

# Śraddhā

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

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All correspondence may be addressed to

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Sri Aurobindo Bhavan  
8 Shakespeare Sarani  
Kolkata 700 071

Editor: Arup Basu  
Phone : 98302 58723  
E-mail : arupbasu99@yahoo.com , arup.mbe@gmail.com

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Sri Aurobindo Bhavan  
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Kolkata 700 071  
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Śraddhāvāml labhate jñanam

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

—Gita IV. 39

Cover : Krishnal’s painting :  
*The mind of earth shall be a home of light,  
The life of earth a tree growing towards heaven,  
Savitri, Book XI, Canto I*

## Editorial

To a few are given the vision and dream to build a new world, a new earth. Fewer still are those who have the daring and the courage to tread the thorny path that leads to our summit selves ever resplendent with an unsetting sun, and bring down from those glorious ‘splendour-peaks’ into this vale of tears ‘the calm, the light, the power, the bliss, the freedom, the wideness, the heights of knowledge, the seas of Ananda’. It is left to the Avatar to accomplish that task and make it happen.

Such was the mission of Sri Aurobindo, the Avatar of the Supermind. He has said somewhere that he has been sent to bring down the Supermind into this earth, the Truth-Consciousness which ‘by its very definition is... Truth in possession of itself and fulfilling itself by its own power’. He went further and said that what he was doing was only ‘a beginning, not a completion’. It was ‘the foundation of a new consciousness on earth – a consciousness with infinite possibilities of manifestation’, a consciousness that would end the rule of Ignorance and usher in a reign of Knowledge and Light. Henceforward the eternal progression will be from ‘Knowledge proceeding to greater knowledge, Light enlarging, heightening into greater Light’. For this he had to dive into the pit of Hell and invade ‘the dolorous vasts’, carry on his shoulders ‘man’s load of fate’ and bear the suffering of the world in his breast. He brought to men ‘Heaven’s riches’ and just as Dadhichi of yore willingly gave up his body so that the gods could fashion out of his bones, surcharged with *tapah śakti*, the deadly thunderbolt (*vajra*) with which Indra could slay Vritra, likewise Sri Aurobindo, ‘in an act of supreme love and unselfishness, renouncing the realisation in his own body to hasten the hour of the collective realisation’, ‘to pave the mortal’s road to heaven’, tied himself, as it were, ‘to the stake of a perennial fire’ and offered his ‘martyred body for the world’ so that ‘the world may be new-born and live’. As the Mother says ‘The best homage that we can

render to Sri Aurobindo’ on this very auspicious day, the day known as the Siddhi day, the day when Krishna, the Anandamaya descended into the physical ‘is to have a thirst for progress and to open all our being to the Divine Influence of which he is the messenger upon the earth’.

December 5, 1950 being the day when Sri Aurobindo left his earthly body to help more fully his work of transformation, we have included in this issue an early writing of Srimat Anirvan, the great yogi, mystic, Vedic scholar and philosopher, which was published in *Asia* No.2 from Saigon, Vietnam in 1951.

We are grateful to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, for permission to reproduce the article ‘What is the Significance of the name ‘Arya’?’ from *Arya*, vol.1, p.61 (no.2), the photograph of the Mahasamadhi of Sri Aurobindo with a few lines of *Savitri* appended to it and one of many Krishnalal’s paintings on the cover of the journal. Our special thanks to the trio, Samata in the Studio for identifying this particular painting by Krishnalal, Chaitanya in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives for making available its high resolution image and last but not the least to Sri Robi Ganguly, formerly of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, for his patience, care and help in doing the layout and design of the cover. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgements and thanks to the Trustees.

## What Is The Significance Of The Name “Arya”?

Sri Aurobindo

The question has been put from more than one point of view. To most European readers the name figuring on our cover is a hieroglyph which attracts or alarms according to the temperament. Indians know the word, but it has lost for them the significance which it bore to their forefathers. Western Philology has converted it into a racial term, an unknown ethnological quantity on which different speculations fix different values. Now, even among the philologists, some are beginning to recognise that the word in its original use expressed not a difference of race, but a difference of culture. For in the Veda the Aryan peoples are those who had accepted a particular type of self-culture, of inward and outward practice, of ideality, of aspiration. The Aryan gods were the supraphysical powers who assisted the mortal in his struggle towards the nature of the godhead. All the highest aspirations of the early human race, its noblest religious temper, its most idealistic velleities of thought are summed up in this single vocable.

In later times, the word Arya expressed a particular ethical and social ideal, an ideal of well-governed life, candour, courtesy, nobility, straight dealing, courage, gentleness, purity, humanity, compassion, protection of the weak, liberality, observance of social duty, eagerness for knowledge, respect for the wise and learned, the social accomplishments. It was the combined ideal of the Brahmana and the Kshatriya. Everything that departed from this ideal, everything that tended towards the ignoble, mean, obscure, rude, cruel or false, was termed un-Aryan. There is no word in human speech that has a nobler history.

In the early days of comparative Philology, when the scholars sought in the history of words for the prehistoric history of peoples, it was supposed

that the word Arya came from the root *Ar*, to plough and that the Vedic Aryans were so called when they separated from their kin in the north-west who despised the pursuits of agriculture and remained shepherds and hunters. This ingenious speculation has little or nothing to support it. But in a sense we may accept the derivation. Whoever cultivates the field that the Supreme Spirit has made for him, his earth of plenty within and without, does not leave it barren or allow it to run to seed, but labours to exact from it its full yield, is by that effort an Aryan.

If Arya were a purely racial term, a more probable derivation would be *Ar*, meaning strength or valour, from *ar*, to fight, whence we have the name of the Greek war-god Ares, *areios*, brave or warlike, perhaps even *arete*, virtue, signifying, like the Latin *virtus*, first, physical strength and courage and then moral force and elevation. This sense of the word also we may accept. “We fight to win sublime Wisdom, therefore men call us warriors.” For Wisdom implies the choice as well as the knowledge of that which is best, noblest, most luminous, most divine. Certainly, it means also the knowledge of all things and charity and reverence for all things, even the most apparently mean, ugly or dark, for the sake of the universal Deity who chooses to dwell equally in all. But, also, the law of right action is a choice, the preference of that which expresses the godhead to that which conceals it. And the choice entails a battle, a struggle. It is not easily made, it is not easily enforced.

Whoever makes that choice, whoever seeks to climb from level to level up the hill of the divine, fearing nothing, deterred by no retardation or defeat, shrinking from no vastness because it is too vast for his intelligence, no height because it is too high for his spirit, no greatness because it is too great for his force and courage, he is the Aryan, the divine fighter and victor, the noble man, *aristos*, best, the *sreshtha* of the Gita.

Intrinsically, in its most fundamental sense, Arya means an effort, uprising and overcoming. The Aryan is he who strives and overcomes all outside him and within him that stands opposed to the human advance. Self-conquest is the first law of his nature. He overcomes earth and the body and does not consent like ordinary men to their dullness, inertia, dead routine and tamasic limitations. He overcomes life and its energies and refuses to be dominated

by their hungers and cravings or enslaved by their rajasic passions. He overcomes the mind and its habits, he does not live in a shell of ignorance, inherited prejudices, customary ideas, pleasant opinions, but knows how to seek and choose, to be large and flexible in intelligence, even as he is firm and strong in his will. For in everything he seeks truth, in everything right, in everything height and freedom.

Self-perfection is the aim of his self-conquest. Therefore what he conquers, he does not destroy, but ennobles and fulfils. He knows that the body, life and mind are given him in order to attain to something higher than they; therefore they must be transcended and overcome, their limitations denied, the absorption of their gratifications rejected. But he knows also that the Highest is something which is no nullity in the world, but increasingly expresses itself here,—a divine Will, Consciousness, Love, Beatitude which pours itself out, when found, through the terms of the lower life on the finder and on all in his environment that is capable of receiving it. Of that he is the servant, lover and seeker. When it is attained, he pours it forth in work, love, joy and Knowledge upon mankind. For always the Aryan is a worker and warrior. He spares himself no labour of mind or body whether to seek the Highest or to serve it. He avoids no difficulty, he accepts no cessation from fatigue. Always he fights for the coming of that kingdom within himself and in the world.

The Aryan perfected is the Arhat. There is a transcendent Consciousness which surpasses the universe and of which all these worlds are only a side-issue and a by-play. To that consciousness he aspires and attains. There is a Consciousness which being transcendent, is yet the universe and all that the universe contains. Into that consciousness he enlarges his limited ego; he becomes one with all beings and all inanimate objects in a single self-awareness, love, delight, all-embracing energy. There is a consciousness which being both transcendental and universal, yet accepts the apparent limitations of individuality for work, for various standpoint of knowledge, for the play of the Lord with His creations; for the ego is there that it may finally convert itself into a free centre of the divine work and the divine play. That consciousness too he has sufficient love, joy and knowledge to accept; he is

puissant enough to effect that conversion. To embrace individuality after transcending it, is the last and divine sacrifice. The perfect Arhat is he who is able to live simultaneously in all these three apparent states of existence, elevate the lower into the higher, receive the higher into the lower, so that he may represent perfectly in the symbols of the world that with which he is identified in all parts of his being,—the triple and triune Brahman.

# Sri Aurobindo and the Mystery of Death

Srimat Anirvan

The news of the passing away of Sri Aurobindo had put at first many of his disciples in an embarrassing position before the problem of death.

But his death can also be looked upon as the first sacrifice for a noble cause. Sri Aurobindo in one of his letters<sup>(1)</sup> speaks of the conquest of death as a problem which can be solved by the Supermind alone, but in which way he does not say. His own death, which cannot be characterised as a normal phenomenon, will appear to many as a masterpiece of supreme art.

Death is natural; and so the grief for the departed. “For one who has been *born*, death is the inevitable end” points out the *Gita* with philosophical unconcern. If birth and death are the two visible ends of the life-process, the position of the *Gita* is unassailable. If the body has been born, it must die.

And yet man has always hankered after immortality. The explicit ideal of the Vedic spiritual realisation has been the conquest of decay and death. The theme has recurred again and again throughout the whole of India’s spiritual history and ways and means have been sought to give it a practical shape.

The mind naturally asks: What lies at the root of this persistent idea? An animal has no prevision and hence no thought of death; it is simply overtaken by it and quietly submits. A man can feel death before it actually comes, and so tries to avoid it. This instinctive avoidance of death in its crudest form has been described by the Yogin as *abhinivesha* which he explains as soul’s inertia, its fervent clinging to the *status quo*. It is the worst form of delusion, he says. And yet, it is this avoidance of death, pictured as its conquest by the spirit that has been the age-long quest of human spirituality. Does it not sound like a paradox ?

We find a solution if we state the problem in other terms. Death is a form of quiescence. There is a striking parallelism between the three forms of natural quiescence: dreamless sleep (*sushupti*), death (*mrityu*), and dissolution (*pralaya*). The first is an actual experience, and the other two conceptual, but nevertheless real. We are not afraid of the quiescence of sleep, because we believe it to be a rhythm in an incessant activity. Sleep might very well turn into death, but we feel it will not. There is a hope of resurrection. The experience of life which can be the only meaning of sentient existence, overflows the blank of the daily death.

Consciousness persists in life both through its periodical activity and quiescence. The process is physical; but it can be easily extended into a metaphysical concept by introversive thought. To the three forms of natural quiescence, can be added a fourth, the quiescence of *samādhi*, an indrawing and consequent intensification of consciousness which characterises all forms of *samādhi*, can release its power of transcending all changes. The transcendence might become a living experience which would induce an indelible feeling of timelessness. In this feeling all experiences become homogeneous and hence colourless. But this homogeneity can very well become the background of a manifold of heterogeneous experiences. All stimuli from the external world will then draw out from the depth of the being the monochromatic reaction of a pure Conscious-Existence — the sole manifestation of the *Purusha* absorbing and transmuting the shocks of *Prakriti* into his self-light. And the basis of the idea of the immortality of the Spirit will be in the experience of an abstract and colourless Void. The realisation of a living death will then be the guarantee for the deathlessness of the Spirit. A paradox again !

But “the essential immortality of the Spirit”<sup>(2)</sup> is confronted by the phenomenon of the eternal change in Nature. The metaphysical idea underlying this is very simple. Viewed conceptually, there is the eternal Void of *ākāsha* with the eternal play of *prāna* on its bosom. The two ideas do not clash, because it is the basic structure of our consciousness also: we can calmly look at the dance of our own thoughts. The Vedic seer has added a rider to the formula: the Void transcends (*atitishthati*) life. In other words, to be eternally in death will mean giving a free scope to the eternal play of life.

The idea in its setting of universal timelessness is no doubt true. But a problem and a travail of the Spirit ensue when we connect it with the process

of time. The universal Spirit endures with universal Nature, let us concede, as a realisable Idea. But the realisation comes at one pole, — the pole of Spirit, and not at the pole of Nature. Of the three quiescences of Nature, individual consciousness can overflow the first — the quiescence of sleep. But can it overflow the other two? Can eternity be a real experience in time? Rationality based on normal consciousness will very naturally doubt it. Consciousness appears to it to be a by-product of material processes. The living body emits consciousness; when the body disintegrates, consciousness is extinguished. The survival of the soul cannot be “scientifically” proved. The concept of immortality is an unjustifiable hypothesis born of our power of projecting the consciousness into the future. So argues the materialist.

But the validity of this argument is not absolute. Consciousness does not simply flow out; it can gather itself in, withdraw from its phenomenal play and yet retain a sense of value in intensity. The intensity reveals another form of time — a concentration of duration without losing the potentiality of projection. A moment may contain eternity not in an infinitely drawn out chain of process, but in an extreme consolidation of an ultimate and homogeneous meaning. The *Upanishads* admirably describe this by the term *vijnāna-ghana*. There the two concepts apparently involve a Contradiction. Universality inheres in idea, and consolidation in sensation; there is a juxtaposition between the two, but no fusion. But in yogic consciousness the formless universality of the Real-Idea can absolutely contain the whole gamut of consolidation in a uniquely realisable potentiality. In simple words, the One and the Many and the Power (*shakti*) vibrating between them may form a unitary and comprehensive experience. The concept nearest to this in normal life is that of Personality, which when intensified and universalised becomes the metaphysical concept of Atman.

The Atman like a spider spins out the web of experience and gathers it in. The first drawing-in we see in sleep, where the mental function is withdrawn, but not the vital or the material. The experience is of a quiescence — a kind of normal seed-consciousness as the *Upanishads* describe it so often. A deeper quiescence would come when both the mental and the vital functions are withdrawn. This will be what is known as death. But to the normal consciousness, death is not the same kind of experience as sleep; it is rather the end of all experience. This might be true if we associate

experience always with activity and heterogeneity, but not with passivity and homogeneity. If, however, quiescence becomes a habitual mode of experience, or in other words, if consciousness becomes a yogic consciousness of natural *samādhi* (*sahaj-samādhi* of Kabir), the negative value that we attach to sleep and death might turn into some supernaturally experienced positive value. *Nidrd samādhi-sthitih* — sleep as a poise of *samadhi* is not a very uncommon experience with the *Yogins*.

A plunge into the inner depths in a wakeful sleep may open a vista of eternity which can be projected both backwards and forwards. The experience will apparently belong to a measurable duration of normal time, but its meaning will be immeasurable in extension and infinite in formulation. A single experience of this kind will convince the mind of the immortality of the soul. Normally such an experience will come at the point of liberation from the terrestrial chain of existence. If the witnessing Self looks backwards, the theory of rebirth as taught by Indian spiritual science will be the logical outcome. If it is a vision of the future, it will correspond to the idea of eternal life in Heaven. A confusion has been created in some religious beliefs by an attempt to make a universal application of this vision to the after-death existence of souls of different grades of maturity. The Indian idea of rebirth explaining the backward projection, and the idea of liberation by stages (*krama-mukti*) describing the forward projection give a complete logical picture of the whole movement of spiritual evolution.

This vision of eternity when translated in terms of temporal movement, gives the idea of “the psychic survival of death”<sup>(3)</sup> which is the second of the triple immortality envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. To the unilluminated it is a dogma, which up to a certain stage has not much influence on a man’s spiritual evolution. But if spiritual consciousness is essentially an indrawing of the conscious force liberating an awareness of growing intensity whose impact unfolds new worlds of experience, the vision of eternity becomes a power and an instrument in the hands of the Yogin. At the initial stage, the awareness of immortality which sunders the veil of “temporal ignorance” makes death a conscious event in life. At a higher level, it becomes a *willed* event; and the phenomenon is not wholly rare in spiritual history. A more complete mastery over Nature will be a conscious and *willed* birth — the idea underlying the theory of Incarnation. All this will mean an effective realisation of

immortality in a process of time, which in a liberated soul will give at any given point a total vision of Reality, not necessarily in an omniscience of events, but of truths.

The third form of quiescence, the quiescence of dissolution need not be considered here, because in Sri Aurobindo's vision the emphasis has always been on life and creation, though an integral vision cannot draw an artificial line of separation between being and non-being.

The crux of the problem of immortality lies in the third type of immortality which rose in the spiritual vision of Sri Aurobindo and which has been called physical immortality — “the conquest of the material Inconscience and Ignorance even in the very foundation of the reign of Matter”<sup>(4)</sup>. This idea supported by the very clear and logical thinking of Sri Aurobindo centres round the idea of transformation.

Human mind has divided the unity of Existence into a duality of Spirit and Matter. The relation between the two can be most clearly and directly seen in one's own being where a lump of matter has become endowed with life and consciousness. Consciousness as simple awareness and even as active but unmentalised consciousness does not reach a crucial point until it has become the witness-consciousness. In this form, an ideal division is made in the body of consciousness itself and the possibility of a consciousness independently centred within its own being is created. Just as a multiplication of impacts from without clarifies and consolidates an objective idea, so inward impacts can build a solid structure of soul-consciousness, which might appear to transcend and remain aloof from its peripheral phenomena. This detachment of the Spirit in its self-formative period is reflected in the mind as duality of Spirit and Matter. But in reality, it is one Substance which can be interpreted in various terms in accordance with the graded experiences of different densities. Viewed from the bottom, consciousness has emerged from evolving Matter. If we maintain the notion of duality, we may say there is an interaction between the two. A better way of putting things would be to advance the Upanishadic theory of the transparency of the substratum (*dhātu-prasāda*) leading to the luminous expansiveness of the soul-structure. Or, to take a Vedic imagery, consciousness like fire, may be said to have entered into Matter to transform it into its own substance. The Upanishadic seer will say, “The elements composing the material structure of the body have a gradation of

densities, and each has an absolute property which can be released by yogic consciousness. If these yogic properties emerge, the physical body becomes permeated with yogic fire and no longer knows disease, decay or death”.

From the sensuous view of things, in which the Idea appears as a half-real appendage, this might seem improbable. But if the view-point is reversed, if the Idea that is evoked by the sense-contact is looked upon as real reality and if the Will seeks to manipulate these realities on this new basis, a novel order of things might be born. Disease, decay and death might be attacked, as perhaps had been done by the Buddha, with the spiritual forces. One cures the diseased mind and thus cures the diseased body: modern therapeutics knows something of the trick. The conquest of decay and death on the same lines might be looked upon as a case of extension of what has already been achieved. At least the adventure is worth while.

But the conquest of death is a problem that can be solved on a cosmic level alone. There must be a complete reversal of the present plan of life-evolution on earth before this can be achieved. Sri Aurobindo saw this and launched into the bold adventure of tackling the cosmic forces. He has been ridiculed and abused for this and often branded as a heretic. “It is against God's plan” they said. “No, it is just making way for the inevitable and fulfilling His plan”, was his reply to the charge.

There is no denying the fact that Sri Aurobindo is the first sacrifice in a noble cause. His death very forcefully reminds one of the saying of the *rishi* of the *Purusha-suktam*: “The gods, as they spread the web of sacrifice, tied the *Purusha* Himself to the post as the victim”. And if death, as the Upanishadic seers speak of it, is “the concentration of a final illumination of the Heart”, Sri Aurobindo's death has been like an explosion illuminating the horizon of the distant future and its impact on the living has been and will be far-reaching in its results.

## References

1. *Letters*, Ist Series, pp.32-33
2. *The Life Divine*, p.733 ( American ed. )
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*



# Shri Aurobindo's Commentary on Kenopanisad

Sarnath Basu

There is a striking difference between Śaṅkara's interpretation of the 'yanmanasā na manute', 'yaccaksuṣā na paśyati' etc. and that of Sri Aurobindo. Śaṅkara interprets in all such cases 'yat' as the accusative of the verbs 'manute', 'paśyati' etc, and 'loka' as the nominative of them, Sri Aurobindo accepts this suggestion of Śaṅkara but goes further and suggests 'Brahman' to be the nominative of them. Śaṅkara often quotes from different upaniṣads such passages as 'tasya bhāsā sarvamidaṁ bibhāti', 'parāñcikhāni vyatrṇat svayambhūḥ', 'yadādityagataṁ tejo jagat bhāsayate akhilam' 'ātmanavāyam jyotiṣāste', etc. to justify his interpretation of Brahman as the supreme condition and ruler of our speech, thought and sense-activities. Sri Aurobindo does not deny this essential truth of all our activities, but emphasises on another deeper and profounder aspect of Brahman. He takes *sat-chit-ānanda* aspects of Brahman very seriously, discovers within this chit aspect the supreme Cognitive, Affective and Will-aspects and even in a profound sense a speech-aspect of Brahman-Consciousness and develops his commentary on this upaniṣad accordingly. The other upaniṣads do assert Brahman as *Prajñāna*, *Vijñāna* (*vijñānamānandam Brahma*, *prajñānam Brahma*)—and Śaṅkara in commenting on the phrase 'brahmaṇo rūpam' also quotes them—but Sri Aurobindo does not interpret them as synonyms of *jñāna* but as referring to the apprehensive and comprehensive aspects of Brahman-Consciousness. Moreover, in the other upaniṣads Brahman is said to listen without an ear, to see without eyes (*paśyati acakṣuḥ*, *śṛṇotyakarnaḥ*). From all these we can gather an idea of Brahman as really seeing, sensing, thinking, expressing, acting, creating and governing all the cosmic phenomena. Sri Aurobindo, accordingly, tries to discover within the Divine Consciousness the supreme principles of Mentality, Affectivity, Speech and Activity and describes Brahman-

Consciousness as the Supreme Sense, the Supreme Mind, the Supreme Speech and the Supreme will-force. Sri Aurobindo reasons out that it is in this sense that Kenopaniṣad declares Brahman to be the mind of our mind, speech of our speech, eye of our eyes etc, etc.

In his attempt at interpreting this upaniṣad in the above light, Sri Aurobindo incidentally brings in and discusses summarily and also at length where necessary the western theories of evolution, the *Sāṅkhya* explanation of the evolution of the cosmos, discoveries of the psychical researches, the Greek and the medieval theories of the Logos, the Vedic and the Tantric theories of mantra (seed sounds) and puts new interpretations in some of them. He was all along trying to give a rational justification, an intellectual conception of the different ideas contained in the upaniṣad. Thus we find a Yogin philosophising and not merely dogmatically asserting the truths of this upaniṣad. But the mystic in him is not altogether absent in this commentary. On the contrary its visible marks are found here and there, specially in his theory of the gods (*devas*) and in his exposition of the significance of the *adhyātma*, and *adhidaivata* instructions as given in the fourth chapter of this upaniṣad. We may say that in this respect also the commentary of Śaṅkara differs from that of Sri Aurobindo. Śaṅkara never, perhaps for a reason which might have been best known to him, allows the spiritual Genius in him to utter a single syllable throughout the length and breadth of his commentary. Sri Aurobindo, perhaps feeling the need of delivering the modern scientific mind from the material orthodoxy, speaks out some spiritual truths contained in the teaching of this upaniṣad. A critical analysis of the arguments employed by him in the various fields, a logical scrutiny of them, an examination of the new interpretation he puts in the *Sāṅkhya* theory about material formation and of his view that knowing is essentially being, his declaration that the scientific view of the world-evolution is incomplete without a reference to the Supramental are themselves the independent topics for minute discussions. A full survey of his commentary on this upaniṣad must also take note of the spiritual truths that he has found out through his own mystic experiences because it is only with reference to them that we can discover the profound significance of the third and fourth chapters of this upaniṣad. Otherwise a modern mind may just find a *paurāṇika* story in them as has been in most of the cases of our *purāṇas* and leave them as an unimportant portion of the upaniṣad.

After taking note of these various features of Sri Aurobindo's commentary we shall now discuss some of his findings. They are put in the following numbered paragraphs.

(1) 'This upaniṣad does not assert the unreality but only the incompleteness and inferiority of our present existence'<sup>1</sup>, as a physical, mental and vital being. It is an imperfect functioning of the Superconscient which is eternally in an absolute perfection.

(2) The Superconscient has evolved and developed our mind, senses and life.

(3) In a very profound sense, this upaniṣad describes the Superconscient or the Brahman-Consciousness as Supreme Mind, Supreme Sense, Supreme speech and Supreme Life.

In explaining Brahman as the mind of our mind, Sri Aurobindo urges that the same necessity which has developed life from matter and mind from life shows that mind cannot be the last term in the order of being. 'Mind does not exhaust the possibilities of consciousness and therefore cannot be its last and highest expression'<sup>2</sup>. Mind cannot perceive the truth directly and so 'there must be in the nature of things a faculty or principle which sees the Truth unveiled, an eternal faculty of knowledge that corresponds to the eternal fact of the truth'<sup>3</sup>. This faculty is the Truth consciousness (*satyam jñānamantaṁ Brahma*). This does not think through the mind (*manasa na manute*) and this is the Supreme Mind (*māso mano yat*).

Just as Brahman-Consciousness in its cognitive aspect is described as the Mind of mind, in its expressive aspect it is described as the speech of our speech. Word in the Vedic system, says Sri Aurobindo, was the creatrix ; by the Word Brahman creates the forms of the universe. The theory of the material creation by sound and the tantrika view that a conscious application of the seed- sounds (mantra) may lead to the changes in the physical, vital and mental world suggest the truth of this Vedic theory. 'The Supermind using the word is the creative Logos'<sup>4</sup>.

Sri Aurobindo tries to arrive at some intellectual conception of the sense of our senses, the Sight of our sight, and the Hearing of our hearing with his theory of *Samjñāna* as the essential sense. He says that the vaster sections of the subconscious mind proves that mind is infinite. But there is also a larger field of subliminal consciousness in man which is not limited by the surface mind

and the senses. The actions of *Samjñāna*, *Prajñāna*, *Ājñāna* and *Vijñāna* constitute this vaster field. Of these *Samjñāna* is the essential sense, the original capacity of consciousness to feel in itself all that Consciousness has formed. Sight, hearing etc. are viewed by him as the inherent capacities of mind which it can operate even without bodily organs. These bodily organs are evolved by mind only for applying these inherent capacities on the physical plane for a physical life. The yogic experience and researches in psychical phenomena show, however, that we can have direct experience of things which are at a distance and of the mental happenings of other people without any form of the senses being presented to us. These, he says, are due to the activities of the *Samjñāna*—the Sense of our senses.

Brahman-Consciousness is also the Life of our lives (*sa u prāṇasya prāṇa*). In developing this idea, Sri Aurobindo distinguishes the Upaniṣadic view of *prāṇa* from the popular view of it. *Prāṇa* is not merely the life or life-breath, it is the Life-energy itself supporting all material as well as psychical phenomena. As *prāṇa* is the pure energy acting behind the physical forces, it cannot be detected by physical analysis. Only by purification of our mind and the subtilisation of our means of sensation and knowledge its existence can be known. But even this *prāṇa* is a lower manifestation or working of the Supreme Energy—the *Tapas* or *Cit-Śakti* of Brahman. In explaining '*prāṇasya prāṇa*' Sri Aurobindo puts emphasis on the view of Consciousness as power and holds that this phrase refers to the infinite force of action of the supreme conscious Being.

(4) The Superconscient Existence, 'conscious both of its eternal peace and its omniscient and omnipotent force is also conscious of our cosmic existence which it holds and omnipotently governs. It is the Lord of *Īśa Upaniṣad*'<sup>5</sup>.

(5) *Indra*, *Vāyu* and *Agni* represent the divine powers working in the mental, vital and material plane respectively.

(6) Surrender of physical, vital and mental egoism to the Supramental or the Superconscient is a means of knowing Brahman.

(7) There are two fundamental entities—gods and self. The *adhidaivata* and the *adhyātma* instructions (*ādeśa*) are interpreted as the transfiguration of gods and the transcendence of the self. Transfiguration of gods means resolving the workings of the cosmic principles in us into the workings of the Supramental. This becomes possible only with the sudden descents of the

Supramental in us like the flash of the lightning or the falling of the eyelid if we are ready for it. This is necessary for the higher realisation. But what is more fundamental and necessary is that the self in us which supports the action of gods must find and ascend into the one Self by constantly remembering these divine revelations and meditating on Brahman as if it is reached (*eted gacchatīva ca mano anena caitadupasmarati*) with a firm will (*sañkalpa*).

(8) The goal of the Divine Life, however, is not the complete oblivion of the external. ‘The soul whose gods are thus converted to the supreme law and religion will realise in the cosmos itself and in all the multiplicity the truth of the One besides whom there is no other or second’<sup>6</sup>, will realise ‘all the worlds not as external,.... but as if within it’<sup>7</sup>. In the higher realisation i.e. when the transfiguration of gods in us is effected by the Supramental itself visiting them and opening their vision, we shall no more feel our activities as mental, vital etc. but rather as the conscious movement of the Supramental. And with the ascent of the self it attains ‘the status of self-joyous infinity which is the supreme manifestation of the self’<sup>8</sup>. Thus the goal which this Upaniṣad preaches is not the ‘pure indeterminate Existence self-blissful in an eternal inaction and non-action’<sup>9</sup>. It is ‘the eternal joy of the soul in a Brahmaloaka or a world of the Brahman in which it is one with the infinite existence and yet in a sense still a soul able to enjoy differentiation in the oneness’<sup>10</sup>. Brahman is *tadvanam*—the Transcendent Delight which is, in the view of *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* also the nature of ultimate reality. As a result of knowing and possessing Brahman as the Supreme Ananda, a man ‘becomes the centre of Divine Delight, ....attracting all to it as a fountain of joy and love’<sup>11</sup>.

Thus in the view of Sri Aurobindo, *Kenopaniṣad* starts with a ‘search for the Lord, Master of our mind, life, speech and senses’<sup>12</sup> and closes with its ‘finding of him as the Transcendent Beatitude’<sup>13</sup>.

## References

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## Veda Vyasa's *Mahabharata* in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prema Nandakumar

### 6. Goddess Savitri and the Divine Mother

Just as Vyasa speaks of the aspiration of Aswapati for a child, he has also given us an image of the Goddess Savitri emerging from the sacrificial fire at the conclusion of the tapasya as the answering Grace assuring him of a daughter to continue the line. The passage is brief, as it usually is with Veda Vyasa:

“Then, O Yudhistira, rising from the sacrificial flames in her splendid form she appeared in front of the King, exceedingly glad as she was; and she, the giver of the boons, spoke this way the word of benediction to the Sovereign of the Earth, Savitri to King Aswapati established in regular practices.”<sup>1</sup>

What was the intense meditation into which Sri Aurobindo entered, settling him on the basis of the single verse in which the Supreme Mother showed her image? He had felt in tune with Aswapati meditating and could note down the experiences of the Madran King. The traveller of the worlds, taking in all knowledge was intent upon achieving realisation. But the future? The future for Aswapati was indicated by Vyasa as a divine figure that materialised from the sacrificial fire. How could Sri Aurobindo convey this idea to the modern mind that has been imprisoned in a giant capsule of doubt called Science? He solves the problem in an elegant manner that leaves us spellbound.

As we begin the *Book of the Divine Mother*, we see Aswapati getting ready to enter the third stage of his yoga. He is not going to stop at the personal level. The rest of the struggling humanity has to benefit from his tapasya and take a big step forward. Hence his spiritual adventure begins anew and he is determined to see the face of the Unknowable, the Absolute. He could feel the divine presence now and then but it was not tarrying enough for him to have a transformatory vision:

“A Being intimate and unnameable,  
A wide compelling ecstasy and peace  
Felt in himself and all and yet ungrasped,  
Approached and faded from his soul's pursuit  
As if for ever luring him beyond.  
Near, it retreated; far, it called him still.  
Nothing could satisfy but its delight:  
Its absence left the greatest actions dull,  
Its presence made the smallest seem divine.”

The hint is enough. Aswapati is not on a fruitless chase! Though it is Unknowable, “to the pursuit of our personality it reveals itself out of the secrecy of things as the God or Deva, — nameless though he has many names, immeasurable and beyond description though he holds in himself all description of name and knowledge and all measures of form and substance, force and activity.”<sup>2</sup>

Certainly our rishis of the past were not creating creatures of human imagination. As with a scientific experiment in a laboratory, they also meditated and struggled and have left behind truths that need to be studied deeply by aspirant souls. Hence, Aswapati's sacrifice is on. But where is the *yajna vedi*? Where are the priests, the ladles, the chanters of Vedic mantras? All we know in the epic poem is of Aswapati sitting motionless in his palace, in deep meditation. Is this the same as the tapasya of Vyasa's Aswapati? For an explanation we have to go to Sri Aurobindo again when he describes what constitutes sacrifice for man. “Our sacrifice is the offering of all our gains and works to the powers of the higher existence.” This total offering is the subject of the canto, ‘*The Pursuit of the Unknowable*’.

Aswapati has gone beyond Mind, leaving behind the safety of the known world, the material universe. It is not easily done, for one has to go through terror and anxiety before coming to the world of light. As he notes down in one of his sonnets:

“I walk by the chill wave through the dull slime  
And still that weary journeying knows no end;  
Lost is the lustrous godhead beyond Time,  
There comes no voice of the celestial Friend,  
And yet I know my footprints’ track shall be  
A pathway towards immortality.”

This could almost be Aswapati’s soliloquy as he proceeds to invoke the Divine Mother. Indeed, our efforts are always helped by the Mother herself to draw us towards her. There is a belief prevalent in the Ranganath Temple at Srirangam. When you take four steps towards the temple of Mother Ranganayaki, she takes eight steps towards you! As he stands “on being’s naked edge”, Aswapati is full of hope. He is certain that despite this Nirvanic atmosphere, he remains what he is, an aspirant soul and no salt doll which has disintegrated in the ocean of Nothingness. At this moment the Supreme brings an assurance too. One is never alone in this world shot through with the Divine. The conclusion of the tapasya-sacrifice is indicated by a simple statement: “The Presence he yearned for suddenly drew close.”

The evocation of the image is done very gently by Sri Aurobindo. He has taken the cue from Vyasa who has no glorious ecstatic description of ornaments and armaments for Goddess Savitri. It is a luminous presence but has a form which both Vyasa and Sri Aurobindo leave to our imagination. Vyasa says she is “Rupini” (one with a form, beautiful). Sri Aurobindo deftly conveys this luminous image:

“Across the silence of the ultimate Calm,  
Out of a marvellous Transcendence’ core,  
A body of wonder and translucency  
As if a sweet mystic summary of her self  
Escaping into the original Bliss

Had come enlarged out of eternity,  
Someone came infinite and absolute.”

Aswapati has achieved total calm within and without and so he is able to have a clear vision of the image. Indeed even a physical closeness is indicated by Sri Aurobindo, drawing further inferences from the term “Rupini” and what Vyasa’s Goddess Savitri tells Aswapati:

“O King sovereign, I am immensely pleased by your purity and chastity, by your abstinence and self-restraint, the observance of the rules of austerity, and all the heart with which you worshipped me in devotion. O Aswapati, Ruler of Madra, ask what you desire, the boon; falter not in any way, in performance of the duties of the dharma.”

Full of maternal love to give the gifts the child asks for, she also reminds Aswapati to follow dharma as he has been doing till now. Sri Aurobindo grasps this idea of maternal love:

“Someone came infinite and absolute.  
A being of wisdom, power and delight,  
Even as a mother draws her child to her arms,  
Took to her breast Nature and world and soul.  
Abolishing the signless emptiness,  
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless hush,  
Piercing the limitless Unknowable,  
Into the liberty of the motionless depths  
A beautiful and felicitous lustre stole.  
The Power, the Light, the Bliss no word can speak  
Imaged itself in a surprising beam  
And built a golden passage to his heart  
Touching through him all longing sentient things.”

‘A surprising beam’. It is as if Aswapati is made one with the entire creation, such is the power of the divine touch that even sorrow seems no

different from joy and in a trice Aswapati gains universal consciousness. The individual remains himself but is also part of the universal. How wonderful this world would be if each one of us is able to gain this universal consciousness which is the spiritual view!

Under the Supreme Mother's aegis this new world can definitely be built. If the divine light can invade Aswapati, it can invade the whole world if the world desires it. Meanwhile Aswapati would be the representative of mankind for he has been chosen by the Mother. The Goddess Savitri in Vyasa has Vedic beginnings, being the child of the Sun, Savitar. The motherhood portrayed in the Vedas has to be studied with care and concentration to understand the importance given to Savitri by Vyasa and Sri Aurobindo.

The *Bhu Sukta* in the Vedas is a description of the mother as Earth Goddess, Vasundhara. One of the terms used for Bhu Devi is "*andhoparisati*" which means she is a mother who lives for her metaphorically blind children. Haven't we experienced the anxiety of human mothers for their physically blind or mentally-challenged children? Do they do it all for any return for themselves? It is pure love to help these children achieve a normal life. Hence Mother Earth is also known as "*medini*", one who holds up all sentient beings.

The touch of the Mother as "a surprising beam" has poured into Aswapati a new strength and hope. No more will he divide area as light and dark. No more divisions like birth and death. All experience is an undulating movement. Opposites lose their divided life. Man-made illusions are gone. Accepting the Mother's closeness itself is soaring beyond the dualities of love and hate, joy and sorrow. When She is with us, when you feel her presence, there Delight comes and takes its post. Automatically our hearts sing joyously a paean. This point is beautifully brought forth by Sri Aurobindo as he places a wonderful prayer to the Mother at this stage:

"Hers is the mystery the Night conceals;  
The spirit's alchemist energy is hers;  
She is the golden bridge, the wonderful fire.  
The luminous heart of the Unknown is she,  
A power of silence in the depths of God;  
She is the Force, the inevitable Word,  
The magnet of our difficult ascent,

The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,  
The Light that leans from the unrealised Vasts,  
The joy that beckons from the impossible,  
The Might of all that never yet came down."

'The magnet of our difficult ascent'. The prayer that has risen in his heart automatically also helps him give a total offering to constitute the sacrifice. Lest any minute desire in him betray this universal consciousness, lest any human weakness in him distance him from the divine, he performs the *poorna-ahuti* to mark the conclusion of the yajna:

"He tore desire up from its bleeding roots  
And offered to the gods the vacant place.  
Thus could he bear the touch immaculate."

This passage marks the major transition from Vyasa to Sri Aurobindo in Aswapati. In Vyasa, when Goddess Savitri appears, the king asks for a child to continue his dynasty when she offers a boon:

"O Goddess, it was with the intention of begetting children for performing religious rites that I had initiated the holy sacrifice; grant several sons that the line of my ancestors may grow. If so pleased Thou art, O Goddess, I ask for this one boon that I entreat of Thee; the twice-born, the wise of the world, tell me that the proper begetting of progeny is a great dharma."

There is a brief conversation between the Goddess and Aswapati. She says that Brahma has already decided to give him a daughter at the earliest. So a luminous child will be born to him soon: *kanya tejaswini saumya kshiprameva bhavishyati*. Did the Mother chance to see any line of disappointment in Aswapati's face? He may have hoped for a son to continue the line, but Brahma is giving a daughter. However, he does not speak. It is as well for the Goddess continues: "You should not in the least utter anything or argue against it; it is as bestowed by the Father-Creator that I tell it so, pleased that I am with you."

Now apparently Aswapati replies expressing his gratitude. And though she had already said the child will be born soon, *kshiprameva bhavishyati*, Aswapati repeats the word and entreats her not to tarry any more: *prasaadayaamaasa punah kshiprametad bhavishyati*. The Goddess then withdraws.

What was the tapasya that brought Aswapati face to face with the Divine Mother, helped him converse with her so that he could gain the boon to be granted at the earliest, *kshiprameva*? We have no idea how much meditation upon this passage was undertaken by Sri Aurobindo. All we know is that the poem Savitri was half a century in the making. A good deal of the significances compressed in the lines by Vyasa must have revealed themselves to Sri Aurobindo in his yogic meditation. The results, the expansions on the original ideas in the style of the classical Sanskrit writers, come to us in the course of two cantos as two independent powers. One power is the ability to look into the future and into what constitutes ideal humanity. This is certainly an inspiration for those of us who find that man's nature tends to be like a dog's tail! If this New Creation has been seen by a rishi, then it must be true, and is sure to take place in the future. One man's universal consciousness becomes the natural way of life for all humanity.

Aswapati has a vision of this golden future. As he awaits the next step in the ascent while he also looks forward to the descent of the avatar to transform the world, the transformed world itself appears before him as a blueprint. A great peace wraps him up in total quiet as "a new and marvellous creation" rises before him. The denizens of this creation fascinate us no end:

"A universal vision that unites,  
A sympathy of nerve replying to nerve,  
Hearing that listens to thought's inner sound  
And follows the rhythmic meanings of the heart,  
A touch that needs not hands to feel, to clasp,  
Were there the native means of consciousness  
And heightened the intimacy of soul with soul...  
In these new worlds projected he became  
A portion of the universal gaze,  
A station of the all-inhabiting light,  
A ripple on a single sea of peace."

Sri Aurobindo also points out that Aswapati had not ignored the purblind world from which he has risen. He remembers its two negations – the Materialist's Denial and the Refusal of the Ascetic — very well, and how the two divergent pathways would not meet. For this world is begun (or thinks it is begun) by an "unknowing Force", in its middle is the "embodied striving soul" and in the end "a silent spirit denying life". Aswapati is aware of this but is far away from it as he has fallen into a "mystic sleep". The suffering humanity calls out to him as the deliverer, one who has gone in the front and Aswapati can feel an answering cry from the "occult Supreme". How can a mother ever forget her child or remain deaf to its cry of distress? So he (rather his heart which he had torn out and offered to her) turns towards the answering cry; the world should not be abandoned to remain forever in ignorance. Individual realisation is not *poorna yoga*! And his aspiring heart is midway between his human personality with its flaws and his true self which is electrically free:

"Interceding twixt God's day and the mortal's night,  
Accepting worship as its single law,  
Accepting bliss as the sole cause of things,  
Refusing the austere joy which none can share,  
Refusing the calm that lives for calm alone,  
To her it turned for whom it willed to be.  
In the passion of its solitary dream  
It lay like a closed soundless oratory  
Where sleeps a consecrated argent floor  
Lit by a single and untrembling ray  
And an invisible Presence kneels in prayer."

Isn't this exactly like sadhaks praying in the Matrimandir, close to the crystal? In that very heart which had been offered in total sacrifice to the Divine Mother, she comes down to stay. We search for the Divine all over the world but she is all the time with us, in us! This is why the ancients have said that the body itself is a temple and the *sanctum sanctorum* is the heart. The veil between the aspiring spirit and answering Grace is now gone and Aswapati is able to 'see':

“Even lost in slumber, mute, inanimate  
 His very body answered to her power.  
 The One he worshipped was within him now:  
 Flame-pure, ethereal-tressed, a mighty Face  
 Appeared and lips moved by immortal words;  
 Lids, Wisdom’s leaves, drooped over rapture’s orbs.  
 A marble monument of ponderings, shone  
 A forehead, sight’s crypt, and large like ocean’s gaze  
 Towards Heaven, two tranquil eyes of boundless thought  
 Looked into man’s and saw the god to come.”

The Mother spoke. In what language did she speak? Ah, she speaks and Aswapati understands. She speaks in Sanskrit in the Mahabharata tale. Aswapati also speaks in Sanskrit. Here she speaks in English and it remains a divine voice; so is the aspiration of Aswapati in English! She understands Aswapati’s goal which is not interested anymore in the limited realm of dynastic future. And Sri Aurobindo makes the Sanskrit line in Vyasa yield its significances, “you should not in the least utter anything or argue against it”, *uttaram cha na te kinschid vyaaharthavyam kathanjchana:*

“Awake not the immeasurable descent,  
 Speak not my secret name to hostile Time;  
 Man is too weak to bear the Infinite’s weight.  
 Truth born too soon might break the imperfect earth.  
 Leave the all-seeing Power to hew its way:  
 In thy single vast achievement reign apart  
 Helping the world with thy great lonely days. ...  
 Only one boon, to greaten thy spirit, demand;  
 Only one joy, to raise thy kind, desire.  
 Above blind fate and the antagonist powers  
 Moveless there stands a high unchanging Will;  
 To its omnipotence leave thy work’s result.  
 All things shall change in God’s transfiguring hour.”

The Mother seems to be reminding him of the purpose with which he had set out on his spiritual journey for self-realisation. But Sri Aurobindo’s Aswapati is now arguing not for himself but for the entire humanity. Hadn’t her touch, his success in yoga sadhana, revealed him of a great future for humanity? Must we wait for aeons and aeons undergoing pain and death before we reach the level of perfection? In a marvellous passage Sri Aurobindo unveils his vision:

I saw the Omnipotent’s flaming pioneers  
 Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life  
 Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;  
 Forerunners of a divine multitude,  
 Out of the paths of the morning star they came  
 Into the little room of mortal life.  
 I saw them cross the twilight of an age,  
 The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,  
 The great creators with wide brows of calm,  
 The massive barrier-breakers of the world  
 And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,  
 The labourers in the quarries of the gods,  
 The messengers of the Incommunicable,  
 The architects of immortality.”

There have been so many! In our own times Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda! Down the centuries these architects have come, but their influence has been limited, at times minimal. Should it be so for aeons till the New Creation becomes a present tense? Aswapati can wait no more, humanity can wait no more! Like Kalidasa and others before him, one line from Vyasa is enough for Sri Aurobindo. Vyasa’s Aswapati entreats Goddess Savitri to fulfil the promise speedily in the near future, *prasaadayaamaasa punah kshiprametad bhavishyati*. But he is also careful not to cross the boon of the Goddess. Yes, one daughter she would grant him, but this one daughter should be an incarnation that can transform the whole of humanity. He wants the Mother herself to incarnate: “Let thy infinity in one body live.” He prays for All-Knowledge and All-Love to enshawl the mind and heart of



this avatar. Power too, “the power of God.” It is an awesome speech which is mantric for our ears. After such a prayer, how can a mother remain indifferent?

Vyasa’s Aswapati had asked for a speedy fulfilment and no more; so the Mother had withdrawn immediately. In Sri Aurobindo’s epic, the Supreme Mother’s reply to Aswapati becomes yet another meditation on the phrase, *kanya tejasvini* to describe Aswapati’s heir. Now we glimpse the avatar for *tejas* is the capacity to oppose evil, to rule over others. It is not a crucified body but a glorified body that is the need of the hour:

“One shall descend and break the iron Law,  
Change Nature’s doom by the lone spirit’s power.  
A limitless Mind that can contain the world,  
A sweet and violent heart of ardent calms  
Moved by the passions of the gods shall come....  
She shall bear Wisdom in her voiceless bosom,  
Strength shall be with her like a conqueror’s sword  
And from her eyes the Eternal’s bliss shall gaze.  
A seed shall be sown in Death’s tremendous hour,  
A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;  
Nature shall overleap her mortal step;  
Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.”

Vyasa says that after the Goddess Savitri withdrew from his sight, the king went back to his capital and ruled the land according to dharma (*prajaa dharmena paalayan*) as desired by the Goddess. This too is echoed in the epic Savitri. From his yogic trance he awoke “beneath the ignorant vault of Night”:

A wanderer from the occult invisible suns  
Accomplishing the fate of transient things,  
A god in the figure of the arisen beast,  
He raised his brow of conquest to the heavens  
Establishing the empire of the soul  
On Matter and its bounded universe

As on a solid rock in infinite seas.  
The Lord of Life resumed his mighty rounds  
In the scant field of the ambiguous globe.”

(To be continued )

## References

- 1 Translations from Vyasa’s Savitri Upakhyana quoted in this series of essays are by R.Y. Deshpande
- 2 Sri Aurobindo, **Hymns to the Mystic Fire** (1985 ed.), p. 21

# Sri Aurobindo On “The Two Negations”: Reconsideration Of The Materialism-Spiritualism Debate

R.C.Pradhan

Sri Aurobindo’s “The Two Negations”<sup>1</sup> in *The Life Divine* has great philosophical significance in view of the fact that it leads a reconsideration of the debate between materialism and spiritualism as two opposed metaphysical schools. From time immemorial, philosophers have been divided between those who affirm the supremacy of matter over spirit and those who affirm the supremacy of spirit over matter. The former are the materialists who either deny spirit altogether or admit a mere secondary existence of the spirit, while the latter are the spiritualists who either deny matter altogether or admit only a subsidiary role for it. Thus there is, on the one hand, “the materialist denial” and on the other “the refusal of the ascetic”<sup>2</sup>, as Sri Aurobindo has put it, thus leading to a clash of ideas and world-views.

Sri Aurobindo has made a new metaphysical move to undercut the so-called opposition between materialism and spiritualism by suggesting that matter and spirit are not two substances or realities opposed to each other. For him, both matter and spirit are two forms of the same reality, that is, both are two ways in which consciousness has manifested itself in the process of evolution. Accordingly, while matter is a lower form of consciousness, the spirit represents the highest form of consciousness. This brings an end to the so-called opposition between matter and spirit.

In this essay, I will focus on Sri Aurobindo’s larger metaphysical picture which abolishes the binary opposition between matter and spirit. The matter–spirit dualism which is entrenched in the Platonic and Cartesian thought is challenged by Sri Aurobindo. Like Hegel, Sri Aurobindo has held that both materialist monism and its counterpart, spiritual monism fail to explain the

nature of reality and thus fail to provide the true picture of the human nature and the nature of the universe in its totality and depth.

## I. The Materialist Monism : Where It Went Wrong

It has been the age-old practice in metaphysics to divide reality into matter and spirit, between the unconscious and the conscious, and between Prakriti and Purusha, these two principles being diametrically opposed to each other. Thus out of this fundamental dualism, arose the metaphysical urge to accept the primacy of one over the other, thus ending in either materialist monism like that of the Carvakas or in the spiritualist monism like that of Shankara. The materialist denies the spirit as non-existent because all that he can admit as real is matter or any of its myriad forms. Thus, as Sri Aurobindo points out:

The materialist has an easier field; it is possible for him by denying Spirit to arrive at a more readily convincing simplicity of statement, a real Monism, the Monism of Matter or else of Force<sup>3</sup>.

Materialism has had a triumphant march in the modern times after the rise of the natural sciences in the West thus eclipsing the dominance of religious thoughts in the Western world. The spiritual point of view got a jolt by the rise of the material natural sciences because the latter revolted against any claim regarding the existence of the spirit as anti-scientific and superstitious.

The materialist explanation of the universe including life and mind in terms of matter is reductionist<sup>4</sup> to say the least, because it explains everything in terms of the one and the only reality, that is, matter. That is, materialism never succeeds in explaining reality because it leaves out of account the vast realms of life and mind in the universe. It, in fact, does not explain life and mind, but explains them away in the spirit of aggressive eliminationism<sup>5</sup>. This pursuit of one-sided knowledge of the universe has led to a very narrow understanding of the human nature and its multiple manifestation in ethics, aesthetics, religion and philosophy. Materialism is a short-sighted world-view that really misses the richness and the many-sided nature of the cosmos.

Sri Aurobindo does not reject materialism out of hand because in it he finds a glimmer of true insight in so far as it admits the reality of the physical universe and shows thereby that matter itself is a reality of unbounded

structure. Therefore modern science itself vouchsafes for the fact that there is something more in the physical universe that is grand and systematic. Sri Aurobindo writes:

When we have proved Matter and realised its secret capacities, the very knowledge which has found its convenience in that temporary limitation must cry to us, like the Vedic Restrainers, 'Forth now and push forward also in other fields' <sup>6</sup>.

That is, the very nature of scientific knowledge pushes itself beyond its present horizon in search of a greater knowledge far beyond the sense-knowledge of the empirical type. Such scientific knowledge can never remain within boundaries already set by a particular paradigm.

As Sri Aurobindo observes:

But since its very soul is the search for Knowledge, it will be unable to cry a halt; as it reaches the barriers of sense knowledge and of the reasoning from sense-knowledge, its very rush will carry it beyond<sup>7</sup>...

Thus science itself in its unlimited pursuit of knowledge can very well take us beyond the present state of the knowledge of the visible universe; the realm beyond the physical universe is waiting to be discovered. As Sri Aurobindo optimistically says: We see already that advance in its obscure beginnings<sup>8</sup>.

## II. The Spiritualist Monism : The Emptiness Of 'The Ascetic Refusal'

The spiritualist monism declares that reality is one and that is spirit or consciousness. It makes the spirit the only reality reducing in the process the material world to a mere illusion or a projection of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo takes Shankara's Advaitism as a form of spiritual monism that declares the world to be Maya. In his own words:

Shankara's wordless, inactive Self and his Maya of many names and forms are equally disparate and irreconcilable entities; their rigid antagonism can terminate only by the dissolution of the multitudinous illusion into the sole truth of an eternal Silence<sup>9</sup>.

The monism of the Advaita makes the material world a form of the Maya that shrouds the reality of Brahman. In this system matter has only a derivative or phenomenal existence.

The spiritualist monism is no less reductionist than materialism because it

also denies the reality of the material world by affirming the sole existence of the spirit. This leads to reductionism in the reverse order and denies what is affirmed by science and commonsense. Spiritual monism goes against the very spirit of our empirical knowledge by suggesting that what we see around us is only a matter of our own projections. Sri Aurobindo does not endorse such idealism or spiritualism both in its subjective and objective forms for obvious reasons. First of all, such a world-view does not fully represent the total reality because it leaves out of account the vast realm of matter and life in the world. Secondly, it leads to the negation of everything that is this-worldly, especially the mundane human life. The doctrine of Maya has led us to believe that this world is not the place for spiritual life and that we must escape from it into a realm far beyond the frontiers of this world. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

But all have lived in the shadow of the great Refusal and the final end for all is the garb of the ascetic. The general conception of existence has been permeated with the Buddhistic theory of chain of Karma and with the consequent antinomy of bondage and liberation, bondage by birth, liberation by cessation from birth<sup>10</sup>.

Thus the philosophy of life based on the refusal of the world by the ascetic has created a general metaphysical indifference to the world in space, time and history thereby bringing into existence a "consensus that not in this world of the dualities can there be our kingdom of heaven, but beyond, whether in the joys of the eternal Vrindavan or the high beatitude of the Brahmaloaka, beyond all manifestations in some ineffable Nirvana or where all separate experience is lost in the featureless unity of the indefinable Existence"<sup>11</sup>.

Sri Aurobindo does not minimise the importance of the spiritual monism but faults its excessive refusal to entertain the reality of the material existence and therewith to refuse to admit any value of the this-worldly life. He refuses to accept that the world itself is devoid of the spirit or that there is complete absence of the spirit in this world itself. In short, he rejects the suggestion that the world is Maya or that its reality is a matter of sheer illusion. Any form of monism that goes against the very of nature of reality as an integral system is not acceptable to Sri Aurobindo. In the spirit of reconciliation between materialism and spiritualism, he offers a grand synthesis of matter and spirit in the harmonious totality of the supreme existence.

### III. Spirit And Matter : Towards A Grand Synthesis

Sri Aurobindo's critique of spiritualism and materialism as two ideological standpoints opposed to each other brings out the severe limitations of both and shows that though each is right in what it asserts, each is wrong in what it denies. Materialism is wrong in denying the reality of the spirit, while spiritualism is wrong in denying the reality of matter. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo undertakes the task of bringing out the importance of both matter and spirit in a new synthesis which while admitting the independent reality of both goes further in showing that both are related to each other in a unique bond.

For Sri Aurobindo, matter is real to the extent it is not divorced from the spirit of which it is a manifestation. Matter is the first visible form in which the spirit or consciousness takes a concrete shape. It cannot be the case that the material world with all its physical laws is a matter of our mental projection. The world has its own existence, but not the way the materialist thinks it to be. The material world is real as a part of the higher consciousness which manifests itself in the forms of all material existence. This is where Sri Aurobindo shows to the materialist that the world taken only in terms of the physical laws is not enough; it has to be seen in what way the material world is related to a higher reality than matter, that is, the spirit. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The world is real precisely because it exists only in consciousness; for it is a Conscious Energy one with Being that creates it. It is the existence of material form in its own right apart from the self-illuminated energy which assumes the form, that would be a contradiction of the truth of things, a phantasmagoria, a nightmare, an impossible falsehood<sup>12</sup>.

That is, matter divorced from the spirit is a false abstraction from its own existence as a concrete reality. It is because matter cannot exist on its own right except as a form of the higher consciousness of which it is a form.

The materialist might argue that matter itself cannot be a form of a higher reality like spirit since it does not show any sign of being conscious. Besides, according to the materialist, matter is the very negation of spirit and thus it has to be governed by only physical laws. Sri Aurobindo refutes this argument by showing that matter is created out of consciousness and has consciousness already involved in it as its underlying potentiality<sup>13</sup>. For him, matter is a form of consciousness in that what we call matter is just a form of energy and at

a still higher stage matter is consciousness itself. There is no matter in the sense of something inert, unconscious and lifeless in the scientific sense; all matter is throbbing with life and consciousness however rudimentary and undeveloped. In this sense he follows the Upanishadic dictum: "Matter also is Brahman"<sup>14</sup>. However, Sri Aurobindo's argument is based on the premise that everything in the universe is Brahman, the conscious spirit and so it is concluded that matter cannot exist as an autonomous entity.

Sri Aurobindo does not reject matter out of hand but gives it a new definition by suggesting that matter is a form of consciousness and it is the lowest form of the manifestation of the spirit. Matter is thus given a new status in the whole scheme of reality without sacrificing anything important regarding the material world. The so-called laws of nature are given due importance in the background of the vast realm of reality which includes non-physical facts as well. The physical facts are not the whole of reality, according to Sri Aurobindo because there is a supraphysical realm waiting to be discovered by the human mind. He writes:

As soon as we begin to investigate the operations of mind and of supermind, in themselves and without the prejudgment that is determined from the beginning to see in them only a subordinate term of Matter, we come into contact with a mass of phenomena which escape entirely from the rigid hold, the limiting dogmatism of the materialist formula<sup>15</sup>.

It is the rigid dogmatism of materialism that blocks our knowledge of the supraphysical realm which is very much real. Therefore what is needed is a recognition of the limitations of the materialist world-view and then recognising that there are realities which pass beyond the domain of the senses and sensuous knowledge.

### IV. From The Physical To The Supraphysical

Sri Aurobindo takes the physical reality only as a fraction of the supraphysical reality in view of the fact that there is more than the physical world which metaphysics can discover beyond the horizon of our empirical knowledge. We have been blindfolded by the materialist sciences so as not to recognise the higher reality. The physical world is only a signal of the fact that the higher reality is non-physical in nature, that is, is of the nature of consciousness.

And the moment we recognise, as our enlarging experience compels us to recognise, that there are in the universe knowable realities beyond the range of the senses and in man powers and faculties which determine rather than are determined by the material organs through which they hold themselves in touch with the world of the senses,— that outer shell of our true and complete existence,— the premise of materialist Agnosticism disappears. We are ready for a large statement and an ever-developing inquiry<sup>16</sup> .

The large statement consists in that we are not basically prisoners of the material world and that something more real and important is awaiting our metaphysical inquiry.

The realm beyond the physical world is not a mere abstraction nor a mere gaseous mental image. It is rather the reality on which our physical existence stands. Consciousness or the spirit which is the foundation of the physical world is manifest in the physical world and yet goes beyond it. In that sense, the spirit is not divorced from the material world; it is all the while peeping through the physical world. The physical world is its garb, the outer clothing such that the spirit speaks through it as its means of expression. Thus Sri Aurobindo finds no incompatibility between the physical reality and its supraphysical counterpart. In fact, he makes it necessary that we know the physical world before we can venture into the supraphysical world. “The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness— to its heights we can always reach— when we keep our feet firmly on the physical”<sup>17</sup>. The knowledge of the physical world itself leads to the knowledge of the supraphysical world by virtue of its own limitations and by its necessary thrust towards the knowledge of the higher kind.

Sri Aurobindo divinises the physical world by showing it in the light of the higher consciousness or the spirit which is always speaking in the language of the physical world. But the true nature of the spirit will be revealed only when we transcend the physical world and seek the knowledge of the higher reality. Our finite intellect and language are geared to capture the physical world and so they leave out the fine meaning of the higher reality in the medley of world-directed symbols. We need new symbols to track the truth of the higher reality in the higher form of knowledge. Sri Aurobindo writes:

There is even a kind of knowledge which is one with Identity and by which, in a sense, It can be known. Certainly, that knowledge cannot be reproduced successfully in the terms of thought and speech, but when we have attained to it, the result is a revaluation of That in the symbols of our cosmic consciousness<sup>18</sup> . . . .

This knowledge, definitely higher than the knowledge of the physical world, is expressed in symbols which only a developed or spiritually illuminated mind can decipher. Still higher is the Supermind that can have direct knowledge of the spirit because of its proximity to the higher reality both in essence and power.

The supramental consciousness is the next higher level of human mind in which the truth of the spirit will be revealed. This level of supremental consciousness can be the gateway to the higher reality not yet recognised by modern science and metaphysics. Sri Aurobindo’s effort is to unravel the mystery of the supramental consciousness which can decode the language of the spirit and can have a genuine grasp of the higher reality.

## V. The Language Of The Spirit : Overcoming The Binary Categories

Sri Aurobindo considers the language of the spirit writ large on the universe for the reason it is in this language that the universe is made understandable to us. The physical universe along with the world of life and mind is very much intelligible in terms of consciousness which is the very essence of the spirit. That is to say that nothing remains a matter of inscrutable mystery in the universe if the language of the spirit is properly understood. Not even the so-called physical reality which has been the domain of the scientific research for centuries.

For Sri Aurobindo, the language of the spirit is the language of harmony, synthesis and reconciliation between opposite categories. In it there is no place for dualism between mind and matter, conscious and the unconscious and the animate and the inanimate. It is the language of one reality, that is, of consciousness in different degrees. The so-called matter is a form of consciousness in that consciousness is dimly manifest in it. From Life and Mind to Supermind, there is the gradation of the manifestation of consciousness. Thus the opposite categories of matter and spirit are fused together in the

category of consciousness. It overcomes the category-binarity and leads to a category-fusion. That establishes harmony among all opposite categories and realities As Sri Aurobindo observes:

We shall preserve the truths of material Science and its real utilities in the final harmony, even if many or even if all of its existing forms have to be broken or left aside. An even greater scruple of right preservation must guide us in our dealing with the legacy, however actually diminished or depreciated, of the Aryan past<sup>19</sup>.

That is, the material sciences and the spiritual knowledge of the ancient rishis must be fused in the harmony of the universal language of the spirit. The harmony is not only at the level of categories but also at the level of reality in that what is material is at the same time spiritual by nature. Spirit and matter do not exist independently, but harmoniously within the broad spectrum of consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo resolves the spiritualism-materialism debate by bringing both on the same platform within the integral point of view. He offers the alternative standpoint in which both the spiritual and the material points view are fused. This fusion of points of view does not deny their basic standpoint but makes them harmoniously coexist in a higher integral point of view. That is to say, it makes both matter and spirit co-habit the same ontological space such that one does not cancel the other. This leads to a widening of the point of view in which what is looked as matter is assimilated into the spiritual realm and similarly, what is taken as spiritual is brought down to the plane of the material world in a bid to make them meet at a point of convergence.

Sri Aurobindo's vision of the grand synthesis is marked by the remarkable reconciliatory spirit of making the material world the home of the spirit and to take up matter as the instrument of the divine manifestation on Earth. Such a view of reality rises above all petty divisions created by the finite mind and aspires for a supramental point of view that destroys these divisions and disensions created by the inferior mind. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognise not only eternal Spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept Matter of which it is made, as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves constantly His garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of His mansions<sup>20</sup>.

Thus there is a lively reconciliation of the spirit and the material world in the form of the spirit taking upon itself the task of manifesting its nature in the form of the material world.

## VI. The Spiritual Point Of View : Integralism Re-Affirmed

Sri Aurobindo makes it very clear that in spite of his sympathy for the scientific point of view affirming the reality of matter, he admits the overall supremacy of the spiritual point of view because of the fact that it is the spirit which manifests itself as matter. He does not make the spiritual point of view excluding the scientific point of view but of transforming it into a spiritual point of view. Therefore his central point of view is spiritual rather than scientific and materialist in character.

The reason why Sri Aurobindo rejects the classical spiritual point of view is that it excluded the material life and world altogether declaring it to be a matter of illusion or Maya. The so-called "refusal of the ascetic" led to the rejection of matter and material world and life as of no significance because it was taken to be bereft of spiritual content. That is why the material life was condemned wholesale by the so-called spiritualists. Sri Aurobindo gets rid of this whole exclusivist approach by opening up the possibility of spiritualising the material life by making spirituality a content of the ordinary life lived in the world.

It is a subject-matter of serious philosophical investigation as to how the mundane life can be elevated to the spiritual plane. It is the main effort of Sri Aurobindo to make life in the world spiritual by transformation of the human consciousness. That is why he makes elaborate effort to understand human consciousness in terms of its possibility of divine transformation. He sees no conflict between the human consciousness with the divine or higher consciousness. That is why he takes the divine consciousness or the supramental consciousness as the end point of the evolution of man on earth. He writes:

The conception which we have so far been striving to form is that of the essence only of the supramental life which the divine soul possesses securely in the being of Sachchidananda, but which the human soul has to manifest in this body of Sachchidananda formed here into the mould of a mental and physical living<sup>21</sup>.

Thus the new age of spiritual or divine life on earth is meant to transform the present human existence in the light of the supramental life. Such a conception of life is a far cry from the prevailing materialist view of life and also of the received view of spiritual life on the lines of the classical spiritualism.

## VII. Conclusion

Sri Aurobindo's revolutionary conception of the divine life is laid in the "The Two Negations". It prepares the ground for the development of the idea of a harmonious life of spiritual realisation which he elaborates later. Therefore, it is important that we closely study this concept thoroughly to bring out its philosophical significance in *The Life Divine*.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 7.
4. See David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1996), Chapter 2.
5. See Paul M. Churchland, "Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes" in *Mind and Cognition: An Anthology*, ed. William G. Lycan (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1990; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1999), pp. 120-132.
6. Sri Aurobindo, op.cit., p. 13.
7. Ibid., p. 13.
8. Ibid., p. 13.
9. Ibid., p. 7.
10. Ibid., p. 23.
11. Ibid., p. 23.
12. Ibid., p. 22.
13. See Sri Aurobindo, op.cit on the nature of involution of the Spirit in matter.
14. Sri Aurobindo, op.cit., p. 6.
15. Ibid., p. 10.
16. Ibid., p. 10.
17. Ibid., p. 11.
18. Ibid., p. 12.
19. Ibid., p. 24.
20. Ibid., p. 6.
21. Ibid., p. 159.

## Charles Darwin And Sri Aurobindo : Evolutionists With A Difference

Tapan Banerjee

Nature always hates the stereotype. Her acts are restless and she does not allow the same string of events to follow repetition. That is why nature is found to be full of discords and wonders (although, in a sense, perception of discord is a matter of frustration of human expectation and, so is wonder). Differentials emerge to set the domain of consciousness (when it is the case of human nature) that virtually reflects an adaptive success. An adaptation, in this respect, is said to assume the character of value through the rejection of disvalues, while consciousness asserts the adaptive supremacy through ceaseless winning over the immediately previous ego, thereby establishing man's everyday evolution. Consciousness, in this regard, becomes a phenomenon in the world of evolution that is, itself, a great observable (but not provable) phenomenon (and, never a law). This phenomenon of evolution is not a monopoly of biology, as is often misinterpreted, but it is involved with every Space-Time event. This is where the present paper takes its stand to study two personalities of two different Space and Time. One of them is Charles Darwin, the other is Sri Aurobindo. While the former is known to have revolutionised the traditional concept of organic evolution, the latter is revered for his thesis on spiritual evolution.

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The word 'evolution' is derived from the Latin root *evolvere*, which means 'to unroll'. While unrolling anything we eagerly await to know the yet unknown, which implies that, the word 'evolution' essentially opens up a problem in a different form. This is how we understand that 'evolution' extends its significance beyond pure biology — its scope is virtually unlimited. There are, how-

ever, some terms that appear as near-synonyms to evolution, contextually these require to be made distinct. The terms, which we usually come across, are: change or motion (*parispanda*), development, transmutation, transformation, manifestation, synthesis (in Chemistry), *parināma* (in the *Sāmkhya*). Each of these has its own aspect of explanation, and hence, the vocabulary needs to be understood well. The terms apply to every finite object of existence that shows an inherent tendency to transcend itself, thereby being viewed as transitory.

To ‘change’ is to become the other and it implies instability bringing alternations. The instability is caused and geared up by molecular movements. ‘Motion’ indicates a series of displacements from a particular point. ‘Development’, in a living being, is associated with the growing up of the being (i.e. ontogeny) and expresses the unfolding of what has already potential existence. ‘Transmutation’ (derived from the Latin roots: *trans* = across/beyond, and *mutare* = to change) implies a drastic and irreversible change. The term ‘transformation’ comes very close to it and involves complete change of something. An observational change features what is called ‘manifestation’ or *abhivyakti* (involving the change of latency to revelation). ‘Synthesis’ ascertains production of something new, i.e. what was not there earlier. The *Sāmkhya* views ‘*parināma*’ as continuous becoming of the world. All these terminologies follow a direction towards, and are pregnant with the story of a progress or improvement or perfection. These find no room in Darwin’s evolutionary scheme, for the natural world deviates from any reasonable definition of perfection as a universal quality. The organic ‘evolution’, though, associates change of form or behaviour of a population over time (phylogeny), and proceeds by selection occurring within populations containing a large number of genetically varying individuals, rejects a directionality, for even loss of parts or behaviour, in many instances, is considered an evolutionary feature. The glaring example is man himself who, having been born with many adaptive imperfections, i.e. scars of evolution (for many characters are there without any selective value), has his seat at the apex of evolution and, therefore, rules the evolutionary history of the earth.

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Evolution is unique in itself as it combines both universal interest and accessibility. It conceives a relationship among all forms of life and admits that diver-

gence (in structure and behaviour) observed in the organic world is a play of the amplitude of time during which ever-changing interaction between a species and its environment keeps sustained to precede evolution as an invisible phenomenon. It reveals a world of likenesses and differences and, thus, forms the foundation of Natural Science.

Any science remains always ready to modify its existing ideas, i.e. it acknowledges its results as tentative. Tentativeness reflects its openness, not its weakness. If we go deep into the domain of Natural Science, we would find a series of enquiries to follow to arrive at a tentative result. The facts lead to the story of evolution of science.

Thales, the sixth century BC Greek philosopher, is considered to be the first thinker to have applied scientific interpretation of the universe. He believed that the *ā arche* (first principle) of all things is water. A similar explanation is found recorded as revelation in the Rig Veda (X.129.3 ṛk) in a far ancient India. Anaximander, another Greek philosopher, claimed that all things stem from ‘the boundless’ (which is, however, nothing supernatural). Both Empedocles (in Greece) and Cārvāka (in India) held that all matter is composed of four basic ingredients: earth, water, fire and air. Life originates and subsequently consciousness evolves from these elements, they say. Another great observer and naturalist was Aristotle who had made the first serious attempt to classify animals. Lucretius (1st century BC) wrote about the perpetual change in nature and the extinction of species. Observational and interpretative approaches of these thinkers, among many others, could be seen as an outcome of the dissatisfaction with the prevailing view of things.

That is where ‘science’ (derived from the Latin root *sciens* that means ‘knowing’) lies. A so-called scientific (testable) domain is organised around a ‘paradigm’ (in Greek, it means ‘pattern’), argues Thomas Kuhn — the 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher of science. The whole history of science tells the story of rise and fall of paradigms. Every paradigm offers innumerable scope to examine a problem and, thus, past knowledge often gets modified with passage of time towards knowing the reality. To quote Feynman “... we are trying to prove ourselves wrong as quickly as possible, because only in that way can we find progress”<sup>1</sup>. It implies making the picture of the knowable more complete, i.e. the road remains always open to a higher degree of accuracy.



Evolutionary biology is replete with exemplary cases of paradigm shifts, and, at each instance, we would find independent theories of evolution. The aim of the theories, however, coincides: it is to account for the existence of living organisms today on this earth.

The first of such theory was put forward by the French naturalist Lamarck. His view rests on the effects of conscious efforts towards use and disuse of organs followed by their improvement and he believes that the improvement is transmitted to the offspring to make ‘inheritance of acquired characters’ operative in evolution. Darwin, convinced of the mutability of species, thinks that the cause of change must lie in reproduction, in heritable variations, rather than in spontaneous changes in adult organisms. While he cannot explain the source of variations and confesses as: “Our ignorance of the laws of variation is profound”, Darwin finds small, *continuous* variations in a ‘steady accumulation, through natural selection’ mode as the raw material for evolution. But, for T. H. Huxley, a leading advocate of Darwinism, *discontinuous* and saltatory (jumping) changes bring evolution into effect. Darwin’s idea is most severely challenged by Hugo de Vries’ mutation theory at the dawn of the last century. It proves that Darwinian variations are unable to exhibit heritability, for they have no lasting effect. Mutations, occurring spontaneously in the genome, are ‘pure chance’ phenomena of large scale quantum jump of an *allele* (one of the two partners of a gene). This discovery still offers a paramount interest in the evolutionary queries and, the journey narrated, informs one of a domain with evolutionary at its centre

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A developmental and directional view of evolution with a vertical form of ascent from the simplest to the most complex life-forms formed the core of the pre-Darwinian period. In his own view of evolution, Darwin could not accept such a predestined pattern of development, for *natural selection* — his interpretational mechanism behind the organic evolution — works with accidental, rather than progressive, variations. Now, let us see what his understanding of the mechanism (that was, in his words, although the chief, but not the ‘exclusive means of modification’) was in the following discussion.

A five year circumnavigation had gifted Darwin with a world full of varied

observations and findings. And he gifted the world a theory that was both explicit and vague. It appeared explicit owing to its simplicity in depiction and, vague (chiefly to the Western creationists) as because it had no room for the scriptural myths on creation. The idea in the theory was not at all a new one, but he was the first person who put it on a sound scientific basis. At this point it is to be noted that Darwin had himself never referred to his specific theory as ‘evolution’; instead he used the phrase ‘descent with modification’. The most distinctive feature of his theory appeared as a substitution of the natural for the supernatural, cause for biological adaptation. His works thus gave a new purpose and direction to biological enquiry, and formed the conceptual bedrock of modern biology. In his search for a better explanation than Special Creation (by the Almighty superintending designer) mentioned in the *Genesis* to account for the undeniable basic unity of the entire living world, Darwin reached a point whence he could say that incessant struggle for existence among the living organisms was the key factor behind individual variability. Else, “all animals and all plants throughout all time and space should be related to each other”<sup>3</sup>. Here an often-overlooked wonder of nature emerges before us. Possibly from that period, the term *evolution* virtually became synonymous with Darwinism. He was clearly convinced of even the slightest variation and called the “preservation of favourable variations and the rejection of injurious variations”<sup>4</sup> Natural Selection. He felt that the mechanism behind the change of species acts with extreme slowness and fails to act in absence of variation. Darwin’s significant interest in ‘selection’ in progress developed partly because it was an evidence for the mutability of species. In fact, evolution is founded on the binary relationship between mutation and selection. Darwin assumed that *natural selection* rejects all but the fittest type. It seems that the phrase could have more aptly been termed *natural rejection* instead. His observations support that nature grants a vast yet a finite time span for natural selection to work, whereby very small ‘profitable’ variations are inherited in the preserved being. By ‘profitable’ variation Darwin implied a *useful* one that could help outlive others in reproductive success. It further implies that, natural selection evolves only ‘selfish’ organisms. Darwin himself wrote: “natural selection acts solely by and for the good of each”<sup>5</sup>. However, its limitation appears in its inability “to modify the structure of one species”<sup>6</sup>, i.e, its influence emerges individualistic. While comparing man’s

‘methodical’ mode of selection with that of nature, Darwin presents a scientific yet poetic attitude by saying: “Man can act only on external and visible characters; nature cares nothing for appearances, -.. . Man selects only for his own good; Nature only for that of the being which she tends”<sup>7</sup>. It asserts *nature’s* individualistic treatment. Truly, natural selection, according to Darwin, occurs between individuals within a population to impel beneficial adaptations evolve among smaller entities.

Nature thus selects in her own way towards differential survival of entities. If the way be viewed as nature’s ‘sport’, then it could otherwise be equated with selfishness that is “expected in any entity that deserves the title of a basic unit of natural selection”<sup>8</sup>—views the post-Darwinian naturalist, Richard Dawkins. He considers *genes* as the fundamental and practical units of natural selection and cannot accept individual, population or species in that place, for the smaller a unit, the greater remains the chance of evolutionary stability. Genes, the “denizens of geological time”<sup>9</sup>, also behave as the fundamental units of self-interest. But, it does not imply that genes and characters bear a simple one-to-one correspondence. Genetic variations are seen as ‘mistakes’ in the incessant copying process of reproduction. These *mistakes* make evolution possible, says Dawkins. Long geological periods are required to finally select such accumulated ‘mistakes’ and, in this respect, Darwinian selection virtually operates by an unobservable and unpredictable mechanism.

According to Darwin, natural selection leads to organic diversities through “much extinction of the less improved and intermediate forms of life”<sup>10</sup>, i.e. it advances through a constructive destruction idea (where less adaptive organisms are rejected on the one hand, while the more adaptive ones are selected to ensure survival and ensure diversity on the other). Arrival of diversified descendants promotes chances of their winning of life’s battle, thereby attributing adaptation as an organic feature evolved by natural selection. It also appears as a creative force of Nature. But, de Vries does not support such an idea. He rather argues natural selection as a ‘sieve’ and holds that even the mutants are sieved for selection. In action, the selection is not conscious (hence no teleology)—rather a ‘blind’ process. One has to admit a sense of novelty in such a-teleological selection. But, in the evolution of a complex organ like an eye, the design of the eye of *a* species says much about its need for vision, i.e. the design respon-

sible for the visual acuity evolves in a direction-specific way or, teleologically. If a living being is viewed as an organised whole of numerous simple and complex organs, does not the phenomenon of evolution appear to nurture a teleological idea? Evolutionary change, however, “‘blindly’ follows the route of maximum resource use”<sup>11</sup>, i.e. it obeys the principle of economy. Through this vision Darwin introduced a novel idea to the world of evolution. His acuteness of vision lies in his observation of both retrogressive and progressive evolution in the living system, i.e. a non-linear, open process works behind evolution. As evidences, he respectively held loss of sight in cave-dwelling animals and development of subtle instinctive behaviour—both conforming to the contingencies of the environment to which an organism remains exposed. He realised that contingencies favour diversification and so comes a complexity. A non-directional idea in Darwinian evolution, accomplished essentially through natural selection, thus stands in tune with the biological equivalence of living species.

v

The theory of evolution arouses great curiosity. Apart from its biological aspect, it bears intense philosophical and ideological implications. In fact, the importance of understanding evolution becomes almost one of understanding our own place in the scheme of nature. Despite its varied interest and its ability to account for the unity and diversity of life, the theory has its limitation in its aim for it accounts for a phenomenon (evolution itself) that could probably never be observed. It also does not encourage any great anticipation of an exclusive ascent, which that of civilisation wants to otherwise detail within the cosmos. To be more precise, the cosmic struggle for existence in the world of organic evolution is supposed to be replaced by a sort of self-restraint in the progress of civilisation, so that the survival of the fittest (that tends to a vertical and singular directionality) be better viewed as the maximum survivability (having a horizontal and pluralised directionality) of the fellow beings. In reality, human beings, bound by biological endowments, can enjoy freedom from biology, with culture playing the role of selector of human drives (supposed to be inherited from the animal past). But the riddle remains: could culture, that uniquely dominates mankind, be viewed as the sole determinant of human attributes? Perhaps not, for genes primarily act as determiners, although statisti-

cally. Possibly the best way to study evolution at this moment is to view it in terms of selection occurring at the genetic level.

The evolutionary philosopher, Herbert Spencer, conceived biological evolution as a progressive process, leading only to 'higher' forms. Such progressive evolutionary pattern is also attested by the *Sāmkhya* that "assumes the continuity of the world from the lowest to the highest"<sup>12</sup>. But, does it appear as a fact in the cosmos, the world of becoming? Sri Aurobindo described evolution as a manifestation of the One into the Many, of one Consciousness-Force into its many forms. The idea asserts that the basic machinery is the same in all. In Darwin also, we discern a similar thought, for he realised that all life has arisen from an unremembered beginning, i.e. all living beings are related to each other by descent or, simply, all life is essentially one with potentialities of converting energy into matter. Although got struck by the natural diversity and growing complexity of life, Darwin held distinction between human beings and other animals as meaningless. He avowed that, mentally, "man and the lower animals do not differ in kind, although immensely in degree"<sup>13</sup>. It emphasises his view that neither any animal (including man himself) nor its mind is exempt from the evolutionary forces. Further he wrote: "The most humble organism is something much higher than the inorganic dust under our feet"<sup>14</sup>. Darwin buttressed his arguments with tests, while the pre-Darwinian ideas were mostly speculative in character. Darwin's ideas associate change of quality or, what could be called *dharmaparināma* (of the Yoga system of Patañjali), of one ceaseless 'thinking principle' so to say. Considering this into account Darwin is seen to cross the confines of biology. Man, a subject to natural selection, emerges unique in many an aspect in the living world; but, can we — with our Darwinian stand — attribute any special distinction to man? If not, confusion starts shrouding the whole idea of evolution, which conceives distinctiveness as its inevitable consequence.

Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary idea of the Many from the One goes in tune with that of the *prakṛti* (of the *Sāmkhya*) that is One yet gets progressively pluralised. *Prakṛti*, however, evolves not out of itself, but owing to the *sannidhi* or *sāihitya* of the *Puruṣa*. It reminds one of Bergson's *élan vital* ('urge'/life-force) that is common to all organisms and acts as the creative effort that becomes the chief motive force in evolution. Sri Aurobindo believes too that,

"this urge is the evolutionary will of a secret Conscious-Being"<sup>15</sup> (cf: *Tat aikṣat vahu syām* in the *Chāndyoga Upaniṣad* : VI.2.3). The force is broken into its manifold reverberations in nature. But, if evolutionary 'urge' be given priority, then one has to accept Lamarckism as the evolutionary explanation. This would be a great problem. The problem intensifies if we follow emergent evolutionists, Samuel Alexander or Lloyd Morgan. Both of them consider *nisus* (creative thirst of the universe) behind any form of evolution.

Sri Aurobindo viewed evolution as an ascent of consciousness. In his metaphysical concept, man is a being with involved consciousness wherefrom he can reach the Divine (the Reality) through evolution. Thus, evolution fundamentally emerges as a *spiritual* phenomenon to Sri Aurobindo, who always held man as the 'transitional being' in the evolutionary ladder. He also conceived that evolution always presupposes an involutionary process. Contemporary to Sri Aurobindo, there was the Palaeontologist, Chardin, who, in his book *The Phenomenon Of Man*, regarded man as having a superhuman future and stated that evolution pushes a man towards a higher goal, for he viewed evolution as 'a trajectory which all lines of thought must follow'. He further held that evolutionary process has two complementary tendencies: differentiation and integration and evolution itself tends towards unification. But what does Chardin indicate by the adjective 'superhuman'? The answer might be sought in Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary vision.

For the composite idea of evolution-involution, Sri Aurobindo draws much upon Heraclitean account of the cosmos, for Heraclitus selected the "Everlasting Fire" as his principle of both Being and Becoming. Fire always remains in a state of flux (it is to be noted that the organisation of the world is in a state of flux too, and this is where lies the central idea of evolutionary philosophy) and its changes ensure existence of evolution and involution through all its stages, i.e. in kindling and extinguishing. Sri Aurobindo discerned *Agni* as something more than random physical fire. He interpreted the *Vecic Agni* as the divine Consciousness-Force, the Light and the Power of the universe. According to him "He burns in order to purify. He destroys in order to save"<sup>16</sup> and, in such realisation, Sri Aurobindo possibly had his evolution-involution idea in seed-form. In his idea of spiritual evolution, Sri Aurobindo sees man as the central instrument and we all know that it was founded on his long yogic experience.

Evolution “states the phenomenon without explaining it”<sup>17</sup>, concedes Sri Aurobindo. It implies that evolution itself is a phenomenon that expresses some of the aspects of existence whose chief essence is probably the infinite diversity in the world. Diversity is established since each life (descendant) comes into being in unique pattern. In multiplicity, however, the individualities do not dissolve into one another; rather there exists an ‘ordered relation’ between unity and multiplicity to justify existence.

Sri Aurobindo thought of a ‘sevenfold mode’ of cosmic existence and developed his idea of evolution-involution on that plane. For all this, he points to the *Śruti* phrase *sapta tantu* in the R̥k: 1.164.5 to possibly act as the seed of his thought, from where he went into the making of the chapter as *The Sevenfold Chord Of Being* in his book *The Life Divine*. The book reveals basically two ideas: Force and Consciousness, as well as their interrelation in viewing the phenomenal existence and the beyond. From this understanding he formed the whole idea of evolution. He was more keen on evolution of latent consciousness (in Matter) than of forms, even in consideration of terrestrial existence, and preferred to call it the *spiritual evolution* of man who — in his metaphysical concept — is a form with divinity despite a quite late appearance in the evolutionary history. Sri Aurobindo believed that through spiritual evolution, man could reach the Divine, the Reality.

The Indian concept of creation as the putting forth of what is in the being, greatly influenced Sri Aurobindo and he viewed it as a persistent movement between two involutions: *Spirit* (that downwardly envelopes itself as Matter) and *Matter* (that upwardly evolves towards Spirit). Through such cyclic evolution idea, creation presents ceaseless emergence of the *manifest* from the *unmanifest* and asserts what is involved must evolve. It is, therefore, wrong to hold creation and evolution as mutually exclusive alternatives, for while creation is *a process*, evolution appears as a *phenomenon*. In brief, however, it accounts for the resultant evolution idea or the *satkāryavāda* and makes it clear that the distinction between Spirit and Matter is only illusory.

That the same principle manifests in diverse forms in the universe implies that it is both one and many. One physical instance may be cited here. The singular principle of inherent molecular movement shows manifestation into

diffusion, osmosis and dialysis in the phenomenal world. Among the living organisms, man and chimpanzee are found to share identical sequence of amino acids in the alpha-chains of their haemoglobin molecules and it calls for a widespread molecular unity. In fact, the entire evolutionary development in the living world reflects only elaboration of ever-new combinations of the universal genetic ‘letters’. It establishes a latent interrelation between one and many. This is why the unity of life becomes equally remarkable as its diversity. Here, one can find Sri Aurobindo’s stand of the same principle manifesting into ‘seven chords’ as viable. But, in such a relation between unity and diversity, one has to face the question: does diversity tell only of a new arrangement of internal molecular system with different functions as needed or as tried for?

The seven principles of existence, as perceived in the Vedas and as reflected in Sri Aurobindo, comprise, in order of ascent, Matter, Life, Mind, Supermind, Bliss (*ānanda*), Consciousness-Force (*cit*), and Existence (*sat*). The *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* (iii.2.1) says that, from ‘matter’ (*annam*) all existences are born. Science also considers matter as the persistent basis of everything. The *Upaniṣad* further endorses that Matter is a form of what we realise as Spirit. Some Indian philosophical traditions go in tune with this. However, of these seven principles, the fourth one, the all-comprehending Supermind, i.e. the intermediary state of supramental consciousness, deserves the major attention in the present content.

Each of the seven forces, principles, organisations or entities (of the one Consciousness-Force) is an emergent to Sri Aurobindo. Of these, the Supermind, occupying the fourth stage in the order, evolves and involves both. It differentiates (puts forward forces or consciousness) the One, but does not divide. It is the fourth state or the *turīya*, above which there exists no more state (the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*; 12]. This is the state of Illumination, the Gnosis or *bodhi*. With this view, we cannot attribute ‘statehood’ to any of the three entities in the Unitarian Consciousness, spoken of as ‘*Sachchidananda*’, the self-contained Existence. The question of *what* evolves or *who* evolves following the fourth stage then becomes inadmissible. Sri Aurobindo perceived that we ascend from Matter towards Existence, while Existence becomes Matter in the lower hemisphere; and, in our developing life, the Supermind comes as an extreme vast-

ness. He believed that by the ascent man sees opportunity to go beyond the realms of purpose, towards harmony, as the 'natural rule of the Spirit',

It would probably not be irrelevant, in this content, to review Plato's response to the problem of reality and, his idea of the serial ascent of man, that makes man fully liberated. By using the allegory of the Cave, Plato sketched the path as: conjecture>belief → *dianoesis* (reasoning) → *noesis* (understanding), where the fourth cave reveals the Supreme Idea. One could understand the way Plato conceived reality in its true perspective only at the stage of *noesis*. The fourth stage of Plato or Sri Aurobindo, *noesis* or *Supermind*, frees man from darkness or illusion and gives him the taste of freedom. Both these thinkers happen to see freedom concerned with Knowledge, i.e. both of them view man's evolution from Ignorance to Illumination. A quite similar idea is found reflected in Tagore, for whom "Life's story of evolution,..... seems to develop ..... the tremendously powerful challenge of the vast Inert"<sup>18</sup>. This story could be found everywhere, whether the evolution is biological, psychological or spiritual, with slight alterations of the exterior, to ultimately help man's existence earn its rhythm.

In the physical world the fourth state of matter is represented by Plasma which is the most abundant form or phase of matter in the universe. In behaviour it responds strongly to electro-magnetic fields. Man, being himself an electro-magnetic entity, remains subject to some extraordinary behaviour of the highly ionised and energetic Plasma. Lightning, as an example of Plasma at earth's surface, makes the effect clear at times. The *Br̥hd̥āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (V.7.1) calls *vidyut* (Lightning) the Brahman, while in Sri Aurobindo's vision, Supermind reflects the Brahman. Both Supermind and Plasma then emerge as Luminous Truth in the metaphysical aspect. And, at the base of both, there is Matter in which Consciousness-Force finds a medium or Energy gets arrested respectively, in order to evolve or transform into something new particular, i.e. an emergent. It implies that the material cannot be the only plane of our existence and one can arrive at a higher level of Consciousness or a higher energised state by a gradual opening of the knot of Matter, according to Sri Aurobindo. But, such attainment marks a rarity, not universality, for not everyone can attain that ought-to state. Now, since rarity precedes extinction in most cases, we cannot escape the problem: whether mankind would run toward a new direction following the extinction.

Who knows the solution? Perhaps none. To Darwin, everything in Nature is unpredictable and, so, he too could be said to be an emergent evolutionist. Nietzsche also thought of an evolutionary continuity beyond man keeping his heroic ideal in *Übermensch* (Superman or Overman). When he says that "The weak and the failures shall perish: first principle of *our* love of man"<sup>19</sup>, one finds Darwinism to stand only on a different plane. However, some might accuse Nietzsche to have been inspired by Darwin's idea of survival of the fittest in the struggle for life. Sri Aurobindo, for whom every imperfection is a mere 'sign of a transitional state', evolution can never stop with man. In fact, we cannot remain satisfied with our anthropocentric view of regarding man as the crown of evolution, though in normal human law of limitations, he cannot exceed himself 'to grow into the superman', as Sri Aurobindo holds. In the realm of consciousness, at the call of the delight of manifestation, the same man (we may not call him Superman or the like), by judiciously *selecting* his ideas (cf nature's *selection* of the fittest genes), might evolve into wiser/more creative man. In such an evolution, human *intuition* (spontaneous, flash-like change in the idea) may be compared with mutation, while his reasoning power with selection. It is true that *intuition* always stands veiled and *reason*, which follows in arrival, becomes instrumental in arriving at a higher truth. If this (the relationship between mutation and selection, or, precisely, selection of the mutants, as Hugo de Vries holds) goes to be a universal feature, then man would be said to have reached a point wherefrom he can manipulate evolution. In the prevailing condition of transitions, however, we can indeed assume that, one day, the meek might inherit the earth, when the irresistible might advance towards extinction as undesired (non-adaptive) group following a ceaseless period of intra-group struggle (for existence). But, again, such triumph of the meek, the good, points to the apocalyptic thought which lies beyond the scope of the present paper. We are, in fact, yet to master the subject of predictability. Who knows about the future emergences wherein lies hidden the phenomenon of evolution? Can anyone say that evolution, pre-exists in. any form?

Darwin never endorsed the application of his theory in social contexts, yet both “Marx and Engels adopted Darwinism as the biological counterpart to the class war”<sup>20</sup>. Engels even smelt that Darwin was a spokesman of capitalism, which was a cruel theory. It cannot explain altruistic ethics. But, Engels perhaps has misunderstood Darwinism. Natural Selection, as we know, truly favours those genes that confer on their bearers the ability to successfully self-propagate and preserve. In Darwin’s own words, it “acts solely by the preservation of the profitable modifications”<sup>21</sup>. That is why natural selection is said to favour selfishness. But, as the modern theory of natural selection suggests, a human being (an evolute of natural selection) appears at his best only when he exhibits altruism — a social behaviour and a deontological ethics both. Its intensity, however, tends to increase proportionately with the closeness of the blood relationship, while its vice versa is equally true. It is because, when seen at the individual level, altruism appears to evolve essentially in the interest of the blood relatives of the altruist.

Darwin’s own work points to the very nature of *struggle* as the one that establishes the supremacy of the adapted over the unadapted forms, (hereby bringing value into being. Also, the word *fittest* (which survives), though implies the most favoured forms, (of Nature), is often substituted for the word *best* (that has a moral flavour). One should take note that both the superlatives, ‘fittest’ and ‘best’, change conditionally or contextually; and, especially for human beings, one cannot claim any absolute co-ordinate.

Returning to the just mentioned phrase ‘altruistic ethics’, one could ask: what is altruism? If it becomes one’s behaviour of bringing welfare to others at the expense of one’s own and, at the same time, remaining free from any sort of repayment-thought, the next question could be raised as to what is ‘welfare’ and what is implied by ‘others’? If ‘welfare’ is measured in terms of the ‘chances of survival’, by the word ‘others’, groups of varied sizes would crowd instantly, for altruism also evolves in the interest of the group as a whole. Now, when Dawkins says: “altruism within a group goes with selfishness between groups, this is a basis of trade unionism”<sup>22</sup>; an implication becomes clear: the altruist group favours its *own* individuals in the struggle for limited resources. Altruism then cannot release mankind from bondages, for “the ego of the altruist is as

powerful and absorbing as the ego of the selfish and it is often more powerful”<sup>23</sup>. Such altruism goes on as an incessant struggle for existence among the living organisms before they are set for the sieving force, the *natural selection*. Its influence, as Darwin puts, is individualistic. Do we not see a similar individualistic effect in the ascending struggle (within) of emerging consciousness, sketched by Sri Aurobindo as spiritual evolution? In both Darwin and Sri Aurobindo, the superior is always acknowledged posterior in appearance as an evolutionary fact. But the theory of organic evolution differs in many respects from that of spiritual evolution, i.e. one of Consciousness. Yet, we can echo the optimistic Huxley: “Some day... we shall arrive at an understanding of the evolution of the aesthetic faculty”<sup>24</sup>, when savage instincts would be curbed to slowly change human nature towards something that could be termed supra-human. A full-stop of the paper, at this stage, can only set a pause to turn for a newer discussion.

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## Reviving The Vedic Aryan

Anuradha Choudry

### ABSTRACT

*The term Aryan has its origin in the Rigveda. It acquired several definitions in the course of time. Many European scholars in the middle of the nineteenth century believed that it denoted a race and propagated the Aryan Invasion Theory to serve colonial interests. But Sri Aurobindo says that the term is a symbol of another profounder sense that can be discovered when the Veda is given a psycho-spiritual interpretation. It is this truer sense of the word Aryan that needs to be highlighted once more in the greater interest of mankind.*

### 1.Introduction – Bharatam as Aryavarta

In ancient times another name for Bharatavarsham was Aryavarta meaning the land of the Aryans. The term ‘Arya’ first appears in the Rigveda. It has ever since been absorbed in most Bharatiya languages in a particular context but for the past two centuries there have been several debates over the definition of the term in various scholarly circles. All these debates have led to a certain ambiguity regarding the word. So much so that even in Bharatam, people are confused about its actual meaning. Sri Aurobindo said, ‘Indians know the word, but it has lost for them the significance which it bore to their forefathers.’ (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, Vol. 13, p.441)<sup>1</sup> This essay is an attempt to rediscover that lost significance and present before the Bharatiyas

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<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo,

*The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo: Essays on Philosophy and Yoga (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust: 1998), Vol.13. Henceforth all the references from this book will be indicated by the Volume number. (Vol. 13)*

in particular, once more, the role models of their forefathers. It will try to bring forth some of the most popular definitions of the term, examine them in their historical context, test their validity and then attempt to establish the true sense of the word as given by Sri Aurobindo. Finally it will seek to show the need and relevance of reviving the Vedic Aryan in the context of the modern world.

## 2. Racial definition of the term

With the coming of the British in India, several European scholars started taking greater interest in Sanskrit literature and its scriptures. Historically, it was a period when the British Empire was at the height of its glory. It was also a time when many administrators in the British Government were convinced that the colonisation of India was necessary for the upliftment of the natives from their pagan beliefs. They justified their presence in India as part of their benevolent 'mission civilisatrice' in the world. Under these circumstances it was impossible for them to acknowledge that Sanskrit and its prodigious literature, acclaimed by previous European and other scholars for their brilliance, could have been produced by the very same Indians whom they felt the need to enlighten and consequently Christianise.

These factors played a significant role in the creation of the Myth of the Aryan Invasion. On reading the Rigveda, the European scholars found several descriptions of wars between the Aryans and the Dasas or the Dasyus. Moreover the Aryans were associated with the colour white and the dasyus were depicted as the dark. This reference to varna or colour along with narrations of wars were, for them, clear descriptions of a war between two races, of an Aryan Invasion, a theory that the European Indologists propagated in the second half of the nineteenth century soon after the Aryans were first defined as a race in 1843 (Danino, 2001, p. 26).<sup>2</sup> It was accepted as a fact that these Aryans had come from somewhere between Central Europe or Central Asia and invaded the northern parts of India around 1500 to 1200 BCE. They are supposed to have destroyed the highly developed Indus Valley civilisation (Harappan) which had flourished for over a millennium and then driven the

original inhabitants, the Dasas or Dasyus but more commonly referred to as the Dravidians, southwards of the Indian subcontinent after a bloody war. In the following centuries these Aryans are believed to have composed the Vedas, spread Sanskrit throughout India and established the great Ganges civilisation.

This theory received widespread support from several reputed European Indologists like Max Müller, who had translated the Rigveda into English during the British colonial period in India. The other branch of scholars who strongly backed this theory were the linguists who found great similarities between Latin and Greek with Sanskrit and concluded that there must have been a language prior to these ancient languages which they called proto-Indo-European, from which the rest were later derived. Moreover, due to the prevailing sense of superiority, it was unthinkable for the colonisers to acknowledge that 'they owed their languages and civilisation to a benighted India.' (Danino, 2001, 26) This problem was conveniently resolved by the introduction of the Aryan Invasion Theory that stated that those credited with composing the brilliant Sanskrit treatises were in fact not native Indians but of Aryan or Indo-European origin.

This theory was further exploited in many ways by the British to enable them to strengthen their rule in India. In his book *The Invasion that Never Was*, Michel Danino analyses the consequences of the theory as follows:

One such use was to cut down the Indian's pride in his past and nation – since India was no longer the source of Indian civilisation – and to make him all the more willing to accept the white man's rule: now that the Hindus were shown to be descendants of former invaders who belonged to the same "Aryan race" as the Europeans' ancestors, it was easier to legitimise Britain's conquest of India as merely one more "Aryan wave" which, this time, would bring the true light to the subcontinent. (Danino, 2001, p. 27)

In Oxford in 1847, Max Müller had similar musings about 'how the [English] descendants of the same [Aryan] race, to which the first conquerors and masters of India belonged, return ... to accomplish the glorious work of civilisation, which had been left unfinished by their Arian brethren.' (Danino, 2001, p.28) That this view also formed the basic strategy of colonial rule is clearly evident in the speech made by Stanley Baldwin in 1929 in Britain's House of Commons when he said:

<sup>2</sup> Michel Danino, *The Invasion That Never Was* (Mysore: Mira Aditi, 2nd ed., 2001).



Ages and ages ago there sat, side by side, the ancestors of the English, Rajputs and Brahmins. Now, after ages ..., the two branches of the great Aryan ancestry have again been brought together by Providence.... By establishing British rule in India, God said to the British, "I have again brought you and the Indians together after a long separation, not in order that you should lord over them, or that you should exploit them, but in order that you should recognise your kinship with them.... It is your duty to raise them to their own level as quickly as possible, and work together; brothers as you are, for the evolution of humanity...." (Danino, 2001, p. 28-29)

The second and more destructive use of the theory was "to deepen the divisions in Hindu society and exacerbate caste conflicts so as to legitimate and boost the efforts at conversion that had been going on for several centuries." (Danino, 2001, p. 29) They introduced the idea of the Brahmins as the pure descendants of the Aryans who, according to them, later created the caste system to dominate and suppress the lower castes or the tribals whom they associated with the Dravidians. In the same breath, the latter were encouraged to rebel and reject everything Aryan and Hindu and seek refuge in Christianity.

On similar lines Max Müller wrote to his wife after he produced the first translated edition of the Rigveda. He said:

This edition of mine and the translation of the Veda, will hereafter tell to a great extent on the fate of India and on the growth of millions of souls in that country. It is the root of their religion and to show them what the root is, I feel sure, is the only way of uprooting all that has sprung from it during the last three thousand years. (Danino, 2001, p. 24)

The goal of proselytisation in India was pursued with utmost dedication by missionaries under the supervision of British officers. In 1883, Richard Temple, a high officer, addressed the London missionary society to generate donations to missions in the following words:

India is a country which of all others we are bound to enlighten with eternal truth... But what is most important to you friends of missions, is this – that there is a large population of aborigines, a people who are outside caste ... If they are attached, as they rapidly may be, to Christianity, they will form a nucleus round which British power and influence may gather. Remember, too,

that Hinduism, although it is dying, yet has force ... and such tribes, if not converted to Christianity may be perverted to Hinduism ... You may be confident that the missions in India are doing a work which strengthens the imperial foundations of British power ... I say that, of all the departments I have ever administered, I never saw one more efficient than the missionary department. (Danino, 2001, p. 32-33)

The two-fold objective of the theory met with great success. So much so that even after sixty years of independence, and years after the theory has been rejected as baseless by scholars across the world due to lack of any kind of scientific evidence, casteism, specially the identification of Dalits with the 'non-Aryans' versus the Brahmins, is still used as an effective divisive tool in society by power-hungry politicians and by missionaries who relentlessly seek to convert the 'outcastes' to Christianity. More unfortunate still is the fact that the Aryan Invasion Theory continues to be taught in schools as part of history lessons subtly resulting in a mindset characterised by the colonial hangover of the white man's supremacy! It is therefore to undo the damages caused by this myth that the true sense of the word Aryan needs to be declared once more in Bharatam and the world.

## 2.1 Aryans in Europe

Interestingly enough the creation of the Aryan Invasion Theory based primarily on linguistic premises in the nineteenth century had significant repercussions in Christian Europe as well where it assumed a strong racial connotation in a growing anti-Semitic atmosphere. Max Müller, a strong proponent of this view, often declared during his lectures in Oxford from 1859 onwards that 'the Brahmans of India belong to the same family, the Aryan or Indo-European family, which civilised the whole of Europe' (Danino, 2001, p. 42). The Aryans, who were believed to have invaded Europe as well from the plains of Central Asia, became the 'European-Arya' or the 'Indo-Germanic' with Teutonic or Nordic features, synonymous with 'the aggressive, conquering white man, preferably blond-haired, blue-eyed and broad-chested' (Danino, 2001, p. 46). There were heated debates among eminent scholars about which European people were the true descendants of the Aryans, ordained as the 'master race', destined to rule the world. Michel Danino points

out in his book that the rise of Hitler and his anti-Semitic policies during the Second World War were only a grossly exaggerated but perfectly logical consequence of the racial theories propagated during that period. In his book, *Mein Kampf* ["My Battle"], written in 1924, Hitler wrote, 'The Aryan alone can be considered as the founder of culture ... a conqueror who subjugated inferior races.' (Danino, 2001, p. 46) In the ensuing war, the horrors perpetrated in the name of race shocked scholars into silence and the term Aryan became a taboo in decent societies. Thus, in a span of two centuries, the Europeans made a superman of the Aryan and finished by giving him an embarrassed funeral!

The question that comes to mind at this juncture is how such a theory came to be accepted by such eminent scholars if there was never any validity in the theory at all? To remove all possibility of such doubts, Michel Danino in his book *The Invasion That Never Was* puts forth some convincing archaeological data retrieved from various sites of the Indus Valley civilisations like Mohenjodaro and Harappa, along with the latest scientific views in anthropology, linguistics and astronomy to clearly show that the theory was completely baseless, that there never existed an Aryan race except in the imaginations of those European scholars who refused to look at the question from an unbiased perspective. Michel Danino concludes his analysis of available archaeological records by saying that there is no evidence of any invasion during or after the Indus-Saraswati civilisation. As a result, most archaeologists have rejected the Aryan Invasion Theory. Moreover, he adds that the picture that is evident from archaeology is one of continuity and evolution, with no disruption except for the collapse of the urban phase which he says was attributed to natural calamities rather than an invasion.

### 3. Voices of dissent

It is necessary to point out that even when the Aryan Invasion Theory was at the height of its acceptance there were many scholars who refused to endorse it. In 1892, Salomon Reinach, a French archaeologist categorically said, 'To speak of an Aryan race of three thousand years ago is to put forward a gratuitous hypothesis; but to speak of it as if it still existed is quite simply

absurd.' (Danino, 2001, p. 51) Most surprising is the fact that in 1888, forty years after the invention of the theory, Max Müller, one of its most vociferous proponents, flatly denied having spoken of the Aryan as a race. He said 'I have declared again and again that if I say Aryas, I mean neither blood nor bones, nor hair nor skull; I simply mean those who speak an Aryan language.' (Danino, 2001, p. 53)

During this period there were several Indian scholars who openly disputed this myth. Swami Dayananda Saraswati may be considered as the first Bharatiya to challenge the theory. He said, 'In none of the Sanskrit or history textbooks, has it been stated that the Aryans came from Iran, vanquished the aborigines ... and became rulers.' (Danino, 2001, p. 54) He insisted that in the Vedas the term Arya signified a moral or inner quality and not a race or a people. Another giant of the Sanatana Dharma, Swami Vivekananda scornfully remarked during a lecture in the USA, 'And what your European Pandits say about the Aryans swooping down from some foreign land snatching away the land of the aborigines and settling in India by exterminating them, is all pure nonsense, foolish talk. Strange that our Indian scholars too say 'Amen' to them. ... And all these monstrous lies are being taught to our boys!' In another lecture in India he echoed Swami Dayananda's words when he said 'As for the truth of these theories, there is not one word in our scriptures, not one, to prove that the Aryan ever came from anywhere outside India, and in ancient India was included Afghanistan. There it ends. And the theory that the Shudra [i.e. lowest] caste were all non-Aryans ... is equally illogical and equally irrational ... The whole of India is Aryan, nothing else.' (Danino, 2001, p. 56) He was also keenly aware of the underlying shrewd intentions of the rulers and warned his fellow country men that if they fell prey to the baseless divisive thinking they would waste the energy required for the making of a healthy future for India.

Another very important figure who blatantly rejected the theory is B. R. Ambedkar, one of the authors of the Indian constitution but more famously known for his support for the lower castes and the untouchables. He studied the Rigveda in Sanskrit and made a step by step analysis of the myth as follows:

The theory of the invasion is an invention. This invention is necessary because of a gratuitous assumption that the Indo-Germanic people are the

purest of the modern representatives of the original race. The theory is a perversion of scientific investigation. It is not allowed to evolve out of facts. On the contrary, the theory is preconceived and facts selected to prove it. It falls to the ground at every point.

[My conclusions] are:

1. The Vedas do not know any such race as the Aryan race.
2. There is no evidence in the Vedas of any invasion of India by the Aryan race and its having conquered the Dasas and Dasyus supposed to be the natives of India.
3. There is no evidence to show that the distinction between Aryans, Dasas and Dasyus was a racial distinction.
4. The Vedas do not support the contention that the Aryas were different in colour from the Dasas and Dasyus ... (Danino, 2001, p. 63-64)

Ironically, what had been conspicuously absent during the entire discourse about the term Aryan by European scholars, and was aptly pointed out by Swami Dayananda Saraswati is that, long before Europe had even heard anything about it, it already had a distinctive meaning in Bharatiya tradition where it occupied a prestigious position in the memory of its people. But in order to understand what the term Aryan originally signified it is important to determine the actual purport of the Veda that has been interpreted in many ways throughout history.

#### 4. Vedic interpretations

Today the Vedas have a varied status in Bharatam and the world. The scholars who strongly supported the Aryan Invasion theory treated the Vedas as socio-historic texts that describe warring tribes paying tributes to Gods and Goddesses to win their favour. Others, more conservative, representing the traditional Indian schools regarded the texts as *karmakānda* that primarily describe the performance of *yajñas* or material sacrifices. According to them the word Arya, generally could mean a warrior but more commonly stood for an individual with a noble character as pointed out by Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Interestingly enough it is still used in this sense in many Indian languages. Sri Aurobindo writes,

In later times, the word Arya expressed a particular ethical and social ideal of well-governed life, candour, courtesy, nobility, straight dealing, courage, gentleness, purity, humanity, compassion, protection of the weak, liberality, observance of social duty, eagerness for knowledge, respect for the wise and learned, the social accomplishments. It was the combined ideal of the Brahmana and the Kshatriya. Everything that departed from this ideal, everything that tended towards the ignoble, mean, obscure, rude, cruel or false, was termed un-Aryan.' (He even goes to the extent of adding that) 'There is no word in human speech that has a nobler history. (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, Vol. 13, p.441)

There were yet other scholars who considered the Veda as a repository of an occult and even scientific knowledge and shared the traditionalist view regarding the term. The significant fact as already mentioned by Swami Vivekananda and other scholars is that throughout Bharatiya history, the word Arya nowhere signified a race until it was introduced as such by the European scholars.

Regarding the true content of the Veda, Sri Aurobindo declared that the Veda was essentially symbolic in nature and contained descriptions of the Rishis' quest for immortality as the final objective of their spiritual sadhana. His views about the Veda were very much in keeping with Indian tradition that stated that reality is far more stratified than perceived by the senses. He does confess that due to his Western education and grooming he had initially accepted the European interpretation of the texts and never really questioned the validity of the Invasion Theory. But once he started having his own spiritual realisations he soon discovered its falsity. As deeper psycho-spiritual dimensions of the Veda were revealed to him during the course of his sadhana, he saw that the word Aryan derived from the root 'ar' to fight, did mean a warrior but he was not the blood-thirsty warrior of the Indologists. He was instead a warrior of the inner worlds, ready to destroy any force that prevented him from realising the integral perfection of his being. According to Sri Aurobindo, an Aryan was one for whom,

Self-perfection is the aim of his self-conquest. Therefore what he conquers he does not destroy, but ennobles and fulfils. He knows that the body, life and mind are given him in order to attain to something higher than they; therefore they must be transcended and overcome, their limitations denied, the absorption

of their gratifications rejected. ... For always the Aryan is a worker and warrior. He spares himself no labour of mind or body whether to seek the Highest or to serve it. He avoids no difficulty, he accepts no cessation from fatigue. Always he fights for the coming of that kingdom within himself and in the world. (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, Vol. 13, p.443)

The Aryan was also considered by some scholars as a farmer from the etymological sense of 'ar' meaning to plough. Sri Aurobindo once again supports this sense of the word but adds that the Aryan was a cultivator, not of physical lands but of his own esoteric and subtler worlds to make them fertile enough to grow divine stuff. He writes, 'Whoever cultivates the field that the Supreme Spirit has made for him, his earth of plenty within and without, does not leave it barren or allow it to run to seed, but labours to exact from it its full yield, is by that effort an Aryan.' (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, Vol. 13, p.442)

After 1914 Sri Aurobindo systematically refuted the Aryan racial theory in many articles published in a journal called *Arya* which were later compiled in a book titled *The Secret of the Veda*. He also emphasised on the need for the esoteric understanding of the Veda but pointed out that this reality was only revealed to anyone who cared to look beyond its literal sense.

Sceptics might question whether Sri Aurobindo's psycho-spiritual interpretation of the Veda was not a figment of his imagination either. To this it can be answered that he drew his conclusions by basing them on his own spiritual experiences where he realised that the true sense of the Veda lay not in its historic or ritualistic sense but in its spiritual dimension. Indian tradition has always accepted various interpretations of the Veda depending on the capacity of the interpreter. Yaska, one of the earliest commentators of the Veda clearly states that the texts can be interpreted on three broad levels – *ādhibhautika*, *ādhydaivata* and *ādhyātmika*, viz. material, occult and spiritual.

#### 4.1 The psycho-spiritual interpretation

In *The Secret of the Veda* Sri Aurobindo proves that the Veda regains its true historically privileged status and becomes relevant to humanity as a whole, only when it is accorded its *ādhyātmika* or spiritual interpretation. He did not completely refute the other theories because he acknowledged that there existed a certain truth in the other levels of interpretation as well but

maintained that the core content of the Veda was in its symbolic sense unravelled by a psycho-spiritual interpretation of the texts. As a true scientist who is confident about the results of an experiment that he has himself undertaken, Sri Aurobindo arrived at his conclusions from his personal experiences. During the course of his *sādhanā*, he realised that the Sacrifice mentioned in such detail is not just an outward act but primarily symbolic of a conscious inward movement for self-purification and self-perfection. The offering to the Gods represents an invocation to the higher forces in man that seek to raise him beyond his narrow human confines. To confirm his discovery of the symbolic nature of the Vedas, Sri Aurobindo attributed this deeper psycho-spiritual meaning to the Vedic texts. He respected two rules: 1) the meaning of a word should remain the same throughout the Veda and 2) it should be philologically justified. Once these rules were followed, he saw that the hymns systematically acquired a certain coherence and became not only consistent in their expression but also revealed the universal applicability of the Vedas. The texts were no longer obscure and arbitrary chants of nomadic farmers or descriptions of historic battles but glorious songs of the inner adventure of the Rishis whose sole quest in life was the discovery and realisation of Truth, Light and Immortality which are symbolised by the bringing down of the Waters and the recovery of the Lost Herds. This profound aspiration of theirs is best reflected in the Upanishadic mantra:

*Om asato mā sadgamaya  
tamaso mā jyotirgamaya  
mr̥tyormā amṛtam gamaya  
(Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad, 1.3.28)*

This mantra is commonly translated as: Impel me from Falsehood to Truth, from Darkness to Light, from Death to Immortality. But there is another possible meaning that can be derived from the change of the preposition 'from' to 'of'. Based on this change, the mantra may be translated as: Impel me to the Truth of the Falsehood; impel me to the Light of the Darkness; impel me to the Immortality of Death. This seldom acknowledged translation brings forth the secret search of the Rishi to discover techniques for a kind of alchemy to make base metal into gold, to turn undivine matter into its potential divinity.

## 4.2 Symbolism of key words

In *The Secret of the Veda*, Sri Aurobindo elaborates on the psycho-spiritual approach to the scriptures saying that if key words like *ghṛtam*, *go* and several others are attributed their symbolic sense, several passages and expressions, that are otherwise absurd in content, become suddenly very meaningful and practical.

*Ghṛtam*, for example, is an essential ingredient for the Vedic Sacrifice. In the Veda, Indra's horses are described as *ghṛtācīm*. *Ghṛtam* commonly means clarified butter so a literal translation would imply that Indra's horses are dripping with 'clarified butter'! But Sri Aurobindo describes *ghṛtam* as 'clarified mind'. This interpretation is easily understood if one bears in mind that the language of the Vedas, namely Sanskrit, is an associative language where the word used to denote an object, generally describes some aspect of it rather than serving as a mere nomenclature. This possibility arises because the Vedic language is not like the later classical one where language reached a definite form and shape but is complex and its structure is full of an amplitude and multiplicity and range of suggestions that coexist at different levels. Whether this is due to an insufficient vocabulary or if it is done deliberately with a great mastery and skill to hide something, remains to be answered. Accordingly, the common feature between 'clarified butter' and 'clarified mind' is the process of clarification. *Ghṛtam* is the final result of opaque butter being subjected to heat. Thus exposed to heat, the opaque butter acquires a certain translucency. This end product which is the very essence of milk is called *ghṛtam* which comes from the root 'ghṛ', meaning 'to shine'. Similarly, when the mind is opaque and lacks clarity, one can apply heat on it by the power of will and aspiration symbolised by Agni, and purify it to obtain a transparent product which is the essence of mind, viz 'clarity of mind' or "a rich and bright state or activity of the brain-power *medhā*, as basis and substance of illumined thought." [8] We thus can understand how *ghṛtam* can symbolise clarity of mind. This imagery becomes more appropriate when we place it in the context of Indra's Horses being *ghṛtācīm*. Indra according to psycho-spiritual sense represents the Illumined Mind and Horses, in many cultures, denote Force, Strength and Power. Therefore when Indra's Horses

are described as *ghṛtācīm* it becomes more meaningful to interpret the expression as, 'the Powers related to the Illumined Mind are associated with clear and brilliant thoughts' rather than 'Indra's horses dripping with clarified butter'!

In this light, it becomes essential to review the symbolic sense of the term Aryan in order to rediscover its hidden significance. This entails the need to delve deeper into the psycho-spiritual dimensions of the Veda and understand the four fundamental doctrines that the Rishis practised in their life. These were as follows.

## 4.3 The four doctrines of the Rishis

The first doctrine declared that in his present stage man is essentially imperfect in every respect but must strive to attain to his perfection. Moreover the Vedic Rishis realised that in the scheme of creation and in the evolution of consciousness man has a critical role to play for he contains in himself the lowest tendencies of the beast as a result of the subconscious worlds in him as well as the lofty potential of the Gods who belong to the superconscious realms characterised by the Truth, the Right and the Vast. The Rishis call on man to outgrow his mortal tendencies, to ascend in his inner consciousness and live in a world of Truth, Light and Immortality also called Swar which is higher and superior to our world of existence. The second doctrine stated that the purpose of human existence is to discover once more the path to the great world of Swar, which is also the home of the Truth, the Right and the Vast, and considered as the world of the Sun. This path to be discovered is known in the Veda as '*ṛtasya panthāh*' or 'the way of the Right'. The third doctrine of the Veda is often portrayed using three images.

The first is that our life is a battle ground of Forces. Our existence is the result of a constant struggle between the powers of Light and Truth, the Devas, who are companions and allies in man's adventure to immortality, and the powers of Darkness and Falsehood, the Dasyus, who hamper at every step man's onward journey to self-realisation. On similar lines George Erdosy, a Canadian scholar remarked, 'Even apparently clear indications of historical struggles between dark aborigines and Arya conquerors turn out to be

misleading ... [The Dasas and Dasyus] appear to be demonic rather than human enemies... It is a cosmic struggle which is described in detailed [Vedic] accounts that are consistent with one another.' (Danino, 2001, p. 67)

The second image is that of a *Yajña* or Sacrifice. As mentioned earlier this Sacrifice does not refer to an outer ritualistic act but implies an inner action of offering and receiving. The whole Universe according to the Rishi is engaged in a constant sacrifice where one increases in oneself that to which one sacrifices. But this sacrifice is generally unconscious. The Vedic Rishis therefore extol the need to make this into a conscious act. They knew that through a constant sacrifice to the higher powers man can not only acquire the nature of God's consciousness but has also within him the capacity to transcend them by it. The Vedic Rishis not only brought forth the importance of the Vedic *Yajña* but also laid down the method to perform this *Yajña* in the most effective manner. They recognised that first Agni, Fire, or the Divine Will, had to be lit. Once lit, it had to be kindled constantly with *Ghṛtam*, clarified thoughts, Mantra, the inspired word of truth and Soma, the underlying delight of existence. They also gave an assurance that when this is done in a selfless manner then the gods will shower man with his gifts of Cows - spiritual illuminations, Horses - spiritual energies, gold - purity, sons - renewed spiritual energies and many other such gifts that are symbolic of inner spiritual wealth and that will help him on his journey of self-perfection.

The third image of the Veda is that of a journey, an ascent. The individual is seen as a hill with several layers of consciousness which he has to ascend with the help of the sacrifice and the battle till he reaches the illumined summits of the solar world of the Truth-Consciousness, of Swar.

The fourth mystic doctrine of the Vedic Rishi speaks about the supreme secret of the ultimate Reality. It declares that it is one "ekam sat" or "tad ekam" (Reddy, 1991, p.78). This one Reality is attributed different names according to its special aspects and functions" *ekam sad viprā bahudāh vadanti*" (Kashyap, 2003, I.164.46)

The Rishis spent all their energy in the pursuit of and adherence to these doctrines. They declared that any individual who agreed to work on cultivating his/ her inner being or consciously became a warrior of Truth, an Aryan, fighting incessantly for the armies of Light against those of Darkness. Sri

Aurobindo writes, 'Intrinsically, in its most fundamental sense, Arya means an effort or an uprising and overcoming. The Aryan is he who strives and overcomes all outside him and within him that stands opposed to the human advance. Self-conquest is the first law of his nature.' (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, Vol. 13, p. 442-3) He adds further :

Whoever thus aspires, labours, battles, travels, ascends the hill of being is the Aryan (*ārya, arya, ari* with the various senses, to toil, to fight, to climb or rise, to travel, to prepare the sacrifice); for the work of the Aryan is a sacrifice which is at once a battle and an ascent and a journey, a battle against the powers of darkness, an ascent to the highest peaks of the mountain beyond earth and heaven into Swar, a journey to the other shore of the rivers and the ocean into the farthest infinity of things. (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, Vol. 15, p.233)<sup>3</sup>

Sri Aurobindo then lists the psychological differences that distinguish the Aryan from the Dasyu as the following: The Aryan is *kāru, kīri*, implying that he has the will to work. He is *sukratu* perfect in the power for sacrifice while the Dasyu is the opposite – *akratu*; the Aryan is the sacrificer *yajyu*, the Dasyu being *ayajyu*. While the Aryans are the singers and knowers of the Word, *gīh, mantra, brahma*, the Dasyu is the hater and spoilers of the Word, *brahmadviṣaḥ, mṛdhravācaḥ*. They are incapable of mentalising the word and the truth it contains, *amanyamānāḥ*, and 'the Aryans are thinkers of the word *manyamānāḥ*, holders of the thought, the thought-mind and the seer-knowledge *dhīrah, manīṣī, kavi*. The Aryans desire the godheads and offer sacrifices to them to receive their gifts - *devayū*, the Dasyus are not just god-haters *devadviṣaḥ* but obstruct their working and seek no increase – *avrđhaḥ*. The Aryan willingly offers his wealth to the gods and receives an abundance of their gifts in return but the Dasyus are misers and keep all the wealth for themselves. They are rich in cows and horses but their wealth gives no prosperity to man or to themselves. Thus the Aryan is one who is always ready to work towards realising his self-perfection while the Dasyu is opposed to any such growth. (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, Vol. 15, p.233 - 234)

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3 Sri Aurobindo,

The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo: The Secret of the Veda (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust: 1998), Vol.15.

Henceforth all the references from this book will be indicated by the Volume number. (Vol. 13)

## 5. Conclusion

The title of my presentation is Reviving the Vedic Aryan. At the end of this discussion one could question the relevance of resurrecting the Vedic Aryan in our contemporary times. As if in response to this possible query Bakim Chandra wrote:

Do not lose your reverence for the past; it is on the past that you must plant your foot firmly, if you wish to mount high in the future. You are not a race of savages who have no past to remember. You cannot dis sever yourselves in a day from the associations and influences of a past which extends at least over five hundred centuries. You cannot annihilate in a day a past national existence which has survived the annihilation of hundreds of empires, of hundred systems of religion, and which has surveyed unconcerned the downfall and ruin of many kindred civilisations. I have to make my warning so emphatic because the general tendency of European scholars, who have so great an influence over you, is to decry your past history, to call for its virtual erasure from your memory, and to lead you in the opposite direction. (Danino, 2001, p. 143-144)

One of the main purposes, therefore, for reinstating the Aryan to its rightful position in the understanding and memory of the Bharatiya people in particular, is to attempt by this exercise, to undo or reverse the serious though not irreparable damages that its distortion has caused in the society. Firstly, it would help to generate once again a sense of self-esteem regarding ancient Bharatam and lead to an appreciation of her enormous contribution to world thought. Secondly, it would play a significant role in redefining the term *varṇa* as against its malpractised version called *jāti* or caste. In fact, a true understanding of the Vedic concept of *Ārya varṇa* versus *Dāsa varṇa* would go a long way in helping to resolve issues of the caste system and thereby to harmonise the various sections of society. In addition, a true appreciation of the real definition of the Aryan will help not only in reuniting Bharatiya society but could also serve to unite all the world's peoples under a common banner of humanity irrespective of caste or creed, colour, race or gender. Sri Aurobindo says, 'For in the Veda the Aryan peoples are those who had accepted a particular type of self-culture, of inward and outward practice, of ideality, of aspiration ... All the highest aspirations of the early human race, its noblest religious temper,

its most idealistic velleities of thought are summed up in this single vocable.' (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, Vol. 13, p.441)

The Vedic Rishis saw clearly that at birth each individual embarks on a journey with a predetermined destination of reaching the highest peaks of his/her individual perfection. They observed that every experience of life was an opportunity and a means to teach one how to negotiate the different challenges, physical, psychological and spiritual that come in one's way while attempting to climb from peak to peak of one's being. They walked the precipitous paths themselves and left invaluable roadmaps with adequate warnings and guide-lines regarding how to avoid the caves and crevasses on the way for anyone who cared to follow them. Moreover, the Rishis recognised that they were not alone on this journey but were accompanied by subtle forces that played an important role in determining the course of their lives. There were Powers of Light, the Devas, who sought to help them reach their destination while the Forces of Darkness, the Dasas and Dasyus hindered their onward ascent. The Aryan, according to the Rishi, was one who constantly chose to become an ally of the Devas and fight the Dasyus till the highest peak of their being was conquered and the darkest cave illumined by the Sun of Truth. To achieve these goals, he made Truth, the light of the Sun, his armour and weapon to destroy every form of darkness within and without.

In this modern age blinded with the glories of material success that emphasises the gratification of our sense life, a haven for the functioning of the Dasyus and Panis, there is an urgent need to adopt once more the true creed of the Aryan for he is one who:

...overcomes earth and the body and does not consent like ordinary men to their dullness, inertia, dead routine and tamasic limitations. He overcomes life and its energies and refuses to be dominated by their hungers and cravings or enslaved by their rajasic passions. He overcomes the mind and its habits, he does not live in a shell of ignorance, inherited prejudices, customary ideas, pleasant opinions, but knows how to seek and choose, to be large and flexible in intelligence even as he is firm and strong in his will. For in everything he seeks truth, in everything right, in everything height and freedom. (Sri Aurobindo, 1998, Vol. 13, p. 443)

According to the Rishis, the Aryan perfected became the Arhat. Practising this Aryan creed would in time result in the re-establishment of the Aryavarta

– not as an expansion of some megalomaniac supremacy over the others - but for bringing back into the lives of men the knowledge of the true purpose of life and existence, a re-orientation and a true understanding of the goal of creation. But for that day to happen it is important first to reinterpret the Veda in its universal and eternal sense. Sri Aurobindo says:

The perfect truth of the Veda is the fundamental knowledge, the right relations with the Truth of things, on which alone according to our ideas, all other knowledge can receive the true orientation needed by humanity. The recovery of the perfect truth of the Veda is therefore not merely a desideratum for our modern intellectual curiosity, but a practical necessity for the future of the human race. For I believe firmly that the secret concealed in the Veda, when entirely discovered, will be found to formulate perfectly that knowledge and practice of a divine life to which the march of humanity, after long wanderings in the satisfaction of the intellect and senses, must inevitably return and is actually at the present day, in the impulses of its vanguard, tending more and more, but vaguely and blindly, to return. If we can set our feet on the path, not vaguely and blindly, but in the full light that streamed so brilliantly and grandiosely on the inner sight of our distant forefathers, our speed will be more rapid and our arrival more triumphant. (Sri Aurobindo, 1985, p. 168)

When this truth of the Veda is once more known by men then it would cease to be a text limited to a certain people and would become instead a glorious invitation to humanity as a whole to take up the challenge of creation, to become Aryans, cultivators of their inner and outer beings until it becomes fertile for the Divine working; to become warriors, full of light, *Āryajyotih*, ready to fight for Truth in the face of every adversary and difficulty, to conquer the heavens and establish them on earth, ushering in once more the dawn of the Satyayuga, the age of Truth, for the benefit of man and God.

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# Sanskrit – A Language of Integral Perfection

Sampadananda Mishra

The source of human language, as experienced and expressed by the ancient Indian Rishis, is the urge to express an inner experience. An ideal language must enable the individual to express his experience with minimum loss of meaning, with minimum expenditure of energy, and with minimum words. The quality of a language then depends on the efficiency and effectiveness with which the language enables the individual to express his experience, how perfectly it can communicate and arouse in the listener the exact experience of the speaker. It has to encompass the infinite variety and richness of life, its moods, its depths and its heights and reflect them like a perfect mirror, without any distortions. This is a difficult and challenging task. It demands the capacity to harmonise contradictory qualities. The language must be supple and flexible, capable of subtle shades and nuances, and yet efficient and efficacious, clear, precise and unambiguous. It must be compact and pithy and also rich and opulent; concise yet suggestive, strong and powerful yet sweet and charming, capable of growth and expansion to meet new challenges of the future, and at the same time an inspiring repository of all the great achievements of the past. An impossible demand, one would say. But Sanskrit has successfully met this challenge as perhaps no other language has. This is why it is known as ‘Sanskrit’ – that which is sculpted to perfection and has been well structured and refined to the utmost.

When we look at Sanskrit, we find that in the course of its long evolution it has acquired a fullness and completeness. In other words, this is a language which is complete in all the dimensions of its personality. Its power of expression is commendable. Its power to create new words is incredible. Its flexibility is remarkable. Its linguistic structure is unblemished. Its richness of vocabulary

is unparalleled. Its literature marks excellence in all fields of knowledge. We can go on speaking about the remarkable features of Sanskrit and the list always remains endless. But let me explain to you with examples how Sanskrit fulfils all that makes it a language of integral perfection.

## The Power of Expression

Sanskrit is immensely capable of expressing every kind of human experience, spiritual, aesthetic and intellectual. It has an unambiguous linguistic structure. Its grammar is perfect. It is unimaginably rich in its vocabulary. It provides various alternatives and possibilities from which the speaker can choose just the right word and the right structure. Here comes the significance of synonyms in Sanskrit. This is a language where synonyms are plenty. What is a synonym? Synonyms are equivalent words that can be interchanged in a context. In most languages, synonyms are different names for the same object. They are words that grow out of a convention and do not often have any inherent significance. One could have used the same word to denote a completely different object and, if the convention was sufficiently strong, the word would become a synonym for that object. But this is not so in Sanskrit. Firstly, the name is not just a convention but grows out of a root with the addition of specific suffixes. Therefore, its meaning too is not a convention but is very specific and determined. The synonyms of a word are not just alternate names, where one can replace one by another. Each synonym grows out of and reveals a special quality or attribute of that object. One has to choose from the many possibilities the one that conveys best the exact property in mind.

For example the word fire has as many as thirty-four equivalents in Sanskrit. The dictionary called *Amarakosha* prepared by Amarasimha is a dictionary of equivalent words in Sanskrit. Here we find all the thirty-four words for fire. They are:

अग्निः agnih वैश्वानरः vaiśvanārah वह्निः vahniḥ वीतहोत्रः vītahotraḥ धनान्जयः dhanāñ-jayah कृम्यैट्योपिः kṛpīṭayoniḥ ज्वलनः jvalanaḥ जातवेदस् jātavedas तणुमपात् tanūnā-pāt बर्हिः barhiḥ शु-मा śuṣmā कृ-णवत्स ॐ ० □ ♦ ṛṣṇavartmā शोचि-केशः śocīṣkesāḥ उ-र्बुधः uṣarbudhaḥ आश्रयाशः āśrāyāḥ बृहद्राफुः brhadbhānuḥ कृशाफुः kṛśānuḥ पावकः pāvakaḥ अफलः analaḥ रोहिताश्वः rohitāśvaḥ वायुसखः vāyusakhaḥ शिखावाम् śikhāvān आशुशुक्षणिः āśuśukṣaṇiḥ हिर-यरेतस् hiranyaretas हुतभुक् hutabhuk दहनः dahanah हव्यवाहपः

havyavāhanah सप्तर्चिः saptārcaḥ दमुष्णः damunāḥ शुक्रः śukrah चित्रभाण्डः citrabhāṇuḥ विभावसुः vibhāvasuḥ शुचिः śuciḥ अफिलम् appittam.

Each word here has a specific and different connotation and leads to a particular experience with fire, represents a particular quality of fire. For example वह्नि *vahni* comes from the root vah 'to carry', and means that which carries (the offerings to the gods); while ज्वलन् *jvalana* comes from the root *jval* 'to burn', and means that which is burning; similarly पावक *pāvaka* comes from the root *puu* 'to purify', and means that which purifies; and शुष्म *śusmā* comes from the root *shush* 'to dry', and means that which dries up. The word अपरु *anala* means 'not enough' *na alam*, it conveys that nothing is enough for the fire. It is the all-devourer, ever dissatisfied one. The entire creation can go into the mouth of the fire, still it is not enough. So, it is for the writer, the speaker to decide the most appropriate word for 'fire' in a given context. This adds to the expressiveness of Sanskrit.

Due to its vast creative possibilities it is also capable of expressing precisely and minutely abstract thoughts as well as the most profound and sublime ideas. The supreme experiences and unusual conceptions which are a part of yogic experience are “difficult to represent accurately in any other language than the ancient Sanskrit tongue in which alone they have been to some extent systematised.” [Sri Aurobindo: ‘*The Synthesis of Yoga*’, *SABCL* Vol.20, pp. 11-12]

Look at the texts of various *Upanishads*. Do you know what the *Upanishads* are? The word *Upanishad* literally means ‘to sit near’ (the *Guru*). While writing about the *Upanishads* in his book, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, Sri Aurobindo says: “The *Upanishads* are at once profound religious scriptures (for they are a record of the deepest spiritual experiences), documents of revelatory and intuitive philosophy of an inexhaustible light, power and largeness and, whether written in verse or cadenced prose, spiritual poems of an absolute, an unfailing inspiration inevitable in phrase, wonderful in rhythm and expression. It is the expression of a mind in which philosophy and religion does not end with a cult nor is limited to a religio-ethical aspiration, but rises to an infinite discovery of God, of Self, of our highest and whole reality of spirit and being... Here the intuitive mind and intimate psychological experience of the Vedic seers pass into a supreme culmination in which the Spirit reveals the very word of its self-expression and discovers to the mind the vibration of rhythms which repeating themselves within in the spiritual

hearing seem to build up the soul and set it satisfied and complete on the heights of self-knowledge...” (Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, Vol. 14, p.269) One can find in the language of the *Upanishads* the utmost brevity of expression. Take, for example, the invocatory verse of the *Isha Upanishad*, one of the ten principal *Upanishads*. It says:

पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते।  
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशि-यते॥  
pūrṇamadah pūrṇamidam pūrṇātpūrṇamudacyate  
pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate

All this is full. All that is full.  
From fullness, fullness comes.  
When fullness is taken from fullness,  
Fullness still remains.

This brief utterance is immensely rich in its thought contents. I am not going to explain the verse in detail, that is not my purpose, what I am trying is to give you a feel of the intensity of the power of expression that is there in the verse. In the *Upanishads* we find a clear expression of the thoughts with a minimum use of words. *Upanishads* are short but one can spend one’s whole lifetime to understand even one out of the hundreds of *Upanishads*.

Further, the concept of *sutra* is simply amazing. A *sutra* is like an apothegmatic expression which is short, pithy and a versatile sentence presenting a concept in the most efficient, compact and thorough manner. This is very peculiar to Sanskrit. The *Yogasutras* of Patanjali, the *Brahmasutra* of Badarayana, *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana are a few popular scriptures written in *sutra* form. It is said in some ancient scripture that a *sutra* must have the minimum number of syllables – *alpaksharam*. Not even one syllable should be extra or superfluous. There should be no scope for doubts or ambiguities – *asandigdham*. It should have something worth-while and of value to express – *saaravat*. It should have a wide applicability in diverse situations and should not be confined to a few particular instances – *vishvatomukham*. It should be free from errors, inadequacies and fillers – *astobham*. It should stand on its own strength. It should present a truth that is irrefutable – *anavadyam*.

Panini, who is regarded as the father of Sanskrit grammar, has presented the grammar of Sanskrit in the form *sutras* in his book *Ashtadhyayi*. There are approximately four thousand *sutras* in eight chapters in which Panini has presented the whole Sanskrit language. This is considered to be the greatest monument of the world that the human genius has brought forth. I am quoting here a few *sutras* from *Ashtadhyayi* for showing the utmost brevity that Panini has achieved in composing his text on grammar.

1. ध्रुवमपायेऽपादापम् dhruvamapāye pādānam 1.4.24  
When there is a movement away, the fixed part from which the movement takes place is known as *apadana* (ablative).
2. कर्मणा यमभिप्राति स सम्प्रदापम् karmanā yamabhipraitī sa sampradānam 1.4.32  
That which the agent wishes to reach through the object is known as *sampradana* (dative).
3. साधकं मं करणम् sādhatamam karamam 1.4.42  
That which is most instrumental in bringing an action to accomplishment is known as *karana* (instrumental).
4. आधारोऽधिकरणम् ādhāro dhikaramam 1.4.44  
That which serves as locus is known as *adhikarana* (locative).
5. कर्तुरीप्सिततमं कर्म karturīpsitatamam karma 1.4.49  
That which the agent wishes the most is known as *karma* (accusative).
6. स्वतन्त्रः कर्ता svatantraḥ kartā 1.4.54  
That which is independent of everything is known as *karta* (Nominative).

These are *sutras* related to the *karaka* section of *Ashtadhyayi* which deals with the syntax of Sanskrit. You cannot really believe how much information that the *sutras* have within themselves.

Now I will give you a few examples of different types of compositions in Sanskrit where you will experience something truly amazing. Here you can see the utmost flexibility of Sanskrit language and the high connotative power of the words in Sanskrit.

Have you ever heard of this famous sentence in English which says, “Able was I ere I saw Elba”? Do you know who said this? It was the great Napoleon who said this when he was imprisoned in the island of Elba. What is so special about this sentence? Just read it once more. And try to read it once more from

right to left. What do you find? It reads the same. This is called Palindrome. There are, in English, words like peep, noon, did, dad, madam etc. which when read from both left to right or right to left give you the same sounds and same meanings. I will show you here one example from a Sanskrit text in which you will not only see what is called Palindrome but also you will be amazed to see the genius of the poet and the utmost flexibility of Sanskrit language. Here is the verse:

तं भुसुतामुक्तिमुदारहासं वंदे ॥◆◆◆ भव्यभवं दयाश्रीः ।

श्रीयादवं भव्यभतोयअदेवं संहारदामुक्तिमुतासुभुतम् ॥

taṁ bhūsutāmuttimudarahasaṁ vande yato bhavyabhavaṁ dayāśrīḥ  
śrīyādavaṁ bhavyabhatoyadevaṁ saṁhāradāmuktimutāsuhūtam

Here you can see that the second half of the verse is formed by reversing the first half. Then the entire verse from left to right and right to left is the same. Another important thing about this verse is that the first half is a description of Lord Rama, and the second half, which is the reverse of the first half, describes Lord Krishna. Is it not amazing? Is it not outstanding? How can a poet do this? Also you can observe that by reversing the first line or by reading it from right to left, the arrangement of syllables by short and long remains intact, there is no loss in the rhythmic pattern. It follows perfectly the rules of metrics, rules of grammar, and rules of poetry. Everything is perfectly maintained. What will you call this? Is it Arts or Science or Mathematics or poetry or a formula or a Mantra? I can see everything here integrated into a single whole. This is what I call the perfection of Sanskrit. Only a perfect language can express things in this manner. This particular verse is taken from a text called *Ramakrishna-viloma-kavya* written by Suryakavi. There are fifty such verses where the first half is about Lord Rama and the same line in reverse manner forms the second half describing Lord Krishna.

Likewise it is possible in Sanskrit to compose poetry using only a few consonants, or by dropping a group of letters. Or sometimes you can see verses in which there is only one vowel with the other consonants. It is also possible in Sanskrit to compose a verse in which all the consonants of Sanskrit appear in the same order as they are in the alphabet. There is a whole gamut of poetry which has such wonderful and unimaginable compositions. What exactly I wish

to convey to you is that the language is immensely capable of facilitating such expressions. Unless and until a language attains certain perfection, it cannot have such power of expression.

Let me tell you about another type of composition in Sanskrit which is known as *sandhanakavya*. In this type of poetry one can find, sometimes, one verse describing two or five or seven different topics. The poet when he makes a composition of this type has several topics in his mind and the words he uses have the ability to express all the different topics in a single verse. For example in the *Raghava-pandviya* poem composed by a poet named Dhananjaya we find the story of Ramayana and the Mahabharata in each of its verse. *Saptasandhanakavya* of Meghavijaya describes the story of seven great men. Each of its verses tells seven different stories simultaneously. I present here a very interesting story which illustrates one such verse. I hope you know the story of Nala and Damayanti. This is a story in the Mahabharata, one of the two great epics of India. Sriharsha, a master poet in Sanskrit took this episode of the Mahabharata as the topic of his epic poetry called *Naishadhiya-chcaritam*. In the thirteenth canto of this poem Sriharsha gives the description of *svayamvara* (choosing of bride-groom) ceremony of Damayanti. Damayanti has decided to choose Nala as her consort, whom she loves. But in order to test the fidelity of her love she has been put to a test. In the ceremony there are Indra, Agni, Varuna, Yama and Nala, but the four gods have assumed the form of Nala. Now, from the five, Damayanti has to choose her beloved Nala. Goddess Saraswati is there to introduce each of them to Damayanti. Being the goddess of speech she cannot tell a lie, and if she speaks the truth then there is no point in having the trick. What is to be done in this situation? Now poet Sriharsha composes just one verse. And this single verse is capable of conveying five different meanings. Goddess Saraswati introduces each of them by reciting the same verse. And each time she knows what she means. To explain the verse in detail will take a few pages. So instead of explaining it I am just quoting the verse below.

देवः पतिविर्दुर्गि षैःधराजगत्या  
पिर्णायते ष किमु ष त्रियते भवत्या ।  
फ०यं फलः खलु तवातिमहापलाभी  
यद्येफमुज्झसि वरः कतरः फुफस्ते ॥

devaḥ patirviduṣi naiśadhrājagatyā  
nirṇīyate na kimu na vriyate bhavatyā  
nāyaṁ nalaḥ khalu tavātimahānalābho  
yedyenamujjhasi varaḥ katarah punaste  
(Naishadhiyacharitam of Sriharsha, 13.33)

What do we gather from this? Is this that the mind of the poet that was capable of presenting this and that alone is important? Is this that the language had the power to enable the poet to do in that manner? Who created that mind and that language? I am not going to answer these questions. But what I feel is that we need to concentrate on these questions and I am sure that the answers will come to each one in its own way.

### The Power of Creating New Words

As I have mentioned before, a perfect language must also have the capacity to grow, to meet the demands of completely new experiences. The speaker of the language should be able to create new words to suit his needs and at the same time the listener should be able to understand him. From this point of view Sanskrit is extremely elaborate and sophisticated. Sanskrit has the ability to create new words and any amount of words to meet the coming Age. It has got a beautiful system of formation of words by combining a root-sound with a suffix and prefix. Let me give you one example of creating a new word.

Imagine, you have not seen a camera before. You do not know what it is. It is placed before you, and you are told that this is camera. You are seeing the object for the first time, and hearing the word camera for the first time. Can the word camera help you to know about it? Remember the word camera has not yet been included in any dictionary. What I am trying to say to you is that in languages other than Sanskrit the words are created arbitrarily, the meanings are imposed on the words. But in Sanskrit one can create words without any arbitrariness. Here the words are self-explanatory. You can get at least some idea about an object just by concentrating on the word by which the object is named. Now as for an example let us create a word for camera in Sanskrit. When we need to create a new word for an object what we need to take care is the nature of the object, its function, its different features etc. Now what

does a camera do? The main feature of the camera is to take pictures, to seize forms. In Sanskrit the root-sound 'grah' is used to denote 'to seize' or 'to capture'. The one who (or that which) seizes or captures can be expressed by the word 'graahin' or 'graahaka' derived from the root 'grah'. The word 'ruupa' in Sanskrit is used in the sense of form or image or picture. Now we can combine both the words ruupa and graahin or graahaka to and make it ruupagraahin or ruupagraahaka to mean something which seizes or captures forms or images. And this word can be used for camera. For any Indian, at least, the word ruupagraahin or ruupagraahaka is more direct and simple and self-explanatory than camera. Similarly one can create the word shabdagraahin or shabdagraahaka for a sound receiver. Is it not interesting? Sanskrit in this manner has a powerful system of creating new words.

Take for example another root-sound, let us say 'kri' which means 'to do'. From this one monosyllabic root-sound one can derive hundreds and thousands of words, and the root-experience 'to do or make or to put into action' helps to understand the meanings of all the thousands of words created from this root-sound. Say for example one can get the word 'kartri' meaning 'a doer' by adding the suffix 'tri', 'karana' meaning 'doing' or 'an instrument which does' by adding the suffix 'ana', 'kaarya' meaning 'a thing to be done' by adding the suffix 'ya', 'kartavya' meaning 'that which must or should be done' by adding the suffix 'tavya', and so on and so forth.

The above are just a few stray examples of the way the words are created in Sanskrit but they have far reaching implications. The first implication is that from a single root, by adding various suffixes, we can create a large number of nouns with various shades of meanings. Further, instead of adding only suffixes to a single root, if we successively add a number of prefixes and suffixes to the verb-roots or nouns, we can have an even greater number of nouns and verbs, with just the precise nuances and meanings we wish to convey. We have, therefore, not only a very large vocabulary but also the possibility of creating new words in a very natural manner for all possible situations, actions and objects. And, what is more important, it is possible for any one with a basic knowledge of Sanskrit to follow and understand these new words.

Most languages use the process of adding prefixes and suffixes to create new words. But often it is not a conscious process, not sufficiently natural and sometimes even a bit arbitrary. Nor is it a normal part of the use of the lan-

guage. On the other hand, in Sanskrit it is a very conscious and powerful tool in the hands of the speaker or the writer. The way words unfold from their seed forms is remarkable. When the root creates a word, the sound undergoes certain transformative principles to keep it resonating to its optimum. Hence, *cit* 'to be aware' becomes the resonant *cetaami*, 'I am aware', and *cetanam*, 'awareness'. The root-sound *budh*, 'to know or understand', becomes *bodhaami*, 'I know or understand', and *bodhanam* 'knowing or understanding or being awake'. These relationships operate with mathematical precision throughout the language, and it becomes extraordinarily powerful and structured, and easy to learn.

### Greatness of Sanskrit Literature

According to Sri Aurobindo "The greatness of a literature lies first in the greatness and worth of its substance, the value of its thought and the beauty of its forms, but also in the degree to which, satisfying the highest conditions of the art of speech, it avails to bring out and raise the soul and life or the living and the ideal mind of a people, an age, a culture, through the genius of some of its greatest or most sensitive representative spirits." (Sri Aurobindo: 'The Foundations of Indian Culture', Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol.14, p. 255). Here Sri Aurobindo focuses mainly on the subject matter of a literary work, the thought embedded in it, the beauty of expression, the art of speech, the cultural heritage and the social settings. In this light he speaks of the greatness of Sanskrit literature as follows:

"The ancient and classical creations of the Sanskrit tongue both in quality and in body and abundance of excellence, in their potent originality and force and beauty, in their substance and art and structure, in grandeur and justice and charm of speech and in the height and width of the reach of their spirit stand very evidently in the front rank among the world's great literatures. The language itself, as has been universally recognised by those competent to form a judgment, is one of the most magnificent, the most perfect and wonderfully sufficient literary instruments developed by the human mind, at once majestic and sweet and flexible, strong and clearly-formed and full and vibrant and subtle, and its quality and character would be of itself a sufficient evidence of the

character and quality of the race whose mind it expressed and culture of which it was the reflecting medium.”

These two striking sentences of Sri Aurobindo highlight all the characteristic features of the Sanskrit literature.

The literary glories of Sanskrit are multi-faceted and many-splendoured. Valmiki, Vyasa and Vishvanatha; Kalidasa, Kapila and Kalhana; Jayadeva, Jaimini and Jagannatha; Bhavabhuti, Bhasa and Bharata; Asvaghosa, Abhinavagupta and Anandavardhana; Vatsyayana, Visakhadatta and Vidyadhara; the list is endless. The corpus of Sanskrit literature covers the whole gamut of human experience; it is by no means confined to grammar or philosophy. Every human emotion and aspiration, every beat of the human heart, every flight of the human mind, the joys and sorrows of humanity are to be found in Sanskrit literature, and this makes it continuously meaningful in all ages to come.

### **Conclusion**

No doubt, Sanskrit is rich in vocabulary, in expression, in literature, and it has a perfect structure. The language, as much like music, brings the mind into a beautiful flow. Here we see that while reading or talking, the syllables slur into one another in the natural flow of the language. This allows for an unbroken flow of sound so fluid that it enters seamlessly into memory. This is the reason for which thousands of years ago when there were no written materials, vast amounts of information were committed to memory; great works of literature, the Vedas, the Upanishads, or even entire epics. To a large extent it was the design of the Sanskrit language that made this possible. This is another important feature of a perfect language.

Sanskrit as a perfect language does one more thing, it combines its perfection with inspired truth to create a living experience of spiritual awakening, a sense of being eternal. No language, I believe, has yet achieved the way Sanskrit has accomplished this.

## **Modes And Aspects Of Self In Hindu Philosophy In The Light Of Sri Aurobindo's Explanation**

Arun Chatterjee

### **Introduction**

The concept of Self is a major topic of both eastern and western philosophies, and many philosophers addressed this topic as far back as Plato and the sages of Upanishads. In Indian philosophies a variety of questions as to the existence of Self and its nature have been raised since the time of the Upanishads (700 BCE), and the answers have been various. Hindu philosophy believes in the existence of a permanent Self, and for Hindu spiritual practice self-realisation is of utmost importance. On the other hand Buddhist philosophy denies the existence of a permanent unchanging Self — either individual or universal. Actually in Buddhist spiritual practice a sound understanding of ‘no-self’, or Anatman, is very important.

Hindu philosophy, for which the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita form the foundation, includes different schools with varying views on the nature of Self. They all agree that the ever-changing phenomenon, which is our universe, is not everything there is and that there is a stable ground or stratum of existence, which is called Self, behind and also beyond this universe. However, there is a great deal of disagreement on the question about the reality of an individual self, which perhaps is the most interesting issue for an individual human being. Most introspective individual persons once in a while have had questions in their minds such as, “who am I really?” and “what will happen to me after I die?” I will postpone discussion on the concept of an individual self until later in the article, since one must have an understanding of the other statuses of Self, which are closely related. One must know the concepts of universal Self and also transcendental Self in order to have a complete understanding

about the nature and destiny of an individual self, and I will discuss these concepts first.

The purpose of this article is to review the concepts of Self in Hindu philosophy; however, in a few contexts I will present the perspective of Buddhist philosophy as a contrarian view. Personally I have found that the analysis and understanding of contrarian views are helpful for understanding Hindu philosophy more clearly. Before I begin my presentation I would like to point out that the terminology and definitions used to describe different aspects and statuses of Self vary among different schools of Hindu philosophy, and these differences can be very confusing to a newcomer to philosophy. In some cases the same term is used with different meanings by different writers. Examples of these terms include Atman (Self), Purusha (soul or conscious being), Ahamkara (ego), Jiva (individual self), and Ksetrajña (knower of field). Further, sometimes the first letter of a term is written in either lower or upper case with the intention of giving it a specific meaning. For example, atman (self) may refer to an individual self whereas Atman (Self) usually refers to universal Self. In this article, I will use as much as possible the terminology used and explanation given by Sri Aurobindo in his books *The Life Divine* (LD), *The Synthesis of Yoga* (SY), *Essays on the Gita* (EG), and *Letters on Yoga* (LY). For the concepts and verses of Upanishads I have consulted two books — one written by Sri Aurobindo (*The Upanishads*) and the other by S. Radhakrishnan (*The Principal Upanishads*).

### **Philosophical Concepts Related to Self**

First, I would like to review very briefly a few fundamental concepts of Hindu philosophy. From metaphysical standpoint Hinduism represents 'monism' since one of its fundamental tenets is that there is a single principle that forms the reality of everything, or in other words, this single principle is the source of everything. This single principle is spiritual and called Brahman, and it corresponds to the Ultimate Reality or Absolute of western philosophy. Further, the phenomenal world is not a creation but the self-manifestation of Brahman. Hinduism believes that although Brahman cannot be defined, certain aspects or truths about its nature can be known by spiritual intuition and spiritual experience. According to the seers and sages of Vedas and Upanishads these

knowable truth-aspects of Brahman are self-existence, self-consciousness, and self-delight or bliss, which in Sanskrit terms are Sat, Chit, and Ananda respectively. The consciousness (Chit) aspect includes in itself a force, and to recognise explicitly this force inherent in consciousness the expression consciousness-force (Chit-Shakti) is often used instead of just the term consciousness by itself. Since these aspects are always together a better expression of the knowable Brahman is Sat-Chit-Ananda or Sachchidananda. This triune principle of existence-consciousness-delight becomes the Self of the manifested universe, and thus Sachchidananda as Self is the immutable essence of all things and supports all things although it may be veiled from ordinary consciousness. The focus of this article is Self (Atman) and we will explore various aspects and statuses of Self; however, the identity of Self with Sachchidananda and Brahman should be kept in mind.

### **Statuses (Modes) and Aspects of Self**

Hindu philosophy recognises multiple statuses, or modes, and aspects of Brahman and Self, and the differences between these apparently opposite modes and aspects are not rigid. For example, there are three statuses of Self, which are of fundamental importance, and these are transcendental, universal or cosmic, and individual. The Sanskrit terms used for Self in these three statuses are Paramatman (Supreme Self) for transcendental status, Atman (Self) for universal/cosmic status, and Jivatman (individual self) for individual status. All Hindu philosophers, however, did not give equal importance or significance to these different statuses, and some of them focused on only one status and did not accept the others to be real. For example, there has been a great deal of debate on whether the immutable and transcendental status of Brahman, or Atman, alone is real and the phenomenal status, which is mutable, is unreal. There also has been debate on whether Brahman is without qualities (Nirguna) or with qualities (Saguna) – impersonal or personal. Upanishads and Gita clearly point out that these statuses and aspects are valid simultaneously. Brahman is immutable and One, but it can manifest itself as multiple mutable existences, and both of these statuses can be real at once. Similarly Brahman can be impersonal and it can also be the Divine Being or personal God (Ishwara). Self can be silent and static absorbed in itself or

dynamic when it projects itself in manifestation. One of the major contributions of Sri Aurobindo's analysis of Hindu metaphysics is that he was able to reconcile these apparent differences and clearly bring out the integral view of Upanishads and Gita.

Before proceeding further, I want to point out again that the terminology used for different statuses (modes) and aspects of Self may be different in different contexts. For example, the term Self (Atman) usually is used to refer to the impersonal and silent aspect of Self whereas the term Conscious Being or Soul (Purusha/Person) is used when Self is intimately connected with manifested Nature and also reveals its personal aspect. All writers, however, do not follow a clear-cut demarcation between these terms, and the terms Atman and Purusha are used by some writers synonymously. This variability of language with regard to Self is true with reference to western philosophy also. For example, the term ego has been used by certain western philosophers in the sense of inner self (psyche) or transcendental self whereas in Hindu philosophy ego usually is considered a construction of a person's nature representing his outer personality and not his true self. We should approach these terms with some flexibility.

### **Universal Self**

The most commonly discussed status of Self in Upanishads and other Vedantic literature is the universal Self, which has multiple aspects. Self is pure Being, Self is a pure Subject or Witness, and Self is the essence of phenomenal world. Self has an impersonal aspect as well as a personal aspect. Self has a silent and static mode, and it also has a dynamic mode. All these variations are valid simultaneously. These are discussed in the following sections.

### **Self as Being or Existence**

There has been a great deal of discussion in eastern philosophy about Being and Non-Being. Whereas Hindu philosophy believes in Being as the ultimate Reality, most of the various Buddhist schools of philosophy, especially early Buddhism, believe that there is no permanent or eternal Reality underneath

or beyond the phenomenal existence. According to this view everything in the phenomenal world is transitory and phenomenal existence is a chain of Karma, a causal chain, formed by successive actions and reactions; and what we see and experience is an ever-changing process – continuous Becoming. This concept is based on the principle of inter-dependent origination according to which every object and event is caused by a preceding action or actions, and thus is conditioned. It is emphasised that objects and events do not have any intrinsic existence, or essence, either individually or collectively. This is the concept of Śūnyata or emptiness, which was expounded by the famous Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna. Buddhist philosophers also point out that Buddhism is not Nihilistic in the sense that the objects of phenomenal world are real although transitory. However, with regard to the question about what will remain if and when the causal chain is broken up and the Becoming comes to an end, there is no clear answer in Buddhist literature. The concepts of emptiness and no-self (Anatman) clearly point out that there is nothing stable underneath the causal chain of Becoming, and it is not unreasonable to conclude that Buddhism is Nihilistic with regard to an unchanging ultimate reality. Some Buddhist scholars are reluctant to accept that Buddhism can be considered to be Nihilistic, and they point out that the Becoming is real and in that sense it exists. However, this Existence, which they accept, is only an attribute of Becoming and it does not have a status in its own right. Some scholars point out that according to Buddha himself the ultimate reality is Nirvana, which is Truth. (Rahula, p.35) Some later schools of Mahayana Buddhism accepted the concept of a transcendental Reality beyond the phenomenal existence; and in one case it is considered to be Dharma-Kaya, or Dharma-Body, of Buddha. (Kalupahana, p.138)

Hindu philosophy recognises both Becoming and Being or pure Existence as two terms of Ultimate Reality. Sri Aurobindo explains that Being is the fundamental reality, and Becoming is a mode of Being — an effectual reality. (LD, p. 77) These two terms of existence, one representing stability and oneness and the other representing movement and multiplicity, appear to be so different that some Indian philosophers also have difficulty accepting both to be true simultaneously; they took a position just opposite of Buddhism and held the view that Being alone is real and Becoming is illusory. However, as I will discuss again later, Hindu scriptures are quite clear about the



simultaneous validity of both statuses or modes of the Ultimate Reality. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "World-existence is the ecstatic dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of the God numberlessly to the view: it leaves that white existence precisely where and what it was, ever is and ever will be, its sole absolute object is the joy of the dancing." (LD, p. 78)

Hindu philosophy also accepts the concepts of Being and Non-Being. In Taittiriya Upanishad (II. 7. 1.) it is said that "Non-Being, verily, was all this in the beginning. Thence, verily, was Being born." A contrarian view is found in Chhandogya Upanishad (VI. 2. 2.) which said that "How could Being be born from Non-Being? On the contrary, my dear, in the beginning this world was Being alone, one only, without a second." Sri Aurobindo explained that "We really mean by this Nothing something beyond the last term to which we can reduce our purest conception and our most abstract or subtle experience of actual being as we know or conceive it while in this universe. This Nothing then is merely a something beyond positive conception." (LD, p. 28) The meaning of Non-Being for Hinduism certainly is not Nihil.

For Hinduism Being is pure Existence; however, Being may be considered to be more fundamental than Existence with reference to the manifested universe. It may be said that Existence represents the form of Being. Hindu concept of Being is spiritual and it has a supracosmic dimension. For our purpose Brahman is the ultimate supracosmic Being beyond the universe, and Self (Atman) is Being of the manifested universe. This Being as Self is the unifying principle that forms the base or ground of existence of everything in the phenomenal world. Everything in the manifested universe is contained in Self.

### **Self as Pure Subject or Cognizant Being**

A common way that philosophers define self is as a subject of experience, or a cognizant being, with reference to objects that are observed. The words 'observer' and 'perceiver' (or 'percipient') also are used in the sense of a subject. This is especially applicable to human beings, and in this case a subject, or self, represents awareness. As a subject an individual person is aware of himself as different or distinct from all other individual persons and objects including his own body, feelings and even mental thoughts. As Shrivastava

explains, "the self cannot be equated with anything short of the ultimate subject consciousness to which the body, the world of extra-organic objects and all the diversities of psychical contents are alike objective. It is the foundational consciousness, the ultimate subject, which is comprehending only and never comprehended." (Shrivastava, p. 71) The great Hindu philosopher Shankara wrote a great deal about self as a pure subject, and he also emphasised that self can never be an object of consciousness. I would like to add that the concept of a real subject or percipient of experiences is not accepted in all philosophies. For example, in Buddhist philosophy there is no subject or agent of actions or experiences, and I will discuss this later in the section dealing with individual self.

One important question that arises in this context is whether this pure subject, or the knower, is an individual or a universal entity. The answer to this question varies among the different schools of Vedanta. According to Advaita (Non-Dualistic) Vedanta there is no real and eternal individual self and the pure subject is the universal Self. This school of thought believes that to an individual human being the subject or knower may seem to be individual, but that is due to ignorance or Avidya. When the ignorance is removed then the same individual would realise that it is the same universal consciousness that is acting as the subject of different individuals. According to this view there is one Subject or Knower who is observing and knowing through different bodies of individual beings.

Another key point to note in this matter is that the Self as a pure subject, or knower, is a completely disinterested witness. Self is not affected by any desire and it is not a 'doer'; it simply observes with awareness. J. N. Mohanty addressed this issue of impartiality and universality of Self in an article and wrote, "To be the subject of knowledge requires transcending one's personal interests and prejudices, and to attain universality, such that knowledge is, in principle, valid for everyone. Thus the epistemological subject is *disinterested*, and also *universal*, for otherwise knowledge could not be objective and could not be valid for everyone." (Mohanty, p. 75)

Self as a pure subject can be experienced by spiritual practitioners especially by those who pursue the traditional Yoga of Knowledge. Sri Aurobindo wrote about this experience as follows: "When the Sadhaka [spiritual practitioner] has followed the discipline of withdrawal from the

various identifications of the self with the ego, the mind, the life, the body, he has arrived at realisation by knowledge of a pure, still, self-aware existence, one, undivided, peaceful, inactive, undisturbed by the action of the world. The only relation that this Self seems to have with the world is that of a disinterested Witness not at all involved in or affected or even touched by any of its activities.” (SY, pp. 384-385) Another description of how Self is experienced is given by Sri Aurobindo: “As soon as we become aware of the Self, we are conscious of it as eternal, unborn, unembodied, uninvolved in its workings: it can be felt within the form of being, but also as enveloping it, as above it, surveying its embodiment from above, *adhyaksa*; it is omnipresent, the same in everything, infinite and pure and intangible for ever.” (LD, p. 347)

The silent and immutable universal Self is the Akshara Purusha of Gita. It seems to transcend the manifested universe although it contains the universe too. In Advaita (Non-Dualistic) Vedanta the realisation of the impersonal silent Self is the straight way to individual liberation (Mukti). Sri Aurobindo pointed out that an exclusive focus on the experience of static or passive Self can make the phenomenal world appear to be unreal, and this experience can lead to a negative approach to life and a life-shunning philosophy. In Sri Aurobindo’s view the experience of silent Self is important and essential for a spiritual practitioner, but the other dynamic mode of Self also must be experienced in order to get a complete understanding of Reality. The dynamic mode of Self as the essence or indwelling spirit of phenomenal world is discussed next.

### **Self as Essence and Constituting Spirit of Phenomenon**

One of the major contributions of Bhagavad Gita is that it reconciles many apparently contradictory concepts of philosophy one of which is the distinction between Being or immutable Self, and Becoming or the mutable phenomenal existence. The phenomenal existence appears to be so different from Self that some schools of Hindu philosophy have difficulty recognising any connection between the two. According to Gita, however, Becoming is rooted in Being or Self, and Spirit is present in the mutable existence. Gita refers to Being or Self as Akshara Purusha or immutable conscious Being, and it calls the Spirit that indwells and constitutes phenomenal existence Kshara Purusha or

mutable conscious Being. In Sri Aurobindo’s words, “There is a spirit here at work in the world that is one in innumerable appearances. It is the developer of birth and action, the moving power of life, the inhabiting and associating consciousness in the myriad mutabilities of nature; it is the constituting reality of all this stir in Time and Space; ...” (EG, p. 421)

In Hindu philosophy not only Gita but Upanishads also recognise Self as essence of objects of the phenomenal world. There is a series of verses in Chhandogya Upanishad, which describes how the sage Uddalka Aruni taught his son Svetaketu the concept of Self. He used a variety of examples of material and living things of the world and declared that the subtle essence of all these is the Self or Atman. One of these famous verses, which is repeated several times, is as follows:

Verse VI. 8. 7. That which is the subtle essence, this whole world has for its Self. That is the true. That is the Self. That thou art, Svetaketu.

Self or Purusha, which indwells and constitutes all entities in the world, represents the dynamic aspect of Self, whereas the Self as actionless and disinterested witness represents the static aspect. Spiritual realisation of these two aspects of Self is described in Gita and Upanishads as seeing Self in everything and everything in Self. For a complete knowledge Sri Aurobindo adds another realisation, which is to see Self as all becomings. In his own words, “We have to see it [Self] not only as that which contains and inhabits all, but that which is all, not only as indwelling spirit, but also as the name and form, the movement and the master of the movement, the mind and life and body. (SY, p, 356)

### **Self as Personal Being (Purusha)**

I have mentioned earlier that there is a difference in the meaning of the terms Purusha and Self although these are often used interchangeably. I will try to explain this difference again. In Hindu philosophy there has been a great deal of debate regarding the Nirguna (without qualities) versus Saguna (with qualities) aspects of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. This issue is practically the same as that involving the impersonal and personal aspects of Brahman. The question, which is at the centre of the debate, is whether Brahman is impersonal or personal, or both simultaneously. The same question arises with respect to Self. Some philosophers emphasise the impersonal

aspect of Self. However, there are other philosophers who believe that Self has a personal aspect also, and that this aspect cannot be ignored. The personal form of Self is referred to as Purusha. In its relation with the manifested universe, Self takes up the poise or status of Purusha (Conscious Being), and Prakriti (Nature). Prakriti is the power of Purusha. Whereas Self has a strong impersonal character and seems to be detached and aloof from Nature, Purusha is intimately connected with Prakriti and is more personal. It should be noted that in taking up the personal poise of Purusha, Self does not give up its impersonal character.

The concepts of Purusha (Conscious Being, or Person, or Soul), and Prakriti (Nature), are extremely important in Hindu philosophy as well as in spiritual practice. It should be recognised that the concept of Purusha and Prakriti is fundamental to the philosophy of Samkhya of Kapila, which is documented in Samkhya Karika written by Ishwara Krishna. However, there is a major difference in how the relation of Prakriti with Purusha is seen in these two philosophies – Vedanta and Samkhya. Samkhya philosophy is strictly dualistic, and its Purusha and Prakriti are two different principles although they are coupled together. For Vedanta philosophy, which is monistic, Purusha and Prakriti are two aspects of the same principle, which is Self or Spirit. It also should be clearly understood that for Vedanta, Self (Atman), Purusha and Prakriti are derived from the Ultimate Reality, Brahman. Samkhya of Kapila does not admit either Brahman or Ishwara (Personal God).

For Hindu philosophy Purusha is the cosmic spirit and it provides the substance and support at all levels of manifestation. However, Purusha appears to remain hidden in Prakriti and seems to be subject to its control although in its essence Purusha is free and can become the Lord of Prakriti. As the cosmic spirit Purusha has a universal status, but it also has an individual status as it stands behind the Nature of each embodied individual as the inner self or soul. The subject of individual selves or purushas will be examined next.

### **Individual Self and Different Views**

The topic of ‘individual self’ is of great interest not only to philosophers but also to common laypersons. The reality of an individual self has been

debated for a long time in Indian philosophies as well as in western philosophy. This subject, however, is very confusing because of the different ideas about what exactly an individual self is. Further, a variety of words and expressions are used by different writers to refer to an individual self. Examples of these terms are: Atman (self), Purusha (soul), Ahamkara (ego), Jiva, Jivatman, Antaratman (inner self or psyche), Bhutatman (elemental self), and others. Then adjectives often are added with some of these words and we have expressions of empirical self, apparent self, embodied self, lower self, higher self, true self, etc. Obviously it can be quite confusing for a reader when he/she encounters these terms unless he/she recognises the context of the writing and also the system of words the writer uses. In this section I will try to address some of the commonly used words for an individual self and their commonly held meanings. I will also explain the system of words and expressions that Sri Aurobindo uses and how it may vary from the commonly held meanings.

### **Ego or Ahamkara**

The most commonly held concept of an individual self among lay persons is what in philosophy is called ego or Ahamkara. However, there is almost a unanimous agreement among philosophers that ego is merely an apparent or fictitious self and that it does not represent one’s true self. Sri Aurobindo repeatedly points out that ego is a construction of Nature (Prakriti) and that it serves an important purpose, which is to centralise a person’s experiences and create a sense of individuality. In his own words: “The formation of a mental and vital ego tied to the body-sense was the first great labour of the cosmic Life in its progressive evolution; for this was the means it found for creating out of matter a conscious individual.” (SY, p. 341) He also emphasises that this ego is the primary cause of suffering and that it must be discarded for spiritual advancement. In his own words: “The dissolution of this limiting ego is the one condition, the necessary means for this very cosmic Life to arrive at its divine fruition: for only so can the conscious individual find either his transcendent self or his true person.” (SY, p. 341) According to Gita (Verse II. 71) one who acts without the sense of ‘my-ness’ (Nirmama) and ‘I-ness’ (Nirahamkara) attains peace.

I would like to point out that some Buddhist scholars are of the opinion that the belief in a permanent self, Atman, which Hindus have, leads to egoism and selfishness. (Kalupahana, Rahula). Whereas this view may have some validity for ordinary Hindu individuals who do not understand the philosophical concept of true self in Hinduism, it certainly is not valid for Hindu spiritual practitioners and it is a misrepresentation of Hindu philosophy itself. It cannot be overemphasised that according to Hindu philosophy egoism and selfishness arise from ego-self, or empirical self, and not from the true spiritual self. For spiritual practice one of the first requirements for an aspirant is to stop identifying himself with his ego-self. As we will discuss soon, the realisation of either the true individual self (Jivatman) or the true universal Self (Atman) leads to the understanding of the unity of every living and non-living entity in the world. As a matter of fact, such a realisation leads to the development of some of the virtues that Buddhism cherishes such as empathy and compassion for others.

According to Buddhist philosophy an individual person is made up of five aggregates or bundles (Skandhas), and these are: material form (Rupa), sensation (Vedana), cognition (Samjñana), disposition or mental formations (Samskara), and consciousness (Vijñana). All these aggregates are causally interdependent and constantly changing, and there is no unchanging substance or essence in any of these aggregates. This belief represents the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of no-self (Anatman). Further, there is no subject or agent behind a conscious act although there is an ego sense. When a thought arises there is no thinker, and it is the thought that thinks. Buddhism believes in rebirth, but there is no self or soul involved with it. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "In the Buddhist theory rebirth is imperative because Karma compels it; not a soul, but Karma is the link of an apparently continuing consciousness, — for the consciousness changes from moment to moment: there is this apparent continuity of consciousness, but there is no real immortal soul taking birth and passing through the death of the body to be reborn in another body." (LD, p. 747, footnote)

### **True Individual Self According to Traditional Hinduism**

Now the question that naturally arises is: if ego is not our true self, what truly is our individual self? The term that is most widely used in Indian

philosophy for an individual spiritual self is 'Jiva'; however, there is disagreement among different schools of thought within Hinduism as to the nature of Jiva. According to some writers Jiva is the physical and psychological complex that we commonly think we are. This complex is made up of a gross physical body also called food sheath, and a subtle body made up of vital and mental sheaths. Some include with these another body called causal body, or *Kāraṇa Śarīra*. Some others think that Jiva includes only the non-physical bodies or sheaths. According to these definitions, which I just presented, Jiva is made up of Prakriti (Nature), and thus it is not a spiritual entity. However, there are other schools of thought that consider Jiva to be a spiritual entity, but they also differ with regard to the status of Jiva as to whether it is eternal or temporary, real or illusory.

Students of Hindu philosophy are well aware of the major schools of Vedanta philosophy – Advaita (Non-Dualism), Vishistha Advaita (Qualified Non-Dualism), and Dvaita (Dualism). There has been a great deal of debate regarding the interpretation of Advaita Vedanta philosophy expounded by the famous scholar of Hinduism Shankaracharya (Shankara) with regard to his views about the reality of the phenomenal world and also the status of an individual self. For Advaita Vedanta the universal Self, Atman, is our true eternal self. It also recognises that there is an individual self (Jiva) but that it exists only as long as one lives in ignorance. When living in ignorance Jiva identifies itself with Nature, which forms one's outer personality and ego (Ahamkara), and it remains in bondage. When ignorance is removed Jiva realises that it is not different (Abheda) from the transcendent universal Self (Atman) and it merges with it. Swami Vivekananda explained the difference between Atman and Jiva in the context of Advaita Vedanta as follows: "The Atman never comes or goes, never is born or dies. It is nature that moves before the Atman; and the reflection of this motion is on Atman and the Atman ignorantly thinks that It is moving, and not the nature. When the Atman thinks thus, It is in bondage, but when It comes to find out that it never moves, that It is omnipresent, then it is free. The Atman in bondage is called Jiva. Thus you see that when it is said that the Atman comes and goes, it is said only figuratively. So the Jiva, the bound soul, comes to higher or lower states." (Vivekananda, p. 320) So according to Advaita Vedanta when true knowledge

is gained the individual self, Jiva ceases to exist as a separate entity. Referring to Advaita Vedanta Sri Aurobindo wrote, "... Self in this view is one, it cannot be many or multiply itself; there cannot therefore be any true individual, only at most a one Self omnipresent and animating each mind and body with the idea of an "I".” (LD, p. 752, footnote)

The Vedantic school of Vishistha Advaita (Qualified Non-Dualism) of Ramanuja recognises an individual spiritual self and accepts it as real and an eternal portion of universal Self. It believes that an individual spiritual self in essence is identical with Self, but at the same time it is distinct from Self in some respects and it depends on God (Ishwara). The dualistic school of Madhva also treats an individual self as eternal and real but always different from God as well as from other individual selves. It is very interesting that the founders of the major schools of Vedanta rely on the same scriptures for developing their views. A detailed discussion of the various schools of Vedanta is beyond the scope of this article. I should point out that Sri Aurobindo accepted the validity of each of these schools of thought with respect to the relation of an individual soul with Self and Brahman, and he explained how these differences are based on spiritual experiences, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive although they may appear to be contradictory.

### **Individual Self and Soul in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy**

Sri Aurobindo added a new element or dimension to the concept of an individual soul. He draws from the same scriptures – Upanishads and Gita – and he cites specific verses from these sources to support his view. However, his philosophy goes a little beyond traditional Hindu thought as it affirms an evolution of consciousness and a recovery of self-awareness in which an individual self, or soul, plays a very important role. In his own words, "It is through the conscious individual being that this recovery [of consciousness] is possible; it is in him that the evolving consciousness becomes organised and capable of awaking to its own Reality. The immense importance of the individual being, which increases as he rises in the scale, is the most remarkable and significant fact of a universe which started without consciousness and without individuality in an undifferentiated Nescience. This importance can

only be justified if the Self as individual is no less real than the Self as cosmic Being or Spirit and both are powers of the Eternal.” (LD, p. 755)

Recognising the importance of an individual being in his philosophy now let us examine what Sri Aurobindo considers to be the true self or soul of an individual person. We have already stated that Sri Aurobindo repeatedly pointed out that the ego personality of a human being is not his true self, and he is in full agreement with traditional Hindu philosophy on this issue. He also has pointed out that ego has served a useful purpose in organising and centralising a person's experience of life. Nevertheless ego is not a person's true self or soul although it is the focal point of a person's outer personality. Sri Aurobindo in some contexts refers to this 'ego-self' as 'desire soul'. According to Sri Aurobindo, behind a person's outer personality there is a real spiritual individual. This spiritual individual, however, has two forms or statuses. In his own words, "The human birth in this world is on its spiritual side a complex of two elements, a spiritual Person and a soul of personality; the former is man's eternal being, the latter is his cosmic and mutable being.” (LD, p. 759) The individual spiritual Person is 'Jiva' or 'Jivatman', and the true embodied soul of one's personality is what Sri Aurobindo calls 'psychic being'. A psychic being is formed from the psychic principle or consciousness, which, according to Sri Aurobindo, is present in everything in the manifested world. The psychic consciousness or entity evolves through repeated births and attains individuality in human beings when it is called a psychic being. It is similar to the concept of the 'psyche' of western philosophy. It resides in the spiritual heart of a person and secretly participates in his life and continues to evolve. A psychic being is the representative of Jivatman in terrestrial life. Jivatman is the oversoul and it presides over the evolution of psychic being, but it itself is unborn and does not change. Another important difference between psychic being and Jivatman is that psychic being is truly individual, but Jivatman is at once individual and universal. Sri Aurobindo also points out that whereas psychic being is the Purusha, or conscious being, residing in spiritual heart at the inmost depth of a person's consciousness, there are Purushas at other levels or grades of Nature of a person. Actually Purusha represents consciousness and it is present throughout Nature, or Prakriti, but at some levels of Nature it is more hidden or revealed than at other levels.

For example, consciousness is more hidden at the physical level than it is at the mental level. These other Purushas are referred to in broad groups as mental (Manomaya) Purusha, vital (Pranamaya) Purusha, and physical (Annamaya) Purusha respectively, and they form the inner being of an individual. These Purushas can be experienced by standing back or detaching oneself from the activities of Nature. For most intellectual persons it is the mental Purusha that is most revealed or manifest and more easily identifiable. Mental Purusha can be experienced as witness consciousness or reflected consciousness. Readers of this article are urged to read Sri Aurobindo's own explanation about Jiva, psychic being, ego and also the Purushas at mental, vital and physical levels in *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and *Letters on Yoga*.

### Self in Upanishads and Gita

One of the major themes of Upanishads is Self – universal and individual, and there are many verses that address various characteristics of Self. Gita also has several verses on universal Self and individual self. The definitions of the various terms related to the concept of Self as given by Sri Aurobindo are fully supported by Upanishads and Gita. I have already quoted one famous verse from Chhandogya Upanishad. Here I will present a few more verses from these sources, which Sri Aurobindo quotes in his writings.

The following verse in Katha Upanishad (I. 3. 13) refers to universal Self: “This Self is hidden in all beings and does not reveal Himself; yet the seers with subtle vision can see Him by a sharp and subtle understanding”.

For an individual self, Jiva, Sri Aurobindo frequently refers to Gita's verse XV- 7, which says, “It is verily an eternal portion of Me that becomes the Jiva (living being) in the world of Jivas (living beings) and cultivates the six senses, including mind, which abide in Nature.” Referring to this verse Sri Aurobindo writes in *Essays on the Gita* : “This is an epithet, a statement of immense bearing and consequence. For it means that each soul, each being in its spiritual reality is the very Divine, however partial its actual manifestation of him in Nature. And it means too, if words have any sense, that each manifesting spirit, each of the many, is an eternal individual, an eternal unborn

undying power of the one Existence. We call this manifesting spirit the Jiva, because it appears here as if a living creature in a world of living creatures, and we speak of this spirit in man as the human soul and think of it in the terms of humanity only.” (EG, pp. 430-431)

The concept of psychic being, which is the embodied soul, is not as commonly found in Upanishads as that of Self, or Atman. Sri Aurobindo calls psychic being ‘*Chaitya Purusha*’ in Sanskrit. This expression, however, is not used anywhere in either Upanishads or Gita. There is nothing corresponding to psychic being mentioned in Gita, but there are several verses in Upanishads that refer to an embodied soul, which is similar in concept to psychic being. The following verse according to Sri Aurobindo refers to an embodied soul and is the same as a psychic being.

Katha II. 3. 17. The Purusha, the inner self, who is no larger than a thumb is seated for ever in the hearts of men. One must separate Him with patience from one's own body as one separates from a blade of grass its main fibre. Thou should know Him as the pure, the immortal, yea, as the pure, the immortal.

A similar verse is found in Svetasvatara Upanishad, Verse III. 13: The Purusha, the inner self, who is no larger than a thumb is seated for ever in the hearts of men. He is the lord of the knowledge framed by the heart and the mind. They who know that become immortal.

Sri Aurobindo has written extensively about the subtle differences between psychic being and Jiva and also how they are related. There are two famous verses in Upanishads that beautifully depict the relation between a psychic being and Jivatman. These two verses are in Mundaka Upanishad (Verses III. I. 1. and III. I. 2.) and also in Svetasvatara Upanishad (Verses IV. 6. and IV. 7.). These verses are as follows:

1. Two birds, companions (who are) always united, cling to the self-same tree. Of these two, the one eats the sweet fruit and the other looks on without eating.

2. On the self-same tree, the soul immersed (in the sorrows of the world) is deluded and grieves on account of his helplessness. When he sees the other, the Lord who is worshipped and his greatness, he becomes free from sorrow.

According to Sri Aurobindo (EG, p. 72), the two birds represent the double status of an individual soul. The bird eating fruit is the psychic being, which

is the Purusha in Nature, and it is immersed in sorrow because it identifies itself with the ego-self and forgets its higher status above Nature. This higher status is represented by the other bird, which is free and watches like a silent witness. The bird of higher status is Jivatman. I should point out that these two verses have been interpreted in different ways by other interpreters.

There are several other references to an individual self in various Upanishads. Maitri Upanishad is quite explicit about an embodied self, whom it calls Bhutatman, or elemental self.

### Concluding Remarks

A sound understanding of the concept of Self is important not only for understanding philosophical concepts but also for spiritual practice, but it can be difficult and confusing because of different views held by various philosophers on this subject and also for different terms used to define various modes or statuses of Self. Sri Aurobindo has been very precise in his writings with regard to definitions of various terms. In most cases his concepts and definitions are compatible with those of traditional Hinduism, but in a few cases he differed from commonly used meanings of certain terms. For example, he consistently uses the term Jiva in the sense of Jivatman, which is the individual spiritual self, whereas in common language Jiva refers to the psycho-physical complex of an individual endowed with an ego.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy places great importance on the role of an individual in the evolution of consciousness, and in this context the concept of psychic being, which he presents, is a valuable contribution to philosophy and spiritual practice. The realisation of the Purushas, conscious beings, that support different elements of an individual person's Nature — physical, vital, mental and also psychic — is an essential part of the yogic path laid out by Sri Aurobindo. The realisation of these Purushas is to be followed by the realisation of Jivatman and Atman, which leads to the attainment of cosmic consciousness, which reveals the unity of all beings in the universe. A clear understanding of the nature of various statuses and aspects of Self is extremely helpful for spiritual practice and the understanding of experiences that *come with it*.

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# Epistemology of Perception

Sandeep Joshi

How do we in the role of the subject perceive an object? What is the state of our consciousness with respect to the object? This is referred to as the epistemology of perception. In this article, I will first survey perception (*Pratyaksha*) as outlined by Vedanta and Tantra and then discuss how Sri Aurobindo augmented this theory in the light of his own supramental experiences. By giving new meaning to the four terms *Vijñana*, *Prajñana*, *Samjñana* and *Ajñana* listed in the *Aitereya Upanishad*, Sri Aurobindo presented a fresh perspective on the epistemology of perception.

## Perception in Vedanta

According to Indian philosophy, it is One Consciousness (*Brahma-Chaitanya*) which has “become” (i.e. which underlies) the world in its various forms such as man, animals, plants and even the supposedly inanimate objects. Everything has the same consciousness within it although the outward expression differs in degree and intensity. In the phenomenal world, consciousness has veiled its full power and plunged into what may be called (spiritual) Ignorance or Nescience. In case of the supposedly inanimate mineral kingdom, this consciousness is said to be veiled by a state of inertia (*Tamas*). This veiling is denoted as *Maya* (Illusion) and it is this Nescience which is the cause of all empirical distinctions between the Knower, the Known and Knowledge. There would be no Nescience if we were fully conscious because then the distinction between subject and object would not exist; everything we perceive would be seen as part of the One Self. The act of perception must be

understood in the light of this ontological background. Every act of perception (*Pratyaksha*) may be regarded as an attempted *realisation of the One Self* through an unveiling of the nescience which currently exists between the subject-consciousness and the object-consciousness, the Knower and the Known.

The phenomenon of perception can be illustrated in the words of the tenth century philosopher, Vacaspati Misra, who said: “*Every one who deals with an object first intuits it, then reflects upon it, then appropriates it, and then resolves or determines, this is to be done by me, and then he proceeds to act*”. In accordance with this example, it is possible to identify three stages of perception [1]:

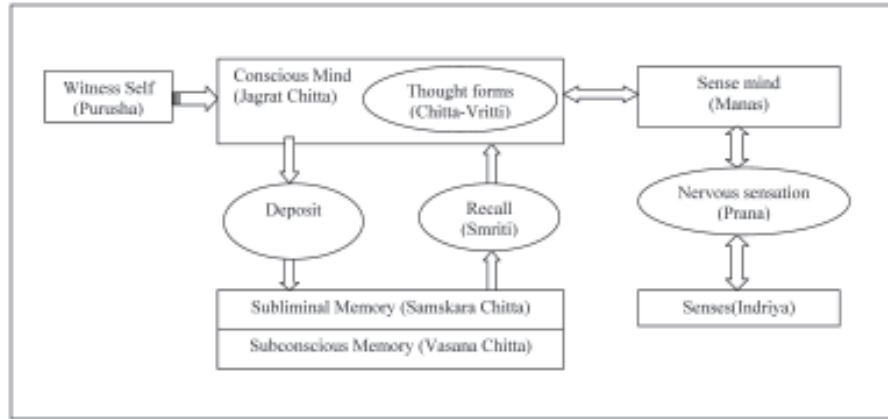
**1. Indeterminate apprehension:** The subject consciousness registers a change in the sense-input. This stage occurs at the level of the sense-mind (*Manas*). The mind must be attentive or attached to the organ. If the mind is inattentive, no perception occurs even if the external sense-organ is active. This is observed in the phenomenon of absent-mindedness where one says, “*I didn’t hear that song even though it was playing.*”

**2. Determinate apprehension:** The mind (*Chitta*) takes the form of the object (*Chitta-Vritti*). The mind is said to be active in perceiving an object, and not a passive recorder of impressions. It is said to capture an impression of the external object. Here, one may take the analogy of a camera which has a photographic film (or pixel buffer, if one uses the analogy of digital cameras) onto which all the sense-impressions are united into a single image.

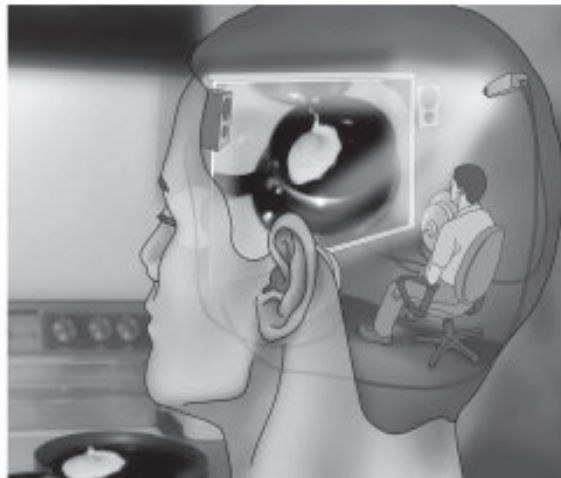
**3. Cognition / Apperception:** In this stage, the mind, in its cognitive aspect (*Buddhi*) along with the ego-sense (*Ahankara*), utilises past memories (*Samskaras*) to resolve and act on the object. According to Vedanta, one part of the mind *becomes* the object (i.e. by imaging the object within our consciousness) and another part of the mind observes this internal image and manipulates it using the intellect. The first part is the determinate apprehension discussed in the preceding paragraph while the second part is cognition.



The following figure of the Mental sheath will be helpful in this discussion.



The figure below can be regarded as a picturesque view of the division that occurs in the mind during the second (determinate apprehension) and third (cognition) stages described above. It was originally used to deride Cartesian materialism but it serves to illustrate the current discussion as well.



The various ancient Indian schools of philosophy such as Nyaya, Mimamsaka, Sankhya, Jaina as well as Buddhism offered their own variants on the epistemology of perception. The full discussion of these variants can be read in Jadunath Sinha's excellent two-volume set *Indian Psychology*.

## Perception in Tantra

Arthur Avalon in his book *Serpent Power* presents the perspective of Tantra on perception. Tantra denotes the object as *Artha* and subject as *Sabda*. The part of the mind which becomes the object, which images the object within the subject-consciousness, is called *subtle Artha*. The other part of the mind, which cognises this subtle image, is denoted as *subtle Sabda*. The following is an excerpt from the Arthur Avalon's *Serpent Power*

The object perceived is called *Artha*, a term which comes from the root "Ri" which means to get, to know, to enjoy. *Artha* is that which is known, and which therefore is an object of enjoyment. The mind as *Artha* that is, in the form of the mental impression is a reflection of the outer object or gross *Artha*. As the outer object is *Artha*, so is the interior subtle mental form which corresponds to it. That aspect of the mind which cognises is called *Sabda* or *Nama* (name), and that aspect in which it is its own object or cognised is called *Artha* or *Rupa* (form). The outer physical object of which the latter is, in the individual, an impression is also *Artha* or *Rupa*, and spoken speech is the outer *Sabda*. Subject and object are thus from the Mantra aspect *Sabda* and *Artha* terms corresponding to the Vedantic *Nama* and *Rupa*, or concepts and concepts objectified. As the Vedanta says, the whole creation is *Nama* and *Rupa*. Mind is the power (*Sakti*), the function of which is to distinguish and identify (*Bheda samsarga-vrtti Sakti*). Perception is dependent on distinguishing and identification. In the perception of an object that part of the mind which identifies and distinguishes, or the cognising part, is subtle *Sabda*, and that part of it which takes the shape of the object (a shape which corresponds with the outer thing) is subtle *Artha*. The perception of an object is thus consequent on the simultaneous functioning of the mind in its twofold aspect as *Sabda* and *Artha*, which are in indissoluble relation with one another as cogniser (*Grahaka*) and cognised (*Grahya*). Both belong to the subtle body. [2]

### Sri Aurobindo on perception

Sri Aurobindo has augmented the Vedantic theory of perception based on his spiritual experience of the Supramental World (*Maharloka* or *Vijñanaloka*). In this world, ideas are not abstractions but always concrete

realities inseparable from the objects they define. To paraphrase Sri Aurobindo, a good illustration of this power would be the ability to simultaneously experience the power of the burning light and the substance of the fire within it [5]. He coined the term **Real-Idea** to denote this experience. This is how he characterised the concept in a conversation with disciples:

On the plane of mind you have abstractions. It is the mind's way of representing realities of planes higher than the mind. Behind these abstractions there is a reality. On the plane above the mind there are no abstractions, there are realities and powers. For instance, you form an abstract idea in the mind about the Supermind. When you get to the Supermind you find it is not an abstraction at all. It is more intensely concrete than Matter, something quite overwhelming in its concreteness. That is why I called it the **Real-Idea** and not an "abstract idea". In that sense there is nothing more concrete than God. Even if we were on the pure mental plane we would find mind much more concrete and real. But as we are on the physical plane we always think the mind more abstract. Before the Supermind, Matter dwindles into a shadow. [3]

The supramental consciousness can be said to have two powers – apprehension and comprehension.

**1. Apprehension (Pratyaya)** is the basis of objective cognition. This is equivalent to the mode of apprehension defined in the Vedantic theory of perception. It is the gaining of relational knowledge of the object from the standpoint of the subject. It is when the subject places an image of the object in front of it (within, not without) in order to build a relation with it.

**2. Comprehension** is gaining knowledge about the object from within – as if the object were part of one's own self. In this mode, knowledge is obtained because the consciousness perceives the other as part of one's own self. Such knowledge is more complete than the traditional form of relational knowledge gained through the subject-object differentiation.

Sri Aurobindo discovered that the all the perceptive powers of the human mind are actually derived from, but inferior to, the Supramental powers of Comprehension and Apprehension. In the unenlightened man, the powers of apprehension are dominant while the powers of comprehension are imperfect and undeveloped. This is in contrast to the Supramental plane, where the powers of comprehension operate perfectly while the powers of apprehension are rendered subordinate or redundant. Sri Aurobindo augmented the Vedantic

theory of perception by redefining the four terms *Vijñāna*, *Prajñāna*, *Samjñāna* and *Ajñāna* mentioned in verse 3.2 of the *Aitereya Upanishad*.

**यदेतद्दृश्यं मनश्चैतत् । संज्ञानमाज्ञानं विज्ञानं प्रज्ञानं मेधा दृष्टि-  
धृतिर्मतिर्मनीषा जूतिः स्मृतिः संकल्पः ऋतुरसुः कामो बश इति सर्वा-  
प्यर्थतानि प्रज्ञानस्य नामधेयानि भवन्ति ॥२॥**

Translation: This which is the heart, is mind also. Concept and will and analysis and wisdom and intellect and vision and continuity of purpose and feeling and understanding, pain and memory and volition and application of thought and vitality and desire and passion, all these, yea all, are but names of the Eternal Wisdom. (*Aitereya Upanishad* verse 3.2)

With reference to the verse above, *Prajñāna* and *Samjñāna* are powers of apprehension, while *Vijñāna* and *Ajñāna* are powers of comprehension.

- **Vijñāna:** The object is held as part of one's own consciousness in order to gain complete knowledge of the truth and idea within it.

- **Ajñāna:** (note that *Ajñāna* here does not signify ignorance but knowledge-will as in the word *Ajñya* and *Ajña Chakra*) The object is possessed in the energy of consciousness.

- **Prajñāna:** The object is analysed as separate from the subject in the outgoing movement of the apprehensive consciousness.

- **Samjñāna:** The object is analysed in the in-bringing movement of the apprehensive consciousness. This is awareness of the object by sense-contact.

We will now analyse the varied actions of these powers of consciousness in the three stages of the spiritual growth of Man.

**1. Unilluminated Mind:** In this case, *Samjñāna* and *Prajñāna* dominate while *Vijñāna* is poor and *Ajñāna* is absent.

**2. Intuitive Mind:** Partial *Vijñāna* awakens and functions along with *Prajñāna* and *Samjñāna*.

**3. Supramentalised Mind:** Now *Vijñāna* and *Ajñāna* dominate while *Samjñāna* and *Prajñāna* are rendered redundant.

### Perception in the Unilluminated Mind

The unilluminated mind proceeds from ignorance to knowledge. Its primary power is apprehension in the form of *Samjñāna* and *Prajñāna* and then it

tries to imperfectly gain comprehension as *Vijñāna* and *Ajñāna*. Sri Aurobindo defined the act of perception as follows:

As our human psychology is constituted, we begin with *Samjñāna*, the sense of an object in its image; the apprehension of it in knowledge (*Prajñāna*) follows. Afterwards we try to arrive at the comprehension of it in knowledge (*Vijñāna*) and the possession of it in power (*Ajñāna*). There are secret operations in us, in our subconscious and superconscious selves, which precede this action, but of these we are not aware in our surface being and therefore for us they do not exist. If we knew of them, our whole conscious functioning would be changed. [6]

Comparing these terms to the Vedantic theory, the correspondence can be identified as follows:

1. **Samjñāna is equivalent to Indeterminate apprehension**, functioning as the action of Sense-mind (*Manas*)
2. **Prajñāna is equivalent to Determinate apprehension**, in the form of imaging of the object within the mind (*Chitta-Vritti*).
3. **Vijñāna** functions in a much-diminished form as the cognitive mode of the intellect.
4. **Ajñāna** is next to absent in the operation of the unenlightened man.

### Perception in the Intuitive Mind

When the consciousness rises to the Intuitive Mind, one develops the four powers of Intuition - Revelation or *Drishti*, Inspiration or *Sruti*, Intuition or *Smriti* and Discrimination or *Viveka* [4]. The functioning of *Vijñāna* is partially awakened. As Sri Aurobindo states in one of his unfinished commentaries on the Upanishads, *Smriti* (Intuition) is the link between *Vijñāna* (Knowledge by Identity) and *Prajñāna* (apprehension) because *Smriti* is innate perception; it is the latent memory of the Truth which rises within our consciousness, we have momentarily unified with the object-consciousness. The relevant passage is:

A still more indirect action of the *vijñāna* is *smriti*; when the truth is presented to the soul and its truth immediately & directly recognised by a movement resembling memory—a perception that this was always true and already known to the higher consciousness. *It is smriti that is nearest to*

*intellect action and forms the link between vijñanam & prajñanam* (emphasis added), ideal thought & intellectual thought, by leading to the higher forms of intellectual activity, such as intuitive reason, inspiration, insight & prophetic revelation, the equipment of the man of genius. [7]

### Perception in the Supramentalised Mind

In the fully supramentalised being, the primary power is comprehension while the powers of apprehension become secondary capabilities. As Sri Aurobindo defines it:

The basis of its action of the world will be the perfect, original and all-possessing *Vijñāna* and *Ajñāna*. It will comprehend all things in its energy of conscious knowledge, control all things in its energy of conscious power. These energies will be the spontaneous inherent action of its conscious being creative and possessive of the forms of the universe. What part then will be left for the apprehensive consciousness and the sense? They will be not independent functions, but subordinate operations (*Prajñāna* and *Samjñāna*) involved in the action of the comprehensive consciousness itself. In fact, all four there will be one rapid movement. If we had all these four, acting in us with the unified rapidity with which the *Prajñāna* and *Sanjñāna* act, we should then have in our notation of Time some inadequate image of the unity of the supreme action of the supreme energy.

If we consider, we shall see that this must be so. The supreme consciousness must not only comprehend and possess in its conscious being the images of things which it creates as its self-expression, but it must place them before it — always in its own being, not externally — and have a certain relation with them by the two terms of apprehensive consciousness. Otherwise the universe would not take the form that it has for us; for we only reflect in the terms of our organisation the movements of the supreme Energy. But by the very fact that the images of things are there held in front of an apprehending consciousness within the comprehending conscious being and not externalised as our individual mind externalises them, the supreme Mind and supreme Sense will be something quite different from our mentality and our forms of sensation. They will be terms of an entire knowledge and self-possession and not terms of an ignorance and limitation which strives to know and possess. [6]

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## Emotion and its transformation

Larry Seidlitz

As with many things in Sri Aurobindo's writings, we find in his treatment of emotions a great paradox together with its synthesis and resolution. On one hand, emotions are presented in the most disparaging terms, as the centre stage for all suffering, perversion, and sordid obscurity. On the other hand, emotions are viewed as not only deriving from the ineffable Ananda or Bliss which is the very nature and substance of the Divine Existence, but they are also a powerful means into the very heart of that Ananda. So let us look at this mystery of emotions, examine their nature, and trace the lines of their transmutation and divinisation as explained by Sri Aurobindo.

### Character of human emotion

Let us consider first the nature of normal human emotion. For the typical person, Sri Aurobindo said, emotion is . . .

*...similar to the animal's, if more variously developed; its emotions are governed by egoistic passion, blind instinctive affections .....often sordid degradations,— heart besieged and given over to the lusts, desires, wraths, intense or fierce demands or little greeds and mean pettinesses of an obscure and fallen life-force and debased by its slavery to any and every impulse.*<sup>1</sup>

We see this character most clearly in certain emotions such as anger, irritation, hatred, jealousy, envy, greed, and lust. But similarly, sadness, despair, and grief typically arise in reaction to the disappointment of an egoistic demand or claim, however justifiable it may seem. Fear and anxiety both have an instinctive quality, and may arise spontaneously due to conditioning with various harmless stimuli.

These negative emotions are the source of much human suffering, but what about our positive emotions, such as love and joy? Here, too, when we scratch the surface we often find them to be egoistic in nature and not very pure. We experience joy at the satisfaction of our cherished desires, but inevitably it carries as its shadow disappointment, sadness or anger when these desires are not satisfied. Even love often is ego-centred and ephemeral. We love with an expectation of reward or return. Although we may not be conscious of it, ordinarily we love so that *we* may be loved, respected, or have our desires satisfied by the other. Moreover, human love, though it can be pure or at least can be purified, readily allies itself with lust, with sexual desire. Human love often is at least partly a bargain, “I will love you if you love me and satisfy my needs.” When love does not meet with the return required, it may turn into grief, anger, or even hatred. Thus, in the ordinary experience of the play of emotions, abiding peace or unmixed delight is hardly possible.

### Enmeshment with the mind

While emotions in themselves colour human experience in shifting hues, pleasant and unpleasant, terrible and wonderful, and often just gray and dull, their action is more far-reaching in that they also distort the faculties of the intelligence and will. Our thought and decision-making, the choices we pursue are often dictated by our emotions rather than a clear disinterested reason and discrimination which looks dispassionately at things and directs our actions and our lives with a clear-seeing intelligent will. We act based on our emotionally coloured preferences and desires, or impulsively out of anger, fear, attraction, pleasure seeking, greed, lust. Our judgment is clouded, our perceptions are narrowed and distorted, our reasoning is used to support our emotional and vital desires and impulses. Thus, our emotions not only bring us suffering and limitation through our experience of them, but they also usurp the control of our higher faculties of reason and judgment that otherwise might provide a more fruitful course of action and experience.

Therefore, because emotions are entangled with the rest of our being, Sri Aurobindo’s analysis of them involves several other layers of our complex psychological make-up. He first distinguishes three basic parts of the being: the mind, the life-force or vital, and the body; though the vital links the mind

and body and is enmeshed in both of them. The body and the vital together make up what he calls the outer instrument; the conscious mentality constitutes the inner instrument, but this also is pervaded by the vital. The vital in its enmeshment with the mentality is sometimes referred to as the psychic prana. The inner instrument or conscious mentality is differentiated into four principal parts, the *chitta* or basic mental consciousness, the *manas* or sense mind, the *buddhi* or intelligence, and the *ahankara* or the ego-idea. Sri Aurobindo says that every fibre of the *chitta* and *manas*, the basic mental consciousness and the sense mind, is pervaded by the psychic prana, and that usually, the *buddhi* and *ahankara*, the intelligence and ego, also are overpowered by it, though they have the capacity of rising above subjection to it.<sup>2</sup>

### Subconscious basis

The basic mental consciousness or *chitta* is largely subconscious; only a part of it is conscious. It is out of this basic substratum of universal mental consciousness that all the action of the higher parts of the inner instrument—the sense-mind, intelligence, and ego—arises. Sri Aurobindo explains that this *chitta* has two basic kinds of action, one receptive, the other reactive and dynamic. As a passive power, it receives the impacts of things, whether or not consciously perceived, and stores them in its immense subconscious memory. Ordinarily we consciously draw only a little of what we have perceived from this memory, but other material stored there may also exert a subconscious influence upon us. This *chitta* also serves as a storage of memory for the submental vital and physical parts of the nature, and underlies the habits of our vital and physical nature.<sup>3</sup>

Sri Aurobindo explains that our emotions arise out of this substratum of mental consciousness. He writes:

*When it is struck by the world’s impacts from outside or urged by the reflective powers of the subjective inner being, it throws up certain habitual activities, the mould of which has been determined by our evolution. One of these forms of activity is the emotional mind,—the heart, as we may call it for the sake of a convenient brevity. Our emotions are the waves of reaction and response which rise up from the basic consciousness . . . Their action too is largely regulated by habit and an*

*emotive memory. They are not imperative, not laws of necessity;*<sup>4</sup>

Sri Aurobindo explains that there is a close dependence of this emotional mind on the psychic prana or life-energy that permeates the *chitta*. This prana introduces into the emotional mind a certain insistent vital craving or desire to seize upon what it feels it does not have, a life-instinct for possession and satisfaction which creates much of the emotional nature's aggressive and obstinate tendencies. The proper function of the psychic prana is pure possession and enjoyment, but the true enjoyment of existence can come only when the object of enjoyment is not things or persons in themselves, but rather the Ananda of the spirit in the things or persons.<sup>5</sup>

All emotion, feeling, and sensation are ways in which the individual soul meets and experiences the manifestations of the Divine in universal nature. Our higher Self experiences the world with which it is One as a universal delight, Ananda. But the individual soul, a projection of this Self in the lower nature, identifies itself with the lower mind and life-force of the limited ego, and experiences these contacts in various gradations of pain, pleasure, or neutral indifference, depending on its ability to meet, assimilate, and master what it experiences as coming from outside itself. Because of the greater Self within, something in us takes delight in all these contacts, even the painful ones, and grows from them. But to experience this universal Ananda, the instruments of the mind and life must learn to renounce their egoistic, dualistic, preferential and perverse grasping at delight in the world, and enjoy only the essential delight or *rasa* that is in these contacts.<sup>6</sup>

### Experience of Ananda

Sri Aurobindo explains that the experience of this deeper Ananda cannot come in its fullness until we can reflect in our nature our hidden spiritual being, the Self above the mind, life, and body. But before this spiritual part of our being discloses itself, a pure and legitimate human enjoyment of things may be established. Sri Aurobindo says that this enjoyment must be based principally in the perceptive, aesthetic and emotive mind, and only secondarily in the sensational, nervous and physical part of the being, but all subject to the clear rule of the *buddhi*, the intelligence with its reason, feeling for the truth, and sense of order, harmony, and beauty. The mind then can take a pure delight

in things while rejecting whatever is troubled or perverse, and the psychic prana can then bring in the full enjoyment of the whole being, which is its proper role.<sup>7</sup>

To summarise these points so far, we have said that the emotions are forms of habitual response to the impacts of things arising out of the *chitta*, the basic mental consciousness. The *chitta* and the emotions arising from it are only partially conscious, and are enmeshed with the psychic prana or vital life-force. This psychic prana has as its psychological functions enjoyment and possession, but due to its obscurity and sense of limitation and separation in the ego, this ordinarily takes the form of desire, an instinctual craving and grasping at things, which carries as a consequence the sense of need, disappointment, and frustration in its inability to satisfy its endless desires. These characteristics of the psychic prana make their way into all the inner instruments—the sense-mind, the emotional mind, and the intelligence and will. To purify the inner instruments of this enmeshment of the psychic prana, and to purify the prana itself of desire, is the solution to the suffering associated with the emotions.

### Purification

Sri Aurobindo suggests several different lines of discipline that can be pursued singly or in combination to achieve this solution. One important line is to clear the *buddhi* or intelligence and mental will of the distorting influences of the psychic prana. As this progresses, the *buddhi* can be made to respond to the higher truth, understand its own nature and the nature of the lower instruments, and set about a proper ordering and organisation of the whole being. However, in order to clear the *buddhi* of these falsifying influences, it is necessary to simultaneously effect a preliminary clearing of the lower parts of the nature—the sense mind, the emotional mind, and the psychic prana itself—of the insistent claims of desire.<sup>8</sup>

To achieve this purification, a clear distinction must be made in one's psychological experience between desire and the will. There is a pure and legitimate will to take delight in the world, but desire is a deformation of this will in the psychic prana. Sri Aurobindo describes the pure will to be a "much more free, tranquil, steady and effective force" than desire.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, desire...

*invades the sensational mind and brings into it the unquiet thirst of sensations, invades the dynamic mind with the lust of control, having, domination, success, fulfilment of every impulse, fills the emotional mind with the desire for the satisfaction of liking and disliking, for the wreaking of love and hate, brings the shrinkings and panics of fear and the strainings and disappointments of hope, imposes the tortures of grief and the brief fevers and excitements of joy, makes the intelligence and intelligent will the accomplices of all these things and turns them in their own kind into deformed and lame instruments, the will into a will of craving and the intelligence into a partial, a stumbling and an eager pursuer of limited, impatient, militant prejudgment and opinion. Desire is the root of all sorrow, disappointment, affliction, for though it has a feverish joy of pursuit and satisfaction, yet because it is always a straining of the being, it carries into its pursuit and its getting a labour, hunger, struggle, a rapid subjection to fatigue, a sense of limitation, dissatisfaction and early disappointment with all its gains, a ceaseless morbid stimulation, trouble, disquiet, aśānti.<sup>10</sup>*

### **Inner analysis and detachment**

Thus to rid all the parts of the mind of desire is indispensable to arrive at the true Ananda of existence. Sri Aurobindo says that “This can only be got rid of by a sort of practical, inward psychological operation of analysis”<sup>11</sup> by which we become aware of the intelligence with its will as a separate power, distinguish these from the psychic prana, and no longer allow the latter to usurp their control, making it instead a transmitting channel for their action, obedient to their commands. The prana then can become a responsive and powerful instrument for the mind’s direct control of the physical life.

This process of inner psychological analysis and the rejection of desire in favour of the clear reason and intelligent will should be supported by the development of an inner psychological detachment from the activities of the nature, and in particular from the suggestions and claims of the desires. The possibility of this detachment, which can become radical and complete, is based on a distinction between the Purusha and Prakriti, that is, between a pure

witness consciousness and the activities of the nature. This distinction is at the base of phenomenal existence in which the One Existent becomes conscious of itself as object. For practical considerations, as one can observe one’s body and say of it that it is not myself, so we can detach ourselves and withdraw our identification from the activities of our vital and mental nature. We can step back in our consciousness into a tranquil poise of a pure witness and observe the activities of our thoughts and emotions and desires without becoming enmeshed in their activities. This requires an inward orientation and poise of the consciousness that refuses to identify with the outward pull and leaping of Prakriti. The individual soul must establish its poise in this inner Purusha consciousness and detach itself from the ceaseless unquiet activity of the outer nature.

From this poise of detachment, it is more possible to establish an effective will to counter the wrong suggestions of the desire nature. Sri Aurobindo explains that the Purusha must . . .

*... repel even the least indices or incidence of trouble, anxiety, grief, revolt, disturbance in his mind. If these things come, he must at once detect their source, the defect which they indicate, the fault of egoistic claim, vital desire, emotion or idea from which they start and this he must discourage by his will, his spiritualised intelligence, his soul unity with the Master of his being. On no account must he admit any excuse for them, however natural, righteous in seeming or plausible, or any inner or outer justification. If it is the Prana which is troubled and clamorous, he must separate himself from the troubled Prana, keep seated his higher nature in the Buddhi and by the Buddhi school and reject the claim of the desire-soul in him; and so too if it is the heart of emotion that makes the clamour and the disturbance.<sup>12</sup>*

### **Equality**

Another movement closely allied with the development of detachment is the cultivation of equality. Sri Aurobindo says equality is “to remain unmoved within in all conditions.”<sup>13</sup> A complete equality can be cultivated which is based, said Sri Aurobindo, on the “sense of the one Self, the one Divine everywhere—seeing the One in spite of all differences, degrees, disparities

in the manifestation.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, if one takes the attitude that the Divine is everywhere and in each person and thing and happening, this attitude discourages the tendency to emotionally react either positively or negatively, but rather to regard things dispassionately, to detect the divine in them, and to look more deeply into their significance. This side of the discipline can be very practical; it is an effort and aspiration towards a state in which, as Sri Aurobindo describes it, one is . . .

*...not to be touched or disturbed by things that happen or things said or done to you but to look at them with a straight look, free from the distortions created by personal feeling, and to try to understand what is behind them, why they happen, what is to be learnt from them, what is it in oneself which they are cast against and what inner profit or progress one can make out of them; it means self-mastery over the vital movements,—anger and sensitiveness and pride as well as desire and the rest,—not to let them get hold of the emotional being and disturb the inner peace, not to speak and act in the rush and impulsion of these things, always to act and speak out of a calm inner poise of the spirit.*<sup>15</sup>

This is not to say that all things are to be accepted or responded to in the same manner. One is to remain calm, unmoved within, but still one is to act, to choose truth and reject falsehood, and to do so in consonance with the highest light of the reason, or if one is capable, in obedience to a higher guidance from above or deep within. One may even be called to fight and destroy. As Sri Aurobindo said,

*...here there is a work to be done, a Truth to be established against which immense forces are arranged, invisible forces which can use visible things and persons and actions for their instruments. If one is among the disciples, the seekers of this Truth, one has to take sides for the Truth, to stand against the forces that attack it and seek to stifle it.*<sup>16</sup>

### **Openness to the Divine**

The methods discussed so far aimed at the rejection of desire from the mental parts of the being and from the psychic prana—the mental discrimination between the pure will of the *buddhi* and vital desire and the rejection

of the latter; the development of an inner detachment of the Purusha consciousness from the activities of Prakriti, and the cultivation of an inner equality—have relied mainly on taking certain mental poises and actions through one’s own personal effort. These methods aimed at bringing calm and purity into the mind and vital can be supplemented by the more spiritual method of calling down the divine Peace, Light and Force from above the mind. These things are already established in our higher consciousness, they have only to be brought down and made effective in our lower nature. In Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga, it is really the Force of the Divine that is the effective agent in the change and transformation of the nature, though it can and does utilise one’s personal effort in its action:

*In this yoga the whole principle is to open oneself to the Divine Influence. It is there above you and, if you can once become conscious of it, you have then to call it down into you. It descends into the mind and into the body as Peace, as a Light, as a Force that works, as the Presence of the Divine with or without form, as Ananda. Before one has this consciousness, one has to have faith and aspire for the opening. Aspiration, call, prayer are forms of one and the same thing and are all effective; you can take the form that comes to you or is easiest to you.*<sup>17</sup>

This aspiration and opening to the Influence of the Divine is then an effective method to establish an increasing purity and calm in all the parts of the mind and vital and physical consciousness, as well as awakening the spiritual consciousness, the vision and the sense of the Divine everywhere and a contact with the Divine Ananda that is in all things. This aspiration or call to the Divine to come down into us can and should be made by each layer and part of the being—from the mind, life, and even the physical consciousness. Whereas for many people the mind and will most readily ally themselves to this aspiration, the heart and emotional being can also turn to the Divine Influence in a powerful way which is particularly effective in the purification of the emotions and in opening the outer being to the deeper soul within, and to the Ananda or bliss which is the true source and goal of emotional experience. It is this aspiration and seeking of the heart for the Divine that we must elaborate next in Sri Aurobindo’s view of the emotions in yoga.



## Bhakti Yoga

In Bhakti yoga, the spiritual path of devotion, the normal types of relationships in human life are directed not towards transient human relations, but towards the Divine Being. It focuses especially on the conception of the Divine in his personality as the divine Lover and enjoyer of the universe, but other relations with the Divine, such as Friend, Teacher, Mother, Father, and even Opponent may also be developed. Sri Aurobindo asserts that the Divine is not limited to an impersonal existence or state, but that the Divine also stands behind all persons and personalities in the universe and is quite capable of entering into personal relationship with the human devotee in whatever form or manner the devotee seeks him. It is through the development and intensification and purification of such relations with the Divine that the emotional being of the devotee can be most readily purified of desire and egoism, and enter into and experience the universal Love and Ananda that is the very nature of the Divine.

This relationship with the Divine may take the form of a relation with a transcendent Being or Presence with whom we feel inwardly connected, supported perhaps by the use of symbols as an aid in making the Presence more tangible, but otherwise independent of physicality. But it may also take the form of a relation with a Being or Presence which expresses itself through all that we meet in the world, through persons, through nature, through objects, through all our inner and outer experiences and events. We can learn to see, hear, smell, taste, touch the Divine in all our contacts with the world, and we can begin to love and enjoy the Divine immanent in all its manifestations. This ampler relation takes us into the mysteries of the divine Love and Ananda, for we then meet and experience the object of our growing love and adoration at each moment, we become surrounded and immersed in the Divine, carried in the arms of our beloved who is the very fount of all love, sweetness, beauty and delight.

As we develop this relation with the Divine, we see that our relations with the world are all means by which we are prepared for entering into relation with Him. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

*All the emotions with which we confront the action of the universal existence upon us are really directed towards him, in ignorance at first, but it is by directing them in growing knowledge towards him that we enter*

*into more intimate relations with him, and all that is false and ignorant in them will fall away as we draw nearer towards unity. To all of them he answers, taking us in the stage of progress in which are; for if we met no kind of response or help to our imperfect approach, the more perfect relations could never be established. Even as men approach him, so he accepts them and responds too by the divine Love to their Bhakti, tathaiva bhajate. Whatever form of being, whatever qualities they lend to him, through that form and those qualities he helps them to develop, encourages or governs their advance and in their straight way or their crooked draws them towards him.*<sup>18</sup>

Sri Aurobindo explains that our relations with the world must more and more be directed consciously towards the Divine, the One Being who stands behind all forms in the universe, and must progressively shed their more earthly and ignorant elements until they become changed into a pure and perfect love. He explains that all other emotions arise from either our seeking or grasping after the delight in existence, from the frustration of our seeking, or from the loss or failure of the delight we thought we had possessed. Only pure love can enter directly into the self-existent delight of the Divine Being; it is, he says, the very body of that Ananda.<sup>19</sup>

## The psychic being

All these methods to purify the emotions of desire help to bring forward in their place the true soul, or psychic being. The psychic being is our inmost, usually hidden self and personality that is centred around the psychic entity, our divine essence, a projection of the divine into our individual existence. This is the true person in us, the divinity in our evolving nature that persists and grows from life to life until the time when it can burst its age-long concealment and come forward and openly and sovereignly lead the external nature to its divine fulfilment.<sup>20</sup>

The psychic being is centred deep within behind the emotional heart centre, its presence hidden by the restless and tumultuous activities of the mind, the emotions, and the vital nature. From behind the veil of these activities of our surface nature, and from its own native realm between earthly lives, it directs the course of our evolving being from life to life through the ignorance to its fulfilment in the higher Knowledge. It assimilates the experiences of life,

extracts what is useful in them for its growth and development, and builds up in this process through many lives a being expressive of its unique divine individuality. Through the experiences of life, parts of the mind, vital, and physical consciousness become integrated with the psychic being and expressive of it, providing an instrumentation for its expression in the outer life. When these outer instruments are sufficiently purified and prepared to consent to this divine leading, the psychic being can come forward into the outer consciousness and take control of the external life and direct and organise all its movements towards their divine potentialities.

The coming forward of the psychic being into the outer nature depends largely on the development of a sense of love and surrender to the Divine, as these are the native character of the psychic being. As Sri Aurobindo says:

*. . . the main business of the heart, its true function is love. It is our destined instrument of complete union and oneness; for to see oneness in the world by the understanding is not enough unless we also feel it with the heart and in the psychic being, and this means delight in the One and in all existences in the world in him, a love of God and all beings.*<sup>21</sup>

The coming forward of the psychic being and its control of the nature bring love and adoration, selfless and dedicated service, an increasingly intimate spiritual knowledge and contact, and a growing openness and surrender of all the being to the Divine. Another important function that it brings is an inner guidance that is surer than the mental reason, a perceptive detection and rejection of all that is false and undivine in the nature, a natural, instinctive choice of the Truth and all that leads towards Truth, a spontaneous affinity towards all that is good and beautiful. Its coming forward marks an important turning point in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, for once the psychic being is in direct command of the nature, it can lead the whole being safely and smoothly towards its highest divine possibilities.

### **Transformation**

Those highest possibilities include a full descent of various powers and qualities of the Divine into the mind life and body leading to a transformation of our limited and hampered human life into a divine living here in the physical world. There are various stages of that transformation, higher and higher

powers that successively descend and effect their change and uplifting of the whole nature to their higher and higher levels of consciousness. At a very high peak there is an opening of and descent of what Sri Aurobindo refers to as the Supramental consciousness, the Truth-Consciousness, which has the Power to effect a divinisation of the physical body and release it from subjection to disease and death. As each of these higher levels of consciousness and transformation is attained and effected, they bring with them the experience and settled realisation of a greater power and purity and fullness of the Divine Ananda.

In Sri Aurobindo's view, the nature of the Divine is Sachchidananda, an infinite existence, consciousness, and bliss, three inseparable qualities that in the highest experience are One. There is no assignable limit to the intensity and absoluteness of the subjective experience of Ananda. As the physical universe in which we dwell is a creation or manifestation of the Divine—it comes from that bliss, exists in that delight, and carries that ecstasy within it. It is the intention of the evolution of which we are a part to release that Ananda from its imprisonment in human life with its grasping and suffering emotions, which are at once ignorant and egoistic gropings after that Delight, and the divided and distorted expressions of it in a consciousness only partly emerged from the self-oblivion of inconscient matter. The fullness of Ananda comes with Oneness of our consciousness and nature with the Divine; suffering comes from limitation and separation of our consciousness and nature from the Divine. A purified Love and a sincere surrender of our whole being to the Divine are at once a path towards, and the very nature of, that Oneness and Delight.

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- 5 *ibid.*, p. 628.
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- 15 *ibid.*, pp. 661-662.
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- 17 *ibid.*, pp. 604-605.
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- 19 *ibid.*, p. 535.
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## Reflections On Jouissance As Ananda

Prithwindra Mukherjee

### Introduction

Ego as conceived in the West seems to have attracted quite a number of contemporary investigations as well as - very often - misled them. Recently I have gone through an original, ambitious and complex essay to explore its limits and the way to determine how such an enterprise can be of any help to any ethical or spiritual quest. The author, an Indian “feminist” teaching abroad, offers a critique of European psychoanalysis with references to Indian philosophy, and a selective examination of colonial to post-colonial literature.

The book rightly deplores the staunch resistance of Freud and Lacan to any theory of the ‘sublime’ (so to say spirituality), even before situating - in contrast – a French “feminist” like Luce Irigaray’s welcoming approach to *jouissance* as the closest to *ananda* or ‘Joy’ (which, in Indian tradition, is the first of the three attributes of the Divine, the other two being *chit* or ‘Consciousness’ and *sat* or ‘Existence’). The author strives to find in her extended idea of *jouissance* the simultaneous juxtaposition of the corporeal and the spiritual dimensions perceptible in a human being. For her, *ananda* is not only the means of “ego-transcendence” — as suggested by as yet living and traditional scriptures like the *Upanishads* — but, once the “absolute” (Divine) is achieved, in a complementary process this transcendence can lead even to bring the same “absolute” down to the more or less material sheaths — body, life and mind — of our being, as has been viewed and most logically elaborated in the recent years in Sri Aurobindo’s vast synthesis, especially in his magnum opus, *The Life Divine*.

Hailing from a land where — down three thousand years at least, extended over an area of a full-blooded continent — a score of languages share the daily experiences of the common citizen practising, apparently, several parallel religious creeds, food habits, clothing styles, our scholar is no exception to other birds of feather aiming at a cross-cultural approach to any given subject, in order to do justice to the full implications embedded in the themes chosen.

Moreover, her method seems to have received already some recognition from specialists engaged in “a thoughtful and immensely creative approach to psychoanalytic theory.”

It is learnt further that preoccupied by the identity of womanhood in the society and by a dialogue between the East and the West, our author has contributed a paper on “Women in the East and Women in the West,” in a symposium on Dharma, as a “Categorical Imperative”.

### Man in the Universe

This present discussion on *jouissance* leads any attentive reader to raise a few basic questions on man’s existence here, its sources and probably its destiny. According to the very ancient school of metaphysical speculation — inspired by a certain cosmogony and known as the ‘School of Enumeration’ (*Samkhya*) — just as the negative and the positive poles of two batteries held in a particular position generate energy thanks to their complementarity, the contact of Purusha (the Man eternal, the Absolute) first of all with Prakriti (the eternal Dame or fundamental Nature)<sup>1</sup> results in disturbing the unruffled cosmic equilibrium with a centrifugal urge to ‘become many’. In the beginning this School in question was a-theist in its attitude, serving as the doctrinal foil to the practical School of Yoga. Even the prince Siddhartha (the future Buddha) is said to have received some guiding light from Arad Kalam, one of its great exponents. This School taught that, Purusha is immobile, helpless and sterile in His ideation and volition until and unless he is roused and charged with the dynamic and creative impact of Prakriti. Receiving in response His desire to reveal Himself out of His primal solitude, She emerges, fulfilled, composed of the same substance as He, yet different, distinct in Her own role. Whereas He wills, She executes. Accomplishes. Not in a relationship of dominating and dominated, but as a numerically programmed sequence of phases which will appear to be an opera enacting a cosmic Drama (*lila*). A Divine Comedy.

### Detecting Ego

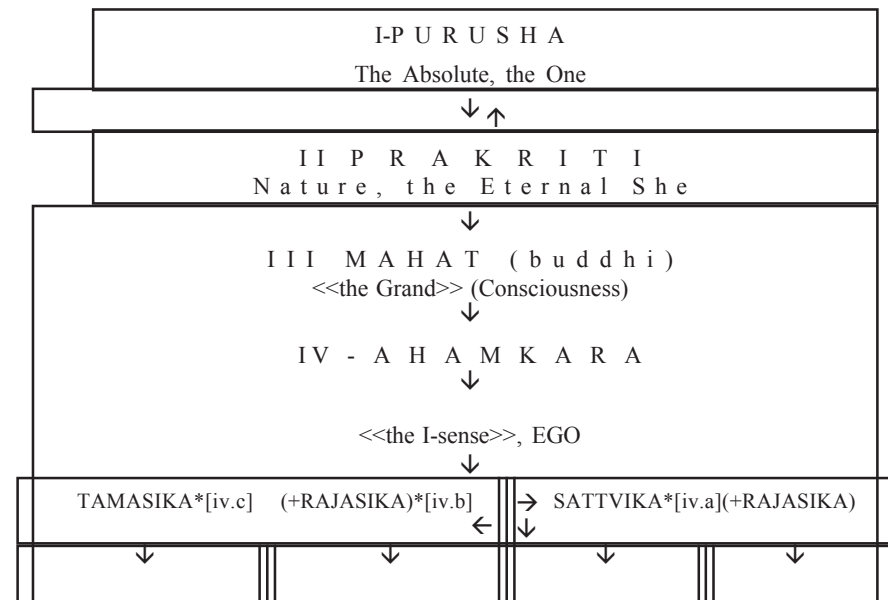
More or less informed about the place of Ego in Western psychoanalysis, we may remember that from the point of view of the above-mentioned Indian metaphysics, it is possible to locate clearly the exact position of Ego

1 Principle No. II in the Chart below

(*ahamkara*)<sup>2</sup>, demonstrating the twenty-five ascending degrees (‘principles’ or *tattva*) that link Matter to Spirit in an evolutionary uninterrupted series. The contrary motion of descending from Spirit to Matter has been termed Involution by Sri Aurobindo.

Having once located Ego in this cosmic structure, next we may have to look for the Man/Woman difference and its place therein: as we shall see, there is altogether and exclusively one single principle – No. XV, out of twenty-five — that responds to our enquiry: it is called *Upastha* (‘Genitals’).

Somewhat like a spider weaving a web out of nothing apparently, hereafter, we find the first ‘principles’ (*tattva*) which are derived (*vikriti*) out of Prakriti. As the very first modification of Consciousness (*mahat*)<sup>3</sup>, Ego or ‘I-ness’ (*ahamkara*) assumes three states, strands or qualities (*guna*) according to the proportionate predominance of the trends, filaments or monads of one of its three components: the right Reality in a radiant poise (*sattva*)<sup>4</sup>, the passionate Impetuosity (*rajas*)<sup>5</sup> and the dark Inertia (*tamas*)<sup>6</sup>. We can thus visualise them :



2 Principle No. IV  
3 Principle No. III  
4 Principle No. IV.a  
5 Principle No. IV.b  
6 Principle No. IV.c

Further, a blending of the type [iv.c]+[iv.b] gives rise to two distinct series of ‘principles’ :

(a) Essences, ‘Only That’ ( <i>tanmatra</i> ) :	(b) Elements ( <i>bhuta</i> ) :
Sound ( <i>shabda</i> )[v]→	Space, Sky ( <i>akasha</i> )[x]
Contact ( <i>sparsha</i> )[vi]→	Air ( <i>vayu</i> )[xi]
Form/Colour ( <i>rupa</i> )[vii]→	Fire ( <i>tejas, agni</i> )[xii]
Savour ( <i>rasa</i> )[viii]→	Water ( <i>ap, jala</i> )[xiii]
Odour ( <i>gandha</i> )[ix]→	Earth ( <i>prithvi</i> )[xiv]

Another blending, of the type [iv.b] + [iv.a], brings about two more distinct series of ‘principles’, each of which – except *Manas* (Spirit) [xv] – is directly concerned with the body or microcosm; this chart singles out that *only* unique principle, called *Upastha* (Genitals) [xxv], indicating visibly the man/ woman distinction; this is taken into consideration as the sole organ for intercourse whereas the preceding nine principles are erogenous centres in sympathetic vibrations (libido) :

(a) Perception-faculties ( <i>jnanendriya</i> ):	(b) Action-faculties or organs
Spirit ( <i>manas</i> )[xv] <sup>7</sup>	( <i>karmendriya</i> ):
Hearing ( <i>shrotra</i> )[xvi]	Speech ( <i>vak</i> )[xxi]
Touch ( <i>tvak</i> )[xvii]	Hands ( <i>pani</i> )[xxii]
Sight ( <i>chakshu</i> )[xviii]	Feet ( <i>pada</i> )[xxiii]
Taste ( <i>rasana</i> )[xix]	Anus ( <i>payu</i> )[xxiv]
Smell ( <i>gandha</i> )[xx]	Genitals ( <i>upastha</i> )[xxv]

Entities : Man/ Woman

Imitating the union of Purusha with Prakriti, two human bodies – one feminine, one masculine, each with its personalised apparatus (*upastha*) in

<sup>7</sup> Jean Filliozat describes it as « organ computing sensorial and kinesthetic data and developing ideas” (*Les philosophies de l’Inde*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1966, p.71)

friction like two brimstone pieces – release an unsuspected charge of energy, stored in each of them as potentials, stirring up (beyond the most obvious physical symptoms) a gamut of sympathetic chords representing overtones or undertones of human reactions, sensations, sentiments, emotions, aspirations, dreams, wishes, intentions, ideas, all of which accompany such a union, right in their automatism, in the way that heat accompanies a flame. Out of this complex experience, we may suppose that in addition to the highly restricted anatomical and physiological differences between the two bodies, there can yet be specific microtones of feelings, temperaments, hopes, expectations and behaviour that belong to the finer layer (*linga-sharira*) projected from and enveloping the epidermis and the physical (*annamaya*) + vital (*pranamaya*) + mental (*manamaya*) kosha of a man and a woman: this is probably made up of what Sri Aurobindo calls the subtle being. A few of those microtones (like the *shruti* vibrations, to borrow a term of Indian musicology) seem to be readily associated with and rooted deeply in the masculine body, a few others, more specifically, with the feminine. Is not the body at times compared to a lute (*veena*) in literature?

### Sex in Indian Tradition

We now approach the rampant question of *jouissance*. Judging from the above-mentioned metaphysical vision of the cosmic structure which links, non stop – without any breach – the grossest Matter with the finest Spirit, we can presume the minimal interest that traditional Indian awareness ever attached to sex: as we have seen it, out of twenty-five principles altogether, only *one* – the *upastha* [No. XXV] – exclusively appears to be taken into consideration, and it draws attention even of a child as the fundamental distinction between the male and the female creatures. We find here somewhat a distant reminiscence of the first two principles (Purusha and Prakriti) which, under no circumstances, can represent any sexual preoccupation. In their abstract functioning, as we have suggested, these latter look rather like currently neutral scientific symbols such as positive (+) and negative (-). This shows the negligible interest that Veda-centred India attached to this ‘minor’ detail, recognising in it merely and eminently the gadget for reproduction. Such a minimalist attitude towards sexual differences, however, is far from denoting

any puritan attempt to turn away from *this* particular – nether – pole of reality.

Out of nine traditional schools of Indian philosophy (*darshana*, ‘glimpses’ of the Reality, its functioning both outside and within, including the psychology of the subject) – six orthodox (recognising the Vedic authority)<sup>8</sup> and three heterodox (either refuting or feigning to ignore it)<sup>9</sup> – only one, the very ancient school of *lokayata* (Materialism), has explored sex in the appropriate context of hedonistic and erotic culture at the heart of human society. From an advantageous panoramic view of life as a field for the soul to accomplish whatever it could not elsewhere, it certainly does not lose sight of sexual relationship and its repercussions in representing existence as the life-reproducing theatre – from the most crude to the *nec plus ultra* elevating figurations – be it in the specialised and sophisticated treatises such as the often misinterpreted *Kama-sutra*, or in the abundant texts in Sanskrit and regional languages, or else on the temple walls from the North down to the South. Without coming down to the voluptuous and virile description of the sex found in Rabelais or in the greening vocabulary of a popular contemporary French singer like Pierre Perret, Indian folk literature does not suffer from much puritanical reserve while portraying, for instance, the drug-addict Shiva and his socially marginal semi-ethereal companions: there are passages in which we find ladies in an assembly introducing herbs – known as offensive to serpents – to drive away those serving as belts to hold the tiger-skin around the Lord’s loins, in order to mock boisterously at his consequent nudity.

### The Vedic Economy of the Seminal Energy

Every human seeker, man or woman, is first of all a soul, asexual in its essence. In an one-pointed endeavour to impart knowledge as revealed in the Vedas, the first promise that the master in ancient times demanded of his pupils was *brahmacharya* (an airtight, rigorous continence of the seminal energy, more precious than a gold coin in a miser’s hand), attaining an asexual

8 They are : A1- Mimamsa ; A2- Vedanta : both concerned with the fundamental knowledge and wisdom available in the Vedas; B1- Samkhya (analysis and nomenclature of the ‘principles’ constituting the physical and the psychological world); B2- Yoga (elaborating the psychological views of the former); C1- Nyaya (Logic); C2- Vaisheshika (the knowledge of things –how they are displayed, their attributes – in order to reach the supreme Good).

9 D- Jainism ; E- Materialism ; F- Buddhism (a protestant movement within the framework of Brahmanism or Vedic teaching and practices).

conditioning of the body and the mind, appropriate for an over-all receptivity, radiating force and an ADSL<sup>10</sup> memory. Thus the ensuing initiation during the ceremony of *upanayanam* – receiving the sacred thread – was accompanied by an oath to maintain physical and mental chastity, in order to look freely into oneself and to contemplate the inner immaterial treasures, to control this unmixed energy and utilise it as a fuel steering towards an ideal life. This method taught him to transform, to sublimate progressively, under proper guidance, all that crudely material stuff (*pratishtha*) of the physical envelope into a spiritual substance (*karana*), which are two poles in the corporeality of our existence. In the Vedic tradition, having led a student’s life at the master’s hermitage, one entered an adult’s status and got married (or else, chose to lead a monastic life), to have intercourse only with his *saha-dharmini* (‘she who shares with him his convictions and ideology’), *for the exclusive purpose of procreation*. Which presupposes shunning all enjoyment, directly carnal or not, that hampers serenity, effulgence and elevation.

### The Tantrika Synthesis

On the contrary, realising the tremendous carburettor potent in the libido, the Tantras examined, cultivated and encouraged— under adequate control— erogenous contacts. Their esoteric parallel path devised the compulsory practice of the adepts’ restrained sexual pleasure (*bhoga*) with the partners, while enjoying with gusto all other available sources of gratification (wild games, select dishes, sparkling vintage, opulent garments, precious stones and metals, significant flowers and perfumes etc) : they relished watchfully and soared with the voluptuous tides mounting during copulation while retaining themselves till its climax. Then, instead of spurting outward, they learnt to contain and orient all its intensity in an inward and upward gush to pierce, so to say, the zenith of the being, full to the top like a thousand-petalled lotus, in communion with an ocean of joy trying to pour down from above.

This process and this experience of an ascending and descending of the cosmic vitality through the neuro-biological system made up of a complex “plexus” (*marman*), repeated consciously, seemed to stimulate and enrich the innermost spiritual *person*, with a progressive effect of thus maturing and

10 “asymmetric (or asynchronous) digital substance line” : a high-speed always connected Internet line

subliming even the cells of the gross physical organism, charging and settling therein a current of robust serenity and light, with an inner detachment, a greater hold on one's life span, for better accomplishing one's mission upon earth in this human form.<sup>11</sup> Gradually, advanced seekers did not even have to turn to an external physical partner for this exercise, once he or she had realised how to marry the inner Hermes (*Purusha*) with the Aphrodite (*Prakriti*) reigning within, leading to an asexual – perfectly hermaphrodite (*ardha-narishvara*) – state of 'enjoying without attachment', stabilising the receptacle (*adhara*) with permanent spiritual Being, Consciousness and Joy (*sat-chit-ananda*), instead of scarce and sporadic intimations from above; that comes close to the right equanimity taught by the Upanishads, *tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma gridhah kasya sviddhanam* ("renounced, thou shouldst enjoy; lust not after any man's possession"), taking for granted that the world is a garment (or a dwelling-place) for the informing and the governing Spirit.<sup>12</sup> A step further lies the secret of *nishkama karma* ('disinterested action') of which Krishna spoke: *karmanye vadhikaraste ma phaleshu kadacha na* ('thou hast the sole right to action, never claiming any retribution')<sup>13</sup>.

### The Unbaked Pitcher

The above-mentioned 'heroic' path of self-control requires, indeed, a great courage. Inspired by this doctrine of self-fulfilment and by allusions made in the 9<sup>th</sup> century *Charyapada* esoteric texts belonging to the Buddhist path of the *Sahaja* (the 'Spontaneous' or the 'Innate'), the tradition of the Bauls in Bengal – like several others all over India – deplores any irregularity on the seeker's part :

*kānchā hāndite... rākhite nārili premajala*

11 Certain traditions believe that even celestial beings such as Gods and Goddesses await their turn for the mandate of leading a mortal life on earth.

Concerning the physical transformation of an adept of Yoga, we remember A.B. Purani's account of his first visit to Pondicherry as a youngman: he had found Sri Aurobindo's complexion close to an average Bengali's. Then, on his return after a couple of years, he saw Sri Aurobindo, radiating with a creamy light, so much so, that he cried out: "Sir, what has happened to you ?" In reply, with a smile, the Master pointed out the beard Purani had let grow and exclaimed: "What has happened to you?"

12 Isha Upanishad §1 in Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 12, 1972, p63; I write enjoy in italics.

13 Bhagavad Gita, II.47

*kancha* : unbaked, in a raw form; *handite*: inside the earthen ware; *rakhite*: retain, contain, preserve; *narili*: [you] have failed to; *prema*: love; *jala*: water ( 'the liquid'): "You have failed to preserve the 'elixir of Love' in an unbaked pitcher".

Accepting the metaphor of the pitcher for this body (the clay-made recipient which requires an adequate 'baking' before becoming 'waterproof' and firm), we may now explore the nature of this 'elixir of Love'. Sushruta, author of an important surgical treatise (6<sup>th</sup> c B.C.) recognised the role of the five elements inside our body and attributed to *jala* (water) therein certain properties like savour, taste, fluidity, weight, freshness, viscosity and semen (*retas*).<sup>14</sup> In initiative texts<sup>15</sup> this *retas*, under a latent form, represents the basic energy called *tapas* (heat, ardour), that which contributes to the charisma of a personality and stimulates all concentrated and intense action under the form of an austere seeking (*tapasya*) : one has to spare this substance by avoiding all soiling from its loss, either physically (owing to an abusive act) or, in a subtle way, by uncomely thoughts aroused by or - more directly - arousing passions and desires. Each loss of this substance further exposes the body to senescence and death. By preserving this energy – accompanied by a control of the vital breath (*praana*) – one obtains *tejas*, source of all knowledge: turn by turn, it becomes *vidyut* ('electricity', which is the dynamic starting point of all powerful action, intellectual or physical), *ojas* (vital energy, the subtle most material substance, enjoying the closest proximity to or resemblance with the spiritual essence); it mounts up to the brain, suffuses and strengthens it ; then it reaches the state of *virya* (virile force, knowledge, faith, love, both physical and spiritual), before filling the whole being – physical, vital, mental and psychic – with a perpetual dash. At the same time, radiance settles in and « bakes » the cells of the so-called pitcher, allowing it not only to contain but, by assimilation, to *turn into* the same substance as the elixir of Love. The Bengali saint Ramakrishna had clearly claimed to *become* sugar, instead of merely tasting it:

*chini khete chaina, hote chai !*

14 Prithwindra Mukherjee, *Le Samkhya*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1983, p158 (new edition Cefyto, 2009)

15 Sri Aurobindo, *Brain of India*, Birth Centenary Library, Vol. 3, pp334-335

*chini*: sugar; *khete*: to eat; *chaina*: (I) do not want; *hote chai!*: (I) want to become.

In other words, the waking of the cosmic energy at the basis of the spinal column (*kundalini*) and its union with the supreme Consciousness above the head can attain the initial state of that «infinite Joy, unruffled by the ‘wind, the moon, and the sun’<sup>16</sup> having once *baked* the body to a considerable degree of youthfulness, splendour and serenity.»<sup>17</sup>

To cite a concrete example of this persisting self-culture, we may remember the injunction given by Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902) – the firebrand monk, disciple of Ramakrishna – to young Jatindra Mukherjee (‘Tiger Jatin’), the future revolutionary leader : “Prepare patriots with iron muscles and nerves of steel, subliming the libido in dedication to the Motherland.” In his *Report on Revolutionary Organisation*, even an uninitiated observer like J.E. Armstrong (Superintendent of Police on Special Duty) did not fail to underline this rare achievement and superiority of Jatindra, who “owed his pre-eminent position not only to his quality of leadership but in great measure to his being a Brahmachari”.<sup>18</sup> This notion of self-control remained compatible with the life of a married man like Jatin who was also known as a loving husband and very affectionate father. To his followers, Jatindra personified the *Gita*: equanimity generating the conviction that nothing was impossible.

Since the dialogue of present-day scholars is cross-cultural, a timely note could remind us of the above-mentioned possible sources, nearly all of which – directly or indirectly – have found convergence in Sri Aurobindo. Much that remained latent in his magisterial *sarit-sagar*<sup>19</sup> – concerning the Tantras for instance – found a more minute investigation in the writings of his followers like T.V. Kapali Shastri and Madhav Pandit. For example, contrary to Irigaray’s solitary and somewhat intuitive glimpse of these realities, they had been in contact with experiences realised by hundreds of adepts down the centuries. In other words, the wine is old, while the bottles and the designs

16 The vital breath held between the ‘lunar’ (*ida*) and the ‘solar’ (*pingala*) channels, respectively on the left and the right of the spinal column

17 Prithwindra Mukherjee, *Les fous de l’Absolu : chant Baul*, Editions Findakly, Paris, 1985, p140

18 Quoted from *Terrorism in Bengal*, Compiled and edited by Amiya K. Samanta, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta 1995, Vol. II, p393

19 « streams that make an ocean »

on them are new, and they are quite welcome as such. It shows that wherever it be, whatever the era, humanity has been guided, intuitively, towards a number of absolutes in essence leading to Divinity.

### Memory. Duration. Consciousness.

If by *jouissance* we accept to mean transcending the ego, we also accept that by so doing, logically, we undertake a somersault to land upward in the realm of Consciousness (*Mahat*, in Chart 1). In about sixty years time, in the West and in India, literary and philosophical works, often based on solitary experiments and experiences almost isolated, have lengthily dealt with this process of introspection, out of which there are a few significant guiding lines:

John Ruskin (1819-1900)	* Beauty is no object of enjoyment... It is a reality infinitely more important than true life. * Fascination yields to a silent labour of intelligence and memory.	
Henry James (1843-1916)	Edouard Dujardin → “Sense of the past” : The stream of consciousness → Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), George Eliot (1819-1980), Ingmar Bergman (1918- )	
Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)	First systematic exploration of the Inconscient	
Henri Bergson (1859-1941)	□	□
	* Mechanical or chronological	* Psychological
R. Tagore (1861-1941)	The quest of Beauty – a legitimate complement to that of Truth and Good – helps discovering the cosmic ego before realising the Self.	
Marcel Proust (1871-1922)	“Even without mentioning God or any religion, this is a tale of a spiritual quest... A quest for the substance of the soul that time, in its flow, masks or masks from our sight.” <sup>20</sup>	
Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)	The mental ego - ascending from the physical and the vital - is the promise of an incarnating superior Consciousness latent and flowing down in it before transforming human existence into a Life Divine.	
James Joyce (1882-1941)	* Catch the play of mind and the flow of thought, the use of metaphor, symbol, image, the language of poetry.	

20 *Neuf siècles de littérature française*, dir. Emile Henriot, 1958, p727



	<p>* Transform an objective account of external experience into subjective inward-turned picture of the mind and the senses. * Protecting the schizophrenia of his daughter Lucia against medical treatment, finding her language ‘telepathic’: → A timeless blur of past &amp; present, of nineteen languages converging into an incandescence syntax (“a war of idioms declared by God”, Jacques Derrida) : myth &amp; symbol → musical expression of experience * ‘redemption through writing’ (<i>claritas</i>, lacanian juggling interpretation of Joyce: <i>Le sinthome</i> ← Saint ‘homme’ → St Thomas Aquinas) →: the very object revealing its essence by identification with the thing itself, in form of an apparition (<i>epiphany</i>)<sup>21</sup>.</p>
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Whereas in certain texts we find almost an equal space to exploring comparatively Tagore and Joyce (we see how important he is as a point of convergence of our themes chosen), and whilst, off and on, Sri Aurobindo comes and goes like a *deus ex machina*, the presence of Marcel Proust would greatly lead to a further convincing explanation of the subject matter. He has been differently represented as “the most precocious child of the Paris salons (3<sup>rd</sup> Republic)...Dandy. Snob. Eccentric. Curious. Esthete.”<sup>22</sup> “A charming and witty fellow with a keen sense of observation” according to Anatole France. Some kind of *a crisis of the soul* – reflected psychosomatically by an allergy since his childhood to excessive light, dust and din (inherited from a hyper-sensitive mother) – turned the “social lion” to a recluse, at the age of twenty. He was to find “immunity in his womb of cork” only. Inside his Parisian apartment in Boulevard Hausman he is tied to his bed, “like Prometheus was on his rock...” Once he switches back to the layers submerged in the consciousness, everything becomes significant and organised: time, the world with its metamorphoses, his art that restores them all... “Memory helps to regain time, duration and these true paradises which are those that had been lost...” Music is supposed to be that art *par excellence* which offers us the greatest pleasure – *jouissance* – since we recognise therein no reality ever learnt by us. “A great writer can become a great writer, only by listening to his inner voices in the solitude” (Pierre Clarac). And “a promise of explaining the mystery of existence, some kind of a profane mysticism towards something

21 Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Le Monde* (literary supplement), 8 April 2005  
 22 *The Reader’s Companion of World Literature*, Calvin S. Brown (ed.), Mentor, 1958 (3rd ed) and comments from various sources in English and French, such as *Europe*, August-September, 1970

Immaterial... His fervour for Beauty and, through her, his quest for Truth has a marginal implication of a fore-knowledge of a pacifying Finality.” (Michel Mouligneau)<sup>23</sup>.

Turning his infirmity into an apparatus for his bold literary experiment, Proust has put on record what has come to be regarded as one of the most truthful artistic searches ever undertaken. Search for the inner workings of the mind. An autobiography of the mind. He borrowed from life the smile of one person and the eyebrow of another (fictitious personages), “novels with 4 or *n*-dimensions”, mainly : (a) *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27) → *Remembrance of Things Past*, Random House, 1934 ; (b) *Jean Santeuil*, posthumous novel, 1952. “*A la recherche* looked upon as a structured heaping of signs – time, art, world – (...) a book not stretching out in the past, but an initiation to future.”<sup>24</sup> Time lost and seemingly irrecoverable remains “written into the *permanence* of art.” A strange nostalgia representing as much a hope as a promise of happiness: for him it is no more impossible to swim back to Time apparently lost. Recapture in the present the heritage of his experience, for the brief moment of actuality, put them on paper before they withdraw in the recesses of memory. Here is a diagram of the classic passage illustrating the Proustian process :

<p>Cake → taste → feeling of intense joy...          Complex series of emotions :          “retrace my thoughts to the moment at which I drank the first spoonful of tea...” [No worries for today; no hopes for tomorrow]</p>	<p>analysis:          the truth is  <i>not in the cup          but in myself,          in my mind</i></p>
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The whole past floods in upon the narrator: the seemingly lost childhood that never was lost – since “the mind retains all memories but forgets them only to exhume them at the trigger-touch of the taste of cake, a stray word, a glimpse of something that calls up one after another of the events of the buried past.”

Proust paints a brilliant picture of a real decadent society (“a singular realism of the soul”): People in their youth → caught grown up in their complexity and variety... Past/ present juxtaposed ... Passage of time. He “stripes the glittering mask of the high society, its frauds and certain general principles.”<sup>25</sup>

23 *Europe*, August-September, 1970  
 24 Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and the Signs*, PUF, 1964  
 25 Calvin S. Brown, *loc. cit*

This ascetic endeavour of an aesthete reminds us of another (proportionately bolder and larger) God's Labour, another *social lion* (of an even greater implication) – Sri Aurobindo – who, in 1910, at the peak of the political agitations that he had engendered for the freedom of his country, retired to Pondicherrian solitude in order to consecrate all his time and energy to the discovery of the inner realms, recording his findings in shorthand-like notes, or elaborate voluminous treatises and, above all, concentrating on his epic *Savitri*, an autobiography of the Soul, distilling in it - during half a century - the quintessence of what he called the overhead poetry, raising tirelessly, step by step, its level to an intense and condensed totality composed of the supreme Good and Joy and Truth.

### Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) has a novel message pertaining to tomorrow's humanity: man, according to him, represents a certitude of a transition from the thinking animal into a transformed creature of consciousness-existence-joy. Concerned with this divinisation of man and society, he has anticipated in great details – out of the probabilities of their present symptoms – various aspects of this becoming. Himself a poet, in his vision of *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo informs us formally: “The pure intellect cannot write poetry.”<sup>26</sup> While admitting that the thinking mind may help to give a final shape, a great and large form to poetry, he believes that the word “must start from a more intimate sense in the heart of the inner being”: the fount of poetry should be “the spirit within” and not the mind without. The truth that poetry interprets is not intellectual, but it is truth in the form of an innate beauty, with “authenticities of the synthetic vision and the seeing spirit”. This poetic truth is, according to him, as much the truth of life as that of the inner spirit. He has observed the arduous ascent of the human intelligence through the intellectual “into an intuitive mentality” known traditionally as *mahendra-loka* (which is situated beyond the mental level of our being) and, according to his classification, it is the Overmind. Sri Aurobindo had detected glimpses of this spiritual domain in great poets of the past who, defying the reliance of Pope and Dryden on measure and consequent monotony, “got back to the greater freedoms of tone” such as, in Wordsworth:

<sup>26</sup> p195. All the quotations in this section refer to the Birth Centenary Library edition, Volume 9, 1972

*Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.*

and others: all, manifesting themselves with an increasingly greater and more comprehensive vision as in Whitman, Edward Carpenter, “some recent French poets”, Tagore, Yeats, A.E. (George Russell), Meredith. Instead of a mystic poetry obscure in expression, he saw in the future poetry the play of full intellectuality bringing in an equal fullness of the intuitive mind; instead of intimations in sporadic sparks, he saw in it “a mind of revelation and inspiration”. One of its gateways will be the aesthetic mind, “a harmonious and luminous totality of man's being”, covering “the whole field of existence”.

Switching back to the Vedic model of the poetic speech – the Mantra – he had found in it “the highest, intensest revealing form of poetic thought and expression (...), an inspired and revealed seeing and visioned thinking and a realisation” of some inmost truth: God, self, Man, Nature, cosmos, life, thing, thought, experience, deed. Wishing the future poetry to be some kind of such Mantra, Sri Aurobindo decreed that thinking in such poetry comes “on the wings of a great soul rhythm” (*chhandas*), where the seeing cannot be separated from the hearing. He further claimed that the Mantra was “born through the heart, shaped or massed by the thinking mind into a chariot of the godhead of the Eternal”: the truth seen therein is a face or a form of that godhead. It is an “intensest and most divinely burdened *rhythmic word* embodying an intuitive and revelatory inspiration. And finally, he held, Mantra is “a supreme rhythmic language which seizes hold upon all that is finite and brings into each the light and voice of its own infinite.” Above the Overmind, Sri Aurobindo situates three other concentric worlds, representing, respectively, the Plane of the Joy (“ananda”), or *jana-loka*; that of Consciousness (“chit”), or *tapas-loka*; and that of Existence (“sat”), or *satya-loka*: these are supposed to constitute the “golden lid” (*hiranmaya patra*) described in the Upanishad, which hides the Face of the Absolute (or the Supermind in Sri Aurobindo's terminology). His entire process of the Integral Yoga teaches how to aspire and open ourselves, and how to receive the grace of attaining, progressively, each of the higher strata of our being: it requires years of austere seeking, before stabilising that realisation by bringing down each of them upto

our physical consciousness, while the Supermind itself is busy descending down the steps of this inner celestial ladder in order to transform our existence into the Life Divine.

### **Jouissance and the Supermind**

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (II.40), Sri Krishna advises: “On this path no effort is lost, nor any recession possible; even a bit of this exercise, however small it be, helps avoid all dreadful suffering.” Judging from the tremendous distance that separates the human mind from the audacious supramental sphere, it may be worth warning dilettante scholars that even motivated by a very lofty aspiration to get the Supermind intervening in our concern for Jouissance as “ananda”, they seem to engage an artillery to kill a mosquito: we wonder whether a far lesser degree of spiritual process such as the Tantras practised, would not serve as well to settle the core of the matter they often choose, once for all. Evidently, desirous to participate in the Yoga of transformation that Sri Aurobindo has left as a loving legacy to mankind, apparently they seem to throw the net very far. Nobody can find fault in such a venture.

### **The Mother on Women**

Before concluding, it would be interesting to know from an alert feminist avant-garde the place occupied by the teachings of the Mother, complementary and indispensable to the vision of Sri Aurobindo. For instance, before receiving her mandate from Sri Aurobindo as the Mother – who, according to Indian tradition, acts by the side of a Master and guides the disciples – Mirra Alfassa (Paris, 1878 - Pondicherry, 1973) had had a rich and dynamic social life, too, frequenting almost the same intellectual and cultural milieu as Marcel Proust, and familiar with personalities like Cézanne, César Franck, Anatole France and Rodin. Along with her friend Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969), she was involved also in determining the physical and spiritual role that women were supposed to and could play in the society. Alexandra had accepted an unconsummated marriage for two reasons: (a) young unmarried women of respectable society were not supposed to move about as they liked; (b) the

wealthy husband was all the same happy to sponsor her journey across continents. Mirra, while marrying the philosopher Paul Richard, seems to have made it clear that their union was to preclude all physical relation. They were both pioneers in a domain where we will find Victoria Ocampo (1890-1979) receiving her friend, philosopher and guide, a famous poet, in November 1924, in her cottage at San Isidro in Argentina for a period of two months. Even Homer sometimes nods. Though painful, yet a recorded fact reminds us that in our mythology even great spiritual personalities succumbed to obscure impulses: sick, in his sixties, the poet is reported to have grown restive and whimsical with demands... whereas the beautiful young lady tried her best to explain to him that there could exist between them only the most delicate friendship. Fortunately these accidental details did not alter their life-long admiration and affection for each other.<sup>27</sup>

After her first visit to Sri Aurobindo in 1914, confirmed in her intuitions, Mirra conducted a regular group of discussion with women, during her interlude in Japan during the War, to develop – in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s vision – her own theory: “True maternity begins with the conscious creation of a being, with the willed shaping of a soul coming to develop and utilise a new body. The true domain of women is spiritual.”<sup>28</sup> Farther in this line, she analysed the social status that history has granted to women and asked: “Why accept the obscure strands of heredity and atavism which are nothing else than subconscious preferences for our own trend of character – when we can, by concentration and will, call into being a type constructed according to the highest ideal we are able to conceive? With this effort maternity becomes truly precious and sacred; indeed, we enter the glorious work of the spirit.(...)”<sup>29</sup> Saluting a new dawn for humanity – behind the terrifying night of the War – she saluted the imminent reign of the Spirit and expected women to participate in the emergence of the divinised Man (and Woman). She settled for good in Pondicherry in 1920.

An anecdote will better illustrate the Mother’s own engagement for the liberation of women from the clutch of what some scholars like to censure as a *phallogocentrist* society. Encouraged by Sri Aurobindo, in the late ‘40s, the Mother introduced a very intensive and methodical programme of physical

27 Jean-Jacques Langendorf, *Vies croisées de Victoria Ocampo et Ernest Ansermet*, Buchet-Chastel, Paris, 2005, p.89

28 *A Talk to the Women of Japan*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1967, p.1

29 *op. cit.* pp. 2-3

education for men, women and children, and resumed herself a daily set of tennis at the age of seventy, dressed in salwar and a light turban-like net on the head. At the same time, a young girl of the Ashram, inspired by the Mother's point of reviewing the man/woman distinction, and convinced that it was high time to revise the settled notions of aesthetics and femininity, chose to sacrifice her beautiful flowing hair enhancing thus, behind her boyish haircut, the fine features of her physiognomy. In reply to the Mother's expectation, a member of the young women's gymnastic group – herself married and mother of a little girl – replaced the usual salwar by a short, a sleeveless shirt and the turban-like net. When this became the general uniform for young ladies and girls for the purpose of physical education – drills, callisthenics, gymnastics, athletics, fencing – it was a big blow to the conventions and taboos.

A guiding spirit before Indira Gandhi, the Mother had urged that it was imperative that 'Bangladesh' should be given official recognition, having issued a message during the events in 1971: "The battle of India is the battle of the world. This is where the world's tragic destiny, or it may be its hopeful leap into a new world of Truth and Light, is being prepared; for... the deepest darkness lies nearest the most luminous light." Later, the Mother sent Indira Gandhi the necessary encouragement by quoting from Sri Aurobindo:

My light shall be in thee, my strength thy force.  
 Let not the impatient Titan drive thy heart,  
 Ask not the imperfect fruit, the partial prize.  
 Only one boon, to greaten thy spirit, demand;  
 Only one joy, to raise thy kind, desire.  
 Above blind fate and the antagonist powers  
 Moveless there stands a high unchanging Will;  
 To its omnipotence leave thy work's result.  
 All things shall change in God's transfiguring hour.

[*Savitri*, Birth Centenary Library, p. 341]

The Mother was thus remembered by Indira Gandhi, the first woman prime minister of India: "The Mother was a dynamic, radiant personality with tremendous force of character and extraordinary spiritual attainments.(...) She was young in spirit, modern in mind.(...)"<sup>30</sup>

30 K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *On the Mother*, 1978, pp. 791-2, 804

## Genius Of Civilisations

M. S. Srinivasan

What is the future destiny of Civilisations? A perpetual clash of conflicting values, ideals and motifs or a concord of complementing ideals and competencies? The intuitive and the idealistic minds of humanity always believed in the possibility of a concord of nations and civilisations. But merely talking about it cannot create this concord. There must be a sincere and creative effort in thought and practice towards mutual understanding and synthesis. This article is an attempt towards such an understanding and synthesis from someone who geographically and temperamentally belongs to the East.

### The Cross-Cultural Perspective

Much has been said and written about the difference or distinction between the East and West. Opinions on the subject differ widely from ideas of irreconcilable antinomy, which sees East and West as two poles that can never meet, to opposite ideas, which sees not much difference and says human nature is more or less the same everywhere. There are also stereotypes like the "spiritual east" and the "materialistic west".

However, like in all such controversies, the truth lies always somewhere in between the extreme views. There is undoubtedly a difference between the Eastern and Western temperament and genius but not amounting to an unbridgeable antimony. Similarly human nature is in essence the same everywhere, but there is a wide variation in temperament, character and qualities among individuals and groups. The concept of a "spiritual east" and the "materialistic west" may be stereotypes. But all stereotypes are not entirely false; most of them contain a kernel of truth, but expressed in a rigid, fixed or popular formula disregarding the complexity of human nature.

## The Oriental Stress

There is a predominant and ingrained spirituality in the Eastern mind tending towards the inward and intuitive pursuits and excelling in the activities of the spirit and the higher intelligence like religion, philosophy, learning, art and literature or in other words cultural accomplishments. But this doesn't mean that the secular, earthly, pragmatic or materialistic tendencies are absent or weak in the Eastern temperament. The secular and pragmatic achievements of the Eastern civilisations like India, China or Egypt in economic, social and political organisation were not inferior to similar accomplishments of the Western civilisation. But the secular organisation or accomplishments of Eastern civilisations were infused with the unique temperament and ethos of the eastern mind. They were inspired by an ethical and religious idealism, which is unique to the Eastern mind. For example the secular life of ancient India was governed by the ethical and religious ideals of dharma, the divine law. Similarly, the secular organisation of China was governed by the religious concept of the "Mandate of Heaven" and the profound ethical teachings of Confucius.

Secondly, the aim of Eastern secularism is very different from that of the Western civilisation. The Eastern secularism never aimed at a separation of religion from the secular life but at a harmony and synthesis of the religious and secular life in which secular life drew inspiration from the spiritual and ethical values of religion. The aim of Eastern secular organisation is not merely economic, political and military but predominantly social and moral; its objective is not material prosperity or political strength but socio-moral well-being. In ancient India apart from these social and moral aims, there was the spiritual aim, which is to provide an appropriate framework of outer life for the inner development and progress of the individual to his spiritual goal.

## The Occidental Turn

Similarly, there is a predominant and ingrained earthliness in the Western temperament, tending towards a healthy this-worldly attitude oriented towards the enjoyment and mastery of the outer life, excelling in the activities of the externalised intellect and the pragmatic mind and will, like physical sciences,

technology and the power of organisation. This doesn't mean that religious, spiritual or philosophical genius or excellence was absent in the West. For example Christian mysticism is a deeply spiritual movement and the great mystics of Christianity like St. John of the Cross or Meister Eckhart are no less spiritual in stature than their counterparts in the East. But in the West these higher activities of the human consciousness took a turn distinct and different from that of the East.

In Eastern civilisations, religion, spirituality and philosophy flowered into a rich, diverse, tolerant, creative and progressive culture and tradition blossoming spontaneously in a soil and environment, which is native, harmonious and favourable to these activities. But in the west, true spirituality appears like an isolated exotic flower emerging miraculously in a soil and environment out of sync or hostile to it. So in the psychological soil and environment of the West, lacking in intuitive depth, penetration, flexibility and the ability to reconcile the opposites, whatever spiritual forces or influences which appear in it are either persecuted or converted by the one-track religious mind into an earthly, stagnant and dogmatic religion. What happened to Jesus Christ and his teachings in the West and Buddha and his teachings in the East give a clear indication of the difference between the Western and Eastern temperament in their dealing with the spiritual influences and forces. Both of them brought a new spiritual influence, which is more or less radically different from the traditional popular religion. But in the West, Jesus Christ was persecuted and his teaching was reduced to a dogmatic and earthly religion trying to outwardly convert the whole world to its own dogmas. But in the East, Buddha was deified into a God and his teachings inspired a rich and creative cultural renaissance in art, philosophy and literature.

This divorce which happened in the West between science, philosophy and religion is to a certain extent inevitable in the Western temperament and environment. In Nature's evolutionary dispensation, those parts of the human consciousness or mind or activities which are more developed or sincere in their quest for truth or open to the progressive march of life advance faster and take the lead. In the West, religion closed itself to the wideness and universality of spiritual truth and got petrified within a narrow dogmatic prison. Philosophy and science, looking at religion with the critical, questioning and piercing searchlight of a well-developed, fast developing and progressive

rational mind, found them to be full of darkness, obscurity and stagnant superstition and therefore rejected religion as a backward force incapable of helping the future progress of humanity.

Those parts of the philosophic reason of the West, which made a sincere search for alternative values, like for example renaissance philosophers and the thinkers of French revolution, found some great secular and human values like liberty, equality and fraternity and progress. The pragmatic mind of the West rushed into action with these secular goals, organising these ideals into conflicting forms of economic and political systems like democracy, socialism, capitalism and communism. Thus, the social evolution in modern West was piloted by intellectual idealism, creating mutually conflicting political systems and preceded through a series of disruptive and violent revolutions. On the other hand in the ancient East, social evolution was steered by two forces: first a religious, ethical or spiritual idealism of the sage, saint and the thinker; second a communal intuition incorporating the higher ideal, as much of it as it can, into the existing traditions, customs and practices with an assimilative adaptation, without any serious disruption in the communal life. Both these methods of social evolution have its advantages and drawbacks. But we can see the inner psychological and temperamental difference between the two cultures.

But later in the West, philosophy as an independent discipline or activity of the Mind lost the creative force because of two factors: first, instead of seeking for the higher principle, values and aims of life as it did in the Eastern civilisations, it began to indulge in intellectual abstractions which has no relevance to life; second factor is that as science became the leading paradigm of the West, philosophy, instead of remaining as a critical conscience keeper and mentor to science, providing a higher moral and spiritual vision for its guidance, became a more or less a servile handmaid to Science.

And finally Science or more specifically physical Science became the governing paradigm of the West because it more or less fulfilled the following conditions: first of all in the modern West it is Science which displayed the highest intellectual rectitude and sincerity in its quest for the truth; second its mind was open to the concept and value of progress; third, its outlook was in harmony with the natural and inborn earthly temperament of the West; fourth, it served the evolutionary intention of Nature for preparing the material

life of the human race. The rich harvest of discoveries reaped by the scientific mind was seized by the pragmatic mind of the West to harness the physical energies of Nature for rapid economic and material development of the outer life. The great success achieved by science and technology in the modern West, made the scientific mind unwisely self-sufficient and insolent to discard philosophy and religion as pastimes of the idle lotus-eaters.

The net result is a secular, rational, scientific and materialistic paradigm emerging in the West, replacing the earlier intuitive, ethical and spiritual paradigm of the East. Nature has permitted or even inspired this to happen probably because it served a purpose in her evolutionary march towards the spiritual goal to which Nature is steering humanity. For some time humanity has to pass through a phase of materialism, utilitarianism, rationalism and secularism so that the outer material life of humanity is purged of all superstitions, religious and stagnant dogmas of the past and prepared to manifest fully a higher and a more integral spiritual ideal and vision of the future.

### **Genius of the East**

In all ancient civilisations religion played a dominant role in moulding their culture, values and the outer life. This is especially so with most of the Eastern civilisation like India, China and Egypt.

The Eastern mind in general had a keen intuition into the inner, invisible and occult forces behind the outer, visible and the physical world. For example, some of the religious practices of Eastern civilisation like the tomb culture of Egypt or the ancestor worship of China are not mere superstitions, as the modern rationalistic mind tends to think. In their origin, they are based on an occult intuition into the after-death states and the persistence of the living being in other supraphysical worlds after the death of the body. The other important aspect of this occult intuition is the inward look or psychological perspective. The ethical and aesthetic temperament of the East laid the primary emphasis on the inner truth, goodness and beauty of the thought, feeling and emotion behind the outer act and the inner realities behind the outer form.

But the spiritual minds of Asia, like for example the Vedic sages or Buddha in India or LaoTse in China, penetrated still further beyond the occult

and the psychological into the deepest and innermost spiritual sources of man and the world and discovered the ultimate truths of existence.

So, a spiritual intuition into the deepest, highest and ultimate truths of existence, an occult intuition into the invisible and supraphysical forces, laws and worlds behind the physical outer phenomenon, an inward psychological perspective with an emphasis on inner values and the quality of the inner being, these are the first and the most important aspect of the inward genius of the Eastern temperament.

Next to the Spirit and its values, the other inner domain in which the Eastern temperament felt at ease and excelled is the higher mind, the scholarly, philosophic, ethical and aesthetic intelligence and its activities or values. The Eastern temperament gave a much higher importance to the values of the inner mind and spirit than the values of externalised pragmatic or dynamic mind, body or outer life. So in ancient Indian culture, as Sri Aurobindo points out: “The spiritual life was to its view a nobler thing than the life of external power and enjoyment, the thinker greater than the man of action, the spiritual man greater than the thinker”.(1) Similarly in China, the scholar occupied a dominant place in society.

This doesn't mean the Eastern mind was lacking in pragmatism. We tend to associate pragmatism with material innovation and execution. But, if we define pragmatism as the ability to give a concrete outer form to an inner idea or to convert an idea into a concrete inner or outer realisation, then there can be higher forms of pragmatism in the spiritual, psychological and moral domains. For example, Indian yoga and the Buddha's eight-fold path are pragmatic psychological disciplines for converting a spiritual idea or ideal into a concrete realisation and experience. Similarly in China, Confucianism was a practical philosophy and discipline for harmonious organisation of human society. The Pyramids of Egypt and temples of India are the result of aesthetic pragmatism for expressing a spiritual idea through a concrete aesthetic symbolism. In ancient India, every human activity from the highest spirituality and the higher activities of the mind like art, music and poetry to the lowest mundane activities like erotics or rearing horses and elephant are converted into a systematic science of theory and practice, shastra, each with its own aims, values, principles, standards and methods of practice.

The highest spiritual intuition of the East, its soul-idea viewed the human being as an embodied and immortal Soul or Spirit or an eternal spark of God

beyond his body and mind, but in his present condition of evolution encased or entangled within his mortal nature made of his body and mind. The aim of human life is to escape from this entanglement and recover our true and essential nature as the eternal spirit. The deepest intuition of the East has also discovered an indivisible Oneness of the Spirit as the essence of all creation and a unity and interdependence linking all life. This unifying spiritual vision saw the individual and the universe, human nature and world-nature as the expression of a supreme and eternal consciousness of the Spirit or more specifically as the expression of the eternal creative energy inherent in the consciousness of the Spirit. This brings us to an important difference between the Eastern and Western view of Nature. While the Western view looks at Nature as physical, Eastern view looks at Nature as at once physical, psychological and spiritual and our human nature, our body as well as our mind, as an integral part of world-nature.

The other life-idea of the East is the intuition of an eternal and universal harmony, law or order of Nature or God, which governs the life of world and man and all creation. This is an idea which is common to all the three great civilisations of Asia: it is called a *Rta* in India, *Tao* or *Tien* in China and *Maat* in Egypt. The human life, in this highest spiritual vision of the East, is viewed as a framework for a progressive education, training and preparation for the realisation of the spiritual Goal of life either in this earthly life or in other supra-terrestrial worlds. This was done through a predominantly inner discipline which leads to a progressive development, liberation or perfection of the inner being of man until it is liberated into or become one with the spiritual reality. The aim of all education, culture, human development and social organisation is to help, facilitate and accelerate this inner evolution of the individual and the collectivity to the spiritual goal through a way of life which is in harmony with the laws of Nature.

This is, in brief and in essence, the soul-idea and the life-idea of East. Each Eastern civilisation has emphasised or caught hold of or developed one or more aspects of the idea. India emphasises the highest spiritual transcendence; Egypt and Tibet the occult and the cosmic dimension; China the natural and aesthetic dimension.

However, among the Eastern civilisation, it is the Indian mind, which grasped the spiritual idea of the East in all its depth, integrality and fullness.

This is probably because ancient Indian civilisation created the right instruments, traditions, institutions and methods to preserve, promote, expand and disseminate a progressive spiritual quest, which continues even today in modern India. The spiritual quest in ancient India was pursued with a more or less same creative and progressive thrust as it was done in modern science in the West. In other Western nations the inborn spirituality of the civilisation remained either confined to a very small group of elite initiates or hijacked by an excessive intellectuality as it happened in China or very much diluted into a shamanistic popular religion as in Egypt. But in India spirituality remained a living force and to a certain extent penetrated into popular religion and the social organisation. In this process of diffusion of the spiritual idea, there was much dilution of spiritual truth, which is inevitable in all such attempts towards mass-communication. But in ancient India most of the higher spiritual ideals of the civilisation, as for example the divinity of man or the indwelling divinity in man, the concept of many paths to the divine Reality and the idea of many gods as forms and powers of the One Divine, entered into the mass-mind through mythology, folklore, and the religious preachers, thereby diffusing the inborn spirituality of the civilisation among the masses.

### **Genius of the West**

If religion and spirituality are the intuitive, inward look and a quest for the heavenly beyond is the characteristic and predominant temperament and genius of the Eastern mind, secular rationalism and an extrovert, this-worldly outlook towards the material and earthly life are the characteristic temperament and genius of the Western mind. Let us now examine a little more closely the contents of this Western genius.

The character, temperament and genius of the Western mind are made of four aspects: First is, as we have mentioned earlier, an earthly, extroverted and this-worldly orientation towards the well-being, progress and perfection of the outer life. While the Eastern spiritual mind viewed the outer life mainly as a means for realisation of inner values and the progress and perfection of the inner being, the secular mind of the West viewed the higher values of the inner being as a means for sublimation of the outer life. The second character

is a pragmatic material mind with a great capacity for innovation and organisation in the outer material life. An important part of this pragmatic temperament is the genius for commerce.

We must note here that this pragmatic genius of the West is not something, which is entirely modern though perhaps modern Western mind developed this competence to its highest potential. The origin of this part of Western genius may be traced to the post-Alexandrian Hellenistic civilisation which evolved a well-developed business and commercial culture with many features of modern commerce like Banks, providing credit to business, advertising, insurance, growth of big business houses, cornering markets, intense competition, speculation. The same period witnessed an incredible array of technical innovations like pulley and the screw, fire engine, siphon, hydraulic engine slot machine, jet engine, catapult.(2)

The other aspect of the Western genius is a keen and sharp rational intelligence, questioning, critical, analytical scientific and logical, with a free and wide ranging intellectual curiosity. And finally the highest part, which the modern Western mind has lost and the ancient Greek mind possessed, an inspired and intuitive aesthetic sense.

If the soul-idea of Eastern civilisations is some form of inner harmony, perfection, freedom or order realised through an inner moral, aesthetic and spiritual discipline, the soul-idea of modern Western civilisation is the perfection of the outer life through the application of reason or intellect, science, organisation and a higher idealism, mental, moral or aesthetic, to the material, economic, social and political life of man. The life-idea of Western civilisation is outer progress measured in terms of increasing efficiency, productivity, power, prosperity, enjoyment and more and more outer liberty, equality of opportunity and association. Each Western civilisation has stressed on one aspect of this genius. Ancient Greece emphasised the philosophic and aesthetic mind and the application of a free, plastic and refined rational and aesthetic intelligence to every activity of human life, leading to a “sound mind in a sound body” in the individual as well as the collective life. The Roman civilisation developed one aspect of the pragmatic mind of the west and applied it to the organisation of the outer life. The Hebrew civilisation shaped the religious temperament of the Western mind and the other aspects its religious and ethical temperament. The modern Western civilisation developed the scientific, tech-



nical and pragmatic mind to its utmost limits and brought some ennobling ideals like liberty, equality and fraternity and progress to the social and political life of humanity.

### **Towards a Global Synthesis**

The main thrust of our enquiry is to understand the essential genius of civilisations and cultures. This collective self-discovery must lead to a global synthesis in thought and action, which will eventually bring forth a global civilisation. We are presenting here a brief review of the steps needed for realising this global civilisation.

❖ Eastern nations, especially the nations with maximum spiritual potentialities like for example India, should discover their spiritual heritage and genius and disseminate their spiritual riches and resources all over the world, especially into the West. The main thrust of this effort has to be in evolving and implementing a new system of spiritual education and culture, which leads to the spiritual awakening of the individual and in every activity of the collective life. The Global community, especially the rich nations should provide whatever material and monetary help needed for this task.

❖ The technological, managerial and financial resources of the West and some of the institutions of the west like multi-national and development banks have to flow more freely and generously to the economic and material development of the poor, especially in the East. But to get the maximum evolutionary advantage from this effort, it should be done neither with a narrow commercial self-interest nor with a lofty altruistic ego. It should be done with a global perspective and with a clear understanding of the law of Karma that what we are doing, since it is in harmony with the higher laws of life, will lead to the highest good of the one who gives and the one who receives and the humanity as a whole.

❖ All attempts towards a synthesis of the Eastern and Western genius or in other words between the physical and secular sciences of the West and the spiritual and occult sciences of the East, have to be encouraged. Especially all experiments which endeavours to manifest and give form to an integral spiritual vision in outer life, in whatever field of human activity like business, politics, or in community living, through a practical synthesis of the spiritual

sciences of the East like yoga and secular sciences of the West like technology, ecology or management, have to be given the highest encouragement in terms of resources, motivation and publicity. For it is such experiments, which can generate the insights, experience and competencies required for the future evolution of humanity towards its spiritual destiny.

❖ Modern Western nations, in order to recover the deeper genius of their soul have to do two things: first of all they have to understand the deeper and inner spiritual significance of their secular values and ideals like liberty, equality, fraternity and progress and recover the aesthetic intelligence of their Hellenic parents. The secular values of the West in their essence are not just outer social and political values but as Sri Aurobindo points out “Godheads of the Soul” of Man, in other words the intrinsic qualities of the inner and higher spiritual nature of Man. The mission of Eastern nations is to establish these values in the outer life of humanity and thereby prepare it for its ultimate spiritualisation. But, as the imperfections and limitations of the various social and political systems of the west indicate, these values of French revolution cannot be perfectly established in the outer life unless and until they are first inwardly established in the consciousness of the people. They have to flow out spontaneously from within outwards as the expression of an inner realisation of the inner liberty, equality, fraternity and progress in our heart, mind and soul. Here, the spiritual thought and practices of the East can help the Western mind in understanding the deeper spiritual significances of its secular values and internalising them in consciousness.

❖ The other task for the Western nations is to rediscover the aesthetic genius of the Greek mind and apply it for a more beautiful and harmonious organisation of the outer life. It is interesting to note that one of the major factors, which gave birth to the period of Renaissance in the West, is the rediscovery of the intellectual genius of Greece through a renewed interest and study of Greek thought. Similarly rediscovery of the aesthetic genius of Greece through a renewed interest and study of Greek art and literature and the aesthetic intelligence of the Greek mind, which sought for beauty, harmony and order in every activity of life, can bring about an aesthetic renaissance of the modern Western culture.

❖ Rediscovery of ancient occult sciences, which were highly developed in ancient Egypt, Tibet and in the Indian Tantras. If these nations can recover

their occult genius and working in close cooperation with the Western scientific minds, reinvent their ancient occults science on modern scientific lines, they can give a new and higher direction to modern science and technology. For example, rediscovery of the secrets of Egyptian pyramid can lead to an entirely new science of architecture, which can bring down positive and healing cosmic energies into our homes and building. Reinvention of occult sciences can give birth to a new science and technology by which human Mind can act directly over Matter without any physical instruments.

❖ Creative potentialities of the various “Diasporas” have to be properly harnessed for a global cultural synthesis. We are here witnessing a new cultural and social phenomenon, some form of a global cultural nationalism transcending the boundaries of geographical and political nationalism. There are influential diasporas like for example the Indian or the Jews in America. Most of the diasporas tend to maintain their cultural identity or organise themselves into a social and political force of influence. This quite often causes much irritation and anger among the native population and also jealousy, if the migrant diaspora becomes a well-to-do and a highly qualified elite of the nation.

❖ The cultural potentialities of the diasporas are not yet fully recognised. When they are properly nurtured, they can become a great force for forging a global cultural synthesis. But for this to happen the following conditions have to be fulfilled: First, the migrant group should absolutely refrain from all activities, which try to subvert or denigrate the society and the culture in which they live. Second, they have to make the effort to understand and live the highest values, ideals and genius of their own native culture in which they are born and thereby become the living cultural ambassadors of their native lands. Third, they should also make the effort to understand and appreciate the best and the highest values, ideals and genius of the society and culture in which they are settled and arrive at some form of a creative synthesis between the culture in which they are born and the culture into which they have migrated. If the migrant communities make a sincere and creative effort on these lines, they will be making a great contribution of the cultural evolution of humanity towards a truly global civilisation.

❖ There are nations like India, China, Egypt and Greece, which were once cradles of great civilisations and cultures. When we look at their present condition, China is at present an economic and military superpower, but

politically and culturally crippled by a suppressive and outdated ideology; India is rising and is now an important economic and political power in Asia but her spiritual and cultural potentialities are still not yet fully manifest; Greece and Egypt have become small and insignificant nations of the global community. All these nations can regain their lost glory and again make important contribution to the future evolution of humanity if they can recover their rich cultural heritage and give a new creative form to it, which can fulfil the evolutionary needs of the present and the future. This is not difficult because whatever these nations have thought, lived or achieved are present in the “collective unconscious” or “morphogenetic field” of these nations and can be recalled by the mind of the nation through a process of collective recollection. What is more difficult is to give a new form to them to suit the needs of the present age.

❖ Each of these ancient nations has in its cultural traditions treasures, which are needed for the present and future evolution of humanity. India’s spiritual genius has become almost indispensable for the survival of the human race. India’s spirituality contains all the vision, values and ideals and the methods for steering the future evolution of the human race towards its spiritual destiny. The occult genius of Egypt can give a new direction to modern science and technology. The aesthetic genius of Greece can give an uplifting thrust to the modern Western civilisation, which is very much in need of a higher culture, especially the culture of beauty. A creative synthesis of Confucianism and Taoism of ancient China can lead to a deeper and a more holistic, spiritual and aesthetic ecology. And the new phenomenon of diasporas creates the possibility that this creative resurgence of national cultures need not be confined to the geographical boundaries of nations but can be a global process. For the cultural genius and inheritance of a nation is present not only in her collective mind and body but also as a genetic inheritance, in all the individuals who are born and lived for sometime within her geographical boundaries.

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# Spirituality And The Crisis In Contemporary Multiculturalism

Sachidananda Mohanty

My entry point into the subject will be through the following set of questions: What is the link between contemporary Multiculturalism and the search for a new ethics in late capitalism? What role do we envision for languages of the world in the ongoing identity politics in civil society? How does this search translate itself in our communitarian lives? And finally, how does it go beyond the conventional understanding of education and culture to newer paradigms?

Conventional reading of Sri Aurobindo tends to make a rigid and somewhat trenchant distinction between Morality, Ethics and Spirituality. In some quarters, the polarisation has been accentuated in order to deny any creative interface among the three categories. Viewed from this rigid angle, Spirituality is supposed to supplant Morality or Ethics. Some argue that no judgment is ever possible regarding human actions. Can we have cultural relativism of the Post-Modern kind? How can communities govern themselves in the absence of a code of conduct howsoever flexible it may be?

The aim of this essay is to take a fresh look at a problem that has come to be at the forefront of spiritual communities, the State and the Civil Society today. Basing myself on some of the best thought in the field, I shall argue that Sri Aurobindo's theory of a spiritualised Ethics offers an alternative set of life values that can serve the interests of a growing individual, as indeed an enlightened social order.

In the first part of this essay, I shall try and sum up the achievements and limitations of contemporary multiculturalism, especially the Anglo-American kind as theorised in the metropolitan academia. Although my thinking is grounded in a multidisciplinary terrain, I am primarily concerned with the debates in literary studies. The public face of this debate, in recent times, has

been the question of the literary canon formations and sensibilities. I shall argue that the key aspects of these debates centre on the question of defining an alternative ethics.

In the second part, I shall suggest that we have regrettably limited our effort by considering primarily two dominant models: namely that of religious nationalism and secular modernity. We need to go beyond these polarities and bring in hitherto marginalised paradigms that could mediate between competing identities rooted to rival claims of language and culture.

## I

The question of the use of languages for inter-cultural dialogue acquires a new urgency in the context of India's 9 X 11. In a tragi-comic sense, language has taken centre stage in the cross-border blame game. Always central to intelligence and espionage, language today seems to have gone beyond its traditional role in international relations. Asked to explain about the weapons of mass destruction, after the so called liberation of Iraq by the coalition forces, Donald Rumsfeld, the U.S Defence Secretary is reported to have said in a somewhat Derridean manner: "the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence!"

Was "Kasav", the name of the alleged terrorist captured in Mumbai, or is it the name of his profession in Faridkot, Pakistan? What could be the inter-cultural dialogue between the alleged assailant who spoke a patois of South Punjab and the interrogators who spoke a version of Mumbai's Hindustani? The use of experts in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Studies to crack the German Morse code during World War II, or Endowment money at Yale University to found and further American Studies Programmes during the Cold War era, reveals the nexus between language, culture and statecraft.

What could be the unique role of language, both inherited and adoptive, in the age of global terror? How may we learn from each other's experience? And how can we carry this knowledge forward to the rest of the world?

The disconnect between the intellectual class and the wider society, between our lived experience and academic discourse, is often cited as a truism of the modern age, a source of perennial despair. Political mobilisation by power elites often defeats the deeper aspirations of the silent majority.

Secular states, especially in the West, strategically deploy languages for the avowed goals of multiculturalism. And yet the outcome of this effort often defeats the cherished hope of social engineers.

Languages, both inherited and adoptive, clearly go beyond the mandate of civic and economic convenience. Always though considered a soft option, they constitute the core of the contemporary debate of culture, and demand attention to crucial questions: of citizenship and sovereignty, migration and displacement, revenge and reconciliation. While we cannot have 'one-size-fit-all' approach, we can certainly learn from a common pool of wisdom, East and West.

I hope to devote some attention to the problems of multiculturalism discourse and suggest that there is an urgent need to forge alliances with hitherto neglected paradigms if languages are to play an empowering role in the globalised world.

## II

Diversity concerns must inevitably take into account a set of factors related to polity, economy, culture, pedagogy and demography. Migrants from within the unified Nation States, or immigrants from outside that travel for economic, cultural and political reasons, are often perceived as illegal aliens who must constantly prove their badge of honour. They must increasingly surrender their unique linguistic and cultural particularism in favour of the national melting pot, or be prepared to be treated automatically as a fifth column.

Recent scholarship at the international level has questioned the dominant paradigms. For instance, in *The Politics of Culture on the Shadow of the Capital*, critic Lisa Lowe brilliantly unmasks the contradictions between the emergence of the American economy in search of cheap labour and the role of the political state that ensured "the disenfranchisement of existing labour forces to prevent accumulation, by groups of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and South Asians."

Thus, it may be appropriate to conclude that "immigration has been historically a locus of racialisation and the primary site for the policing of political, cultural and economic membership in the U.S. Nation State."

What then are the claims of contemporary multiculturalism? How do they address the question of adoptive languages and a new ethical order?

The crisis in literary studies has led to the questioning of the hitherto axiomatic terms such as "Great Book" or "Major Author Tradition," the distinction between "the Major" and "the Minor" and the "Minor" from the purely insignificant. Russell J Reising's attempt at the definition of the American literary canon has been one significant way we see emancipatory possibilities in the construction of non-hegemonic national languages/literatures rooted to a single reductive factor enunciated variously by earlier Americanists such as F.O. Matthiessen, Charles Fiedelson Jr., R.W.B. Lewis, Richard Chase, Daniel Hoffman, Leslie Fielder, Sacvan Bercovitch.

The problems of multiculturalism could be articulated in a series of questions: How do we determine our individual and collective self-image? How to resolve our allegiance to multiple identities, linguistic, ethnic, national and global that a participation in a democratic order entails. How is the question of our collective identities linked to our view of the past? How shall we retrieve the alternative pasts and the submerged memories? How much of the memories of this past shall we retain and how much the trauma and nightmare abandon? Some of the answers are being attempted by feminist projects of archival retrieval and some in the fields of holocaust studies for instance. At the Radcliff Institute, Harvard University, Homi Bhabha is trying to theorise the novel concept of cultural citizenship.

There are two prominent drives that are at times pitted against each other by sections of multiculturalists today: the drive towards cultural universals, and the drive towards cultural specificity. A challenge is to ask whether these seeming divergences could be harmonised by a multicultural thinking under the larger umbrella of inclusiveness. How can such inclusiveness be promoted in literary, cultural and ethnic terms in the context of embattled marginalised groups? One answer is to suggest that we create through mutual negotiation and understanding, a hierarchy of marginal experience and to relate, as Satya P. Mohanty remarks, all experience in terms of the notion of the whole to that of the parts. This is easier said than done. Modern societies have not fashioned the magic tool that can harmonise rival claims.

The study of languages in the context of a multicultural classroom could be promoted by a variety of pedagogic strategies which include Gerald Graff's "Staging a Conflict" model. Students could be encouraged, under this scheme, to consciously debate the merits of monolingualism and multilingualism, the

paradox of the monolingual State and the reality of the multilingual citizenry. There are other approaches too, such as the mode of translations that can be used in the pedagogic context.

How do we articulate and recognise the importance of multilingualism in the era of cultural globalisation? It speaks increasingly in favour of what the critic Benjamin Barber describes as the McWorld international global culture and tragically leads to the extinction of languages.

One way we could further the goal of linguistic pluralism is to free ourselves from our rootedness to traditional paradigms, world views and life-values that reign supreme in the modern world. There are communitarian experiments by progressive men and women in many parts of the world today that see no conflict between adoptive languages and a cohesive group or national life.

As a child from Orissa who grew up in a multilingual set up in Pondicherry and spoke Oriya, Bengali and Hindi no less than French and English, and heard other Indian and European languages, I see the crucial importance of experiments such as the one in Auroville for the furtherance of communitarian goals. Freed from political rivalry and competing ethnic chauvinism, children at such communities speak many language and learn to be part of a larger world. The approach underlines the pivotal role of spiritual and soul factors. As Sri Aurobindo in his *The Ideal of Human Unity* 1918 declared emphatically:

Diversity of language is worth keeping because diversity of cultures and differentiations of soul groups are worth keeping, and because without that diversity life cannot have full play, for in its absence there is a danger, almost an inevitability of decline and stagnation...

It is by the removal of the binary approaches and the Manichean divides that we could move forward: Language continues to play a central role in our individual and collective lives. Used in exclusive terms, it is most certainly a source of discord. Imaginatively and creatively harnessed, languages, both inherited and adoptive, take us forward to our common destiny based on a dialogue of cultures.

How then can we position ourselves creatively *vis à vis* the many languages of the world so that particularism and universalism are harmonised? One way we can do so, as I have argued, is to redefine the meaning of self-determination and base this concept on deeper foundations. In many parts of

the world, faith-based approach aligned to traditional religions, has been discredited. And yet we may not have tapped the full potential of a futuristic spirituality. What could be the contours of such a spirituality *vis à vis* the question of self-determination? I turn to Sri Aurobindo again :

The principle of self-determination really means this that within every living human creature, man, woman and child, and equally within every distinct human collectivity growing or grown, half-developed or adult there is a self, a being, which has the right to grow in its own way, to find itself, to make its life a full and satisfied instrument and image of its being...

The first danger to the principle of self-determination, as to all others, is that it may be interpreted, like most of the ideals of our human existence in the past, in the light of the ego, its interests and its will towards self-satisfaction. So interpreted it will carry us no farther than before; we shall arrive at a point where our principle is brought up short, fails us, turns into a false or a half-true assertion of the mind and a convention of form which covers realities that are quite the opposite of itself.

Clearly self-determination entails the freedom of making fundamental choices. But then, isn't freedom itself a loaded term? It is not freedom by itself as a category but the agents and practitioners of freedom who matter. Freedom is an attribute, a state of existence, or a way of life, political, moral and spiritual, that is invoked arbitrarily and used indiscriminately.

Spirituality helps us redefine the meaning of freedom. According to this world view, the 'self' is often equated with the ego, a limited, flawed and petty being that masquerades as a noble, altruistic and universal entity. The ego feeds by other egos – individual and collective – just as it finds itself in antagonistic terms with similar egoistic formations. A mechanical accommodation of interest, of mutual tolerance based on the need of mutual survival is the inevitable condition for the egoistic condition.

Self-determination impacts today in the arena of the language, ethnicity, identity politics and multiculturalism, in citizenship rights and the rights of the minorities. It is a problematic concept in the politics of representations that asks: who decides? And for whom?

How do we relate self-determination with language and ethnicity? From the spiritual point of view a culture of dialogue is possible only if we recognise the 'other' not as a clone and a polar opposite of ourselves, the bane of the

enlightenment model. We can make this new approach viable in the long run by shifting our terms of reference from the political to the moral and from the psychological to the spiritual. We can then move from a politics of despair to one of responsibility and mutuality.

What is the implication of this world-view with our understanding of the question of languages? Logically we will uphold all languages while giving up the supremacy of the one over the others. National languages will only be a matter of convenience. They will not rival or threaten the others in a hegemonic sense. The state and the civil society will promote all languages, the so-called major, minor, dialects and idiolects: the marginalised tongues, of the 'adivasis' of India's hinterlands or that of the 'Jarawas' of the Andaman Nicobar islands. Since each individual is important and language as the key to self-expression is a profound spiritual fact, the right to speak and preserve one's language must be a cardinal feature of our civic life.

A spiritualised view of language, education and culture will eschew the path of monastic self-denial or divisive sectarianism of traditional religiosity. It will be based on some of the deepest larger tendencies manifest in movements such as Romanticism, Existentialism and deep ecology, the Wordsworthian 'spots of time' experience in "*The Prelude*" no less than the "I" and "Thou" conversation of the existential thinker, Martin Buber. True 'otherness' is found by the annihilation of the narcissistic self, typified in literary narratives such as *Steppenwolf* by Herman Hesse, or in the existential enquiries of the Upanishadic Bhrgu or Nachiketa, the parables of the New Testaments or that of St. Augustine. It will be based on what theorist Patrick J. Hill calls "a conversation of respect" which is possible when true mutuality is recognised.

The approach is manifest in the Truth Commission of South Africa that speaks of possibilities of atonement. They are also evidenced in testimonies of holocaust victims which are healing acts for the later generations.

Why is the spiritual view of life central to our enquiry of multilingualism? I quote Sri Aurobindo again:

...Freedom is as necessary to life as law and regime; diversity is as necessary as unity to our true completeness. Existence is one only in its essence and totality; in its play it is necessarily multiform. Absolute uniformity would mean the cessation of life; while on the other hand, the vigour of the pulse of life may be measured by the richness of the diversities which it

creates. At the same time, while diversity is essential for power and fruitfulness of life, unity is essential for its order, arrangement and stability. Unity we must create but not necessarily uniformity. If man could realise a perfect spirituality, no sort of uniformity would be necessary; for the utmost play of diversity would be securely possible on that foundation (*The Ideal of Human Unity*: p.153).

This spiritual view of language is corroborated by contemporary political readings, such as the one offered by New historicists like Stephen Greenblatt. In *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Greenblatt shows that Columbus makes the new land uninhibited, *terrae, nullius* by emptying out the category of the 'other'. The 'other' is denied the ability to speak; he exists as an empty sign, a cipher. There is none in the New World to challenge Columbus's proclamation, because the natives are denied of speech, and because only linguistic competence, the ability to understand and speak, would enable one to fill in the sign. Thus, we have the legal ritual through the experiences of Marvellous to the mystical understanding and appropriative power of naming. The claim of possession is grounded in the power of wonder. Greenblatt's analysis provides an effective epitaph project of colonisation of language and culture.

How then can we restore to language the power of wonder in late capitalism?

Languages are more than a means of communication and civic convenience. They typify our life experience and shape our troubled past and fragile futures. It is time we made them part of the solution we desperately seek. It is only then that a new spiritualised ethics can truly promote a dialogue of civilisations.

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## “ Seer deep-hearted “ a metrical fragment by Sri Aurobindo

SRI AUROBINDO'S CONTRIBUTIONS  
TOWARD A GLOBAL SPIRITUAL CULTURE

Shraddhavan

### ABSTRACT

Sri Aurobindo has spoken of himself as being primarily a poet. Although his many writings in prose are addressed to our intellectual understanding, it is through his poetry that he has appealed to our deeper and higher levels, touching the deep heart and stirring the intuition. Over the past hundred years, metre and rhyme have gone out of fashion – many modern poets have the feeling that traditional metres are a limiting bondage or frivolous artificiality, insufficiently free and subtle to give adequate expression to the complexities of our developing psychology. Sri Aurobindo understood and sympathised with this feeling, yet insisted that “metre ... is not only the traditional, but also surely the right physical basis” for great poetry. He explored ways of bringing deeper and more subtle musical possibilities into English metre, by adding quantity to the traditional tools of stress and accent for forming the rhythms of poetry in English. An 8-line fragment demonstrating that a regular pattern of long and short syllables can support poetry of high seriousness has been studied, and is offered as a tribute to the poet.

1) Sri Aurobindo has spoken of himself as being primarily a poet. We have evidence of his poetic gifts from a very young age in the form of his first published poem, which appeared in 1883 when he was only 11 years old. This has recently been made available in the CWSA edition of his *Collected Poems*. It is entitled 'Light' and consists of 8 verses, modelled on Shelley's 'The Cloud' – a complex stanza form which the young boy has used to

perfection, although in later life he referred to it as “an awful imitation of somebody I don’t remember”.

2) The first verse runs :

From the quickened womb of the primal gloom  
The sun rolled, black and bare,  
Till I wove him a vest for his Ethiop breast,  
Of the threads of my golden hair;  
And when the broad tent of the firmament  
Arose on its airy spars,  
I pencilled the hue of its matchless blue,  
And spangled it around with stars.

Not only the metric mastery, but also the rich vocabulary and imagery and the sequence of thought, developing the concept of Light step by step from beginning to end of the poem, confirm that the young Aurobindo was a poetic prodigy. Amongst his *Collected Poems* we can find his ‘*Songs to Myrtilla*’ and other youthful compositions. He has stated that after starting to practise pranayama from 1904 onwards he experienced, amongst other effects, a remarkable increase in the fluency of his poetic composition. After his arrival in Pondicherry, writing poetry became one of the fields of his sadhana, resulting finally in his masterwork – *Savitri* in addition to many profound and moving shorter poems. Although his many writings in prose are addressed to our intellectual understanding, it is through his poetry that he has appealed to our deeper and higher levels, touching the deep heart and stirring the intuition.

The 78 years covered by Sri Aurobindo’s lifetime witnessed not only unprecedented upheavals in social and political conditions all over the world, but also new departures in the Arts, and not least in the forms of poetry. As a poetry lover and would-be poet, I have matured under the dominant influence of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, and my Professor of Poetry at Bristol University was Charles Tomlinson, a subtle and non-metrical poet of note at the time. To my generation, the unusual rhythms of Gerard Manley Hopkins were immensely more stimulating than the pedestrian classicism of his friend the Poet Laureate Robert Bridges. And in our own compositions we avoided metre and rhyme altogether, as something far too mechanical and limiting to our inspiration. Poetry-lovers of my generation may read the classical poets with

appreciation and enjoyment, but we have not been taught about the uses of metre, which almost disappeared from the repertoire of the 20<sup>th</sup> century poet, and has so far hardly reappeared. Recent experiments in the uses of classical metres by poets such as Charles Reading are curiosities which seem hardly serious, more like games or jokes than serious poetic offerings. And this is in tune with a general loss of poetic seriousness over the last half century.

Sri Aurobindo stood aside from this change of fashion, and encouraged the poets developing under his influence in the Ashram to do likewise. He considered poetry as the highest form of human speech, and its highest expression, Mantra, as the aim of the poetry of the future. For this, he writes in his book “*The Future Poetry*”, “*metre ... is not only the traditional, but also surely the right physical basis.*”

Nevertheless he understood and sympathised with the modern sense that traditional metres are a limiting bondage or frivolous artificiality, insufficiently free and subtle to give adequate expression to the complexities of our developing psychology. He adds, “*There must be a deeper and more subtle music entering into the metrical form and often overflowing it before the real poetic achievement begins. A mere metrical excellence, however subtle, rich or varied ... does not meet the deeper aims of the creative spirit; for there is an inner hearing which makes its greater claim, and to reach and satisfy it is the true aim of the creator of melody and harmony.*”

In his early years in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo explored the possibilities of using hexameters – the vehicle of the great Greek and Latin epics, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid* - in his poems *Ilion* and *Ahana*. But when in 1916 he started on the first version of *Savitri* he returned to the most commonly used English metre, the iambic pentameter – although as the poem developed, he used this basic metre in a unique way, unparalleled in earlier English poetry.

In 1942, when Sri Aurobindo’s *Collected Poems and Plays* was published for the first time, he included in it an essay entitled *On Quantitative Metre* in which he explained his idea of enriching the compass of metre in English poetry by adding to it the wide field of possibilities that would be opened up by a true use of quantity, in addition to the accepted use of stress and accent, in determining rhythm.



3) He set out four simple rules for achieving what he calls ‘true quantity’ in English metre – for he found attempts to stick strictly to the old classical rules applying in Greek, Latin or French inappropriate for English, in which stress and accent are so fundamental.

### Sri Aurobindo’s Rules for Quantitative Metre in English Poetry

1) All stressed syllables are regarded as metrically long, as also all syllables supported on a long vowel.

2) All short-vowel syllables not stressed are regarded as short unless they are heavily weighted with consonants. But on this last point no fixed rule can be given; in each case the ear must be the judge.

3) There are a great number of sounds in English which can be regarded according to circumstances either as longs or as shorts. Here too the ear must decide in each case.

4) English quantity metres cannot be as rigid as the metres of ancient tongues. The rhythm of the language demands a certain variability, free or sparing, without which monotony sets in; accordingly, in all English metres modulation is admitted as possible. ... The same rule must apply in quantitative metres; especially in long poems modulations are indispensable.

This system is not only not at discord with the sound-structure of the language; it accords closely with its natural rhythm; it only regulates and intensifies into metrical pitch and tone the cadence that is already there even in prose, even in daily speech. ( *Collected Poems* SABCL 5:585-86 )

Sri Aurobindo illustrated these possibilities by fifteen poems as examples of what he meant. Amongst them were some of his most remarkable and well-loved compositions – *Rose of God* for example, and *The Dream Boat* – as well as part of *Ilion*.

I would like to draw attention to a fragment which appears on page 603 of Volume 5 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library. This is very obviously one of Sri Aurobindo’s experiments with new metres.

4) Seer deep-hearted, divine King of the secrecies,  
Occult fountain of love sprung from the heart of God,

Ways thou knewest no feet ever in time had trod.  
Words leaped shining, the flame-billows of wisdom’s seas  
Vast in thy soul was a tide washing the coasts of heaven,  
Thoughts broke burning and bare crossing the human night,  
White star-scripts of the gods born from the presses of Light  
Page by page to the dim children of earth were given.

( *SABCL* 5:603 )

I find these lines remarkable not only because of their resonant content, but also on account of their unusual rhythm, and I would like to share with you today something of the journey of exploration that I have felt inspired to make into the form of these few lines. I first undertook this exploration about five years ago, and recently took it up again, revising what I had learned and found at that time, and making some new discoveries.

The first thing we might notice about them is that the lines are longer than those of *Savitri*. Yet they are not hexameters. A hexameter line consists of six metrical feet. In poetry a ‘foot’ corresponds to something like a bar in musical notation. In the classical hexameter, some of the six feet making up the line may contain three or more syllables, leading to lines of 15 or 16 syllables in length. But the lines of this fragment are not iambic pentameters either – the commonest, apparently most natural, metre in English poetry, used by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Wordsworth and Tennyson for their major compositions, as well as by many lesser poets. While iambic pentameter (five feet of two syllables each) leads to lines of 10 syllables, these lines have 12 syllables each. The most widely-used metre involving lines of 12 and 13 syllables is the Alexandrine – the vehicle of French classical poetry. Sri Aurobindo has left two compositions in Alexandrines.

5) If we read the shorter of the two, we can hear immediately that its rhythm is distinctly different from that of the lines we are examining.

A voice arose that was so sweet and terrible  
It thrilled the heart with love and pain, as if all hell  
Tuned with all heaven in one inextricable note.  
Born from abysmal depths on highest heights to float,  
It carried all sorrow that the souls of creatures share,  
Yet hinted every rapture that the gods can bear.

O Sun of God who cam'st into my blackest Night  
 To sound and know its gulfs and bring the immortal light.  
 (SABCL 5: 117 )

Our fragment sounds very different. Let us look at it again :

6) The twelve-syllabled lines are broken up by caesuras - the pauses in a line of poetry which determine its rhythm. I have found that in order to read a line of poetry correctly, to bring out its inherent music, it is essential to find where the caesura falls. I used to find the first line of *Savitri* very difficult to read, although all the words in it are so simple, until I found the caesura : 'It was the hour II before the gods awake.' In *Savitri*, some lines have two caesuras. But in this fragment, each of the 8 lines has one major pause clearly marked, its position varying from line to line, as well as some less-pronounced pauses determined by the word-groupings.

#### Caesura pauses

Seer deep-hearted, II divine King of the secrecies,  
 Occult fountain of love II sprung from the heart of God  
 Ways thou knewest II no feet ever in time had trod.  
 Words leaped shining, II the flame-billows of wisdom's seas  
 Vast in thy soul was a tide II washing the coasts of heaven  
 Thoughts broke burning and bare II crossing the human night  
 White star-scripts of the gods II born from the presses of Light  
 Page by page II to the dim children of earth were given.

First observation :

Twelve syllables to a line with variable caesura.

Rhyme scheme : a b b a c d d c

Besides the caesura, the main pause in each line, other subsidiary word-groupings can be heard. Moreover, the rhythm is very obviously based on a pattern of long and short syllables. The most striking feature is the repetition of three long syllables at the beginning of each line. In fact if we analyse the distribution of long and short syllables throughout the lines, we find an amazingly regular pattern.

#### 7) Syllabic scheme

Seer deep-hearted, divine King of the secrecies,

Occult fountain of love sprung from the heart of God,

Ways thou knewest no feet ever in time had trod.

Words leaped shining, the flame-billows of wisdom's seas,

Vast in thy soul was a tide washing the coasts of heaven,

Thoughts broke burning and bare crossing the human night,

White star-scripts of the gods born from the presses of Light

Page by page to the dim children of earth were given.

Second observation :

This fragment consists of 8 lines, all of which follow a very regular pattern of 12 long and short syllables. In each line there are 7 long syllables, interspersed by 5 short ones. The pattern goes like this:

(long, long, long, short, short, long, long, short, short, long, short, long).

Although this pattern remains the same in all the 8 lines, it is not immediately obvious to the ear, and even when we have become aware of it we do not experience it as monotonous, because this overall pattern has been very subtly modulated in two ways.

The first way is by the weight value of syllables. For example, while the overall syllabic pattern is the same in the first and second lines, we hear the second line quite differently, because the first syllable of the second line is long through stress, rather than through pure quantity as the first syllable of the first line is.

In the third line, we may be tempted to stress the word 'no', making it long instead of short, and in the fourth line, with the word 'billows', we have a similar situation, with a first syllable which has a short vowel becoming quantitatively long by stress, while the second syllable, which has a long vowel but is unstressed, sounds comparatively lighter.

Please note the words 'heaven' and 'given' at the end of lines 5 and 8. It is possible to pronounce these words as either two syllables or one. I consider that in this case, each of these words is to be pronounced as a single long syllable, rather than as a two-syllabled word.

In line 7, the rhythm is modulated by the introduction of an additional short unstressed syllable towards the end of the line, in the word 'presses'. The only other instance of an additional syllable occurs in line 5, where the insertion of a short unstressed syllable near the beginning of the line, combined with a caesura pause after the fourth syllable, produces a marked variation in the overall rhythmic pattern, clearly noticeable when we read the line aloud.

Secondly, the overall pattern is modulated by being divided up differently in each line, by the caesura-pauses we have already noticed, as well as by subsidiary word-groupings.

But throughout the 8 lines we find a regular metrical scheme based on quantity.

### 8) Metrical pattern :

1	_ _ _ v	v _ _ v	v _ v _	
2	_ _ _ v	v _ _ v	v _ v _	(1 <sup>st</sup> syllable long by stress)
3	_ _ _ v	v _ _ v	v _ v _	
4	_ _ _ v	v _ _ _	v _ v _	(modulation)
5	_ v _ _ v	v _ _ v	v _ v _	(additional short)
6	_ _ _ v	v _ _ v	v _ v _	
7	_ _ _ v	v _ _ v	v _ vv _	(additional short)
8	_ _ _ v	v _ _ v	v _ v _	

This brings us to ask whether we are meant to consider these rhythmical groupings as metrical feet.

To do this we need to know a little more about metre. As I said earlier, I had never been taught anything about this in the course of my studies of English language and literature, either at school or at university. Now I had to embark on some research, as a result of which I can share with you this table

### 9) Metrical feet

#### Two syllables :

Iamb	short + long	v	_
Trochee	long + short	_	v
Spondee	long + long	_	_
Pyrrhic	short + short	v	v

#### Three syllables

Dactyl	long + short + short	_	v	v	
Anapaest	short + short + long	v	v	_	
Amphibrach	short + long + short	v	_	v	
Amphimacer	long + short + long	_	v	_	(or Cretic)
Bacchius	short + long + long	v	_	_	
Antibacchius	long + long + short	_	_	v	
Molossus	long + long + long	_	_	_	
Tribrach	short + short + short	v	v	v	

#### Four syllables

Antispast	short + long + long + short	v	_	_	v
Double iamb	short + long + short + long	v	_	v	_
Choriamb	long + short + short + long	_	v	v	_
Ionic a majore	long + long + short + short	_	_	v	v
Ionic a minore	short + short + long + long	v	v	_	_
Epitrite	three longs and one short in any arrangement				
Paeon	three short and one long in any arrangement				

#### Five syllables

Dochmiac	short + long + long + short + long	v	_	_	v	_
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The first of these, the iamb, is the basis of the iambic pentameter, a stress-metre, which, as we said, is the most commonly used metre in English – five feet or groups of iambs:

di-da, di-da, di-da, di-da, di-da

This basic pattern can easily be varied by using any other two-syllable foot, or by the occasional insertion of an extra syllable, stressed or unstressed. Pentameter lines can be combined with lines of three or four iambic feet to produce song-like lyrical stanzas.

Another commonly used foot in English poetry is the anapaest – two shorts and a long, which gives a skipping rhythm, as in Shelley’s poem *The Cloud*, on which Sri Aurobindo’s first youthful effort was modelled.

The longer types of feet are usually encountered in hexameters or other classical metres.

In Amal Kiran’s talks on poetry given in the Ashram School in the 1960s, he illustrated his remarks on metre with a mnemonic poem composed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (the author of ‘Kubla Khan’, one of the favourite and most recited poems in English). Here it is

**10) A Guide to Metre in the form of an illustrative poem by S.T. Coleridge enlarged by Amal Kiran**

Trochee trips from long to short	–	v
Two longs paired off, in calm grave sort		
Slow Spondee stalks, strong foot, yet proves ill able	–	–
Ever to come up to Dactyl trisyllable.	–	v v
Iambics march from short to long.	v	–
With a leap and a bound do the Anapaests throng.	v	v –
A syllable long with a short at each side,	v	– v
The Amphibrachs haste with a stately stride.		
First and last being long, middle short, Amphimacer	–	v –
Strikes his firm hoofs, a proud thorough-bred giant racer.		
At the tail end is a small foot, sheer opposite brother	v	v
To the strong Spondee, the weak Pyrrhic with two shorts together.		

*(last two lines added by Amal Kiran)*

So, to return to our metric fragment from Sri Aurobindo, are we to consider that his lines are meant to be scanned in metric feet? That is the question I investigated next. (10)

**Word Groupings**

– – – v	II	v – / – v v / – v –	<i>Epitrite, iamb,</i>		
Seer deep-hearted,	II	divine / King of the / secrecies,	<i>dactyl, cretic ?</i>		
– – – v / v –	II	– v v / – v –			
Occult fountain / of love	II	sprung from the / heart of God	„		
– – – v	II	v – / – v v / – v –			
Ways thou knewest	II	no feet / ever in / time had trod.	„		
– – – v	II	v – / – v v / – v –	<i>Epitrite, iamb</i>		
Words leaped shining,	II	the flame-/ billows of / wisdom’s seas	<i>antibacchius, cretic</i>		
– v – – v v –	II	– v v / – v –	<i>Choriamb, anapaest,</i>		
Vast in thy soul / was a tide	II	washing the / coasts of heaven	<i>dactyl, cretic ?</i>		
– – – v / v –	II	– v v – v –	<i>Spondee, trochee,</i>		
Thoughts broke / burning / and bare	II	crossing the / human night	<i>iamb, dactyl, cretic</i>		
– – – v v –		– v v – v v –	<i>Molossus, anapaest</i>		
White star-scripts / of the gods	II	born from the / presses of Light	<i>dactyl, choriamb</i>		
– – –	II	v v – / – v v / – v –	<i>Molossus, anapaest</i>		
Page by page	II	to the dim / children of / earth were given.	<i>dactyl, cretic</i>		
		– – v			
1 : Epitrite	II	iamb	dactyl	cretic	
2 : Epitrite		iamb	II	dactyl	cretic
3 : Epitrite	II	iamb		dactyl	cretic

4 :	Epitrite	II	iamb	antibacchius	cretic
	_ v v _		v v _		
5 :	Choriamb		anapaest	II dactyl	cretic
6 :	Epitrite		iamb	II dactyl	cretic
	(Spondee + trochee)				
	_ _ _		v v _		_ v v _
7 :	Molossus		anapaest	II dactyl	choriamb
8 :	Molossus	II	anapaest	dactyl	cretic

I have several doubts about this scheme. The first line should perhaps be scanned :

\_ \_ \_ v II v \_ \_ / v v / \_ v \_                      *Epitrite, bacchius,*  
 Seer deep-hearted, II divine King / of the / secrecies,                      *pyrrhic, cretic*  
 Or

\_ \_ \_ v II v \_ \_ v / v \_ v \_                      *Epitrite, choriamb,*  
 Seer deep-hearted, II divine King of / the secrecies,                      *double iamb*

Neither of these schemes would work for the second line, because of the position of the caesura in it :

\_ \_ \_ v / v \_ II \_ v v / \_ v \_                      *Epitrite, iamb,*  
 Occult fountain / of love II sprung from the / heart of God                      *dactyl, cretic*

And perhaps we should treat line 5 like this :

\_ v \_ \_ v v \_ II \_ v v / \_ v \_                      *Dochmiac?, iamb,*  
 Vast in thy soul was / a tide II washing the / coasts of heaven                      *dactyl, cretic*

Lines 6, 7 and 8 present further irregularities. And however we scan we seem to end up with about 10 different kinds of feet. But Sri Aurobindo has told us that the metre scheme should supply an underlying regularity, which can be modulated here and there for variety. We have already found an overall regular pattern in the syllabic scheme, subtly modulated to avoid monotony. Although it is possible to assign foot-labels to the syllabic groupings, this description in terms of metrical feet, arrived at by some forcing, seems a clumsy and artificial way of labelling the syllabic pattern, which is far more regular and convincing. To try to force on that regular pattern an erratic and

irregular framework of labelled feet seems perverse to me. The variation of pauses within the same overall regular syllabic pattern suggests that this is not intended. Rather, I conclude, the metre of these lines is purely syllabic, following a regular pattern of long and short syllables, variously divided up by caesura pauses and subtler ones imposed by the word-groupings, but maintaining a recognisable underlying persistent rhythm, a majestic pacing which admirably supports the seriousness of the content, without ever becoming monotonous, suggesting ‘*The rhythms that bring the sounds of wisdom’s sea.*’ (*Savitri*)

I hope that I have been able to communicate to you some of the fascination that has fuelled my exploration of the structure of these lines. But, fundamentally, I have been attracted to analyse this marvellous fragment in some depth, not simply because its rhythm is very unusual and striking, but even more by its content. The words which Sri Aurobindo has written – perhaps as an experiment – evidently refer to a great rishi. May I suggest that they provide us with an expressive tribute, which we could very appropriately offer to Sri Aurobindo himself, as we celebrate the Centenary of his arrival in Pondicherry? It is in this spirit that I wanted to share them with you today, and with this spirit uppermost, I would like to read them to you for one last time now.

- (11) Seer deep-hearted, divine King of the secrecies,  
 Occult fountain of love sprung from the heart of God  
 Ways thou knewest no feet ever in time had trod.  
 Words leaped shining, the flame-billows of wisdom’s seas  
 Vast in thy soul was a tide washing the coasts of heaven  
 Thoughts broke burning and bare crossing the human night  
 White star-scripts of the gods born from the presses of Light  
 Page by page to the dim children of earth were given.

### Postscript

My colleague Vladimir, who is a Vedic scholar, heard my presentation at SACAR, and afterwards commented to me that the rhythm of these lines suggested to him some of the Vedic riks, which are also composed in 12-

syllabled lines. He has prepared a comparative table for me, which seems to confirm that in composing this fragment Sri Aurobindo was very probably inspired by ancient Sanskrit metres – that would, of course, very appropriately correspond with the substance of the lines.

A couple of weeks later, I came across a letter of Sri Aurobindo to Dilip Kumar Roy, written in 1933, encouraging him to persist with the introduction of syllabic scansion into Bengali metre. In the early 1930s, several sadhak-poets were sending their writings to Sri Aurobindo in English and Bengali for his comments, and sometimes translating his, their own, and each other's poems. It is conceivable that this fragment was written at this time by Sri Aurobindo, as a sample of what can be done in this line. If any readers can cast further light on this topic, I shall be most grateful to hear from them.

*(Presented at the National Seminar at Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR), Puducherry March 27-29, 2010 )*

## **The Theme Of Urvashi In The Indian Renaissance:**

**Madhusudan Datta, Rabindranath Tagore , Sri Aurobindo**

*( Continued from the previous issue )*

Ranajit Sarkar

### **Urvashi and Pururavas**

In Madhusudan's epistle it was Urvashi who wrote about herself to her human lover. The presence of Pururavas was indirect, seen through the eyes of Urvashi. Rabindranath had no use of Pururavas. Urvashi alone was the subject of his poetic inspiration. But in Sri Aurobindo we get back both the lovers. The growth and evolution of one depends on the growth and evolution of the other. Kalidasa, because of his dramatic approach, needed a wider set of characters. Aushinari, the hermitess, Ayus and even the minor characters were necessary for the many-sided development of the plot.

In Sri Aurobindo the two important characters are Urvashi and Pururavas. The other characters – nymphs, particularly Menaka, and Tilottama , the divine sage Bharata and Indra, the lord of the gods, are necessary for the smooth flow of the story. They are all taken from known sources. Apart from them Sri Aurobindo introduces three other characters who have a symbolic-allegoric function in the poem: Ila, Pururavas' mother, Lakshmi as the goddess of the land of the Aryans, and the Mighty Mother. Minor though these characters are, they help us to understand the lovers, and the thought-world and the poetic-world which the story depicts.

Pururavas was the "lover", but there lingers always the shadow of another Pururavas, the ideal king, the leader of men, who had the power to lead humanity beyond its earthly state to a divine destiny. It is, in fact, this power that made his meeting with Urvashi possible. He was the "hero" who helped the

gods to fight evil. Even though mortal he possessed the heroism of the heavenly gods. His was the power of *dharma* pure and austere. He did not, in the beginning, know the power of *kāma*, (love) with its dual expression of beauty and delight. *Dharma* which is pure and austere often falls a prey to beauty as the temptation-stories of sages by divine nymphs testify.

And Pururavas too was smitten by beauty. When he saw Urvashi, he stood voiceless “and, troubled, watched / That lovely advent, laughter and delight/ Gaining upon the world.” Earth is beautiful. The children of the earth grow in beauty and love. But some deny that beauty in order to pursue an austere moral or ascetic ideal. Pururavas too denied beauty that he saw in the clouds and moonlight and starlight and fire. The object of his life was to pursue his duty as an ideal king, unshakable in his dharmic resolve:

.....Surely I thought  
The hills would move and eternal stars  
Deviate from their rounds immutable,  
Never Pururavus.... (I.78-31)

He had the strength in him to be greater than the heavenly gods. But when love and beauty touched his soul he could not abide by his resolution. Was it a fall from the ideal? No. For, *dharma* in its bareness can give only a partial, though sublime, fulfilment to life; it must hold within its widened domain love, joy and beauty.

When the ascetic self-denial is left behind and love is accepted, the possibility of a greater fulfilment arises – the fulfilment of the *trivarga*-ideal. His austere purity has made him fit to be loved by a divine being. Pururavas’ love and passion, which at first seem to be a negation of the higher value of duty, is really a widening of the ideal which is expressed in his conjugal life.

There is at first an ascetic self-denial, a life of bare *dharma*. Then a life of passionate enjoyment of love (*kāma*), in delightful places which the poet describes with a Kalidasian imagination:

.....The green tremulous groves,  
And solitary rivers white with birds,  
And watered hollow’s gleam, and sunny boughs

Gorgeous with peacocks or illumining  
Bright bosom of doves, in forests, musing day  
Or the great night with roar of many beasts, (III. 16-21)

But after Ayus’s birth passionate desire calms down. Pururavas returns to his capital with Urvashi and Ayus. A new, though brief, period begins in his life: it is the life of the householder, *grhastha*, in which the three objects of life, *kāma*, *artha* and *dharma*, are harmoniously fulfilled. Urvashi bears him “a race of glorious children”, and the whole kingdom is prosperous, arts flourish, and there is intense religious fervour:

The sacred city felt a finer life  
Within it; burning inspirations breathed  
From hallowed poets; and architects to grace  
And fancy their immense conceptions toned;  
Numberless heroes emulously drove forth  
And in strong joyous battle rolling back  
The dark barbarian borders, flashed through fields  
Brilliant, and sages in their souls saw God. (III.104-111)

But after this brief dharmic period, there is an unexpected turn. Due to the very nature of earthly creation this state cannot endure. Indian thought finds the culmination of the *trivarga*-ideal in the fourth goal – liberation. There are also lesser solutions proposed. Some versions of the story make Pururavas reach the *gandharva*-world and he lives there happily for ever with Urvashi. Others finding this a lower ideal say that through the worship of Vishnu, the king gets liberation from the lower heaven of nymphs. Kalidasa makes the dharmic stage continue on this earth.

Sri Aurobindo’s Pururavas chooses the lesser goal of the *gandharva*-world, in which there is the romantic fulfilment of love, realised by the sacrifice of the earth. It is not the higher fulfilment of love, beyond the dharmic pattern, here on earth. Therefore, in spite of the immense possibilities with which he was born, he fails. There seems to be a certain weakness in his nature. As in Kalidasa’s play, so in this poem, it is Urvashi who reminds him that he should return to his kingdom and duty:

“How long shall we in woods, Pururavus,  
Waste the glad days of cheerful human life?...” (III. 29-30)

As long as he knew no love, he could be the ideal king, he could lead a life of austere purity. But no sooner does he learn love than every other ideal becomes adventitious. He can therefore quite easily leave the kingdom and his royal responsibilities to his son Ayus and go away in search of disappeared Urvashi. He chooses *kāma* above *dharma*, and thereby he denies the possibility of a still higher ideal – the establishment of a divine life upon earth. But his actions are not prompted by any so-called religious sense of reward or punishment. He has pursued his kingly duties through a conscious will – he has been master of his deeds. But desire is stronger than that will. When he meets Lakshmi, he tells her:

“O Goddess,.....I  
Not from the fear of Hell or hope of Heaven  
Do good or ill. Reigning I reigned o’er self,  
And with a kingly soul did kingly deeds.  
Now driven by a termless wide desire  
I wander over snow and countries vague”. (IV.163-168)

Pururavas is a “mortal mightier than the Gods”, born with the possibility of becoming more than the typical gods and attain supreme perfection. Through love he achieves immortality and godhead; he becomes one of the gods but not “with God conterminous”. (I.285.)

Urvashi is an *apsarā*, a goddess, and as such has no evolutionary possibility. But because of her love for a mortal she falls to a lower earthly status where she can evolve and achieve something that she cannot as a nymph. She can become a mother.

Sri Aurobindo portrays Urvashi with all the colours of his youthful romantic imagination, with all the delicacy and sweetness that Kalidasa had imparted to her. At first she is only a nymph, the loveliest of the heavenly clan, yet a nymph only. Sri Aurobindo gives a beautiful description of the heavenly nymphs. Everything about them is lovely, even their names are delightful. He follows the

ancient conception of them as heavenly *hetaerae* born of the churning of the ocean:

... girls of heaven whose beauties ease  
The labour of the battle-weary Gods;  
They in the golden dawn of things sprang gold,  
From youth of the immortal Ocean born,  
They youthful and immortal,..., (I.43-47)

They are not bound by the earthly laws of *dharma*, of fidelity and conjugal love. Tilottama explicitly reveals this *apsarā*-nature:

They not to one lord yield nor in one face  
Limit the universe, but like sweet air,  
Water unowned and beautiful common light  
In unrestrained surrender remain pure. (II. 251-254)

They are also the dream of the poets and artists. In heaven they sing, dance and act and when they visit mortal artists, the artists are “moved to immense creative anguish”. They are the highest dream of sensuous beauty free like the wind and flowers, pure in a heavenly way.

Pururavas is pure in his austerity; Urvashi is pure in an *apsarā* way. But a change comes on her too when she sees the mortal king. And the goddess becomes a woman.

As a goddess, a nymph, she is the incarnation of all that is beautiful and delightful in nature. She appears at first as the dawn, her face

Was secret in its own divinity  
Like a high sun of splendour, or half seen  
All troubled with her hair. Yet Paradise  
Breathed from her limbs and tresses wonderful,  
With odours and with dreams. (I. 67-71)



And she is all-beauty: beauty of things, of sounds and of thoughts. Even her name

.....seems the grace  
Of visible things, of hushed and lonely snows  
And burning great inexorable noons,  
And towns and valleys and the mountain winds.  
All beauty of earthliness is in thee, all  
Luxurious experience of the soul. (I. 101-106)

Note the phrase “beauty of earthliness”. Urvashi is a goddess, heavenly, and would appear to be the opposite of earthly. But there is no essential dichotomy between heaven and earth. What is here broken, imperfect and scattered, is there perfect. As soon as Pururavas recognises this truth, goddess and woman become one: “O Goddess! woman, to my bosom move!” (1.117) She may incarnate the universal beauty but she is a woman, a woman in love. What Sri Aurobindo says, in respect to her characterisation by Kalidasa, applies in part to his own portrayal. We shall here quote the relevant passage : “... a beautiful and radiant woman deeply in love. Certainly the glories of her skiey residence, the far-off luminousness and the free breath of the winds are about her, but they are her atmosphere rather than part of herself. The essential idea of her is natural, frank and charming womanliness...”<sup>178</sup> She is indeed a person, not an idea. And it is as a person, as a woman, that she evolves in her earthly nature. In that evolution there are two definite moments of change.

When she wakes to love on regaining her consciousness and sees her rescuer, the handsome heroic mortal Pururavas, a change comes upon her. She returns with her sisters to heaven, performs her daily tasks, dances, plays the harps of heaven and goes to bathe in Svarga’s streams; but “All she did,/ Celestial occupations, all she thought/ And all she was, though still the same, had changed.” (II.20-22) She becomes a woman in love, merged in thought with the lover. This is the stage of *kāma*. The second change comes when she becomes, wife and mother— the stage of *dharma*. This was already foretold by Bharata:

“.....Let her  
To the pure banks of sacred Ganges wend.  
There she may keep her exile, from of old  
Intended for perfection of the earth  
Through her sweet change. Heaven too shall flash and grow  
Fairer with her returning feet though changed,—  
Though changed, yet lovelier, from beneficence,  
For she will come soft with maternal cheeks  
And flushed from nuptial arms and human-blest  
With touches of the warm delightful earth”. (II. 103-112)

After the birth of Ayus she really becomes a wife and a mother. When the king brings her to Pratisthana, the palace-girls clothe her as a human bride: “Over her hair the wifely veil was drawn.” (III.88) And subdued to gentle ordinary things, sweet service, household tasks and trivial daily words she fully realises what “wife and home” really mean.<sup>179</sup>

She does not evolve further. Fate is against the couple. She must return to heaven, enriched by her earthly experience, “soft with maternal cheeks”. However, she remains, although changed, although mellowed, the dream incarnate of the lover-king. A critic rightly remarks that “the poem depicts centrally the colour and the strength of a one-pointed love daring the seemingly impossible and achieving it.”<sup>180</sup>

### Beauty and Love

Sri Aurobindo had learnt, from English poets like Meredith and Phillips, and Indian poets like Kalidasa, the power of love, and the possibility of earth’s perfectibility through love. Love can even conquer death – death which is the greatest barrier to the realisation of man’s highest destiny. In the *Mahabharata* he read the story of Ruru and Pramadvara, and the more famous story of Savitri, both of which attracted him.

At the time he wrote *Urvashie, Love and Death*, and began the first draft of *Savitri*, he had already developed a love philosophy which he clearly exposed in the above-mentioned letter to his brother. Speaking about the great

epic lovers, Rama and Sita, Savitri and Satyavan, Ruru and Pramadvava, he wrote, "... love in them ... finds not only its crowning exaltation but that perfect *idea* of itself of which every existing love is a partial and not quite successful manifestation. Ideal love is a triune energy, neither a mere sensual impulse, nor mere emotional nor mere spiritual. These may exist, but they are not love. By itself the sensual is only an animal need, the emotional a passing mood, the spiritual a religious aspiration which has lost its way. Yet all these are necessary elements of the highest passion"<sup>181</sup>

Poetically, as Kalidasa and other ancient Indian poets knew, sensual love is the foundation and root of all love. This is expressed as beauty and physical eroticism (*kāma*). Indeed love grows in the lovers' hearts often at first sight. Such a love cannot but be beauty's attraction. It is the sudden revelation of beauty that fires the king's desire; it is beauty that shatters his denial of love. And he cries out:

O comest thou because I left thy charm  
Aiming at purity, oh comest thou,  
Goddess, to avenge thyself with beauty...? (I. 107-109)

As in Kalidasa, we have, here too, intensely passionate descriptions of sensual love, *sambhoga-sringāra*, love in enjoyment.

Amid her wind-blown hair their faces met.  
With her sweet limbs all his, feeling her breasts  
Tumultuous up against his beating heart,  
He kissed the glorious mouth of heaven's desire.  
So clung they as two shipwrecked in a surge. (II. 347-351)

As in Kalidasa again, this sensual love does not exhaust itself with the senses. The strong surge of emotion is unmistakable, and that surge loses itself into something ever deeper, a suggestion of love lost in the great ocean of existence. The undertone of a spiritual love is even more marked in the following passage:

And he beheld her standing and his look  
Grew strong; he yearned towards her like a wave,  
And she received him in her eyes as earth  
Receives the rain. (II. 296-299)

Love-in-separation, *vipralambha-sringāra*, is also vividly pictured. After Urvashi vanishes, Pururavas, in search of her, comes to old familiar places full of memories of many happy hours:

....Here she lay, her arms thrown back,  
Smiling up to me, and flowers rained  
Upon her lips and eyes and bosom bare. (IV. 24-26)

But there is only absence; the whole atmosphere is full of *viraha*— sense of separation and loss— and loneliness made more intense by the movement of a solitary bird or a snake:

.....But all was silent; only  
Perhaps a bird darted bright-winged away,  
Or a grey snake slipped through the brilliant leaves. (IV.35-37)

Love in its various moods, love which harmonises the sensual, emotional and the spiritual, love overwhelming in its expanse, all-absorbing in its intensity, pervades the whole poem. It is no abstract love: it is the love of one man for one woman for whose sake the lover is prepared to abandon everything else:

And what shall God profit me or his glory,  
Who love one small face more than all his worlds? (II.293-4)

And that one small face is that of Urvashi. Such is the love depicted in the poem. Love is itself its own fulfilment. Yet there is something more. The love of the mortal man and the immortal woman carries here a resonance far beyond the personal realisation of the lovers.

## Earth's Destiny

The story of Sri Aurobindo's *Urvashie* can be read on two levels. On the individual plane it is a love-story with a happy end. On the cosmic plane, on the contrary, it is the story of a failure of the earth to fulfil its higher destiny,

Sri Aurobindo does not subscribe to the idea that the world is an illusion, earth a vale of tears. Man, the son of the earth, is capable of rising beyond his earthly imperfections, beyond even the static heavenly perfections, into the Infinite. But this ascension and evolution do not signify the renunciation of the earth by man to merge his self into some unmanifest absolute or to attain nirvana, but rather the uplift of the earth itself to a divine status where nothing that is human will be abandoned. All passions, all efforts, all aspirations, transformed and harmonised will be incorporated in the totality of life.

Pururavas has never been an ascetic, but at first we find in him the ascetic denial of a fundamental aspect of life, namely love with its aesthetic components, beauty and delight. We have said that before his meeting with Urvashi his mission was dharmic in its bare purity. Urvashi and heaven represent what he denied then. Heaven is, in this poem, the world of perfect beauty, of perfect love, but static in its perfection. The coming of Urvashi is the bringing down of that beauty and love into the earthly context of evolutionary possibilities. Fear, anxiety, uncertainty are imperfections from the heavenly point of view but these imperfections are, on the earth, signs to show men that they must move towards an ever receding perfection.

The humanisation of Urvashi is the symbol of love, beauty and delight entering into the evolutionary process. A harmonious synthesis of the bare *dharmā* of Pururavas with the ideal that Urvashi incarnates would lead to the realisation of earth's destiny. But Pururavas was not ready.

Tilottama saw in Pururavas the possibility of the individual man to rise to the Supreme. Man could evolve personally to reach God beyond the lesser realisations of *svarga*, the dharmic heaven. Tilottama says:

0 King, 0 mortal mightier than the Gods!  
For Gods change not their strength, but are of old  
And as of old, and man, though less than these,  
May yet proceed to greater, self-evolved.

Man, by experience of passion purged,  
His myriad faculty perfecting, widens  
His nature as it rises till it grows  
With God conterminous..... (1.273-280)

But the ideal of Sri Aurobindo is not the individual self-evolution, but the evolution of the earth for which heaven with its beauty must descend on earth.

Heaven is apparently the opposite of the earth. There everything is perfect, even the earthly arts have "their rich prototypes" there. Heaven in its static perfection does not tolerate the touch of mortality. Urvashi is the symbol of heaven trying to break loose from its own perfection. But Heaven punishes such darings. It is only earth that is plastic enough, free enough, to break old perfections and create new ones. Urvashi had to go down:

Since thou hast brought the breath of mortal air  
Into the pure solemnities of heaven,  
And since thou givest up to other ends  
Than the one need for which God made thee form,  
Thy being and hast here transferred from earth  
Human failure from the divided soul, ...(II. 68-73)

The fall of Urvashi is however a gain for both heaven and earth. In heaven "Gods change not". Urvashi acquires the possibility of change. And earth— in the representative man— gets the possibility of integrating love with *dharmā*. And it seems that the integration is near at hand. Personally, Pururavas has not been able to synthesise the two trends— bare *dharmā* and love. For a short while, after the couple returns to Pratisthana, it seems that the ideal will be realised. The bards sing:

"The fires of sacrifice mount ever up:  
To their lost heavens they naturally aspire.  
Their tops are weighted with a human prayer.  
"The soul of love mounts also towards the sky;

Thence came the spark but hardly shall return;  
Its wings are weighted with too fierce a fire... (III. 159-164)

But the spark has to return. The earth is not ready yet. After the return of Urvashi, Pururavas goes for love and a personal immortality in the perfect heaven of beauty and joy. He relinquishes earth's evolutionary possibilities for the satisfaction of his personal joy. He has established in his kingdom a high *dharma* and a noble norm of life. Before taking leave he tells his subjects:

Lo, I have planted earth with deeds and made  
The widest heavens my monument, have brought  
From Paradise the sempiternal fire  
And warred in heaven among the warring Gods.  
O People, you have shared my famous actions  
Done in a few great years of earthly life,  
The battles I fought, edifications vast,  
And perfect institutes that I have framed.  
High things we have done together, O my people.  
But now I go to claim back from the Gods  
Her they have taken from me, my dear reward. (III.382-392)

He sets out in search of Urvashi and finds her, but not to bring her back. Sri Aurobindo has beautifully expressed, in the closing lines of the poem, the double note of the personal realisation of love and the cosmic failure of the earth to fulfil its evolutionary destiny

..... so pressing back  
The longed-for sacred face, lingering he kissed.  
Then Love in his sweet heavens was satisfied.  
But far below through silent mighty space  
The green and strenuous earth abandoned rolled. (IV.365-369)

Rabindranath found his ideal in Lakshmi, Sri Aurobindo too will find the ideal of earthly perfection in the theme of Savitri.<sup>182</sup> The epic heroine Savitri conquers death and brings back Satyavan to earth and life to fulfil God on earth,

to make this earthly life the life divine.<sup>183</sup> Love, beauty and delight manifest upon earth:

A power leaned down, a happiness found its home.  
Over wide earth brooded the infinite bliss.<sup>184</sup>

( Concluded )

## References

- 178 Sri Aurobindo, "Kalidasa's Characters", SABCL, Vol. 3. p.279.  
179 See, Sri Aurobindo, *Bankim Chandra Chatterji*, SABCL, Vol. 3. pp.90-97.  
180 K. D. Sethna, *Sri Aurobindo - the Poet*, p.340.  
181 "To my brother", pp.154-155.  
182 *Savitri*. See also K. D. Sethna, *Sri Aurobindo - the Poet; The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*. Bombay, 1947; Nolini Kanta Gupta, *Poets and Mystics*. Madras, 1951; K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History*. Pondicherry, 1985; *Indian Writing in English*; V. K. Gokak, *Sri Aurobindo - Seer and Poet*, New Delhi, 1973; Prema Nandakumar, *A Study of 'Savitri'*, Pondicherry, 1962; R. Y. Deshpandey, (ed.) *Perspectives of Savitri*, (2 vols) Pondicherry, 2000 & 2002.  
183 *Savitri*, SABCL, Vol. 29. p.711.  
184 *Ibid.*, p.712.

## Notes on Authors

**Anirvan, Srimat**, a Bengali/Hindu monk, writer, Vedic scholar and philosopher, was born on July 8, 1896 in the town of Mymensingh, then a part of British India and now in Bangladesh. His birth name was Narendrachandra Dhar. He was the son of Rajchandra Dhar, a doctor, and Sushila Devi. He was a spiritually and intellectually-inclined child, who by age 11 had memorised the *Astadhyayi* of Pānini and the Bhagavad Gita. He was named **Baroda Brahmachari** after going through the sacred thread ceremony. He also won a state scholarship as a teen and completed university IA and BA degrees at the University of Dhaka and an MA from the Sanskrit College of the University of Calcutta. At 16, he joined the Assam Bangiya Saraswata Math ashram, located in the village of Kokilamukh near Jorhat in Assam. He was a disciple of the ashram's founder, Paramahansa Srimat Swami Nigamananda Saraswati Dev, who initiated him into sannyas. Anirvan's new monastic name was **Nirvanananda Saraswati**. He taught at the ashram school and edited its monthly magazine *Aryadarpan*. Some time after 1930, Nirvanananda changed his name to **Anirvan**. He travelled widely in North India, eventually returning to Assam and establishing an ashram in Kamakhya near Guwahati. However, he continued to travel. In the 1940s, when he was living in Almora, Madame Lizelle Reymond documented some of this period in *My Life with a Brahmin Family* (1958) and *To Live Within* (1971). During this time, Sri Anirvan translated Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* into Bengali (as *Divya Jeevan Prasanga*); which was hailed by Sri Aurobindo himself as 'a living translation'. In 1953, Sri Anirvan moved to Shillong in Assam. His reputation as a Vedic scholar grew; and he wrote chiefly in Bengali on various aspects of Hindu philosophy, particularly Samkhya, the Upanishads, the Gita and Vedanta and the parallels between Rigvedic, Puranic, Tantric and Buddhist thought. His magnum opus, *Veda Mimamsa*, was published in three volumes in 1961, 1965 and 1970. This work won him the Rabindra award. Sri Anirvan made his final move, to Kolkata, in 1965, where he died on May 31, 1978, after a six-year illness.

**Anuradha Choudry**, a graduate from the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Puducherry, completed her Ph.D in Sanskrit on Vedic Psychology from Pondicherry University and became an Erasmus Mundus Scholar for

an MLitt in European Humanities at the Universities of St.Andrews, Scotland and Bergamo, Italy. Presently, she is a free lance instructor for Sanskrit as Yoga for organisations like Auroville International, the Netherlands, the School of Philosophy and others. As a volunteer with Samskrita Bharati, Anuradha is an active advocate of Spoken Sanskrit and regularly conducts workshops on experiencing the transformative power of Sanskrit sounds. Apart from her passion for Sanskrit she is deeply committed to the cause of human harmony and has recently started a project called Ekataa which invites all human beings to celebrate our common humanness for 11 minutes at midnight on 1.1.11 (One.One.Eleven).

**Arun Chatterjee** is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Tennessee in USA, where he taught for 34 years. He currently lives in Knoxville, Tennessee, with his wife Kalpana. He grew up in Kolkata, and he did postgraduate study (Master's and Ph.D.) in USA. Although his formal education is in Engineering, he has been studying philosophy and religion informally at the university for many years. He came to Pondicherry with his parents in 1949 when he was a child and had the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. His father late Shyama Charan Chatterji translated three books of Sri Aurobindo in Bengali for the Ashram.

**Larry Seidlitz** (lseidlitz@gmail.com) is a faculty member of Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR) in Pondicherry, where he facilitates online university courses on Sri Aurobindo's teachings. Originally from the USA, he has worked at SACAR for the past six years. He also is editor of *Collaboration*, a USA based journal on the Integral Yoga (also available in India), and co-editor of *New Race: A Journal of Integral Studies* published by the Institute of Human Study, Hyderabad. Before coming to India, Larry was involved with several Sri Aurobindo Centres in the USA, and worked as a psychologist at the University of Rochester Medical Centre.

**Prema Nandakumar** obtained her Ph.D in 1961 for her study of Sri Aurobindo's epic poem *Savitri*. Since then, she has been an independent researcher, publishing critical and biographical works. As a translator, her career spans half a century, with the UNESCO publishing her book on Subramania Bharati. Dr. Nandakumar's translation into English of *Manimekalai*, the ancient Buddhist epic in Tamil has been received with enthusiasm. She is also a creative writer in English and Tamil. One of her recent publications is K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, a monograph on her father for Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi (2008). Dr.

Nandakumar is a frequent keynote speaker and draws her inspiration from sources as varied as the Vedas, ancient Hindu and Buddhist epics, ancient and modern Indian literature. She is a recipient of several awards, including the Sri Aurobindo Puraskar and Panditha Ratna.

**Prithwindra Mukherjee** (Kolkata, 1936) joined the Ashram in 1948; after his studies - languages, literature, philosophy, history, music (North and South Indian, Western) - he taught at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (1955-66). The Mother opened his eyes to the art and the science of translation. With a French Government Scholarship (1966-70), he defended his University Doctorate, and the State Doctorate (1986) on pre-Gandhian freedom movement in India. Taught in two Paris faculties and produced features for Radio France (1972-81). Visited the U.S. archives with a Fulbright Scholarship, before joining the department of ethnomusicology, CNRS (1981-2003). Author of more than 60 books, 400 articles. Henri Dutilleul has set to music one of PM's French poems for an opus for voice and orchestra. Recipient of the Sri Aurobindo Award. The French Government appointed him Knight in the Order of Arts & Letters (2009).

**Ramesh Chandra Pradhan** is at present Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hyderabad. He has specialised in the area of Western Philosophy, especially in Analytic Philosophy, Philosophy of Language and the Philosophy of Wittgenstein. He has authored several books in these areas. He has also interest in Metaphysics, both Indian and Western. He has keen interest in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo”

**Ranjit Sarkar** (b.1932) At the age of 12, he joined Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry; studied and later taught there at the International Centre of Education. In 1965 went to France, studied at the Sorbonne; he got his doctorate at the University of Aix-Marseille. From 1970 until his retirement he taught Sanskrit literature and Indian culture at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. He has published poems, literary studies and Sri Aurobindo's thoughts. He lives in the Netherlands.

**Sachidananda Mohanty** is Professor, Department of English, University of Hyderabad. He is the recipient of several national and international awards including those from the British Council, the Salzburg, the Katha and the Fulbright and the U.G.C. He has to his credit 21 books in English and in Oriya including *D.H.Lawrence Studies in India*, 1990, *Lawrence's Leadership Politics and*

*the Defeat of Fascism*, 1992, *Understanding Cultural Exchange*, Vision Books 1997, *Literature and Culture*, Prestige, 2000 *Travel Writing and the Empire*, Katha, 2002; 2003, *Early Women's writing in Orissa, 1898-1950: A Lost Tradition*, Sage Publications, 2005, *Gender and Cultural Identity in Colonial Orissa*, Orient Longman 2008, and *Sri Aurobindo: A Contemporary Reader*, Routledge India, 2008. His essays and articles have appeared in some of the leading journals and forums in the country including *India Today*, *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *The New Quest*, *The Book Review* and *Economic and Political Weekly*

**Sampadananda Mishra** is working as Chief Coordinator, Sanskrit and Indian culture, in Sri Aurobindo Society, Puducherry. He is the author of several books including "Sanskrit and the Evolution of Human Speech", "Sri Aurobindo and Sanskrit", "Chandovallri: A Handbook of Sanskrit Prosody," "The Wonder that is Sanskrit". Dr. Mishra also conducts workshops, teacher's training programmes, orientation courses, gives talks, presents papers in National and International seminars and conferences. He also writes popular articles related to India and Sanskrit in English, Oriya and Sanskrit, and composes verses and songs. He conducts special workshops on Sanskrit Alphabet and effective chanting of mantras in Sanskrit.

**Sandeep Joshi** is a computer engineer by profession currently living in the USA. He received initiation into Raja Yoga at the age of fifteen through a teacher in Bombay (Mumbai), who was also instrumental in introducing him to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He writes an Integral Yoga blog at <http://auromere.wordpress.com>

**Sarnath Basu** is a retired Professor of Philosophy from Burdwan University. He had been teaching at Jogmaya Devi College and also at the University of North Bengal. His special areas of study are the Nyāya Vaiśeṣika, Advaita Vedānta and the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. He was a Sectional President of the 62<sup>nd</sup> session of the Indian Philosophical Congress held at the University of Kashmir in 1987. He had delivered the Maharshi Devendranath Thakur Memorial lecture at Visva Bharati, Santiniketan in 2004.

**Shraddhavan** "Shraddhavan" is the Sanskrit name given by the Mother in June 1972 to a young Englishwoman who had left her country, after completing

studies in English Language and Literature as well as Librarianship, to join the up-coming project of Auroville. The Mother asked her to work in the Aspiration School, which was just being started at the time of her arrival in Auroville in November 1970. She has continued to be associated with a wide range of educational projects in Auroville. Since August 1999 she has been the Coordinator of the “Savitri Bhavan” unit of SAIER (Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research) which is a centre of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother Studies in Auroville.

**Srinivasan, M.S.** is a Research Associate at Sri Aurobindo Institute for Research in Social Sciences, a unit of Sri Aurobindo Society, Puducherry. His main areas of interest are Management, Indian Culture, Yogic Psychology and History.

**Tapan Banerjee** Following his post-graduation and research works in Botany from Calcutta University, Tapan Banerjee (53 yrs.) served, for the most part of his profession in the Ministry Of Agriculture, Govt. of India, wherefrom he voluntarily retired to passionately consecrate himself to his long-cherished search for the marvels and mysteries of the Indian cultural heritage. So far Sri Banerjee has, to his credit, more than a dozen valued papers in both English and Bengali journals of countrywide esteem.