) in the early hours of 15 August 1872 at Kolkata. The house where he was born was rented by Manmohan Ghose, noted barrister of that era, for his friend Krishnadhan so that the baby could take birth in the healthy environment of the city. At the time of Aravinda's birth, Krishnadhan was posted in the district of Rangpur where he worked as an assistant surgeon. Six months later, Krishnadhan was made the Civil Surgeon of Rangpur.

Despite hailing from a conservative Hindu family, Krishnadhan had become a member of the Brahmo Samaj — the Society of God founded by Raja Rammohan Roy — to marry Swarnalata, the beautiful daughter of Rajnarain Bose (1823—1899), fondly remembered with reverence as the 'Grandfather of Indian Nationalism', who was one of the leading members of the Samaj. Rajnarain had high hopes for his son-in-law but was terribly disappointed with him when the latter returned from England after obtaining the degree of M. D. with honours from the King's College, Aberdeen, in 1871, as a staunch atheist and anglicised Indian who despised anything that was Indian and considered the British to be a superior race. 'He loved everything English, and felt a great admiration for the culture and civilisation of the West — its material glamour, its vigorous, energetic life-force, and its sound, rational, practical utilitarianism.'<sup>2</sup> As a result of his extreme fascination and obsession with British culture, he disallowed the use of Bengali, his mother-tongue, at his residence. Another example of his fondness for English culture was that he gave an English middle-name to Aravinda — 'Akroyd' — in honour of his friend Annette Akroyd who later married another friend of Krishnadhan, Henry Beveridge, the then

Officiating District and Sessions Judge of Rangpur.

Swarnalata, Sri Aurobindo's mother, had begun to show signs of mental disorder soon after the birth of her first child, Benoy Bhushan, in 1867. With the passage of time her condition worsened and reached such a stage that by 1877 she was always laughing at herself. She would also get violent at times and beat her children mercilessly. To provide his children with a perfect European education as well as to keep them away from the eccentricities of their mother, Krishnadhan sent his three sons Benoy Bhushan (1867 — 1947), Manmohan (1869 — 1924) and Sri Aurobindo to the Loreto House School run by Irish nuns at Darjeeling in 1877. Some months after the Ghose siblings joined the boarding school, Annette Beveridge visited Darjeeling and went to meet them. After meeting the boys, she wrote in a letter that the children looked well-dressed in their 'blue serges & scarlet stockings'. She also remarked about Sri Aurobindo, the youngest of the siblings: 'The little fellow had a grey suit — very becoming — & is greatly aged — grown tall and boyish. I was struck particularly by the broadening of his forehead. He was pleased to see me I think but all were quite silent except for an extorted yes! or no!'<sup>3</sup>

Krishnadhan had firmly resolved that his children should receive a perfect European upbringing. Therefore he decided to send his sons to England. His friend Edward Glazier, the magistrate and collector of Rangpur, offered to help him. Following Edward's request, his relative William H. Drewett, a clergyman, agreed to act as the guardian of the Ghose siblings during their stay in England. Accordingly, Krishnadhan sailed for England in 1879 with his pregnant wife, three sons and daughter Sarojini who was then two years of age.

William H. Drewett stayed at 84 Shakespeare Street in Manchester (later he shifted with his family to 29 York Place). It was here that Sri Aurobindo and his two elder brothers spent the initial years of their stay in England. Krishnadhan had strictly instructed Drewett and his wife Mary that his children must not be allowed to 'make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence'; his instructions were faithfully executed due to which Sri Aurobindo and his brothers 'grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture.'<sup>4</sup>

Being an accomplished scholar in Latin, William H. Drewett taught the rudiments of the said language to the Ghose siblings for two years. In 1881 Benoy Bhushan and Manmohan were enrolled in the Manchester Grammar School. Since Sri Aurobindo was too young to join the school, William H. Drewett taught him Latin, History and English privately at home while Mary Drewett tutored him in Geography, Arithmetic and French. In 1884 William H. Drewett shifted to Australia and gave the custody of the Ghose siblings to his mother

Elizabeth. Sri Aurobindo and his elder brothers went with her and settled in London where the elderly lady took a flat at 49 St. Stephen's Avenue in Shepherd's Bush. In September 1884, Manmohan and Sri Aurobindo were enrolled in St. Paul's School.

Sri Aurobindo writes about his life as a student of St. Paul's School: 'Aurobindo gave his attention to the classics... at Saint Paul's; but even at St. Paul's in the last three years he simply went through his school course and spent most of his spare time in general reading, especially English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and the history of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe. He spent some time also over learning Italian, some German and a little Spanish... The school studies during this period engaged very little of his time; he was already at ease in them and did not think it necessary to labour over them any longer.'<sup>5</sup>

Elizabeth Drewett was 'fervently evangelical' (to quote the words of Sri Aurobindo); one day she quarrelled with Manmohan about religion and proclaimed that she 'would not live with an atheist as the house might fall down on her.'<sup>6</sup> Soon she left the flat and shifted elsewhere. The young boys continued to occupy the flat until the autumn of 1887 when financial constraints forced Benoy Bhushan and Sri Aurobindo to move to 128 Cromwell Road (which housed the South Kensington Liberal Club) where they were allowed to stay in a room above the club's premises while Manmohan went to Oxford. To meet the daily expenses, Benoy Bhushan worked for James Cotton, the Secretary of the Club, for a meagre five shillings a week. Dr. Ghose's irregular remittances from India made life extremely hard for the two brothers who lived — for an entire year — on '... a slice or two of sandwich, bread and butter and a cup of tea in the morning, and in the evening a penny saveloy formed the only food.'<sup>7</sup> There was no coal in their home to protect themselves from the winter of England nor could they buy new overcoats to replace the old ones.

In December 1889 Sri Aurobindo went to Cambridge to appear for the Scholarship Examination for King's College. Oscar Browning, noted scholar of Cambridge who was one of the examiners, would later remark that Sri Aurobindo's papers were the best ones ever seen by him. His performance earned him an annual scholarship of eighty pounds which he shared with his two brothers. He joined the King's College in October 1890 and for the next two years prepared himself for the Classical Tripos (the honours examination for the Bachelor of Arts degree) as well as the Indian Civil Service examination (which his father wanted him to qualify for). As an Indian Civil Service probationer, he was granted an allowance of three hundred pounds one half of which was paid in two instalments after the periodic examinations and the



other half was paid after the completion of the final examinations. Sri Aurobindo had to bear all the expenses related to his meals, books and his brothers' requirements from these stipends. Despite a spartan life, he busied himself with his studies. He won all the prizes in King's College in one year for Greek and Latin verse.

The first periodic examination of the Indian Civil Service was held in March 1891 and Sri Aurobindo obtained the twenty-third position among the forty-six candidates. In the second periodic examination, he obtained the nineteenth position. In that very year he received the Rawley Prize for Greek iambs. He received the said prize again in 1892 for Latin hexameters as well as Greek iambs. His performance in the college examinations was rewarded with forty pounds' worth of books. Also in 1892, he passed the First Part of the Classical Tripos but he did not graduate because the degree was awarded at the end of the third year whereas Sri Aurobindo left Cambridge in October 1892 after the completion of the second year.

In August 1892 Sri Aurobindo passed the final examination for the Indian Civil Service. However he was least interested to pursue a career in the civil service. He had opted for it to fulfil his father's wish but it was again courtesy Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose that he changed his mind. Despite being an anglophile, Dr. Ghose was not oblivious about the repressive rule of the British Government in India and would send to his son *The Bengalee* newspaper 'with passages marked relating cases of maltreatment of Indians by Englishmen and he wrote in his letters denouncing the British Government in India as a heartless Government.'<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Sri Aurobindo deliberately got himself disqualified from the Civil Service by absenting himself at the horse-riding test.

At the tender age of eleven, Sri Aurobindo had felt that 'a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it.'<sup>9</sup> By the time he had gone to Cambridge, he had made up his mind to work for the freedom of his motherland. The nationalist feelings which had taken birth in his heart were duly expressed by him in the revolutionary speeches which he delivered as a member of the Indian Majlis — an association of Indian students — denouncing British imperialism. Later he was informed that these speeches 'had their part in determining the authorities to exclude him from the Indian Civil Service'<sup>10</sup>. Sometime between October 1892 and January 1893 (that is, before he sailed for India) Sri Aurobindo joined the 'Lotus and Dagger'<sup>11</sup> along with his two elder brothers Benoy Bhushan and Manomohan.

Towards the end of 1892, Sri Aurobindo was introduced to Sayajirao Gaekwar, the ruler of Baroda who was on a visit to London by James Cotton. After an

interview the Gaekwar offered Sri Aurobindo a job at Baroda with a monthly salary of two hundred rupees. Sri Aurobindo accepted the offer and began to prepare to sail for India.

### **A Staunch Critic of Indian National Congress**

Sri Aurobindo arrived in India on 6 February 1893. On 8 February he joined the Baroda State Service where he began his work in the Survey Settlement Department as an attaché. Soon after his arrival in India in 1893, as a young and realistic man of twenty-one, he observed how flawed the political policies of the Indian National Congress — which was founded in 1885 — were although like other educated Indians of his time he had ‘hailed the Indian National Congress as a timely and efficient instrument of political salvation.’<sup>12</sup> ‘It is within the recollection of most of us,’ he would write soon after his arrival in India about the Congress, ‘to how giddy an eminence this body was raised, on how prodigious a wave of enthusiasm, against how immense a weight of resisting winds. So sudden was it all that it must have been difficult, I may almost say impossible, even for a strong man to keep his head and not follow with the shouting crowd. How shall we find words vivid enough to describe the fervour of those morning hopes, the April splendour of that wonderful enthusiasm? The Congress was to us all that is to man most dear, most high and most sacred; a well of living water in deserts more than Saharan, a proud banner in the battle of Liberty, and a holy temple of concord where the races met and mingled.’<sup>13</sup> However, he was soon disillusioned when, after a detailed study of the activities of the Congress, he realised its defects and shortcomings. Keshav Ganesh Deshpande, a brilliant mathematician and barrister who had befriended Sri Aurobindo at Cambridge and who also shared Sri Aurobindo’s distaste for the do-nothing ways of the Congress as well as his strong nationalist opinions, asked Sri Aurobindo to pen articles about the Congress in the bilingual weekly journal, *Indu Prakash*, published from Bombay of which he was the editor. Thus took birth from the pen of Sri Aurobindo the series *New Lamps for Old* which appeared from 7 August 1893 to 5 March 1894 through which he exposed the futility of the political policies of the Congress and ignited the pondering-minds of his countrymen to realise what they should really seek. (Years later when asked about the significance of the series’ title, Sri Aurobindo answered: ‘This title did not refer to the Indian civilisation but to Congress politics. It is not used in the sense of Aladdin story, but was intended to imply the offering of new lights to replace the old and faint reformist lights of the Congress.’<sup>14</sup>)

Keshav Ganesh Deshpande had introduced the series with the following note:

‘We promised our readers some time back a series of articles on our present

political progress by an extremely able and keen observer of the present times. We are very much pleased to give our readers the first instalment of that series. The title under which these views appear is '*New Lamps for Old*' which is very suggestive though a metaphorical one. The preface will take us over to the next issue. The views therein contained are not those that are commonly held by our politicians, and for this reason they are very important. We have been long convinced that our efforts in Political Progress are not sustained, but are lacking in vigour. Hypocrisy has been the besetting sin of our political agitation. Oblique vision is the fashion. True, matter of fact, honest criticism is very badly needed. Our institutions have no strong foundation and are in hourly danger of falling down. Under these circumstances it was idle — nay, criminal, — to remain silent while our whole energy in Political Progress was spent in a wrong direction. The questions at issue are momentous. It is the making or unmaking of a nation. We have therefore secured a gentleman of great literary talents, of liberal culture and of considerable English experience, well-versed in the art of writing and willing, at great personal inconvenience and probable misrepresentation, to give out his views in no uncertain voice, and, we may be allowed to add, in a style and diction peculiarly his own. We bespeak our readers' most careful and constant perusal on his behalf and assure them that they will find in those articles matter that will set them thinking and steel their patriotic souls.<sup>15</sup>

In the said series, Sri Aurobindo severely criticised the Congress leaders and their methods of working. He labelled most of the political actions of the Congress as failure and asked his fellow-countrymen to deal with the problems that confronted them instead of seeking favours from the Queen of England and the British Prime Minister whom he described as 'an old lady so called by way of courtesy' and 'an astute and plausible man' respectively. He denounced the constitutional agitations styled in the typical British way and favoured the way shown by the French Revolution. 'If we are bent upon adopting England as our exemplar,' Sri Aurobindo wrote in the instalment dated 18 September 1893, 'we shall certainly imitate the progress of the glacier rather than the progress of the torrent... these seven centuries have done less to change partially the political and social exterior of England than five short years to change entirely the political and social exterior of her immediate neighbour [that is, France].'

'Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism,' Sri Aurobindo wrote in the instalment published on 21 August 1893, '... Our appeal, the appeal of every high-souled and self-respecting nation, ought... to be... to our own reviving sense of manhood, to our own sincere

fellow-feeling — so far as it can be called sincere, — with the silent and suffering people of India. I am sure that eventually the nobler part of us will prevail,— that when we no longer obey the dictates of a veiled self-interest, but return to the profession of a large and genuine patriotism, when we cease to hanker after the soiled crumbs which England may cast to us from her table, then it will be to that sense of manhood, to that sincere fellow-feeling that we shall finally and forcibly appeal.’

‘I say of the Congress,’ Sri Aurobindo wrote in the instalment of 28 August, ‘then, this — that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts, not the right sort of men to be leaders; — in brief, that we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed.’

In the instalment dated 30 October, we find Sri Aurobindo pointing out:

‘Prompted by our English instruction we have deputed to a mere machine so arduous a business as the remoulding of our entire destinies, needing as it does patient and delicate manual adjustment and a constant supervising vigilance — and this to a machine not efficient and carefully pieced together but clumsy and made on a rude and cheap model. So long as this temper prevails, we shall never realise how utterly it is beyond the power of even an excellent machine to renovate an effete and impoverished national character and how palpably requisite to commence from within and not depend on any exterior agency.’

Decades before the architects of the Russian Revolution conceived the theory of the proletariat in the Marxist light, Sri Aurobindo had spoken about it in 1893 and remarked that the ‘first and holiest’ of duties was to elevate and enlighten the proletariat (by which he referred to the members of the lower classes).

‘...our national effort’, he wrote in the installment dated 4 December, ‘must contract a social and popular tendency before it can hope to be great and fruitful... The proletariat among us is sunk in ignorance and overwhelmed with distress. But with that distressed and ignorant proletariat, — now that the middle class is proved deficient in sincerity, power and judgment, — with that proletariat resides, whether we like it or not, our sole assurance of hope, our sole chance in the future. Yet he is set down as a vain theorist and a dreamy trifler who would raise it from its ignorance and distress... To play with baubles is our ambition, not to deal with grave questions in a spirit of serious energy. But while we are playing with baubles, with our Legislative Councils, our simultaneous Examinations, our ingenious schemes for separating the judicial from the executive functions, — while we, I say, are

finessing about trifles, the waters of the great deep are being stirred and that surging chaos of the primitive man over which our civilised societies are superimposed on a thin crust or convention, is being strangely and ominously agitated.’

And in the last instalment of the series which was published on 6 March 1894, we find Sri Aurobindo proclaiming about the importance of the proletariat: ‘...the proletariat is, as I have striven to show, the real key of the situation. Torpid he is and immobile; he is nothing of an actual force, but he is a very great potential force, and whoever succeeds in understanding and eliciting his strength, becomes by the very fact master of the future. Our situation is indeed complex and difficult beyond any that has ever been imagined by the human intellect; but if there is one thing clear in it, it is that the right and fruitful policy for the burgess, the only policy that has any chance of eventual success, is to base his cause upon an adroit management of the proletariat. He must awaken and organise the entire power of the country and thus multiply infinitely his volume and significance, the better to attain a supremacy as much social as political. Thus and thus only will he attain to his legitimate station, not an egoist class living for itself and in itself, but the crown of the nation and its head.’<sup>167</sup>

*New Lamps for Old* created a strong uproar in the political circles. As a result Mahadev Govind Ranade (the veteran Maratha leader who was a social reformer and High Court judge) who was associated with *Indu Prakash*, asked the proprietor of the journal not to allow publication of such seditious articles in the paper as it might lead to prosecution. Deshpande was in a dilemma and he approached Sri Aurobindo with the request to tone down his criticisms and write something ‘less violent’. Sri Aurobindo then began to write about the philosophy of politics but soon discontinued it as he lost his enthusiasm. But it was courtesy Deshpande that Sri Aurobindo’s introduction to the political field through the medium of the pen took place. The spark which was reflected through his writings was a clear indication of the fire which the young man was capable of igniting.

Some time in 1894 Sri Aurobindo met Ranade in Bombay. The senior leader spoke to him for almost half an hour dissuading him to leave off writing and asked him to undertake some activities which were in consonance with the policies of the Congress like tasks related to jail reforms. Sri Aurobindo was ‘surprised and displeased’ at Ranade’s request and he flatly declined it.

Dr. R. K. Mukherji writes about the importance of *New Lamps for Old*: ‘Sri Aurobindo stands out as the first exponent of the new revolutionary political thought and idealism which inspired national effort, struggle, and

suffering through half a century and achieved for India her full political freedom in 1947. It was Sri Aurobindo's rare insight and inner vision that first detected the inherent defects of the traditional Congress method of political work which was so far based on what was rightly described as mendicant politics — the politics of small administrative reforms, passing pious Resolutions as appeals to the foreign rulers, and ignoring the fundamental need of the country, that of its total freedom from foreign rule itself.<sup>17</sup>

### **Organiser of Secret Societies**

As mentioned before, Sri Aurobindo worked in the Survey Settlement Department as an attaché when he joined the Baroda State Service in February 1893. In March 1894 he was transferred to the Revenue Department. Towards the end of 1895 we find Sri Aurobindo working directly under Sayaji Rao Gaekwar and having a post in the office of the Dewan of the Baroda State. Following the request of the Principal of Baroda College who wanted Sri Aurobindo to take French classes in the college for an hour every day, Sri Aurobindo started to work in the Baroda College as a lecturer in French. In 1898 he was appointed acting professor of English Literature and two years later, following the recommendation of the Principal, the Gaekwar made him a permanent professor in the college. He taught in the Baroda College from 1898 to 1901 and again from 1905 to 1906. On 28 September 1904 he was promoted to the post of Vice-Principal and between March 1905 and February 1906, he worked as the acting Principal.

But it does not imply that after penning fire-breathing articles for *Indu Prakash*, the nationalist sentiments of Sri Aurobindo had cooled off. On the contrary, he continued to study and monitor the conditions of India and the 'temperament and characteristics' of the Englishmen as well as their political instincts 'to judge more maturely what could be done'<sup>18</sup>. After considerable analysis he arrived at the conclusion that the military organisation of India was quite weak. However, this weakness could be transformed into strength with proper organisation and substantial assistance from external forces. Since India was a vast nation and the regular British troops were small, Sri Aurobindo realised that the style of guerrilla warfare along with general resistance and revolt could be effective. He considered the possibility of a general revolt in the Indian army. However, he also realised that though the attempts of self-liberation by the Indians would be resisted by the British people and they would concede to reforms 'very slowly' to safeguard their imperial control, 'still they were not the kind which would be ruthlessly adamant to the end: if they found resistance and revolt becoming general and persistent they would in the end try to arrive at an accommodation to save what they could of their empire or in an extremity,



prefer to grant independence rather than have it forcefully wrested from their hands.<sup>19</sup>

Now that the goal of freedom was envisaged, Sri Aurobindo formulated a political programme consisting of three plans to translate the goal into reality. The first plan dealt with starting secret revolutionary propaganda and organisation with the objective of preparing an armed insurrection; the second plan aimed to convert the entire country to the ideal of complete independence through a public propaganda while the third one involved organising the countrymen to carry on a public and unified opposition of British rule through an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance. Sri Aurobindo further explains his political strategies:

‘The idea was to establish secretly or, as far as visible action could be taken, under various pretexts and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruiting throughout Bengal. This was to be done among the youth of the country while sympathy and support and financial and other assistance were to be obtained from the older men who had advanced views or could be won over to them. Centres were to be established in every town and eventually in every village. Societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral and those already existing were to be won over for revolutionary use. Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action, such as riding, physical training, athletics of various kinds, drill and organised movement.’<sup>20</sup>

The planning part was done; what was left was to find a suitable lieutenant who would translate the plan into action. Since Sri Aurobindo was employed in the Baroda State Service, he could not openly participate in politics or revolutionary activities. In Jatindranath Banerji (19 November 1877 — 5 September 1930; the future Niralamba Swami), he found the man he was looking for. In 1898 or 1899 he met this young Bengali gentleman who was exceedingly keen to receive military training and become a soldier. With the help of Khaserao and Madhavrao Jadhav, two brothers who worked in the Baroda State Service (Khaserao was a high official in the State Service while Madhavrao was an officer in the Baroda army), Sri Aurobindo enrolled Jatindranath as a trooper in the cavalry regiment of the Baroda army so that the young man could receive the military training required for the successful execution of revolutionary activities in Bengal. Later he became a bodyguard of Sayaji Rao Gaekwar. His training continued till 1901 or 1902 after which he was sent to Bengal with detailed plans and programmes of the proposed revolutionary work. Accordingly he arrived in Calcutta and established a revolutionary centre in the garb of a gymnasium in the city where wrestling, *lathi*-play, cycling, target-shooting,

fencing, etc. were taught. He also established contact with Pramathanath Mitter (better known as P. Mitter), a renowned barrister of Calcutta High Court, Sarala Devi Choudhurani and Bibhuti Bhushan Bhattacharya who had already commenced certain revolutionary activities. In 1903 he met Yogendra Vidyabhushan who introduced him to Jatindranath Mukherjee (alias Bagha Jatin) and Lalit Chandra Chatterjee. Sri Aurobindo also met these dedicated political workers on Jatindranath's initiative but he simply kept himself 'informed of their work'<sup>21</sup>. Under the able leadership of Jatindranath, the centre spread throughout Bengal and its branches were established in Bihar and Orissa. In 1902 Sri Aurobindo visited Bengal during his vacations with Jatindranath Banerji and Barindra Kumar Ghose — his younger brother who had joined him at Baroda some months ago — and went to Midnapore where he met Hem Chandra Das Kanungo. At Midnapore, it was resolved to form as many as six centres of revolutionary activities in Bengal. Sri Aurobindo also gave oath of the revolutionary party to Hem Chandra Das Kanungo and Pramathanath Mitter which they took by holding a sword and a copy of the *Gita* in their hands and pledged to free their motherland from the shackles of foreign rule.

A few words about the revolutionary centres of the pre-Swadeshi and Swadeshi era would not be irrelevant here.

The pioneer in establishing centres to teach martial arts was Sarala Devi Choudhurani, daughter of Janakinath Ghosal (a noted leader of Congress) and Swarnakumari Devi (a renowned authoress of her time and elder sister of Rabindranath Tagore). Deeply influenced by a demonstration of physical culture in Maharashtra, she opened a gymnasium in Calcutta sometime around 1897 to promote *lathi*-playing and other martial arts like fencing. Her gymnasium was very successful and before long several centres emerged in the various parts of the city to develop physical culture. One of such centres was the '*Atmonnati Samiti*'. However, it is essential to remember that though these centres stressed mainly on physical culture it provided the platform for revolutionary activities as well. But the one who played the most prominent role in the establishment of secret societies was Pramathanath Mitter who was one of the founder-members of the '*Anushilan Samiti*' which in the later years went on to become a political party. Officially established on 24 March 1902, it had its headquarters at 108 Upper Circular Road and its activities included giving lectures by Pramathanath (who spoke on military and political history including the history of the Sikhs, the French Revolution and biographies of Mazzini and Garibaldi) and Sister Nivedita who roused nationalist sentiments among the recruits of the society. 'There was also instruction in lathi, drill, boxing and other martial activities. All this training was presented in the guise of legitimate physical culture. So effective

was the artifice that when the samiti wanted to give swimming lessons it asked for and received the help of the police.<sup>22</sup> Sri Aurobindo met the members of this society in April or May 1902 when he visited Bengal. The '*Anushilan Samiti*' met with a crisis when a conflict erupted between Jatindranath (the main fund-raiser) and Barindra Kumar Ghose. However, the society survived the crisis and spread its branches in East Bengal with Dacca being the most active centre. In fact, at one point of time, the '*Anushilan Samiti*' of Dacca had overshadowed the parent society and subsequently absorbed most of the other groups which existed in East Bengal like the '*Suhrid Samiti*' and the '*Sadhana Samaj*' of Hemendra Kishore Acharya Chowdhury, Manoranjan Guha Thakurta's '*Broti Samiti*' which had its branches in Khulna and Faridpur, etc. The rate of growth of the secret societies in East Bengal was indeed noteworthy and this growth was accelerated due to the misadministration of the Lieutenant-Governor of the province, Sir Bampfylde Fuller whom Barindra Kumar and his associates tried to assassinate a number of times.

There was also a secret society in Midnapore which was established by Jogendranath Bose (the son of Rajnarain Bose, Sri Aurobindo's maternal grandfather) around 1900 in association with Satyendranath Bose and Jnanendranath Bose. Hem Chandra Das Kanungo was a member of this society.

These *samitis* or secret societies were instruments of mass mobilization aptly utilised by the workers of the Swadeshi movement. Through the 159 branches of the '*Swadesh Bandhab Samiti*' founded by Ashwini Kumar Dutt, an 'unparallel mass following' was generated among the Muslim belts of the region<sup>23</sup>. Through magic lantern, lectures and patriotic songs, the message of Swadeshi was conveyed to the remotest corners of the land. Not only did the societies spread the message of Swadeshi but also did a number of social works during epidemics and famines. They also established schools, arbitration courts and developed Swadeshi handicrafts. According to a report, the Barisal Samiti settled 523 disputes through 89 arbitration committees by August 1906.

No discussion on secret societies would remain complete if '*Chattra Bhandar*' or the 'Students Store' is ignored. Though the proclaimed aim of this society was mercantile activities for the purpose of generating money for philanthropic causes, its actual activities included spreading of propaganda, training the recruits for revolutionary activities, establishing branches in the various parts of the province, etc. It channelised the funds raised from its mercantile activities to the revolutionaries.

The foremost secret society was the Manicktola Secret Society whose undisputed leader was Barindra Kumar Ghose. Among the thirty six members of this society, 13 came from East Bengal and Assam, one (Bal Krishna Hari

Kane) from the Central Provinces and the remaining twenty-two came from the regions of Calcutta, Hooghly, French Chandernagore, Jessore, Khulna, Nadia and the 24 Parganas. Most of the members of this secret society were school or college-dropouts. More discussion about this centre would be made a little later.

Sri Aurobindo writes about the establishment of secret societies in Bengal as conceived by him:

‘As soon as the idea was sown it attained a rapid prosperity; already existing small groups and associations of young men who had not yet the clear idea or any settled programme of revolution began to turn in this direction and a few who had already the revolutionary aim were contacted and soon developed activity on organised lines; the few rapidly became many.’<sup>24</sup>

Apart from masterminding the setting up of revolutionary centres in Bengal, Sri Aurobindo established contacts with nationalist politicians, organised a secret revolutionary society around 1900 and joined another secret society in 1902 with the view to explore an armed rebellion to oust the British. In October 1902 he met Sister Nivedita during her visit to Baroda; he received her at the railway station when the latter arrived at Baroda as a guest of the Baroda State on the 20th of October. Both had heard about each other through their friends and acquaintances and Sister Nivedita knew that Sri Aurobindo was a ‘worshipper of Force’ and belonged to ‘the secret revolutionary party like herself’<sup>25</sup>. Sri Aurobindo too had read her book *Kali the Mother*, a work which earned his appreciation. They talked about politics and other subjects. About his meetings with Sister Nivedita, Sri Aurobindo would recall later in one of his talks:

‘She was one of the revolutionary leaders. She went about visiting various places in India to come in contact with the people. She was open and frank and talked about her revolutionary plan to everybody. When she used to speak on revolution it was her very soul that spoke, her true personality used to come out. Yoga was yoga of course, but it was as if this work was intended for her: that was fire if you like. Her book *Kali the Mother* is very inspiring, but it is revolutionary and not non-violent. She went about among the Thakurs of Rajputana trying to preach them revolution... There was no non-violence about her... She was a solid worker.’<sup>26</sup>

In December 1902, Sri Aurobindo went to Bombay with his younger brother Barindra Kumar Ghose to attend a meeting arranged in the Taj Mahal Hotel with G. D. Madgavkar, an officer of the Indian Civil Service, to discuss the possibilities of sending Madhavrao Jadhav to Japan for military training (for which Madgavkar agreed to contribute a sum of one thousand rupees) and about the forthcoming eighteenth session of the Indian National Congress

scheduled to be held at Ahmedabad which Sri Aurobindo attended on 25 December. It was during this session of the Congress that he was introduced to Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the lion of Maharashtra whom Sri Aurobindo regarded as ‘the one possible leader for a revolutionary party’. Tilak took Sri Aurobindo ‘out of the pandal and talked to him for an hour in the grounds expressing his contempt for the Reformist movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra.’<sup>27</sup>

A. K. Bhagwat and G. P. Pradhan writes of Tilak’s association with Sri Aurobindo:

‘The association of Tilak with Aurobindo was a happy accident. Both of them had a burning passion for the liberation of India and yet there was a great difference in their temperaments and methods... Aurobindo was a visionary and had a mystic touch about him. Tilak was a realist and relied on intellect rather than on intuition. Tilak was among the first to be struck by Aurobindo’s articles in *Indu-Prakash*... [At the Congress session in Ahmedabad in 1902] There Tilak took Aurobindo out of the pandal to the open grounds and talked to him for an hour expressing his contempt for the tinker-work show and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra. This was not just a meeting between two political leaders but a meeting of two forces, one representing the robust idealism and the indomitable will of Maharashtra, the other representative of the revolutionary fervour and the tempestuous energies of Bengal. Tilak could be compared to an ocean with waves crashing on a rock with tremendous uproar. Aurobindo resembled a smouldering volcano which would erupt at any moment... The meeting was like a sacred confluence of two rivers, out of which emerged new stream, flowing with tremendous rapidity and creating a new life on its banks.

‘Tilak recognised in Aurobindo a new force in Indian politics and, in spite of the difference in approach, realised the need for a close association with him. Both these great leaders took their ideals to the people mainly through their writings... Both of them wanted to teach the people the lesson of self-reliance, but the ways in which their thoughts found expression were quite different. Tilak’s writings were direct, matter-of-fact and un-embellished. In Aurobindo’s writings there is a religious tone and the throbbing of an intense emotion.’<sup>28</sup>

Sometime also in 1902, Sri Aurobindo came in contact with another secret revolutionary society whose purpose was to prepare a national insurrection. The leader of this society was a Rajput noble of Udaipur named Thakur Ram Singh whose prime interest was the subversion of the Indian army. According to Sri Aurobindo Thakur Ram Singh had won over two or three regiments out

of which one was visited by Sri Aurobindo. The most active of these circles was the West India circle which consisted of a Council of Five at Bombay and had a number of Maratha politicians as its members. When Sri Aurobindo was initiated into this secret society he was made the president of the Gujarat circle of the society and introduced to its council in Bombay. However, Sri Aurobindo's 'future action was not pursued under any directions by this Council, but he took up on his own responsibility the task of generalising support for its objects in Bengal where as yet it had no membership or following. He spoke of the Society and its aim to P. Mitter and other leading men of the revolutionary group in Bengal and they took the oath of the Society and agreed to carry out its objects on the lines suggested by Sri Aurobindo.<sup>29</sup>' He had also intended to create a sense of 'disaffection' in the Indian army and started to work to attain the desired goal but his efforts went in vain due to the death of Ram Singh during the Russo-Japanese War in Manchuria. By December 1907 this secret society also lost its existence.

Thus we find Sri Aurobindo becoming the 'secret link between the revolutionary groups in Western and Eastern India.'<sup>30</sup>

In the beginning of 1903 Sri Aurobindo sent Barindra to Calcutta to help Jatindranath Banerji to organise the revolutionary movement in Bengal. On reaching Bengal, Barindra toured the province to set up revolutionary centres but did not taste the desired success at every place. Moreover conflicts began to emerge between him and Jatindranath and they soon parted ways. When Sri Aurobindo came to Calcutta in February 1903, he rebuked his brother for quarrelling with Jatindranath and instructed him to rejoin hands by forgetting their mutual differences. He also set up a controlling committee with Pramathanath Mitter, Chittaranjan Das, Sister Nivedita, Surendranath Tagore and Jatindranath as members to supervise the revolutionary activities in Bengal. But the reconciliation between Barindra and Jatindranath was short-lived and soon they separated their paths after Sri Aurobindo returned to Baroda. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar aptly remarks:

'Although this committee was no conspicuously successful in its work of coordination, the movement itself spread... to a phenomenal extent, and for this growing body of young men and dedicated workers Sri Aurobindo became the supreme (if absentee) leader of the coming revolution.'<sup>31</sup>

Before long Jatindranath retired from active politics and took initiation — in 1906 — from Tibbati Baba, the Guru of Soham Swami, and was renamed as 'Niralamba Swami'. He was arrested during the Alipore Bomb Trial but was acquitted due to absence of evidence. After his release from imprisonment he dissociated himself completely from revolutionary activities and embraced



spiritual life. Hailed as the ‘Brahma of Bengali Revolutionaries’, Niralamba left his body on 5 September 1930.

During his visit to Bengal in 1903, Sri Aurobindo was introduced to Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya, who was one of Barindra’s closest associates in revolutionary work. The young man later became the Manager of *Jugantar*, the nationalist journal started by Barindra and also the publisher of two books in Bengali, *Mukti Kon Pathe* (Which Way to Liberation?) and *Bartaman Rananiti* (Modern Science of Warfare) which expressed fearlessly the ‘bold new temper of the Bengali mind’ and were considered to be seditious by the British Government. Recalling his first meeting with Sri Aurobindo, he writes in his reminiscences:

‘Barin told me: “Come, Abinash, I’ll introduce you to Sejda.” I went with him with great pleasure. When we arrived we saw Aurobindo-babu and Jatin-babu sitting on a mat spread on the floor, talking and laughing. I did *pranam* to him and hardly had sat down before him when Barin said: “Sejda, his name is Abinash Bhattacharya, Bengal’s first volunteer.” I said, “I’m not the first. Jatin-babu is, and you are second. I’m only the third.” Barin countered: “No, Jatin-babu and I came here after being initiated in Baroda. You were the first person we found in Bengal, the first to give up everything and plunge into our work. So you are Bengal’s first volunteer.” With great concentration Aurobindo-babu looked into my eyes for a long time. I felt completely thrown off balance — it seemed as if he were wringing out my inmost being. I could neither shut my eyes nor avert them. My heart began to pound. Then Aurobindo-babu looked at my forehead, examined it by pressing; after this he looked at my eye-brows. He lifted my eyelids and looked. Suddenly he pushed my head down and began examining it by pressing. Finally he said: “Your first recruit is quite fine. He is a determined, faithful and silent worker.” I felt as if an elixir had revived my dead self back to life. I was the first in Bengal! My heart was swollen with pride.<sup>32</sup>

From the latter half of 1903 till the middle of 1904 Sri Aurobindo kept himself busy —although quite silently — in various political activities which included meeting members and sub-officers of an Indian regiment in Central India who were interested in the secret society and touring the districts of Jessore and Khulna (now in Bangladesh) with Debabrata Bose to ascertain whether the country was prepared for the struggle for independence but was greatly disappointed to see ‘the people steeped in pessimism, a black weight of darkness weighed over the country... Only a few... stood for independence.<sup>33</sup>’ He attended the annual sessions of the Congress held at Bombay and Benares in 1904 and 1905 respectively with the view of bringing together ‘the few like-

mindful leaders who were prepared to fight for nothing less than *swaraj* or complete independence free of all foreign control.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Sri Aurobindo's attempts to bring the secret revolutionary societies under a close organisation, it did not materialise due to the difference of opinions between Jatindranath Banerji and Barindra which caused considerable harm to the movement itself and dampened the spirit which was leading it. However, Sri Aurobindo observes that 'the general idea was taken up and activity of many separate groups led to a greater and more widespread diffusion of the revolutionary drive and its action.'<sup>35</sup>

On 3 December 1903 the British Government proclaimed its grand plan to merge the districts of Dacca, Chittagong and Mymensingh with the province of Assam on the pretext of better administration and control. Sri Aurobindo realised that such a measure was not 'a mere administrative proposal but a blow straight at the hearts of the nation', hence, he wrote — in an incomplete and unpublished article — that the national movement should ignore the points of division and create 'new points of contact and union.'<sup>36</sup> Sometime in 1904 he authored a pamphlet titled *No Compromise* denouncing the amalgamation of the districts of Bengal with Assam which no press was willing to print. With the help of Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya and a young Marathi man, Kulkarni, Barindra printed it secretly in Calcutta and arranged for its widespread circulation. When a copy of the pamphlet reached the hands of Sir Surendranath Banerjea, the senior Congress leader wondered who could be the author of such a well-presented and ably argumentative piece of work; he doubted whether it was written by an Indian for he felt that no Indian could write such extraordinary English. When Abinash Chandra informed him about the actual identity of the author, he is said to have remarked that only Sri Aurobindo could have penned it.

(To be continued)

1. He dropped his middle name Acroyd in 1893 and changed the spelling of his name to Aurobindo in 1906 after shifting to Bengal. He started signing his name as 'Sri Aurobindo' from 1914.
2. Rishabhchandra, *Sri Aurobindo: His Life Unique*, p. 3, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 1981.
3. Annette Beveridge to Henry Beveridge, September 29, 1877, Beveridge Papers, India Office Records.
4. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Volume 36, p. 15, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2006.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 116
8. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*,
11. The 'Lotus and Dagger' was a secret society in which every member had to pledge to work for the freedom of India. The society's inaugural meeting was its last meeting and hence Sri Aurobindo called it a 'still-born'.
12. *Sri Aurobindo — His Life Unique*, p.93.
13. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Volume 6, p.13.
14. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 36, p.67.
15. A. B. Purani, *Life of Sri Aurobindo*, pp.40-41, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2001.
16. See *New Lamps for Old* in the *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 6.
17. *Sri Aurobindo — His Life Unique*, p.91.
18. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 36, p.49.
19. *Ibid.*, p.48.
20. *Ibid.*, p.49.
21. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History*, p.62, Sri Aurobindo Centre of Education, 2006.
22. Peter Heehs, *The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India in 1900-1910*, p.34, Oxford University Press, 1993.
23. Bipin Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, p.129. Penguin Books, 1989.
24. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 36, p.49.
25. *Ibid.* p.74.
26. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, pp.655-657, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2007.
27. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 36, p.51.
28. A. K. Bhagwat and G. P. Pradhan, *Lokmanya Tilak: A Biography*, pp.316-317, Jaico Publishing House, 1959.
29. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol.36, p.50.
30. *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History*, p.63.
31. *Ibid.*, p.64.
32. Chanda Poddar, Mona Sarkar and Bob Zwicker (ed), *Sri Aurobindo and the Freedom of India*, pp.220-221, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 1995.
33. *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, p.623.
34. *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History*, p.190.
35. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 36, p.50.
36. *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 6, p.70.

# Indian Spirituality and Life – Part 2

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

(Continued from August 2016 issue)

Supriyo Bhattacharya

## I

“Once there was a wicked Maharaja who could not bear to think that anyone was his superior. So he summoned all the pundits of the realm, as was the practice on momentous occasions, and put to them this question: ‘Which of us two is greater, I or God?’ The Pundits began to shake with fear. Being wise by profession, they asked for time, for out of habit they clung to their positions and their lives. But they were worthy men and did not want to displease God. As they were lamenting their misfortune, the oldest Pundit reassured them: ‘Leave it to me, tomorrow I shall speak to the Prince.’ The next day, the whole court was gathered in a solemn durbar when the old man quietly arrived, his hands humbly joined together, his forehead smeared with white ashes. He bowed low and pronounced these words: ‘O lord, undoubtedly thou art the greater.’ The Prince twirled his long moustache thrice, and tossed his head high. ‘Thou art the greater, King, for thou canst banish us from thy kingdom, whilst God cannot; for verily, all is His kingdom and there is nowhere to go outside Him.’— this Indian tale, which comes from Bengal, and is narrated by Satprem, a French disciple of Sri Aurobindo (*Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness*, Satprem, 1984, Institute for Evolutionary Research, New York), points to the fact that the total movement of Indian Spirituality is towards the transmutation of the instruments of the human into instruments of a Divine living. But, Sri Aurobindo notes that Indian Culture like other cultures was not at all times and in all its parts and movements consciously aware of its own total significance. Indian spirituality, at least in its later period, tended towards spiritual exclusiveness, which imposed on spirituality ‘a certain impotence to deal effectively with the problems of human existence’, for a wider spiritual culture

must recognise that ‘the spirit is not only the highest and inmost thing, but all is manifestation and creation of the spirit; its aim must be not only ‘to raise to inaccessible heights the few elect, but to draw all men and all life and the whole human being upward’.

The spirit of Indian religion and spiritual culture retains this all-embracing outlook, but looking at the broad sweep of history we can discern, following Sri Aurobindo, that the form of Indian religion and spirituality has undergone remarkable changes. These changes are not freaks or random movements, but the results of a logical and inevitable evolution inherent in the very process of man’s growth towards the heights. The first Vedic system may be taken as its earliest form. The earliest Vedic system, according to Sri Aurobindo, took its outward foundation on the mind of the physical man; its faith is in things physical, in the sensible and visible objects, presences, representations and the external pursuits and aims of this material world. This is but natural, because man’s first and primitive idea of the Divine can only come through his vision of external nature and the sense of a ‘superior power or powers concealed behind her phenomena,..... in the sun and moon and stars, its lights and regulators, in dawn and day and night and rain and wind and storm, the oceans and the rivers and the forest, all the circumstances and forces of her scene of action, all that vast and mysterious surrounding life of which we are a part’; through these the human creature feels instinctively that there is here ‘some divine Multitude or else mighty Infinite, one, manifold and mysterious’. The Vedic religion took this natural sense and feeling of the physical man; it sought to lead man through his perceptions of the natural world to the ‘psychic and spiritual truths of his own being and the being of the cosmos.’ The Vedas recognised that man was right when he saw behind the manifestations of nature ‘great living powers and godheads’, even though he knew not their inner truth, and right too in offering to them worship and propitiation and atonement. He accepts the outward manifestations as something greater than his own natural self, something that guides, sustains and directs his life and he calls to it for help and support in the desires and difficulties of his life. The idea of sacrifice in the Vedas sprang from this — it was founded on ‘the secret of constant interchange between the individual and the universal powers of the cosmos’ which secretly supports all the process of life and develops the action of nature. This must be the initial way in which his active physical, vital and mental nature is allowed to approach the Godhead. Sri Aurobindo here brings in the Gita in support of this approach of the early Vedic man; for the Gita recognises four kinds or degrees of worshippers and God-seekers. There are first the artharthi and arta, those who seek God for the fulfilment of desire and those who turn for divine help in the

sorrows and sufferings of existence; there is next the *jijnasu*, the seeker of knowledge, the questioner who is moved to seek the Divine in his truth and in that to meet him; last and highest, there is the *jnani* who has already contact with the truth and is able to live in unity with the Spirit.

## II

At this stage, we may take a quick look at certain vital aspects of the outlook of Vedic people: their reverence for nature and the earth and the importance and value they attached to human life and relationship with fellow beings. This is of supreme importance because we are talking about spirituality and life. Sri Aurobindo has time and again emphasised the fact that a spirituality that ascends to the heights and either ignores or despises earthly life may be high and grand but is devoid of a full-blooded relevance for earthly life and hence incomplete. Let us quote a few prayers of the Vedic people to elucidate our point.

First, the sense of wholeness of the Vedic people: to them nature was not a sum of objects to be used or manipulated. Nature was the very source of life. This may be seen from the following Vedic prayers for the sick:

May the great wind breathe purification upon you  
May the waters rain immortality upon you  
May the sun warm your body with blessing,  
May death show you mercy! Do not perish! (*Atharva Veda* VIII, 1: VE, 588-9)

.....  
May heaven and earth be gracious to you,  
May those two splendours set you free from suffering!  
May the sun warm you with blessings!.....  
May rice and barley bring you to good fortune!  
Let them rather serve to release you from anguish!  
To Autumn, Winter, Spring, and Summer we now entrust you.  
May the rainy season, which makes the plants grow, console you! (*AV* VIII, 2: VE, 592)

Next, for peace to reign within souls there must be peace in the without, and vice-versa:

Peaceful be heaven, Peaceful the earth,  
Peaceful the broad space between.  
Peaceful for us be the running waters,  
Peaceful the plants and the herbs!  
Peaceful to us be the signs of the future,  
Peaceful what is done and undone,  
Peaceful to us be what is and what will be.



May all to us be gracious!  
Peaceful be to earth and to airy spaces!  
Peace be to heaven, Peace to the waters,  
Peace to the plants and Peace to the trees!  
May all the Gods grant to me Peace  
By this invocation of Peace may Peace be diffused! (*AV* XIX, 9: VE, 304-5)  
Nature is the mother of all, the mother divine: The prayer from the *Bhumi*

*Sukta:*

Impart to us to those vitalising forces  
That come O Earth from deep within your body,  
Your central point, your navel; purify us wholly.  
The Earth is mother, I am son of Earth.  
The Rain-giver is my Father; may he shower on us blessings!  
All creatures, born from you move round upon you.  
You carry all that has two legs, three or four  
To you, O Earth, belong the five human races,  
Those mortals upon whom the rising sun  
Sheds the immortal splendour of his rays.....  
I venerate this mighty Earth, the golden-breasted! (*AV* XII, 1: VE, 124-6)  
The Vedic people knew that all labour not in harmony with Rita was an act  
of sheer violence done to mother earth. This is expressed in the following prayer:  
Whatever I dig up of you, O Earth,  
May you of that have quick replenishment!  
O purifying One, may my thrust never  
Reach right unto your vital points, your heart! (*AV* XII, 1: VE, 126)  
The community of origin (from Nature) and the community of desire blossom  
into the community of love:  
Of one heart and one mind I make you,  
Devoid of hate.  
Love one another as a cow  
Loves the calf she has borne....  
Be courteous, planning and working  
In harness together.  
Approach, conversing pleasantly,  
like minded, united.  
Have your acting and drinking in common.  
I bind you together.  
Assemble for worship of the Lord,  
like spokes around a hub.

Of one mind and one purpose I make you,  
following one leader.

Be like the Gods, ever deathless!

Never stop loving! (*AV* III, 30: VE, 857)

(All quotations are from “*The Vedic Experience*”, R. Panikkar, M.L.B Pvt. Ltd., 2001)

### III

Let us now come back to the more subtle aspects of the Vedic religion to see how it dealt with the relation between spirituality and life. Here, Sri Aurobindo points out that, even in its external and exoteric side the Vedic religion did not limit itself to this acceptance and regulation of the first religious notions of the natural physical mind of man. The Vedic Rishis gave a psychic function to the godheads worshipped by the people; they spoke to them ‘of a higher Truth, Right, Law of which the gods were the guardians, of the necessity of a truer knowledge and a larger inner living according to this Truth and Right and of a home of immortality to which the soul of man could ascend by the power of Truth and of right doing.’ The people no doubt took these ideas in their most external sense; but they were trained by them ‘to develop their ethical nature, to turn towards some initial development of their psychic being, to conceive the idea of a knowledge and truth other than that of the physical life and to admit even a first conception of some greater spiritual Reality which was the ultimate object of human worship or aspiration.’ This religious and moral force was the highest reach of the external cult and the most that could be understood or followed by the mass of the people.

This inner Vedic religion started with an extension of the psychic significance of the godheads in the Cosmos. Its primary notion was that of ‘a hierarchy of worlds, an ascending stair of planes of being in the universe. . . . . a mounting scale of the worlds corresponding to a similar mounting scale of planes or degrees or levels of consciousness in the nature of man.’ A Truth, Right and Law sustains and governs all these levels of Nature; one in essence, it takes in them different but cognate forms. There is for instance the series of the ‘outer physical light, another higher and inner light which is the vehicle of the mental, vital and psychic consciousness and a highest inmost light of spiritual illumination.’ Here, Sri Aurobindo reveals to us the double character of the Vedic godheads: Surya, the Sun-God, was the lord of the physical Sun; but he is at the same time to the Vedic seer-poet the giver of the rays of knowledge which illumine the mind and he is too the soul and energy and body of the spiritual illumination. And in all these powers he is a luminous form of the one and infinite Godhead. All the Vedic godheads have this outer and this inner and inmost function, their known and their secret Names. ‘All are in their external character powers of physical

Nature; all have in their inner meaning a psychic function and psychological ascriptions; all too are various powers of someone highest Reality, *ekam sat*, the one infinite Existence.’ This hardly knowable Supreme is called often in the Veda “That Truth” or “That One”, *tat satyam, tad ekam*. This complex character of the Vedic godheads assumes forms which have been wholly misunderstood by those who ascribe to them only their outward physical significance. “Each of these gods”, Sri Aurobindo reminds us,

“is in himself a complete and separate cosmic personality of the one Existence and in their combination of powers they form the complete universal power, the cosmic whole, *vaisvadevyam*. Each again, apart from his special function, is one godhead with the others; each holds in himself the universal divinity, each god is all the other gods. This is the aspect of the Vedic teaching and worship.....”

Here, an observation of R.C. Zaehner, former Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at the University of Oxford (1952-75) may be very apposite: ‘The religion of the *Rig Veda*.....starts by being polytheistic but it does not develop into the modified monotheism that we find in Greece and Rome with one god — Zeus or Jupiter — emerging as the undisputed ruler of the rest; it takes a very different turning and develops into something wholly Indian, something quite different from the religion of any of the other Indo-European peoples. None of the gods — not even Indra, to whom nearly a quarter of hymns of the *Rig Veda* are dedicated — ever reaches the supreme distinction of being the undisputed king of gods and men. Rather they tend to coalesce the one into the other, and in so doing they lose their identity and indeed their relevance. The supreme principle is felt to be one and it does not matter very much what you call it: ‘They call it Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Fire; or again it is the celestial but garutmat. What is but one the wise call (by) manifold (names). They call it Fire, Yama, Matarisvan’ [*Rig Veda*]. (*Hindu Scriptures*, R.C.Zaehner, J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd., 1978)

#### IV

However, the greatest power of the Vedic teaching, which made it the source of all later Indian philosophies, religions, systems of Yoga, lay, according to Sri Aurobindo, in its application to the inner life of man. Man lives in the physical cosmos subject to death and the “much falsehood” of the mortal existence. To rise beyond this death, to become one of the immortals, he has to turn from the falsehood to the Truth; he has to turn to the Light and to battle with and to conquer the powers of the Darkness. This he does by communion with the divine Powers and their aid; the way to call down this aid was the secret of the Vedic mystics.” Here, Sri Aurobindo brings out the significance of the Vedic

symbols.

‘The symbols of the outer sacrifice are given for this purpose in the manner of the Mysteries all over the world an inner meaning; they represent a calling of the gods into the human being, a connecting sacrifice, an intimate interchange, a mutual aid, a communion. There is a building of the powers of the godheads within man and a formation in him of the universality of the divine nature. For the gods are the guardians and increasers of the Truth, the powers of the Immortal, the sons of the infinite Mother; the way to immortality is the upward way of the gods, the way of the Truth, a journey, an ascent by which there is a growth into the law of the Truth, *rtasya pantah*.’

Man arrives at immortality by breaking beyond the limitations not only of his physical self, but of his mental and his ordinary psychic nature into “the highest plane and supreme ether of the Truth”: for there is the foundation of immortality and the native seat of the triple Infinite. On these ideas the Vedic sages built up a profound psychological and psychic discipline which led beyond itself to a highest spirituality and contained the nucleus of later Indian Yoga. Already we find in their seed, though not in their full expansion, the most characteristic ideas of Indian spirituality.

“There is the one Existence, *ekam sat*, supracosmic beyond the individual and the universe. There is the one God who presents to us the many forms, names, powers, personalities of his Godhead. There is the distinction between the Knowledge and the Ignorance, the greater truth of an immortal life opposed to the much falsehood or mixed truth and falsehood of mortal existence. There is the discipline of an inward growth of man from the physical through the psychic to the spiritual existence. There is the conquest of death, the secret of immortality, the perception of a realisable divinity of the human spirit.”

In an age of which the insolence of our external knowledge we are accustomed to look back as the childhood of humanity or at best a period of ‘vigorous barbarism’, this was the inspired and intuitive psychic and spiritual teaching by which the ancient human fathers, *purve pitarah manusyah*, founded a great and profound civilisation in India.

## V

In this connection, a very significant observation of Sri Anirvan, a great mystic steeped in the Vedas, illuminates Sri Aurobindo’s analysis:

‘In the *Brahmans*, the *Aranyakas*, and the older prose Upanishads which are directly connected with the Brahmanas, there are many suggestions of a symbolic nature which are indispensable aids for understanding the secret

meaning of the *Mantra-samhitas*. It is an undeniable fact that the cleavage between the *jnana-kanda* (knowledge section) and the *karma-kanda* (ritual section), which was a creation of a later intellectual age, did not exist in the Vedic period. The broad dictum of the Gita that all actions (*karma*), without an exception, culminate in knowledge (*jnana*) was literally true with the Vedic *rsis*. But there knowledge is to be taken not in the sense of philosophical reason or intellectual co-ordination of experiences, but in the sense of spiritual realisation which aims at an inner soul-experience of illumined consciousness. This state of illumination is what the ancient *rsis* called *svar* or the realm of light, which popular mind translated into the image of a heaven. The heaven of popular imagination is an extension or sublimation of sense-experiences, and as such it has been combated in later ages by the concept of liberation or *moksa*. But in the mind of the Vedic seers, *svar* was an actual inner illumination to be realised here on earth, and was not fundamentally different from *moksa*, though it did not distinctively suggest the philosophical postulates connoted by the latter term. *Svar* can be attained by *dhi*, which the *Nighantu* explains both as *karma* or action and *prajna* or knowledge; and this is extremely significant. Realisation through rituals (*dravya-yajna*) and realisation through knowledge *jnana-yajna* are not mutually contradictory; and the concepts of *svar* and *moksa* also do not clash. At least such was the position in the Vedic age, and the basic implication of this idea continues to the present day in various philosophical doctrines and spiritual practices, because it has its roots in spiritual psychology.'

'It is important to remember this fusion of *jnana* and *karma* in Vedic-thought. A clear proof of this lies in the composition of the *Sukla Yajur Veda*, the last chapter of which is an Upanisad. *Isha* is the only Upanishad which has been included in the *Samhita* portion of the Vedas. *Yajur Veda* is essentially the Veda of rituals. To end this Veda with an Upanishad is extremely significant. This little Upanishad (*Isha*) of only eighteen verses is unsurpassed in the whole of Vedic literature for the deep and wide spirit of synthesis that it breathes. To light this lamp of Supreme knowledge at the end of the Veda of rituals seems to be an illuminating commentary on the dictum of the Gita mentioned before. We might remember in this connection the tradition about Yajnavalkya to whom, it is said, the *Sukla Yajur Veda* was revealed. In Yajnavalkya and in Vyasa, we have another grand synthesis of Arya thought. Ritualism found its true meaning in him; and symbolically speaking, he may be said to have rediscovered the secret of transforming the 'black' (*Krishna*) action to 'white' (*Sukla*) through the principle of non-attachment (*nirlepa*), and spiritual intuition also reached its sublime height in his Upanisadic teachings which focussed into a spotlight an

ancient way of Vedic thought. It has since then dominated the subsequent development of Arya philosophy, and is still regarded as the highest peak to which spiritual wisdom can soar.' (*Buddhiyoga of the Gita and Other Essays*, Sri Anirvan, Biblia Impex Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1983).

## VI

We may now conclude with some interesting observations of a great Vedic scholar, Vedamurti Mahamahopadhyaya Pundit Sripad Damodar Satwalekar, (Sahitya Vachaspati, Gitalankar, author of thirty volumes of the Veda), regarding the application of Vedic culture in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Satwalekar, made a lifelong study of the Veda and its interpretation. He visited the Ashram on 29th July, 1960 and stayed there up to 17th August. He had an interview with the Mother on July 30 and was moved to his depths to see the Mother's power at work everywhere. He said,

"The thing for which I was praying for the last fifty or sixty years, the dream I cherished all these years I see in living forms here. Perhaps after the Vedic age for the first time this kind of thing is being attempted. The whole process of sadhana is based here on Vedic principles. My heart overflows with joy to see that all that is hinted at in the Vedas is trying to find its fulfilment here in one way or another."

"Here I see not a trace of casteism anywhere. What a change the Mother has brought out here! However, this is a thing which one can understand and appreciate with the mind. But it is simply a miracle that young boys and girls are allowed to meet without the least bit of scruple in the Ashram, in the school, in the playground and anywhere else. Here co-education, academic and physical, has raised no problem."

"The Mother makes no distinction between men and women. It is a great experiment indeed. It seems to me the Mother is trying to found a purely spiritual society. The Veda recognises no sex-distinction. It looks as if the Mother wants to create a society where relations would be as between soul and soul. Bodily difference does not count. Fault-finding minds may detect defects here and there, I also do not say that it is all perfect but the attempt is definitely in the direction envisaged by the Veda, and I am sure that the Mother's efforts will one day meet with success."

One department of the Ashram has been named Prosperity by the Mother. When Satwalekarji was told that the inmates could have soap, oil, cloth etc from this department, he said:

"Here we can see spirituality taking a true form. Nowhere in the Veda is there the gospel of Sannyas. Everywhere we come across prayers for prosperity, fire and force, tejas and ojas, even material things. Nowhere one



sees the scene of poverty, no body living the life of a destitute, passing his days at the foot of a tree clad in rags with total renunciation of material things. Escape from the world and its concerns and passing one days in inert contemplation of the All- High—these things are far from the Vedic way of life. In the Vedic age kings like Janaka rule kingdoms; Rishis like Vasishtha stood behind kings to give them counsel. The Rishis never betook themselves to the forest, renouncing the world. These things belong to the dark period of India. I see, today, that the Mother insists on Prosperity, not austerity. She does not want to leave the world to its fate but to endow it with opulence governed by spirituality. The world itself has to be changed. Here one finds the Vedic age being reborn. No material thing has to be shunned or scorned. Everything is trying to find its own legitimate place.”

Satwalekar continued:

“Do you know the real cause of the fall of India? I attribute it to two things: we despise the material world in order to turn to the spiritual, gave more importance to luck than to labour and reduced our women, that is to say, half the society, into a benumbed mass. What a pity! The country which gave birth to the idea of women as Shakti, the country which gave to gods four to eight hands in the pages of the *Puranas* but visioned the goddess as having a hundred and eight hands, that very country relegated women to a lower level than that of men and deprived them of the right to read the Veda and, worst of all, shut them up within the four walls of the family, lowering their status in society to being cooks and child-bearing machines. I have been praying for years: O Lord! Grant that our women may rise again to their rightful place as in the days of yore.....It is here that the Mother seems to have taken upon herself to raise the status of women. It is here, I repeat, that I sense the Vedic ideal taking form. ....According to the Veda, old age begins after 116. Until one was eighty one could not pass for full-blown youth; only after 116-120 old age could dare set in. Before that even if death appeared, a true Sadhak could defy it and say that his whole life was a ceaseless yajna and he must not be stopped from his offering.” (*Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, Narayan Prasad, 3rd enlarged edition, 24th November, 2010, Sri Aurobindo Karmi Sangha Trust, Matrimandir, Habra, North 24 Pgs, West Bengal)

Thus ends the moving narration of Satwalekar. But the dream of the Vedic rishis has not ended, the flame lit up by them burns on. As Sri Aurobindo says, Nothing ends, all but began.

(To be continued)

# In Search of Organisational Soul

(Continued from Part 1, August 2016)

Suhas K. Mehra and Beloo Mehra

## A Historical View of Business

Man's economic and political motives have always predominated the study of history of business. For example, in the book *The Living Company* an evolutionary history of business is presented, almost entirely based upon the economic factors:

“...there have always been three key sources: land and natural resources, capital (the accumulation and reinvestment of possessions) and labour. The combination of those three creates the products and services that society needs for its material well-being. During most of human history, the critical factor of success was land: those who could dominate and possess the land were guaranteed the controlling role in creating wealth.... a dramatic shift took place between the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the twentieth century — a shift from land to capital as the primary factor in generating wealth. The addition of more capital to the process of creating material wealth led to considerable increases in the effectiveness and efficiency of technological and commercial activity....Sometime over the course of the twentieth century, however, the Western nations moved out of the age of capital and into the age of knowledge.<sup>i</sup>”

Such a view that only looks at the objective factors playing out in the world of business, without considering the more subjective aspects such as the role of human psychology in business, is primarily a Western view. In this view, the three production factors<sup>ii</sup> – land, resources and labour are substitutable, and success defined as maximum profit is determined by an optimum combination of production factors. Labour in this view is also regarded as a commodity.

Employee layoff is the most commonly used cost-cutting measure employed by a majority of organisations, suggesting the dispensability of workers whose worth is often measured only in terms of the revenue they are able to bring for the organisation.

In ancient India, we find a different historical view:

“In ancient India *vitta* included wealth, riches, prosperity, management, finance. It was given a preeminent position and formed a part of the national development. It was recognised that economic well-being does not depend only on the material resources. The entrepreneurial class, the Vaishya had a significant role to play in the organisation of the society. The emphasis was not on consumption, on acquisition and possession. It was on spending, sharing, giving. Thus the *Mahabharata* advocates in unmistakable terms the patronage of commerce and trade. “The power of production in the Vaishyas should always be encouraged. They make the realm strong, enhance agriculture, develop its trades... A wise king should be favourable to them. There is no greater wealth in the kingdom than its merchants.”

But in the ancient Indian wisdom economic development and wealth maximisation were not the aims in their own right. Progressive socio-moral fitness and increasing commitment to the Law of the Right were held as its culminating ideal. *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* were not ends in themselves, but were a means to a nobler end. That end was *Moksha*, liberation from the littleness of our mortality. The trader was also accompanied by the sage, the warrior, and the labourer.<sup>iii</sup>”

What characterises the Indian ideal of Vaishya, which is one part of the four-fold system of *Chaturvarna*, is its equal or perhaps greater emphasis on an appropriate psychological-ethical capability development among the entrepreneurial, merchant classes in addition to their more material contribution to the economic well-being of the society. This subjective view of the nature of business and its rightful place in the overall social setup is now finding a new form in modern times.

### **Subjectivity in Business**

A slow shift towards the subjective can now be seen in the modern business world. As we tried to show in some of our earlier series of articles titled ‘*The Organisational Cycle*,’ the gradual move away from the use of more objective approaches such as scientific management toward more humanistic management practices serves as a good example. Additionally, in leadership studies also we are seeing a greater trend toward identifying more subjective characteristics

that distinguish successful leaders. For example, in the bestselling book<sup>1</sup> *Good to Great*,<sup>iv</sup> the authors conclude that the characteristic traits of great leaders were: blend of personal humility and professional will, vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, exceptionally high personal capability, etc.

One of the most striking examples of this shift toward subjectivity in business can be found in the case of Aravind Eye Care System<sup>2</sup>. Right from its inception based upon a conscious subjective vision of its exemplary founder, Dr. V, who was driven by his unflinching faith in his spiritual gurus (Sri Aurobindo and the Mother), to its unique experimental approach of combining the most scientifically proven work-flow processes with a deeper attitude to work as service to the Divine, Aravind has led the way in integrating deeper psychological and spiritual focus with the world of successful business. The leading ideal guiding the work at the Hospital is:

“Intelligence and capability are not enough. There must also be the joy of doing something beautiful. Being of service to God and humanity means going well beyond the sophistication of the best technology, to the humble demonstration of courtesy and compassion to each patient.”

While most modern businesses are nowhere near this kind of ideal which speaks of ‘being of service to God and humanity,’ it will be a fallacy to assume that such type of business organisation which values a deeper subjective approach to individual progress through work is not viable elsewhere. One clear example is found in the work of Dr. Gullapalli N. Rao, who gave up his medical teaching practice in the United States and returned to India to establish a state of the art hospital, named L.V. Prasad Eye Institute<sup>3</sup> along the lines of the deeper values and principles behind the work of Aravind Eye Care System.

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1. The author and his team started with over 1,400 companies. They examined their performance over a forty-year period and selected eleven companies, which had outperformed in their segment. The team tried to seek answer to the questions “Are there companies that defy gravity and convert long-term mediocrity or worse into long-term superiority? And if so, what are the universal distinguishing characteristics that cause a company to go from good to great?”
  2. Aravind Eye Care System was founded in 1976 by Dr. G. Venkataswamy, a man known simply as Dr. V. In an eleven-bed hospital manned by 4 medical officers, he saw the potential for what is today, one of the largest facilities in the world for eye care. Over the years, this organisation has evolved into a sophisticated system dedicated to compassionate service for sight. Aravind now serves as a model, for India, and the rest of the world.
  3. According to Subroto Bagchi, author of *Zen Garden: Conversations with Pathmakers* (Penguin India, 2014), 15 million patients have received state of the art treatment free of charge at LV Prasad Eye Institute.

## Searching for Deeper Cause

However, even when the self-formulation journey of an organisation is still primarily focused around its more objective identity, Sri Aurobindo's view of the inner processes driving a collective evolutionary path will suggest that such outer conditions "only apply to the imperfectly self-conscious period" of the organisation's self-development. To quote from him,

"Even then there was always a greater subjective force working behind individuals, policies, economic movements and the change of institutions; but it worked for the most part subconsciously, more as a subliminal self than as a conscious mind. **It is when this subconscious power of the group-soul comes to the surface** that nations [we may substitute 'nations' with organisations or any collective entity] begin to **enter into possession of their subjective selves**; they set about getting, however vaguely or imperfectly, at their souls.<sup>vi</sup>" (Emphasis added)

Let us consider an example, from a fairly large business organisation<sup>4</sup>, a world leader in its field. Satya Nadella, the current CEO of Microsoft, has on several occasions emphasised the need to discover the soul of the company.

"... When I first started in my new role last year I told employees it was time for us to rediscover our soul — what makes us unique.<sup>vii</sup>"

"I also said that in order to accelerate our innovation, we must rediscover our soul — our unique core.<sup>viii</sup>"

"Perhaps the most important driver of success is culture. Over the past year, we've challenged ourselves to think about our core mission, our soul — what would be lost if we disappeared.<sup>ix</sup>"

Why would one of the largest multinational corporations want to embark upon this soul-searching mission? Doesn't Microsoft already have a highly efficient and effective organisational structure and work culture which ensure its revenues, profits and overall financial health? What could be some of the possible reasons for this attempt to rediscover the company's soul, its unique core?

It could primarily be economic reasons. In the past Microsoft was successfully able to implement its vision that a personal computer at every home and office would operate on Microsoft's operating system and use Microsoft software. But things are different now. The company's share of software used on connecting devices (including personal computers, phones and tablets) has

4. It is relatively easier to find examples of big business organisations because much has been written about them in scholarly and popular case studies. Also, many details about their performance, their guiding mission, their organisational structure etc. are easily available in public domain.

plunged from 90 percent in 2009 to just around 20 percent today<sup>x</sup>. This staggering drop occurred not because Microsoft lost ground in the market of personal computers, on which its software still dominates, but rather because it failed to adapt its products to devices such as smartphones and tablets, the area where all the growth is happening today and is expected to happen tomorrow<sup>xi</sup>.

But economics alone is not enough. Other reasons could also be driving this tendency to look inside and renew itself. Vineet Nayar, former CEO of HCL and who is credited for turning HCL around, uses the metaphor of *Mirror Mirror* in his book:

“*Mirror Mirror* is a communications exercise that involves talking with employees throughout the organisation about the truth as they see it and getting them to acknowledge the reality, the elephant in the room, that everyone essentially knows about but which has never been publicly acknowledged. It is a matter of getting the members of the organisation to look at themselves in the mirror and describe carefully and truthfully what they see.”<sup>xii</sup>

The *Mirror Mirror* metaphor is good as long as we also realise its limitations. A mirror only reflects what is placed in front of it. If all that we place before the mirror is the organisation’s past performance and track record, it only ends up becoming a rear view mirror. In that case, the purpose might be lost. Also, a mirror may be only effective in showing the surface reality. More important is the individual’s ability to look beyond the outer surface, to look through the reflection in the mirror so that a deeper truth may begin to reveal itself. Sri Aurobindo reminds us that only a deeper look beyond the physical and vital helps us see that the “things of the mind” are in themselves essential or the sign of something essential.

“As man has been accustomed to look on himself as a body and a life, the physical animal with a certain moral or immoral temperament, and the things of the mind have been regarded as a fine flower and attainment of the physical life rather than themselves anything essential or the sign of something essential... [....]

Certainly, there is always a vague sense of this subjective existence at work even on the surface of the communal mentality.”<sup>xiii</sup>

In other words, a shift of our identification with only the physical and vital parts of our individual and collective beings toward a more mental part within us is already a step in the direction of greater subjective understanding. To illustrate the point further, let us try to understand Microsoft’s attempt to rediscover its soul in the light of this view. Microsoft continues to attract some



of the best and the smartest minds to develop its innovative products and services and yet for many years the company was experiencing loss of market share. A possible reason could be that the company was somehow unable to provide the best possible environment for even the smartest minds to reach their maximum potential and offer their best. On some level, these individuals might be experiencing feelings of mistrust, frustration and over-pressure because of internal aggressive competition between different units of the company, poor work-life balance, and suffocation because of a work-culture which values the dictates of the top executives (termed as ‘c-suites’ in the corporate slang) on ideas and projects. Because of these and other things, the best and smartest minds may also be unable to experience a deeper sense of self-fulfilment and self-development through their work. In such conditions, the collective mind of the company somehow remains at the level of a vague formation, unable to develop a conscious sense of its identity, thereby preventing both the individuals and the organisation to tap into its potential strength to lead toward a greater self-discovery.

### **Initial Sense of Discovering the Soul**

Let us go back to the ideal we set before us in the first part of this paper – the ideal of an organisation set up primarily for soul discovery, Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Two fundamental and non-negotiable characteristics of such an organisation are: a) the belief that there is a plane of existence beyond the mental plane, and b) it is possible to bring the light and truth from this higher plane so as to illuminate and heighten our everyday lives. Such an institution enables its members to discover and experience for themselves the truth that a deep need for the kind of self-development which enables an individual to get in touch with those higher planes and to lead his or her life in the light of that higher truth exists in all individuals. In most cases the individuals may not be conscious of such a need, and in some ways one of the chief purpose of such a soul-seeking institution is to facilitate the individual’s process of becoming more conscious of this need through various outer activities and experiences, as long as the individual himself or herself is putting in the necessary effort and aspiration.

In the world of business the idea of believing in something beyond mental plane might seem far-fetched. And yet we see examples like Satya Nadella speaking of “customer love” as the leading indicator of company’s success<sup>xiv</sup>. This is not a typical, measurable, objective financial parameter. It suggests quite a departure from the conventional measure of success. It emphasises a subjective or an experiential quality which individuals experience vis-à-vis the company. Success in terms of the “customer love” implies that the company is employing a forward-looking indicator in the sense that a greater customer love which can

also be sustained over a period of time may hopefully yield its reward only in the long run. Of course, many questions emerge – how to measure a subjective indicator like “customer love,” how to track such an indicator over time? But these questions seem difficult or even relevant and worth considering, only when we try to seek answers or look at the whole issue of company’s success using our present mental processes of reasoning, analysing and deducing. As the organisations begin to enter more and more into their subjective group-consciousness, they are bound to develop a greater ‘feel’ for how individuals relate to the collective consciousness of the organisation, as customers as well as employees. That is when we can say that an organisation begins to enter into a greater “possession of their subjective selves” (Sri Aurobindo).

Interestingly, this corporate attempt to be more in possession of its subjective self doesn’t mean that the organisation will have to necessarily suffer any material loss. A quick example may be seen in the fact that since Satya Nadella took over, Microsoft’s stock price rose by 14 percent and sales increased by 12 percent. Also, unlike his predecessor Nadella is much more “popular with investors, venture capitalists, and startups.”<sup>xv</sup> During July 2012 the internal approval rating of Steve Ballmer, Satya Nadella’s predecessor, was paltry 46%<sup>xvi</sup> as of May 2016 Satya’s approval rating is at 93%<sup>xvii</sup>. While it may not be possible or even necessary to attribute all these improved parameters to Nadella’s higher emphasis on the overall cultural change in the organisation and rediscovery of the company’s soul and its unique core, certainly there is something to be said about the fact that his high internal approval ratings may have something to do with how his vision for company’s future has struck a chord with the members of the organisation, and this despite the fact that soon after taking over the role of CEO he had taken a tough decision of letting go of tens of thousands of employees. Somewhere somehow he has been able to convince a large chunk of people working at Microsoft that the company’s future relies on rediscovering its unique core strength, its soul from which originates everything else that the company does. Leading this effort from the top Nadella said:

“There is something only a CEO uniquely can do, which is [to] set that tone which can then capture the soul of the collective. And it’s culture.”<sup>xviii</sup>

Nadella’s public statements in this regard speak of his will to pursue this soul-seeking mission. As commendable as this effort is, it is also a sure sign of a deeper change happening at Microsoft. We are reminded of Sri Aurobindo’s words:

“Will is also omnipresent. It can throw itself into all with whom it comes into contact and give them temporarily or permanently a portion of its power, its thought, its enthusiasms. The thought of a solitary man can become, by

exercise of selfless and undoubting will, the thought of a nation. The will of a single, hero can breathe courage into the hearts of a million cowards.<sup>xix</sup>”

An organisation’s soul-seeking exercise, however, cannot happen in a vacuum. A rigorous change in the overall work culture, the company’s increasing preference for a more people-focused outlook, and a greater participatory decision-making approach may be some of the important steps to create a greater subjective collective consciousness. For example, in the case of Microsoft, many important changes were made since the arrival of Nadella as the company’s CEO.

“Where Microsoft employees once received mandates from the C-suite, today they share ideas at company-wide hackathons. And where Microsoft once had combative relationships with rivals such as Apple, today the company has forged a variety of new partnerships with Sales force, Box, as well as Apple. These moves are seen by many analysts as make-or-break plays to try and position Microsoft for growth in a competitive cloud- and mobile-first world.<sup>xx</sup>”

“We are rallying behind a single strategy as one company — not a collection of divisional strategies... We will see our product line holistically, not as a set of islands.<sup>xxi</sup>”

“The notion of having work-life harmony in a highly competitive economy is a first-class topic...I think the key is to make sure you’re engaging in a dialogue with your employees. There also needs to be flexibility in all the (workplace) policies that someone like me sets and propagates. You cannot have people burn out. It’s bad for your company, and it’s bad for society.<sup>xxii</sup>”

To see the organisation as one unified entity with different parts integrating and harmonising with one another, to value collaboration with other organisations, to emphasise flexibility and dialogue when dealing with employee concerns, and to value employees’ well-being as part of organisation’s social responsibility are all indicators that Microsoft understands the role of developing a greater subjective sense of its identity.

Discovery of the organisational soul has been the pet project of not only Nadella, but also of several other CEOs. For example, at Synovus Financial one of their weekly activities (“rituals”) led by CEO Blanchard is “a weekly meeting with a rock-the-boat agenda. First question at the meeting: “What are the 25 dumbest things we do around here?<sup>xxiii</sup>”

Numerous other activities aimed at developing a greater subjective collective consciousness are seen in many organisations. These may include remodelling the workspace to allow greater and freer interactions among workers (Microsoft, Google); promoting art in the workspace to inculcate an aesthetic temperament

which can facilitate greater creativity (SAS Institute); organising idea generation events, team building activities, etc. Such activities help in important ways in the discovery of a collective organisation's subjective self and also facilitate individuals to become more self-aware. However, the risk remains that over time such activities may end up becoming some type of idiosyncrasies or mechanical habits that the organisation continues to follow in a mindless manner, and in which individuals mindlessly or almost blindly participate. When that kind of conventionalism sets in, all deeper meaning and intended purpose of such activities is gone and only the outer shell remains. This is an important reason why corporations must continually reinvent, rediscover and redevelop meaningful strategies and practices as part of their self-development journeys.

Sri Aurobindo when speaking of a nation's continued self-discovery process of formulating a subjective collective consciousness speaks of possible false starts and misdirected aims. He also assures that behind the "waverings and strivings of our twilit surface minds" the group-soul knows of its intention and is in fact guiding the collective to its fulfilment. But this is not an excuse for the group to not continue with its efforts and aspiration to discover its purpose. In fact, as Sri Aurobindo suggests, "by seeing our way and our goal more clearly we may better be able to avoid the waste of energy, talent and even genius to which [false starts and misdirected aims] give rise.<sup>xxiv</sup>" Same may be said of any collective organisation.

### ***Organisations where Soul Feeling/Seeking Predominates***

This growing tendency to seek a subjective communal consciousness is predominantly seen among new business organisations and those struggling to rediscover their identity or redefine themselves in some manner. Sri Aurobindo explains why this may be so:

"For these need more to feel the difference between themselves and others so that they may assert and justify their individuality as against the powerful superlife which tends to absorb or efface it. And precisely because their objective life is feeble and it is difficult to affirm it by its own strength in the adverse circumstances, there is more chance of their seeking for their individuality and its force of self-assertion in that which is subjective and psychological or at least in that which has a subjective or a psychological significance."<sup>xxv</sup>

This could also explain why in spite of the odds of success stacked up against many start-up organisations some of them end up becoming highly successful. (Another possible reason for the success of some start-ups could be that in their earlier stages of development, many organisations are usually highly driven by the energy of some new or innovative idea they are trying to execute.) We

can find several examples within India such as PVR, which completely changed the movie-watching experience; Make My Trip, which revolutionised online travel business; Mirchi Radio, which dramatically changed the scene of radio programming; Mitti Cool, which revived among the urban classes the use of eco-friendly clay products for cooking and storage. All these start-ups and many others like these began with a seed-idea to bring innovative products and services to the marketplace. But a common psychological factor driving these organisations was to create their own unique identity, their own niche in the big and competitive world of business. This deeper need “to be ourselves,<sup>xxvi</sup>” “to feel the difference between themselves and others,<sup>xxvii</sup>” and to seek their own individuality by working on some completely radical ideas (at the time) provided them the necessary subjective collective or communal sense of identity.

Newton’s law of inertia, namely, “an object either remains at rest or continues to move at a constant velocity, unless acted upon by a net force” can help us understand some of the psychological tendencies found among individuals and collectives. More often than not, an individual tends to make major lifestyle changes only when faced with some kind of existential issues. Same may be true for organisations. Consider the case of Microsoft as discussed earlier. Or any of the organisations studied by Jim Collins in his book “*Good to Great*” in which he finds that in all organisations transitioning from being laggards to leaders the common threads generally included a process of deep soul searching, of discovering or rediscovering their core purpose and mission, and accordingly making appropriate changes to the organisational structure and work culture.

Let’s take another example of how companies may be forced to take a deeper look at themselves because of an emerging threat to their business. Patanjali Ayurved, which started only ten years ago has now become a formidable force in the FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) market. During the year 2009-10 it had a modest turnover of Rs.163 crore. During 2015-16 financial year it reported a whopping turnover of Rs.5,000 crore and aims to double it to Rs.10,000 crore during the current fiscal year. The 5,000-crore revenue in FY15-16, which is a 150 per cent growth from a year earlier, is in line with estimates drawn up by some foreign brokerage firms that analysed the company’s products and business model<sup>xxviii</sup>. Its spectacular success has generated ripples across the FMCG market and has been a super destructive force to “the business as usual” attitude of its competition. This gives the old well-established brands in FMCG market a much needed jolt to introspect and identify their unique ‘identity.’

“To be ourselves” rather than to become like others is a move toward greater subjective sense of what is an individual, what is a nation or any collective or any organisation. In this seeking of the “deeper being, its inner law, its real self”

and in this quest to “live according to that and no longer by artificial standards<sup>xxix</sup>” necessary attention must be paid to the dangers and errors on the path.

### **The Dangers on the Path**

Using the example of Germany, after the WWI, Sri Aurobindo illustrates the grave danger of false subjectivism. This happens when the seeking “to be oneself” can degenerate itself into a tendency “to live solely for and to oneself.” The latter tendency, Sri Aurobindo warns, if pushed beyond a certain point becomes a disastrous error, both for the individual seeker and for the larger collective.

“For it is necessary, if the subjective age of humanity is to produce its best fruits, that the nations should become conscious not only of their own but of each other’s souls and learn to respect, to help and to profit, not only economically and intellectually but subjectively and spiritually, by each other.<sup>xxx</sup>”

Sri Aurobindo writes that the real German force leading the nation’s march to a subjective self-seeking was not its statesman or soldiers but its great philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Nietzsche; her great thinker and poet Goethe; her great musicians such as Beethoven and Wagner. Together they all represented the uniqueness of German soul and temperament it represented. The statesmen and soldiers acted as the bridge “between the idea and imagination and the world of facts, between the vision and the force, which makes realisation possible.” But unfortunately this bridge “ran mostly through a dark tunnel with a gulf underneath; for there was no pure transmission from the subjective mind of the thinkers and singers to the objective mind of the scholars and organisers.” Sri Aurobindo explains further,

“For more than a half-century Germany turned a deep eye of subjective introspection on herself and things and ideas in search of the truth of her own being and of the world, and for another half-century a patient eye of scientific research on the objective means for organising what she had or thought she had gained. And something was done, something indeed powerful and enormous, but also in certain directions, not in all, misshapen and disconcerting. Unfortunately, those directions were precisely the very central lines on which to go wrong is to miss the goal.<sup>xxxi</sup>”

The disastrous outcome of Germany’s going in the wrong direction and missing the goal, as we all know, was the advent of the rigid, armoured, aggressive, formidable Nazi State and the worldwide destruction that followed. This false subjectivism of an individual or a state or any collective is actually based in a completely false sense of group or collective identity. A false sense of self, an exclusive and aggressive ego, which refuses to see that the ‘other’ too has



equal freedom to seek its unique identity and accordingly be its “own self,” and that in essence the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ are not separate but integral parts of one whole.

A modern-day example of such utterly false subjectivism can be seen in the religious terrorism, particularly the Islamic terrorism. One of the core Islamic beliefs is:

“God revealed His wisdom and instructions through ‘books’ to some of the prophets like the Psalms, Torah, and the Gospel. Over time, however, the original teachings of these books got distorted or lost. Muslims believe the Quran is God’s final revelation revealed to Prophet Muhammad and has been fully preserved.<sup>xxxii</sup>”

Such an exclusivist article of faith, when taken to its extreme literalist understanding, and coupled with a false vital ego-sense of superiority which permits the act of even eliminating others with different beliefs leads to violence and terrorism in the name of religion and loss of innocent lives.

In the business world also we can find disastrous examples of subjectivism gone wrong. All across the world many business organisations have been hit by scandals of various proportions. Corporate greed could be one of the reasons for such corruption. Let’s consider the case of Enron which was founded in 1985 as the result of a merger between Houston Natural Gas and Inter North, both relatively small regional companies in the U.S.<sup>xxxiii</sup> As a new entity, Enron in its zeal to find its uniqueness, its *raison d’être*, felt the need to discover some novel business models. “Throughout the late 1990s, Enron was almost universally considered one of the country’s most innovative companies – a new-economy maverick that forsook musty, old industries with their cumbersome hard assets in favour of the freewheeling world of e-commerce. The company continued to build power plants and operate gas lines.<sup>xxxiv</sup>”

But perhaps over time the very idea of “to be oneself” degenerated into the tendency “to live solely for and to oneself.” This false subjectivism led the company to a wrong direction where it became completely oblivious to the “other’s” pursuit of wealth, profit and happiness. The result was devastating. Near the end of year 2001 it was revealed that the company’s “reported financial condition was sustained by an institutionalised, systematic, and creatively planned accounting fraud, known since as the Enron scandal.<sup>xxxv</sup>” Several thousand people lost their jobs, money and retirement funds. Enron has since become a well-known example of wilful corporate fraud and corruption. In Indian corporate sector, Satyam became a similar example of trying “to live solely for and to oneself,” and the outcome was same as in the case of Enron.

Continuing with the example of Germany, Sri Aurobindo cautions that such

disasters happen because the path of conscious self-finding is exposed to serious perils and dangers. These dangers arise from a wrong identification with the vital ego, mistaking vital ego for “oneself,” finding only one’s force instead of seeking for one’s soul. In this misidentification of oneself with only one’s body and life lies the supreme danger of walking the path of asura, becoming an instrument of a titanic force<sup>xxxvi</sup>.

“It is also evident that there is a false as well as a true subjectivism and the errors to which the subjective trend may be liable are as great as its possibilities and may well lead to capital disasters. This distinction must be clearly grasped if the road of this stage of social evolution is to be made safe for the human race.<sup>xxxvii</sup>”

To avoid such capital disasters, two realisations on the path of subjective self-seeking are essential, both for the individual and the organisation. First, it is important to be conscious not only of one’s own soul “but of each other’s souls and learn to respect, to help and to profit, not only economically and intellectually but subjectively and spiritually, by each other.<sup>xxxviii</sup>” This suggests widening one’s sense of self to include the ‘other,’ which in practical terms could translate as creating greater opportunities for collaboration, partnership and alliances. Second, in order for the subjective collective consciousness to become the basis for outward action, there must be a purest transmission of the subjective mind of visionaries and thinkers to the objective mind of the scholars and organisers. This second point has important implications for encouraging collaborative research and dialogue in the academic fields of sciences, humanities, philosophy and applied fields such as management, engineering and social sciences.

Considering the dangers associated with the path of subjective self-finding should it be pursued at all? By individuals, organisations, societies and nations? We find an answer from Sri Aurobindo: “the misuse of great powers is no argument against their right use.<sup>xxxix</sup>” We also find an assurance, as individuals and as parts of a collective, as to how significant this turning toward subjectivism is, provided we can avoid the danger of a wrong turning.

“The subjective stage of human development is that critical juncture in which, having gone forward from symbols, types, conventions, having turned its gaze superficially on the individual being to discover his truth and right law of action and its relation to the superficial and external truth and law of the universe, our race begins to gaze deeper, to see and feel what is behind the outside and below the surface and therefore to live from within. It is a step towards self-knowledge and towards living in and from the self, away from knowledge of things as the not-self and from the living according to this objective idea of life and the universe. Everything depends on how that step

is taken, to what kind of subjectivity we arrive and how far we go in self-knowledge; for here the dangers of error are as great and far-reaching as the results of right seeking. The symbolic, the typical, the conventional age avoid these dangers by building a wall of self-limitation against them; and it is because this wall becomes in the end a prison of self-ignorance that it has to be broken down and the perilous but fruitful adventure of subjectivism undertaken.<sup>XL</sup>”

### A Final Thought

This present two-part article, and the previous three articles in the series, *The Organisational Cycle*, have been our humble effort to explore the living truth of Sri Aurobindo’s profound psychological insights into the societal evolutionary processes. As students of Sri Aurobindo, this attempt to identify discernible trends in the world of modern business management and organisational development has been of tremendous help to study the real-world applicability of Sri Aurobindo’s explanation of a collective evolutionary journey based on deeper psychological truths. It should be noted that while it is highly likely that for a vast majority of the examples which we have cited, the primary driver for any change in those organisations might have been some outer or objective factor, such as changes in the marketplace or economic necessities. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the gradual changes happening in these organisations or in the overall field of management principles and practices seem to be following an evolutionary pattern or cycle of going from more objective to a deeper subjective view, although in an unconscious or half-conscious movement.

(Concluded)

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# Concepts and Practices of Religion, Philosophy, and Spirituality

Arun Chatterjee

The terms religion, philosophy, and spirituality are used frequently by us but we are not always consistent about their meanings. These terms refer to subject areas that have long histories and are vast in scope. These three subject areas are interconnected, but there are differences with regard to concepts and practices. In the beginning I will discuss the general scope of and concepts related to these areas. I will also try to point out how these areas are interrelated. Next I will examine briefly the place of religion, philosophy, and spirituality in Hinduism.

## **Basic Concepts and Historical Perspective**

Religions have played and continue to play an important role in all cultures of the world. They reflect man's desire to link himself with a Power or powers that he believes to be present beyond the phenomenal world, which is the world that we observe and experience with our senses and by scientific means. The origin of religions can be traced to thousands of years BCE during primitive stages of human existence. Religions started in different forms such as animism, fetishism, and the deification of natural forces. Animism believes in innumerable spiritual beings that are concerned with human affairs and capable of helping or harming human interests. It also believes that natural objects, natural phenomena, and the universe itself possess souls. Fetishism involves the religious worship of material objects alleged to be endowed with supernatural powers. These concepts or views now are considered to be crude, but they reveal man's curiosity about something beyond the world. As time passed more refined concepts of God and gods emerged, and different religions as we know them today originated in different parts of the world. Each of these religions is represented by certain beliefs about God and His relation with the world and its inhabitants. These beliefs are recorded in certain books, which are considered to be sacred and used for guidance as to how a man is supposed to approach



God and act in the world. Most religions developed a hierarchy of organisations and clergies who have considerable influence on their followers. The clergy of a religion usually teaches the followers how to interpret the sacred books and how to practise the teachings in their lives. Unfortunately in some cases the clergy of a religion became dictatorial. In some cases the followers also became dogmatic and narrow-minded, and they had no respect and tolerance for the views of other religions. The dogmas often make one think that only his religion contains truth and others do not. In extreme cases fanatic views of the blind followers of religions have resulted in religious wars and numerous persons have been killed and tortured. However, it will be wrong to point out only the pitfalls of religions since they also have had considerable beneficial impact on societies. Even if a religion cannot do everything that it claims to be able to do, it can at least help a person uplift himself and develop higher morality and values. Faith in God also can help a person go through difficult circumstances of life.

There are many religions in the world, and among them are included the major religions known as Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam. The views held by these religions are not alike, and there are also variations of belief and practice within each religion. One of the religions, viz., Buddhism, does not believe in God and has an existential orientation. Taoism also is not God oriented, and it focuses on a natural way of living. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are strongly theistic. They also are dualistic in the sense that they consider God to be essentially different and separate from man and the world. Hinduism accommodates both theistic and non-theistic views. Most of the schools within Hinduism hold a monistic metaphysical view, which believes that everything is composed of one substance, although a few schools within it have a pluralistic view.

Parallel with the development of religions other types of views emerged, and there was the beginning of philosophies. Philosophies relied more on reason and intellectual analysis and less on faith. One major contribution of philosophies to society is that they questioned and removed many dogmas and superstitions that had roots in religions. The subject of philosophy includes a variety of topics such as Epistemology, Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind (i.e., theories of self and consciousness), Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion.

Philosophies emerged in both the West and the East. In the West the Greek philosopher Socrates (469 — 399 BCE) is often considered to be the father of western philosophies. In the true spirit of philosophies he raised a variety of questions and was fond of arguing with others. He was followed by many brilliant philosophers. Some western philosophers believed in God; some were

agnostic; and some did not believe in God. Western philosophy in the modern time tends to be materialistic and it refuses to speculate on anything that cannot be proven intellectually or scientifically. Many philosophies emerged also in the East. Hinduism and Buddhism have a strong philosophical component as they deal with philosophical issues such as reality, appearance, and consciousness in a way that involves intellectual analysis. Most Indian scholars of religions of the past and present are philosophers too. It should be pointed out that in India there are several schools of philosophy other than Hinduism and Buddhism. These include Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Charvaka, and Jainism. In the Far East Taoism (or, Daoism) and Confucianism developed at about the same time in China in the sixth century BCE. Taoism and Confucianism are not like traditional religions. Tao literally means the 'Way', and Taoism focuses on living harmoniously with Tao, which is a force that is expressed in everything of the world; this is where the concept of yin and yang originated. Confucianism played an important role in Chinese society. Its originator is Confucius (551 – 479 BCE), who is considered to be a sage. His philosophy deals with the right way to live and be faithful to one's relationship with others.

There is another area which is related to religions and also philosophies, and that is spirituality. The term 'spiritual' is used in different senses. For example, some persons think that the term spiritual is related to spirits that are forces of nature, or souls of dead persons; this is a narrow meaning of the term spirit. I will use the term spiritual in a broad sense according to which Spirit is the Ultimate Reality and is the essence or self of everything. So what is spirituality? According to Sri Aurobindo 'spirituality is not a high intellectuality', and it also is not

'religiosity or an ardent and exalted emotional fervour, and not even a compound of all these excellent things. .... Spirituality is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than mind, life and body, an inner aspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with It and union with It, ....' (SABCL, vol.19, *The Life Divine*, p.857)

Most religions have both religious and spiritual components, which are not necessarily opposed to each other. The spiritual component usually is mystical in nature and it involves self-finding or self-realisation. A spiritual person, or at least a theistic one, believes that God dwells within his consciousness, and may also believe that he can reach Him through his inner self or soul without resorting to external rituals and practices of religions. One important aspect of spirituality is the feeling of oneness or unity with all entities of the world. Robert Solomon

explained that “spirituality often takes the form of a generalised love of humanity and of all nature’s creatures. Or it may take the form of a sense of oneness with the universe or togetherness with God.” (Solomon, p.49) In addition to encouraging us to find our own souls, spirituality tells us how to relate to others and why.

Spiritual, or (as often) mystic, personalities can be found in all religions. In Judaism Kabbalah represents a spiritual approach, and there are many teachers of Kabbalah who are highly spiritual persons. Within Christianity St. Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881 – 1955) are examples of highly spiritual persons. Within Islam, Sufis are considered as spiritual persons of a mystic sort. One well-known Persian poet who was a Sufi mystic is Rumi (1207 – 1273). In Hinduism there are several great persons who are philosophers as well as spiritual persons. It is important to note that religious and spiritual approaches are not necessarily opposed to each other. Many saintly persons led religious and spiritual life. For example, Sri Ramakrishna (1836 - 1886), who is regarded in India as a great spiritual person, and even as an Avatar, used to perform rituals in a temple when he was young. However, as he gained the experience of Self and had numerous other spiritual experiences he stopped doing rituals as he was then always united in his consciousness with his Mother Kali, one of the Goddesses of Hindus. The practice of spirituality does not rely on external rituals, and it emphasises introspection, or soul searching methods such as meditation, and also constant remembrance of God.

I would like to point out that the way religions are practised today has raised the question if they are losing their fundamental spiritual orientation. I already mentioned earlier that fanatical views held by the blind followers of a religion create feelings of intolerance, hatred, and animosity toward the followers of other religions, and the fanatics even commit atrocities against the followers of different religions. Swami Vivekananda talked about his hopes for establishing harmony among different religions and also a universal religion. In a speech given at the World’s Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, USA, in 1893, he said,

“but if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will hold no location in place or time; which will be infinite, like the God it will preach; whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be the Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these and still have infinite space for development; which in its Catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms and find a place for every human being [...]’. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognise

divinity in every man or woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be centred in aiding humanity to realise its own true, divine nature.” (Swami Vivekananda, pp.15–16)

Unfortunately Swami Vivekananda’s ideal for a harmonious universal religion has not been realised yet.

### **Place of Religion and Spirituality in Hinduism**

Hinduism is noteworthy for combining both religious and spiritual approaches. The original source-books of Hinduism are the Vedas. *Yajur Veda*, which is one of the four Vedas, has been very influential on Hindu religious practices, and it serves as the guidebook for priests for performing ceremonial rituals. The fundamental concept that underlies these rituals is that of sacrifice. External sacrifice involves offerings to gods in different forms. The offerings are of food, flowers, and, in rare cases, animals. It is important to note that these sacrifices are performed for gaining the favour of gods and not the Supreme Divine. Getting rewards such as wealth, fame, children, and protection from danger is the primary motive of these offerings. However, rituals in many cases are symbolic in nature and offerings can be interpreted as expressions of devotion and adoration for God. Rituals can be performed with correct knowledge and interpretation of the symbols with no expectation for rewards, and in that case they assume a spiritual nature.

The foundation of the spiritual approach of Hinduism is the Upanishads, which is referred to as Vedanta. *Bhagavad Gita* also is considered to be Vedantic literature and it too has a strong spiritual orientation. The Upanishads’ spirituality involves the experience of Spirit, which is Atman (Self) and represents consciousness at the highest level. Hindu spiritual practices include meditation and also the development of a quiet mind, which is not upset under adverse conditions. These practices and/or attitude lead to self-realisation or the finding of one’s true inner self, which is not the external ego. According to *Katha Upanishad*’s Verse II.1.1., “The Self-existent pierced the openings (of the senses) outward; therefore, one looks outward and not at the self within. Occasionally a wise man, desiring immortality, turns his eyes inward and sees the self within him.”

So what about Vedic rituals, which are practised even today? The Upanishads generally accept the validity and efficacy of Vedic rituals, but they also point out that ceremonial sacrifices and ritualistic worship have limited spiritual value. Among all of the Upanishads it is *Mundaka Upanishad* that addresses most clearly and directly the difference between ritualistic religious and spiritual approaches toward God. Although *Mundaka Upanishad* does not denigrate Vedic rituals, it clearly presents spirituality as being superior to the ritualistic

approach. I quote below a few verses from *Mundaka*, which present its view of the ritualistic approach.

*Mundaka* I.2.7: Frail indeed are the boats of these eighteen forms of sacrifice, which are said to be inferior karma. The fools who acclaim this as the highest good fall yet again into old age and death.

*Mundaka* I.2.10: These deluded men who regard sacrifices and works of merits as most important do not know any other good. Having enjoyed in the heaven won by good deeds, they enter again this world or a still lower one.

*Bhagavad Gita*'s views on the ceremonial and ritualistic approach are similar to those of the Upanishads. Gita recognises that the ritualistic approach can yield desired enjoyments and rewards, but these gains are of limited value. Gita prefers a psychological or spiritual approach. I present here a few verses that would reveal Gita's views on ceremonial sacrifices.

Chapter IX, Verses 20 and 21: The knowers of the three Vedas who drink the *Soma* juice and are cleansed of sin, worshipping Me with sacrifices, pray for the way to heaven. They reach the holy heavenly worlds and enjoy in heaven the pleasures of the gods. Having enjoyed the spacious world of heaven, they enter the world of mortals when their merit is exhausted. Thus conforming to the doctrine of the three Vedas, they, who are desirous of enjoyments, are subject to what comes and goes (birth and death).

Gita recognises a variety of sacrifices, which can be performed. These sacrifices range from offerings of food and flowers, ascetic practices of self control, doing desireless work, and gaining knowledge of Brahman. After recognising the validity of these sacrifices Gita reveals its preference for doing works as a sacrifice and also gaining knowledge as a sacrifice. In Verse IV – 33 of Gita, it is said:

“Sacrifice of knowledge, O Parantapa (Arjun), is greater than any material sacrifice. O Partha, all works without any exception culminate in wisdom.” Gita presents its profound concept of sacrifice in Verse 24 of Chapter IV, which says: “Brahman is the offering, Brahman is the oblation, by Brahman it is poured into the fire of Brahman. Brahman is to be attained by one who is absorbed in the contemplation of the action of Brahman.”

Gita wants an aspirant of spirituality not only to understand the meaning of this verse, but also to act accordingly. The Gita wants one to see God in every action and to surrender to God's will. Thus one can become desireless and egoless. The Gita recommends that every action, however small it may be, should be performed for God as an offering. This approach is expressed clearly in the following verse of Gita:

Chapter IX. 27. O son of Kunti (Arjuna), whatever you do, whatever you

eat, whatever you offer as sacrifice, whatever you give, whatever austerities (*Tapasya*) you practise, (all) that you offer to Me.

### **Closing Comments**

I would like to make two comments before I close this article. First, it seems to me that there is a growing trend toward spirituality as opposed to traditional religiosity among the younger generation of persons today. This was expressed by Swami Satyamayananda in a recent article in which he wrote, “People are discovering that truth lies within and that the old running about in search of a guru or teacher is futile. One must be able to experiment with one’s mind, and plunge inside, and discover truth. No method is standard and each one can tailor them according to their needs, time, and place.” (*Prabuddha Bharata*, January 2015, pp. 60) This new trend represents the emergence of new and higher grades of consciousness about which Sri Aurobindo has written extensively in the book. (*The Life Divine*)

Second, traditionally spirituality has been limited to changes at mental and emotional levels, and it has not sought the transformation of physical and vital parts on a person. Some of the ascetic practices attempt to control desires of various types by suppressing the vitality of the physical life. The integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo takes a very broad and thorough approach to the transform all parts of a being including the physical. It may take a long time for the complete realisation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision of a divine life of earth. However, it is clear that a new outlook of life and a new approach to spirituality are emerging among the new generation of individuals.

### **Acknowledgement**

This article uses some of the thoughts presented in an article titled “Religion and Spirituality”, which the author published in *Prabuddha Bharata* (Chatterjee, 2015)

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# Of Epic Proportions Epic Poetry through Films and through Time

Anuradha Majumdar

*Men are haunted by the vastness of eternity...*

Perhaps it is the scale: a huge screen fills with images and voices, the sound of the sea and wind as enemies tramp across fields and one plunges through the darkness into a visual arena of action, complete with drama, love and strife, which makes film a natural extension of epic poetry.

An epic is a poem of some great length, which usually tells a story. In ancient times it was an oral form supported by a strong rhythmic metre, like Homer's dactylic hexameter, instilling the cultural memory with tales of great kingdoms and heroes, some born of men, some of gods, the battles they fought, the journeys they undertook and of gods who protected or tricked them. These stories have seeped down to us through the centuries. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Vyasa's *Mahabharata* or Valmiki's *Ramayana* continue to add meaning or bring fresh interpretation to the life we find around us.

Homer, the ancient Greek poet, was blind, but his ability to *see* the field of existence from man to the universe, is immortal.

*Men are haunted by the vastness of eternity and so we ask ourselves, will our actions echo across the centuries? Will strangers hear our names long after we are gone and wonder who we were? How bravely we fought, how fiercely we loved...*

The voice of Odysseus opens *Troy*, a Hollywood blockbuster loosely 'inspired' by Homer's *Iliad*. That this film about the siege of Troy was released during the Iraq War, in the months that led up to the siege of Fallujah in 2004, was perhaps no coincidence. *This is the greatest war the world has ever seen*. But was it? It is not surprising therefore, that critics were not always favourable.

Mythological facts were thrown aside and heroes died or were killed at random to suit the plot and the epic sense reduced to an action film.

Still, there are lines reminiscent of Homer that leap out of *Troy*:

*Nothing unites people like a common enemy, or that War is young men dying and old men talking.* Or, Achilles' wrath against an unjustified war and king, even as Odysseus entreats him to fight: *Men are wretched things...* Yet, a Greek hero's business was to fight, to achieve *kleos*, an immortal glory, which could carry them past death to immortality.

*If they ever tell my story, Odysseus says in the end, let them say I walked with giants. Men rise and fall like winter wheat, but these names will never die. Let them say I lived in the time of Hector...in the time of Achilles.*

Heroes battling demons and enemies, good battling evil were salient features right from the epics of *Gilgamesh* and *Beowulf*, all heady stuff for the silver screen. The later more religious epics like Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Milton's *Paradise Lost*, full of moral trial and retribution were not so easily cast on screen.

Vyasa's *Mahabharata* composed around the same time as Homer's epics, is said to be the longest known epic poem, roughly 'ten times the size of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined,' consisting of a hundred thousand *shlokas* or couplets that spawn stories, histories and many adjacent tales through its eighteen books. These have led to many film adaptations in India and around the world. Of them, the most renowned is Peter Brook's film, *The Mahabharata*, possibly because it comes closest to a symbolic rendering of the myth.

Originally adapted for the stage without technical or virtual back-up, Brook invented a series of successful visual metaphors and symbolic settings that gave the film unusual power and integrity despite its stark beauty. We see a line of fire transcend distance allowing Duryodhana to *see* Arjuna's actions far away in the Himalayas. But the film falls short of *rasa*, that taste of a knowledge-experience beyond the mental plane, so central when it comes to characters like Krishna or Bhishma.

The *Mahabharata* alters many definitions specially that of the hero, the enemy and of immortality. Here Immortals are those who have conquered desire and grown one with divine knowledge, mostly great sages and occasionally, warriors like Arjuna, who earned the knowledge of the Gita on the battlefield.

Ironically, the message of *ahimsa* or non-violence pervades the epic: *ahimsa paramo dharma – non-violence is the highest law*. It is there in the Book of Beginnings, in the Book of the Forest and again, in the Book of Instructions, making Arjuna's confusion on the battle field real:

*What is kingdom to us, O Govinda, what enjoyment, what even life?  
Those for whose sake we desire kingdom, enjoyments and pleasures,  
stand here in battle...*

*What pleasures can be ours after killing the sons of Dhritarashtra?*

The *Bhagvad Gita* sees Krishna take him through the stages of yoga to a detached understanding of action while exhorting him to ‘stand up and fight.’ But it is not a fight for glory. Krishna counsels against all egoism or desire, the two greatest enemies.

*Abandon all dharmas and take refuge in me alone.*

*I will free you from all sin and evil, do not grieve.*

Yet, after the long denouement of exile and war, of betrayals, intrigues and revenge, and many, many deaths, we arrive at last at the final scene. As people take leave of their loved ones in the battlefield, Gandhari enters and heaps a fresh curse on Krishna. It is a curse that perpetuates the cycle of war and revenge, the clash of prejudices and hierarchies even today. If that story changes, can civilisation alter?

The world has changed several times since and many things can now be questioned. For one, the women, though noble in these epics, always remain helpless in the face of events and are reduced to perpetual weeping, specially in films. Sita preferred death in the *Ramayana* rather than humiliation even after being proven true, and it is Draupadi alone who screams for justice in the *Mahabharata* and questions dharma. *Until the Lions* is a recent retelling of the epic by Karthika Nair, seen exclusively through the eyes of its women: the war, the men, the prejudice and injustice, the inequalities, falsehood and enslavement. The list is long.

Dadasaheb Phalke, the father of Indian Cinema, also drew stories from the *Mahabharata*. In 1914 he produced his second film, *Satyavan and Savitri*, a tale of conjugal love picked from the Book of the Forest.

This tale also gave rise to a modern epic: *Savitri* by Sri Aurobindo.

Written in English, the epic consists of twelve books with approximately twenty-four thousand lines of blank verse, in iambic pentameter. The modern Indian literary milieu, impatient to leave the past behind dismissed *Savitri* for its apparent mysticism, even denounced it as “a confused, unconscious parody of the worst features of English rhetorical style.” Yet, almost seventy years on, *Savitri* continues to be read across a vast cross-section of people throughout the world, remains continuously in print, and will remain so, one suspects, for a long time to come.

At a time when democracies have replaced kingdoms and war threatens to go nuclear and is remote controlled, what use are heroes like Achilles or Arjuna?

What is immortality while death and ignorance prevail over everything? A scholar of the Western Classics at Cambridge, who later translated and wrote on the Vedas and much of the epics, Sri Aurobindo pursued the question further by taking up the simple tale of conjugal love that overcomes death and moved it higher.

In the old epic, the childless King Ashwapati prays for sons for eighteen years and is, in the end, rewarded by a single daughter. In *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo turns those eighteen years into a spiritual journey, first by grounding Ashwapati's individual realisation.

*He drew the energies that transmute an age...*

*And cast his deeds like bronze to front the years.*

*His walk through Time outstripped the human stride.*

*Lonely his days and splendid like the sun's.*

This yoga would bring about a profound change in him:

*A Will, a hope immense now seized his heart...*

*Aspiring to bring down a greater world.*

Ashwapati journeys further, traversing the world's night, its dire ignorance and violent falsehood:

*A greater darkness waited, a worse reign...*

*He met with his bare spirit, naked Hell.*

But there is no clang of armour here, no battle cry, for this battlefield is crossed with the spirit:

*A prayer upon his lips and the great name.*

For Ashwapati no longer seeks just another child but a greater birth: a power to change the future of the world.

*Let a great word be spoken from the heights*

*And one great act unlock the doors of Fate.*

He is finally granted a boon, a daughter, born to save.

*One shall descend and break the iron Law,*

*Change nature's doom by the lone spirit's power.*

With *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo created a new kind of hero and a new kind of woman. Her strength is spiritual, calm and independent. Not given to weeping or helpless lament, Savitri makes her choices, some quite unorthodox, knowingly. She follows Death without fear, not to seek immortal realms with her beloved but to rescue the power of Love and bring it back, to transmute the world's pain and divisions.

*My will is greater than thy law, O Death,*

*My love is greater than the bonds of Fate...*

*I am a deputy of the aspiring world,*

*My spirit's liberty I ask for all.*

With the spirit's liberty there are now such things as a postmodernist epic.

Named after Homer, Derek Walcott's *Omeros* is composed in the three line form similar to the *terza rima* of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Set in Santa Lucia, in the Caribbean, Helen is a black housemaid in *Omeros*, sought after by two fishermen, Achille and Hector. But there are no gruesome tragedies here. Hector smashes his van for speeding. Then, there is Ma Kilman with special healing powers, and the Plunketts, left to come to terms with the British colonial past of the islands.

The Greek myth serves as a means to express the truth of human relations and the past. Sgt. Major Plunkett travels back in time to relive some of his history. Achille journeys to Africa to find his father, his original name lost in the slave trade. And, most unusually, the poet himself speaks as he travels the world, examining identity, the ruptures in his life and a racism that still wounds. And finally, as he is about to lose all faith, he seeks out the blind guide, Omeros, back home on his island. This is a work of great beauty, carried by a deep love of the island and the sea. There are no heroes here in the old epic sense but at times, a quiet transcendence and a unity, greater than all war hungry egoism.

*Once Achille had questioned his name and its origin,  
She touched both worlds with her rainbow, this frail dancer  
leaping the breakers, this dart of the meridian.  
She could loop the stars with a fishline, she tired  
porpoises, she circled epochs with her outstretched span;  
she gave a straight answer when one was required...  
Messenger, her speed outdarted Memory.  
She was the swift that he had seen in the cedars  
in the foam of clouds, when she had shot across  
the blue ridges of the waves to a god's orders,  
and he, at the beck of her beak, watched the bird hum  
the whipping Atlantic, and felt he was headed home.*

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(We are grateful to the Editor, *Arts Illustrated*, for permitting us to reprint the above article in our journal **Sraddha**. *Of Epic Proportions* was first published by *Arts Illustrated* Volume 4, Issue 2, August 2016 and is reproduced here with their kind permission)

