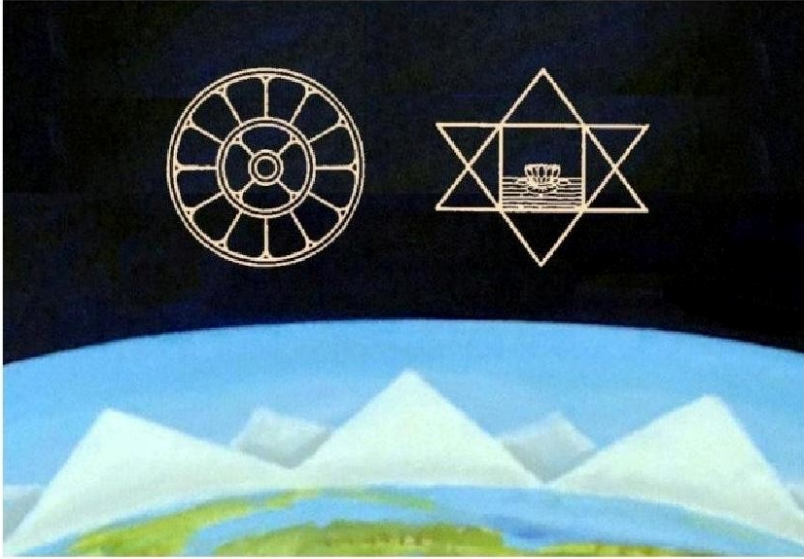


Śraddhā श्रद्धा



24 November 2022



A dual Power at being's occult poles
Still acted, nameless and invisible:
- *Savitri*, 1993, Bk VII, p.553.

Śraddhā

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The Mother and Sri Aurobindo*

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Editorial

On the auspicious occasion of the Siddhi Day, 24th November, 1926, described by Sri Aurobindo as the descent of Krishna into the physical, we offer our sincere and humble homage to the 'Incarnate dual Power' who 'shall open God's door in an ignorant world'.

We are grateful to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust (SAAT) for allowing us to use the photo of Sri Aurobindo, taken from the Ashram's photo gallery, as the frontispiece along with the quote from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgement and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Puducherry.

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Cover: Giles Herdman

श्रद्धावांल्लभते ज्ञानं
Śraddhāvāṁlabhate jñānam

Who has faith.....he attains knowledge

— Gita IV. 39

The General Aim

The Mother

The general aim to be attained is the advent of a progressing universal harmony. The means for attaining this aim, in regard to the earth, is the realisation of human unity through the awakening in all and the manifestation by all of the inner Divinity which is One. In other words, to create unity by founding the Kingdom of God which is within us all. This, therefore, is the most useful work to be done:

(1) For each individually, to be conscious in himself of the Divine Presence and to identify himself with it.

(2) To individualise the states of being that were never till now conscious in man and, by that, to put the earth in connection with one or more of the fountains of universal force that are still sealed to it.

(3) To speak again to the world the eternal word under a new form adapted to its present mentality. It will be the synthesis of all human knowledge.

(4) Collectively, to establish an ideal society in a propitious spot for the flowering of the new race, the race of the Sons of God.

The terrestrial transformation and harmonisation can be brought about by two processes which, though opposite in appearance, must combine, - must act upon each other and complete each other:

(1) Individual transformation, an inner development leading to the union with the Divine Presence.

(2) Social transformation, the establishment of an environment favourable to the flowering and growth of the individual. Since the environment reacts upon the individual and, on the other hand, the value of the environment depends upon the value of the individual, the two works should proceed side by side. But this can be done only through division of labour, and that necessitates the formation of a group, hierarchised, if possible.

The action of the members of the group should be threefold:

(1) To realise in oneself the ideal to be attained: to become a perfect earthly representative of the first manifestation of the Unthinkable in all its modes, attributes and qualities.

(2) To preach this ideal by word, but, above all, by example, so as to find out all those who are ready to realise it in their turn and to become also announcers of liberation.

(3) To found a typical society or reorganise those that already exist.

For each individual also there is a twofold labour to be done, simultaneously, each side of it helping and completing the other:

(1) An inner development, a progressive union with the Divine Light, sole condition in which man can be always in harmony with the great stream of universal life.

(2) An external action which everyone has to choose according to his capacities and personal preferences. He must find his own place, the place which he alone can occupy in the general concert, and he must give himself entirely to it, not forgetting that he is playing only one note in the terrestrial symphony and yet his note is indispensable to the harmony of the whole, and its value depends upon its justness.

(Conversations, 1-3)

Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
The Book of Honey (*Madhu Kāṇḍa*)
Chapter (Adhyāya) Two – Part 1

Debashish Banerji

Section (Brāhmaṇa) One: Experiencers and the Experiencer

1. Om. Once there lived a man of the Gārgya clan named Dṛpta-Bālāki, who was a teacher of Vedic knowledge. He said to Ajātaśatru, king of Kaśi: "I will tell you about Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "For this proposal I will give you a thousand (cows). People will indeed come running, saying: 'Janaka, Janaka.'"

2. Gārgya said: "That person (puruṣa) who is in the sun, I worship him as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk to me about him. I adulate him as all-surpassing, as the head and king of all beings." Whosoever thus adulates him becomes all-surpassing, the head and king of all beings.

3. Gārgya said: "That person (puruṣa) who is in the moon, I worship him as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk to me about him. I adulate him as the great, white-robed king Soma." Whosoever thus adulates him has abundant soma pressed for him every day and his food never runs short.

4. Gārgya said: "That person (puruṣa) who is in the lightning, I worship him as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk to me about him. I adulate him as the radiant one." Whosoever thus adulates him becomes radiant and his progeny too become radiant.

5. Gārgya said: "This person (puruṣa) who is in Space (ākāśa), I worship him as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk about him. I adulate him as full and unexhausted." Whosoever thus adulates him is filled with progeny and cattle and his progeny will never be extinct.

6. Gārgya said: "This person (puruṣa) who is in the Wind (Vāyu), I worship him as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk about him. I adulate him as the Lord (Indra), as irresistible and as the unvanquished army." Whosoever thus adulates him becomes ever victorious, invincible and a conqueror of enemies.

7. Gārgya said: "This person (puruṣa) who is in fire (agni), I worship him as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk about him. I adulate him as irresistible." Whosoever thus adulates him becomes irresistible and his progeny becomes irresistible.

8. Gārgya said: "This person (puruṣa) who is in water, I worship him as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk about him. I adulate him as an image." Whosoever thus adulates him, to him comes what is like him, not what is unlike him and to him are born children who are like him.

9. Gārgya said: "This person (puruṣa) who is in the mirror/ideal, I worship him as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk about him. I adulate him as the shining one." Whosoever thus adulates him becomes shining and his progeny too becomes shining and he outshines all those with whom he comes in contact.

10. Gārgya said: "The sound that arises behind a man while he walks, I worship as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk about him. I adulate him as life." Whosoever thus adulates him reaches his full life-span on this earth and life does not depart from him before the completion of that time.

11. Gārgya said: "This person (puruṣa) who is in the directions, I worship him as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk about him. I adulate him as the double who never leaves us." Whosoever thus adulates him receives a double who does not part with him.

12. Gārgya said: "This person (puruṣa) who consists of shadow, I worship him as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk about him. I adulate him as death." Whosoever thus adulates him reaches his full life-span on this earth and death does not overtake him before the completion of that time.

13. Gārgya said: "This person (puruṣa) who is in the self (ātman), I worship him as Brahman." Ajātaśatru said: "Please do not talk about him. I adulate him as self-possessed." Whosoever thus adulates him becomes self-possessed and his progeny too becomes self-possessed. Gārgya remained silent.

14. Ajātaśatru said: "Is this all?" "That is all." "By knowing that much one cannot know Brahman." "Let me approach you as a student," said Gārgya.

15. Ajātaśatru said: "It is contrary to normal practice that a brāhmaṇa should approach a kṣatriya, thinking: 'He will teach me about Brahman.' Nevertheless, I will instruct you." So saying, he took Gārgya by the hand and rose. They came to a sleeping man. Ajātaśatru addressed him by these names: "O Soma, great king dressed in white." The man did not get up. The king touched him with his hand. Then he awoke.

16. Ajātaśatru said: "When this man was thus asleep, where was the person consisting of knowledge (vijñānamaya puruṣa) and whence did it return?" Gārgya did not know the answer.

17. Ajātaśatru said: "When this man was asleep, the person of knowledge (vijñānamaya puruṣa) having gathered the cognitive functions of the life-energies (prāṇa) and rests in the Space (ākāśa) within the heart. When this person absorbs these (cognitive functions) thus, it is said to be in dream-state. Then breath, speech, sight, hearing and mind are in the grasp of this person (of knowledge)."

18. Wherever he may travel in his dreams, these become his worlds. He then may become a great king or a high brāhmaṇa or may attain high or low states. Even as a great king, taking with him his retinue of citizens, moves about, according to his pleasure, within his own domain, so does the self (ātman), taking with it the life-functions (prāṇa), move about according to its pleasure, in the body.

19. Next, when he enters the state of dreamless sleep (suṣṭi) - when it does not know anything - returning through the seventy-two thousand nerves called hitā, which extend from the heart to the pericardium it comes to rest in the pericardium. As a young man or an emperor or a great brāhmaṇa lives, having reached the summit of bliss, so does he rest.

20. the spider moves along the thread it spins, or as small sparks fly in all directions from a fire, even so from this Self (ātman) emerge all the life-functions (prāṇah), all worlds (lokāḥ), all gods (devāḥ), all beings (bhūtāni). Its secret name (upanīṣad) is "the Truth of truth." The vital breaths are the truth and this is their truth.

The first Adhyāya of the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanīṣad* established its ontology and ontogenesis in terms of contemplative philosophy. The first two Brāhmaṇas confronted us with the Real-Idea of cosmic Being and Becoming through the Time-Image of the regnal Horse and its sacrifice, reconstitution and reproductions. The third Brāhmaṇa introduced an axiology in terms of the struggle between the gods and demons furthering an evolution of consciousness individualised by the secret "breath in the mouth" or psychic spirit-entity. The fourth Brāhmaṇa established the identity of Brahman (Being) and ātman (Self) as foundation and as cosmic distribution. The fifth Brāhmaṇa dealt with the varieties of experience in terms of food and its inexhaustible function in sustaining and evolving the cosmos; and the short sixth and final Brāhmaṇa returned us to a reduction to three divinities or cosmic handles of contemplation and identity from the numerologies introduced in the previous Brāhmaṇas; and further reduced these finally to two exoteric realities, name and form (nāma-rūpa) and one esoteric one hidden by these two, the hidden breath, prāṇa, which it identified with Self.

This Adhyāya may thus be considered a cosmic ontology. Adhyāya Two shifts the theatre of contemplation to the human psyche, a move from a cosmology to a psychology. The first Brāhmaṇa of the second Adhyāya already introduces us to this through a dialogue between two humans who represent two castes, a brāhmaṇa and a kṣatriya. To highlight the counter-cultural aspect of this dialogue the teaching roles are reversed – the brāhmaṇa begins by extending a teaching to the kṣatriya, but the latter betters him in each case and turns the table on him when the brāhmaṇa asks to become his disciple and is given a psychological lesson on the Brahman. This Brāhmaṇa is a foretaste of the second *kāṇḍa* of the Upanīṣad, the muni *kāṇḍa*, constituting the third and fourth Adhyāyas, which is staged as conversations between the unconventional brāhmaṇa sage Yajñavalkya and the philosopher-king Janaka or between Yajñavalkya and the other scholars (pandits) of Janaka's court. In fact, a number of references from the start of this Brāhmaṇa relate us to the next *kāṇḍa*, shadowing the future. In this respect, it is not just a dialogue between a brahmana and a ksatriya, but between two styles of knowledge, book knowledge and knowledge of experience. It is thus reminiscent of Platonic dialogues,

conducted between Socrates and the Sophists. The Sophists are professional philosophers and orators, who are less concerned about the subject they are talking about than in the cleverness of the argument. Socrates, on the other hand, stands for existential thinking, philosophy as transformative inquiry into living and its possibilities and imperatives. Dṛpta-Balaki is introduced as an *anūcāna*, a scholar and explainer of the Vedas. Though not exactly a Sophist, he is like them in not being primarily interested in experience but rather in book knowledge. Like the more conventional brāhmaṇa scholars in Janaka's court, he understands Brahman in terms of the gods or cosmic functionaries instead of the infinite Absolute. Dṛpta-Bālāki is introduced to us as a Gārgya, prefiguring one of the more erudite and wise opponents of Yajñavalkya from the court of Janaka, the female scholar Gārgi. Similarly, the king Ajātaśatru starts his conversation with Dṛpta-Bālāki with a snide comment referring to king Janaka, accepting the brāhmaṇa's offer to teach him about Brahman with the counter of mock payment of a thousand (cows) as a consequence of fame gained as a king through comparison with Janaka (the people will run hither saying "Janaka, Janaka").

We have noted towards the end of Brāhmaṇa Three of the first Adhyāya the double entendre around the word *sama* in relation to Brahman. One level, the stanzas refer to the Sāma Veda, the Veda of song whose hymns were used in Vedic rituals. Svar, voice or vocal tone and accuracy of intonation is held to be its perfection. This also refers to the Vedic use of the word Brahman, which means the Vedic Word, in literal ritual interpretation, the perfect enunciation of the scriptural texts which was meant to make the gods manifest. At another level, that of the revised semantics of the Upaniṣad, Brahman was the "smooth space" of the undifferentiated absolute consciousness, equal everywhere, which had differentiated itself in becoming cosmos. Sama at this register meant equal, the ontological basis of absolute Brahman; and svar was the "fourth world" or Supermind beyond earth (pṛthvī) midworld (antarikṣa) and heaven (dyaus), the forgotten mystical goal of the Vedic ṛṣis. Brāhmaṇa One of Adhyāya Two intends a similar distinction – the Vedic understanding of Brahman as different gods attained through ritual invocation and the Upaniṣadic revision to refer to the experience of a non-dual consciousness attained through contemplation and psychological identity.

Dṛpta-Bālāki successively indicates a number of cosmic functionaries, the gods, referring to each of them as Brahman. In each case, Ajātaśatru dismisses the identification with the words "Don't talk to me about him" and proceeds to explain the specific function served by the deity and the result of worshipping him. In this manner, the narrative cycles through twelve deities or "persons" (puruṣa), each of whom is identified as Brahman. We have encountered several of these as cosmic functionaries related to the sacrificial horse of Adhyāya One, Brāhmaṇas One and Two, also identified as gods in Brāhmaṇa Three. Brāhmaṇa Three was an allegory designed to show how the gods are subject to the dualities and cannot overcome their contraries without the aid of "the breath in the

mouth,” an identifier for the dynamic form of the self or ātman. Here, attention is drawn to the bounded infinity that each of them represents, a relative infinity belonging to a world of relations subject to the relation of the Subject and the Object.

In early Greek classical philosophy, the question of Being is posed by Aristotle in two ways – Being is the indescribable ground of all beings;¹ but it makes itself available in experience as the totality of our experience of all beings. The latter access to Being is that of it which is subject to a cosmic phenomenology. It is the “greatest of all beings,” a comparative superlative, rather than the “Being of all beings.” It is this limitation that characterises the gods, each one the greatest of its domain, but not free from the bounds of this domain. The gods start from the greatest of them all, the sun god, equated in the Veda to the Supreme Being. A solar mythos underlies the Veda and its metaphoricity pervades Vedic society. We have seen this in the case of the cakravartin and ritual of the sacrificial horse. Thus Dṛpta-Bālāki’s identification of Brahman begins with the sun, but Ajātaśatru dismisses it summarily, putting it in its functional place: “I worship him as all-surpassing, the head and king of all beings. He who worships him becomes all-surpassing, the head and king of all beings.” The king of all kings, the emperor or cakravartin is by definition bound in its relationality to the realm of beings – i.e. existence. Its ontology is not independent or absolute. In saying this Ajātaśatru immediately claims a difference-in-kind between Brahman and the realm of existence. Brahman is Being in Aristotle’s sense of the “Being of all beings” not “the greatest or totality of all beings.” It is also the Being beyond all beings, that which grants being to each being yet remains unexhausted by all beings.

Dṛpta-Bālāki continues his identification through alternative supremes, each a god of its domain – the persons (puruṣāḥ) of the moon, the lightning, space, wind, fire, water, mirror-reflection or ideal, the sound which follows one, the directions, the shadow and the sense of self. The first three are sources of illumination, the next four are the subtle or fluid media of manifestation, the last four are related to the phenomenal constitution of the individual. As the sun illuminates the objective world, the moon illuminates the subjective world and lightning illuminates the fragmented world of mental intuition. Ether, wind, fire and water constitute four of the five elements of the Upaniṣadic conception, the subtle elements which precede materiality. Each of these extends a world of its own. These are followed by four persons related to an inferential sense of phenomenal individual existence. First comes the person in the mirror or the ideal (ādarśa), who reflects an ideal image; Ajātaśatru identifies him as “the shining one,” both because it is an image of light and an ideal image. Next is the person of the sound which follows one; this is an enigmatic idea referring either to an occult experience or to the “buzz” created by one’s activities. Our present creates our past in its wake through the plural images it leaves in the mind’s and words of others, the sound that follows one. Ajātaśatru identifies this as the being

of life. This is followed by the being of the directions. We saw in Brāhmaṇa Three of Adhyāya One how the directions were related to hearing; they present us with a located sense of self in the world. Ajātaśatru identifies this being with one's "double," a spatial image through which one is located. Next is the person of the shadow; Ajātaśatru identifies this with death, the inverse image that is tied to us and reminds us of non-being that doubles our existence and waits to erase it into the unknowable. The final inferential being is our sense of self. It is interesting to see that the word ātman is used for this, demonstrating the current existence of two senses to the word ātman. Somewhat later, in the 5th c. BCE, the Buddha, in his second sermon, proceeds through a demonstration of the absence of a permanent self to the phenomenal constituents of individual experience (skāṇḍa). The term anātman used here for the Buddha's demonstration assumes the meaning of ātman as "permanent self," by definition lacking in the impermanent constituents of phenomenal experience. It also means that in common usage ātman was confused with these phenomenal constituents, as it is here. Ajātaśatru assumes that Dṛpta-Bālāki means this loose sense of the ego (aham) when he says ātman and Dṛpta-Bālāki does not contest this repudiation. Ajātaśatru identifies this person as "self-possessed" (ātmanvī), characterised by a distinct finite sense of self, not the independent self (ātman).

Dṛpta-Bālāki has exhausted his understanding of Brahman at this point. Ajātaśatru asks him if he has anything more to say and Dṛpta-Bālāki says that is all. "With just this much it is not known" asserts Ajātaśatru and Dṛpta-Bālāki experiences a moment of reversal, asking Ajātaśatru to become his teacher. As if to rub in the counter-cultural significance of this act, the text makes Ajātaśatru state explicitly that this violates the convention relating brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas but he will make an exception and teach Dṛpta-Bālāki. In the Introduction I have discussed the possible kṣatriya origin of the Upaniṣads, particularly the early ones. While this is probable, the reversal of caste roles could equally be a counter-cultural strategy of the imagination characterising this form of minor literature. It is interesting to note the irony of history in the canonisation of the Upaniṣads as Vedic texts, "the end of the Veda" and indeed, post-Śankara, as "the essence of the Veda." While this last may be true from a certain point of view, without noting its counter-cultural intent, it is merely an appropriation that serves one or more orthodoxies.

Ajātaśatru then displaces the consideration of Brahman from the cosmological to the psychological by dramatising the experience of the cosmos in terms of the human experiencer and its states or conditions (avasthā) of experience. Ajātaśatru takes Dṛpta-Bālāki to a sleeping man and upon waking him, raises the question of the experiencer in its states of waking and sleep. It is interesting to note that his question is asked with respect to the "vijñānamaya Puruṣa." Radhakrishnan translates this as "person consisting of intelligence" and Olivelle translates it as "person consisting of perception." If we are to go by other early Upaniṣads, such as the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, vijñāna is neither

intelligence nor perception but gnosis, what Sri Aurobindo refers to as Supermind. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* locates it beyond the Mind (manah). It is the Mind that is responsible for the trenchant experience of dualities, at the foundation of which is the duality of the Subject and Object. The experiencer in us is immersed in the world of the Object and knows its Subjecthood in its terms. In the waking experience it is the waking subject, bound by the laws of waking experience, in the dreaming experience, it is the dreaming subject, the laws of whose world are quite different and more fluid than those of the waking experience. However the experiencer is the same in each case and is possessed of the same apparatus of senses, mind and other life-functions (prāṇa). In the first Adhyāya of the BU, these life-functions are identified in terms of the subjective functions of the gods, seeing, hearing, thinking, breathing and speaking. In the third Brāhmaṇa, the god related to seeing is the Sun, to hearing are the Directions, to thinking is the Moon, to breathing is the Wind and to speaking is Fire. By the time of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, this experiencing apparatus is identified in terms of the body (śarīra), the senses (indriya), the mind (manah) and the intelligence (buddhi). Perhaps following this, in Sāṃkhya, the apparatus becomes the senses (indriya), the sense-mind (manas), the ego (ahamkāra) and the intelligence (buddhi). The experiencer in all these cases is Puruṣa (or ātman in the case of the *Kaṭha U*), but in this second Adhyāya of the BU it is identified as Vijnanāmaya Puruṣa, the Person of Gnosis. The apparatus and faculties of knowledge are the properties of the Being of Knowledge, who takes the knowledge of these faculties with it to locate itself hermetically in the space within the heart (antar-hṛidaya akaśa) during dreaming sleep. It is no longer the subject of the waking world nor is the waking world with its laws of coherence of time, space and individuality its object. It may change its subjecthood to become a king or brāhmaṇa or other being or creature and roam about in other worlds with other laws of time and space which are then its object. This contemplation is meant to complicate our notion of the Being of Knowledge we all are. The Being of Knowledge experiences itself differently through different modes of knowledge under different conditions of experience, yet the Being of Knowledge supersedes its conditions of knowledge and remains the same. Finally, passing through a special channel (nāḍī) named hita in a system of seventy-two thousand channels, it enters a covering of the heart. The term used for this is purītatam, which is the pericardium, a membranous envelope of the heart, in later Sanskrit. Evidently the text is referring to an esoteric anatomy in this verse, perhaps the equivalent of “the cave of the heart” which is considered the seat of the reincarnating self in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. Here the Being of Knowledge enters the state of deep dreamless sleep, the term used being suṣupti, literally sleep in sleep. This term is repeated in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* for the third condition of (non-)experience, beyond the waking and the dreaming. In the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, there is a fourth condition, merely known as “the fourth” (*turīya*) to refer to an absolute unmanifest condition. The state of suṣupti takes

the experiencer out of the subject-object system into the origin beyond subject and object and hence beyond experience. The question of whether the Being of Knowledge is able to determine other conditions of knowledge for itself is not discussed. In entering the dreamless sleep it realises utter non-duality as a sublime state of stasis in bliss, described in comparison with the “highest bliss (ānanda) that a youth, a king or a great Brāhmaṇa (mahā-Brāhmaṇa) might rest in (as a state of non-experience). One sees here an affirmation of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*’s identification of Bliss (Ānanda) as the non-dual foundation of all existence and experience. This is also dealt with in Brāhmaṇa Five of this Adhyāya of the *BU*, the Madhu Brāhmaṇa or Brāhmaṇa of Honey, which gives its name to the first two Adhyāyas as Madhu Kāṇḍa. But is this a state of Knowledge also, since the Being of Knowledge is experiencing itself in this state? This question is left unanswered here.

However, the Brāhmaṇa ends with a stanza affirming this Self (once more the term ātman is used here, undoubtedly in a different sense than that used by Dṛpta-Bālāki, and in implication as equivalent to the Vijnanāmaya Puruṣa) as the creative source of Subject, Object and World. Its manifestations are likened to the lines of thread spun by a spider or the sparks emerging from a fire: “As a spider spins forth its thread, as sparks fly from a fire, so indeed do all vital functions (prāṇa), all worlds, all gods and all beings spring from this Self (ātman). Its secret name (upaniṣad) is the truth of truths. For the prāṇas are the truth and this is the truth of the prāṇas.” In this way, the Brāhmaṇa, after challenging the misidentification of Brahman with the gods, integrates them along with the worlds, the creatures, and the experiencing apparatus and forces of each individual (prāṇas) in the non-dual origin of the Being of Knowledge (Vijnanāmaya Puruṣa) in its independent condition, equated with the Self (ātman) and with Brahman. Even though located in the esoteric anatomy of each individual, this is the transcendent Brahman, One without a second (ekamevādviṭiyam Brahma) present in and as each vital function (prāṇa), each creature, each god and each world. Implicit in the Brāhmaṇa is the creative function of this self-becoming, one and infinite at the same time, which mobilises the laws by which it holds together the subjective experiences, creatures and gods in each world of experience. It does so by the power of Knowledge or Gnosis (vijñāna) which is its Truth of Truths and its secret name (Upaniṣad). It is instructive to compare this self and person to the Puruṣa of Sāṃkhya. Sāṃkhya is a dualistic system, it separates Puruṣa from the appearances of Prakṛti. Like the Vijnānamaya Puruṣa, Puruṣa of Sāṃkhya can be known outside the play of the senses and the world. However, Puruṣa of Sāṃkhya is without quality, no quality can be asserted of it, since all quality belongs to Prakṛti, which is ontologically separate from Puruṣa. In the case of the Vijnānamaya Puruṣa, it is the non-dual Source of Subject and Object, its intrinsic self-experience (svānubhava) is bliss (ānanda) and its self-nature (*svabhāva*) is knowledge. This differentiates Vedānta from Sāṃkhya, the first is primordially and integrally non-dual while the latter remains dual.

Note: As discussed by Heidegger in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 199-200.

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Saibhya: The Memorable Mother

Prema Nandakumar

“On womanhood I write, of the travail
and glory of womanhood,
Of Prakriti and her infinite modes
And unceasing variety;

Or the primordial Shakti’s myriad
Manifestations on earth
Of the lure and leap of transcendences
Of the ruby feminine...

Of the churn of sorrow and sufferance
Of love and fatality
Of Dawn’s daughters bathed in beauty and love
And tuned to consecration...”

(K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sitayana*)

Three Women: Malavi, Savitri, Saibhya

In his vast epic, *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*, Sri Aurobindo has given us three women characters. Each one is memorable and lives with us throughout our lives as they seek answers to questions as all of us do, or dare and gain answers as some of us manage to achieve or the generality of women who remain passive, silent, watching the ways of the world but deep within like a vast and quiet ocean silently pray for Dharma to win in the end. We need all the three types for humanity to blossom forth as a million forms of life, ever looking towards the heights. But, the last one seems closest to the majority of us who have neither the fiery passion to question come what may, or enter the war like *Mahishasuramardhini* to achieve against all odds. But the silent ones are also active. When John Milton felt immensely sad that due to his blindness he could not work at his epic poems which he had wanted to write on Biblical themes, he gained the answer from within. God’s will is not easily explained! The famous sonnet concludes:

“who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is Kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o’er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait.”¹

Sometimes the winner turns out to be the third person described in the last line of Milton's sonnet. Feverish questionings of the ways of fate do not yield the human being any result. Where millions and millions of human beings are born, grow up, struggle and find all the doors shut against them as in a prison, questioning only weakens our body and mind become weaker still and worthless.

Our '*jai ho*' regards to the brave ones who are ready to take the plunge and strengthen themselves to face the battle, come what may. At least some of us still remember those heroines of our freedom struggle: Basanti Devi, wife of Chittaranjan Das (who defended Sri Aurobindo successfully during the *Bande Mataram* Movement); Aruna Asaf Ali whose lawyer husband defended Bhagat Singh; Bhikaji Kama who had the honour of unfurling our national flag first; Sarojini Naidu whose speeches thrilled women to go to jail...

But not all can do what Savitri's mother does in the epic. Sri Aurobindo gives her no name and Vyasa does not introduce her in the *Mahabharata* narrative. Stung by the terror of the future for her darling daughter, Aswapati's queen relentlessly questions Rishi Narad about this idea of 'Fate' and seeks answers to how fate works on the destiny of the human being and whether the problem of pain is a 'must' for humanity to be a meaningful part of this universe. It is a tremendous dialogue between Rishi Narad and the Queen. There are no answers for the presence of pain in this web of human life.

The Power of Silence

Action or helpless anger. Is there no other way for mankind which is caught in the web of life? Sri Aurobindo seems to feel that while both are present in humanity's advancement to a better future, he has also given us yet another instance of how even patient, prayerful waiting can achieve wonders. No two circumstances are alike in this world of human affairs. But there are pathways that can help the human being by living a steady life as laid down by Fate; silent prayers and an undying hope can yet achieve marvels.

Sri Aurobindo does not give a name to Savitri's mother but we know from other sources like *Puranas* of the name Malavi as the mother of Savitri. So also Sri Aurobindo does not mention the name of Satyavan's mother which we know to be Saibhya. We see Saibhya in the epic, a silent presence that is always in prayerful quietude. Even after the crisis is over, she is silent, watchful. We feel that even after Satyavan and Savitri have returned safe, she is perhaps praying for this good fortune to continue always. Perhaps she is silently praying for everyone on earth. Such is Sanatana Dharma: *lokah samasthah sukhino bhavanthu!*

While Vyasa's Pativrata Upakhyaana does not introduce us to Aswapati's Queen, there are a couple of references to Saibhya, both when Dyumathsena and his wife go in search of the young couple who had gone to the forest as it was already very late. Again, when Savitri and Satyavan have returned home with their parents and other ashramites, Dyumathsena speaks, Saibhya is silent. Now emissaries come with news that the usurper of the Shalwa throne has been killed

and his henchmen are all annihilated; the Court now awaits the coming of Dhyumathsena to the capital and ascend the throne. The emissaries say with one voice:

“O king, consent to it; a happy welcome awaits you even as the trumpets declare in the capital your victory. Long may you live and rule over the kingdom of your forefathers.

Seeing the king possessed with sight, and in good sound health, their eyes grew large with surprise; then, bowing their heads low, they all paid respects to him.

The King made his reverential obeisances to the elderly Brahmins of the ashram, worshipped them all and, with their approval, departed for his capital.

Saibhya, along with Savitri sat in a well-decorated, beautiful carriage drawn by several men, and with the army for protection, left the place.”²

This is one of the three places in the *Savitri Upakhyana* where Saibhya is mentioned by name. We see her as a noble, if silent, figure in the narration after the marriage of Satyavan. But we get a glimpse of her character even earlier, when Rishi Narad describes Satyavan’s character to King Aswapati in glorious terms. He begins saying that Satyavan’s father always speaks the truth and his mother always conforms with her husband’s words. Because of this ideal couple, their son has been named Satyavan (the Truthful):

“his father always speaks truth, even as his mother addresses ever in conformity with it; and for that reason he was named by the Brahmins as Satyavan, the Truthful.”

Questioned further by king Aswapati, Rishi Narad says that Satyavan is possessed of bright intelligence, is of a forbearing nature and all the qualities good and great one can think of. He is handsome, is known for respecting Brahmins and elders and is also generous in giving gifts. The Rishi adds that this generosity is in conformation with what he can afford, स्वशक्त्या दानतः समः! He must have learnt this virtue from his mother who was leading a humble life in the forest, looking after a helpless husband who had become blind and nurturing her child to become a healthy and strong young man with good habits. Such is the rich hint we gather from Vyasa who wrote his epic without using a single purposeless word. The marriage takes place, Savitri is an ideal daughter-in-law who washes the clothes of her mother-in-law, does all the household work, obviously as taught by her mother-in-law to do in a hermitage, performs the “three nights’ *vrata*”, takes the blessings of her in-laws, bowing to them with devotion.

Now she approaches Satyavan and says she would like to accompany him but he feels she will not be able to cope with the rigours of walking in the forest after her strenuous *vrata*. But she says she had never gone out with him and would like to accompany him today. Satyavan asks her to take permission from

the elders at home. Dyumathsena said that this was the first time Savitri had asked for anything since she came to the hermitage, and so he permits her to go. A jubilant Savitri takes leave of her parents-in-law and we know the discussion between Savitri and Satyavan and Savitri's triumph. When Yama gives her boons, she first asks for her father-in-law's eyesight and secondly for the restoration of Dyumathsena's kingdom. Such was the closeness between the in-laws and Savitri. For one year she had watched the anguish of the mother-in-law in helping Dyumathsena, and the tragedy of his being driven out of his own kingdom along with his wife by enemies. Deep must have been her admiration for Saibhya who had accepted the change and despite all the million inconveniences and dangers of living in the forest had looked after her husband with love and respect; also, the exiled queen had trained their son to be an exemplary young man. To be admired so by Savitri herself makes Saibhya an example for all womankind.

When Satyavan wakes up from his swoon, already twilight is becoming dark. He tells Savitri they should return home at once for his mother would be worried. "...my mother always forbids my going out after the twilight hour." They keep warning me to avoid staying out after twilight and once it happened and both of them shed tears throughout the night, says Satyavan. They often say that they cannot live without him. Aged, how will they manage if Satyavan is not beside them? He is their hope, everything! Vyasa's narrative pays a very high compliment to Saibhya, a true सहधर्मिणि! (*sahadharmini*).

"O splendid lady! Not so much am I concerned about myself as for my father and more for my mother, who, feeble and frail, is an excellent companion and follower of her husband."

Savitri now helps Satyavan overcome his grief by first wiping her own eyes Vyasa refers to her as धर्मचारिणी to point out that Savitri had learnt her lessons from Saibhya whom Satyavan had just then referred to as सहधर्मिणि. Meanwhile, back in the hermitage, it is as Satyavan has feared. Evening has been fading and it is getting to be dark, but still the young couple have not returned. So Dyumathsena and Saibhya go in search of news to the other homes in the area. Miraculously, the exiled king is now able to see as they go in search of their dear ones. Markandeya tells Yudhistira:

"O Yudhistira, greatly perturbed he was, for his son, he along with his wife Saibhya went to several hermitages enquiring about him."

Vyasa describes how the couple went to lakes and riverbeds searching for their son, and were consoled by other members of the hermitage. Suvarchas says that with Savitri so well-poised and one who engages herself in tapasya, all will be well with Satyavan. The *tapasvi* Gautama who has performed deep study of the Vedas assures the parents that there are clear signs that Satyavan is alive. Such is the conclusion of the sage Apasthamba who deduces good tidings from

the way birds and beasts behave in the forest. Dhaumya says Satyavan is dear to one and all of the hermits and will have a long life. Even as the *tapasvins* were speaking thus, Savitri and Satyavan arrive on the scene. The happy forest-dwellers make a seat for Dyumathsena and light a fire. They also requested Saibhya, Satyavan and Savitri to be seated.

“Saibhya, Satyavan and Savitri who were standing farther at one end also took their seats when directed to do so by everybody, now griefless.”

The sages are relieved but would like to know of any reason for the return of Dyumathsena’s eyesight. Savitri gives a brief account of what happened beginning with Rishi Naad’s prophecy. The *tapasvins* return to their homes. Meanwhile the emissaries come from Salva and the *upakhyana* concludes with Dyumathsena and Satyavan returning to their land accompanied by their wives:

“Saibhya, along with Savitri sat in a well-decorated, beautiful carriage drawn by several men, and with the army for protection, left the place.”

Sri Aurobindo’s Saibhya

When we think of Saibhya in *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol*,² our immediate thought is the Mother of Sorrows. It is amazing how Sri Aurobindo introduces the three soul-forces which form part of the power needed by Savitri as she engages herself in yoga to prepare herself for the forthcoming struggle with Death. Mother of Sorrows is a power too. Can suffering be a power? But reading *Savitri*, we know this to be true. The Princess had chosen to wed Satyavan despite Rishi Narad’s warning that she will have to be prepared for deep suffering. As she engages herself in yoga to strengthen herself, she meets the Mother of Sorrows, not much different from Saibhya, living in the hermitage in harsh circumstances.

“A moon-bright face in a sombre cloud of hair,
A Woman sat in a pale lustrous robe...
The beauty of sadness lingered on her face,
Her eyes were dim with the ancient stain of tears.
Her heart was riven with the world’s agony
And burdened with the sorrow and struggle in Time,
An anguished music trailed in her rapt voice.”

When Savitri meets Satyavan first in the woods outside the Shalva land, he speaks at length of his father, now exiled and blind. But he does not say a word about his mother Saibhya. While the double tragedy of loss of eyesight and loss of his kingdom was, no doubt, a harsh decree on Dyumathsena, his queen had even more to bear like feeding her husband and son while in the hermitage of poor Brahmin *tapasvins*, she also had the tremendous responsibility of bringing up their young son to be worthy of his great ancestry. If Sri Aurobindo’s Satyavan does not mention his mother to Savitri it was obviously because a mother’s heart, a woman’s sufferings and ultimate success is taken for granted in the Indian clime. A mother is mother, and all at once is said!

Like Vyasa, Sri Aurobindo gives us plenty of indications how Savitri must have loved and revered Saibhya as we read the brief passage in the *Book of Yoga* which describes how Savitri spent the one year immediately after her marriage. The first canto of this book, '*The Joy of Union; the Ordeal of the Foreknowledge of Death and the Heart's Grief and Pain*' makes it all very clear. Yes, it was necessarily a mix of nectar and poison, *amrutam visha samsrushtam*³.

The nectar part of it, was certainly being the daughter-in-law of the quiet, poised Saibhya. After a description of Madra's palace with its rich tapestry and colonnades halls, Sri Aurobindo brings Savitri to the hermitage of Dymsthena.

But the change does not matter for Savitri. She is ready for this change and does it matter when love holds its anchorage for the couple?

Arrived in that rough-hewn homestead they gave,
Questioning no more the strangeness of her fate,
Their pride and loved one to the great blind king,
A regal pillar of fallen mightiness
And the stately care-worn woman once a queen
Who now hoped nothing for herself from life,
But all things only hoped for her one child,
Calling on that single head from partial Fate
All joy of earth, all heaven's beatitude."

We have met this Saibhya in innumerable homes in our own times. All is lost, but not hope! How many women have worked, how many women have struggled with their care-worn lives hard so that their child (children) can enter a brighter day when they can eat better and excel themselves in studies and work? These four lines are a crystalline portrait of the best of Indian womanhood which has nourished our land. As recently as seventy five years ago, we had heard of thousands of women trying to keep the home fires burning, work hard, beg people better off for a few coins to help the education of their children, while the husbands had been jailed for taking part in the independence movement? Himself a part of the *Bande Mataram* Movement, Sri Aurobindo knew at first hand of such brave women who saved Mother India so that the future will give a chance for the Satyavans of tomorrow.

The intelligent Saibhya could recognise in her son the possibilities of a bright, strong and wise young man who would be the pillar of the home and bring comfort to the exiled (and now aged) parents.⁴ That he would also shine as a brilliant Sri Aurobindo's description wets our eyes to see the realistic picture of the care-worn Saibhya and her obedient son who always speaks the truth and is ever active to help his parents, and thereby assuring them of a comfortable future.

Adoring wisdom and beauty like a young god's,
She saw him loved by heaven as by herself,
She rejoiced in his brightness and believed in his fate
And knew not of the evil drawing near."

Savitri knew of the creeping Fate but she did not speak of it to her aged in-laws or anybody else. Let them be happy now. When Fate strikes, it would be time enough to mourn or face the threat boldly. Sri Aurobindo's description of Savitri here is marvellous as a lesson in self-control. The early days of married life were happy enough and the in-laws adored the daughter-in-law who had adapted herself so well to the simple lifestyle of the hermitage.

However as the dreaded day came near, it was becoming very difficult though her iron self-control helped her still. As she knew very well that those around her had no means to help her face the looming threat that hung over the simple hermitage. But she did not believe in wailing about it with no purpose, though, within herself she was preparing herself. As for her elderly parents-in-law, it was better for them to remain calm and peaceful now, for they had no means to act, no way to save.

And now the marvellous lines from Sri Aurobindo which spin together karma yoga and jnana yoga in the same person:

“She was still to them the child they knew and loved;
The sorrowing woman they saw not within.
No change was in her beautiful motions seen:
A worshipped empress all once vied to serve,
She made herself the diligent serf of all,
Nor spared the labour of broom and jar and well,
Or close gentle tending or to heap the fire
Of altar and kitchen, no slight task allowed
To others that her woman's strength might do.”

About three decades ago, I had given the title, ‘The altar and kitchen in Savitri’. Shradhdhavan who had invited me to give the talk in Savitri Bhavan was mystified and was delighted when my speech was woven around this passage and I said: “As a housewife, I learnt that this is also yoga if I had the right perspective”! Such is Sri Aurobindo's thorough study of yoga and his vision that essentially everyone in this world is engaged in yoga, only most lack the perspective to gain the best from it.

When watching Saibhya and the king daily made Savitri think for some immediate help to overcome the threatened extinction of their son. But was there a way when in the matter of annihilation by death, all doors are closed for humanity? Ascend the funeral pyre with Satyavan? But, how about her aged parents-in-law? This is the brave Savitri, she must live if only to look after the aged parents of Satyavan:

“For those sad parents still would need her here
To help the empty remnant of their day.”

At last, it is in the canto, ‘*Death in the Forest*’ that we hear Saibhya speak. It is a brief description of Savitri herself, a fine tribute from a gentle mother-in-law to her affectionate daughter-in-law. She does not know what is happening behind

the curtains of existence. But she recognises a winner queen in Savitri and is grateful for her unswerving love for her parents-in-law.

Not for one moment does Savitri forget the threat and comes to Saibhya to take her permission to go to the forest but also her blessings for success in the forthcoming battle with Death which she leaves unuttered. Even when she takes the permission of Satyavan's mother to accompany him to the forest on the day foretold by Narad, she utters no word that would disturb her beloved mother-in-law, Saibhya:

“At last she came to the pale mother queen.
She spoke but with guarded lips and tranquil face
Lest some stray word or some betraying look
Should let pass into the mother's unknowing breast,
Slaying all happiness and need to live,
A dire foreknowledge of the grief to come.
Only the needed utterance passage found:
All else she pressed back into her anguished heart
And forced upon her speech an outward peace.
"One year that I have lived with Satyavan
Here on the emerald edge of the vast woods
In the iron ring of the enormous peaks
Under the blue rifts of the forest sky,
I have not gone into the silences
Of this great woodland that enringed my thoughts
With mystery, nor in its green miracles
Wandered, but this small clearing was my world.
Now has a strong desire seized all my heart
To go with Satyavan holding his hand
Into the life that he has loved and touch
Herbs he has trod and know the forest flowers
And hear at ease the birds and the scurrying life
That starts and ceases, rich far rustle of boughs
And all the mystic whispering of the woods.
Release me now and let my heart have rest."

This is the only scene in which we hear Savitri's detailed speech asking Saibhya her permission to go to the forest with Satyavan. Saibhya knows that her darling daughter-in-law had never once made any request to her. We never hear Saibhya in Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, but now we do, and find each word an accurate description of Savitri. What a divine pair! And each word from Saibhya rings with regal nobility, the words of a perfect mother-in-law to her golden daughter-in-law:

"Do as thy wise mind desires,
O calm child-sovereign with the eyes that rule.
I hold thee for a strong goddess who has come

Pitying our barren days; so dost thou serve
Even as a slave might, yet art thou beyond
All that thou doest, all our minds conceive,
Like the strong sun that serves earth from above."

Where are words that can describe or analyse this conversation? Saibhya had recognised in her daughter-in-law a power akin to Shakti, "the strong goddess" this morning. We are given to understand that Savitri's yoga was now poised for achieving victory.

We have already noted in the *Book of Yoga* that Savitri was not ready to confess failure. If God has created this world, surely there must be a way out. And the push comes from within her that she should not give in to the challenge posed by Death. "Arise, O soul, and vanquish Time and Death. Is it possible" The inner voice succeeds in strengthening her being, and she now is ready to act. We have a detailed picture of her yoga in Sri Aurobindo's words. There is the terrible struggle that goes on between Death and Savitri and finally Savitri is triumphant, Death withdraws from Satyavan. The familiar and beloved narrative of Sri Aurobindo gives us the nectarean canto, '*The Book of Everlasting Day*'. Satyavan regains his life and the couple exchange in words their immense joy of being together. They begin to walk back to their hermitage though it is quite dark.

"Then hand in hand they left that solemn place
Full now of mute unusual memories,
To the green distance of their sylvan home
Returning slowly through the forest's heart.
Round them the afternoon to evening changed."

As they walked, there came from the opposite side huge crowds with lit torches, searching here and there by parting the boughs in the thickly-wooded forest. There came also brilliantly armoured persons carrying lights with King Dyumathsena in their front:

In front King Dyumathsena walked, no more
Blind, faltering-limbed, but his far-questing eyes
Restored to all their confidence in light
Took seemingly this imaged outer world;
Firmly he trod with monarch step the soil."

As we take in this scene word by word, the Aurobindonian touch comes down firmly too, the touch that is a moving tribute to motherhood for a mother is all eyes looking after her child and never allows him to move away from her consciousness: Saibhya!

"Her patient paleness wore a pensive glow
Like evening's subdued gaze of gathered light
Departing, which foresees sunrise her child.
Sinking in quiet splendours of her sky,
She lives awhile to muse upon that hope,

The brilliance of her rich receding gleam
A thoughtful prophecy of lyric dawn.”

Then comes the nectarean line:

“Her eyes were first to find her children's forms.”

So we salute Saibhya and watch the memorable mother blessing silently. The King speaks but where is the need for words or questions for Saibhya? The children are safe; and so we take leave of the epic:

“In flare of the unsteady torches went
With linked hands Satyavan and Savitri,
Hearing a marriage march and nuptial hymn...”

References:

¹‘On His Blindness’

²Translated by R.Y. Deshpande

³Sita Devi to Hanuman on seeing Rama’s signet ring brought by Hanuman

⁴For information on this part of Satyavan’s life as a crown prince of Shalwa, who argues brilliantly as a human rights activist, see The *Mahabhatara*, *Shanti Parva*, *Adhyaya 267*; also, paper presented by me at the National Conference on “*Re-reading Sri Aurobindo*” held on 4th-5th March, 2010 at the Department of English, Pondicherry University.

From Personality to Person —The Imperative Shift

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[**Author's Note:** This is an attempt to take a closer look at the burning need and relevance of such a shift and some of the unique dimensions that characterise its effectuation in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.]

Part 1: Need and relevance of the shift

What is the shift?

Much has been achieved on the material plane but on the personal front man continues to be trapped, impaired and afflicted endlessly. Distress and discontent have become the norm. His subjective life seems no less than a tragic dead end. The verdict from all sides is that man as he is, with his grossly one-sided existence, is plainly incapable of any real solution, any true perfection, any lasting happiness. Something is amiss. The West, with its modern findings, acknowledging only the apparent physical side of life, fails miserably to alleviate his pain. The east too, oblivious of its own spiritual past, fails to deal adequately with the blinding material present, and its crashing consequences. The search is at its most frantic, there has to be a connection, a nexus between what we are and what we ought to be, between reality and the hope of perfection we harbour secretly. The inner and the outer, spirit and matter, soul and nature, are the primal dualities of our life and the source of all the contradiction and discord of our daily life; the opposite poles that man seeks constantly to fathom and bridge. The pillars upon which rests all the success of life, world and god.

Spiritual significance: Integral opening to the Light

To arrive somehow at a working harmony of the two extremes, because it seems that thus alone can be found the way to his perfection and joy, is the challenge and the solution that man must achieve. Life is but a laboratory for the fulfilment of this purpose. All our imperfection is seated in our nature or personality and all our potential perfection is concealed in our soul or the real Person. In the current scenario the personality is all we know for we have never met the real person. The wise have told us that it is the inner Person that must be given the charge of the governance of life. The shift from personality to person is our only hope. In Sri Aurobindo's words,

The fact is not only there, it determines our whole existence, it is the one fact that is really important to us as human beings with a will and an intelligence and a subjective existence which makes all our happiness and suffering. The whole problem of life resolves itself into this one question, — What are we to do with this soul (person) and nature (personality) set face to face with

each other?...The whole of human philosophy, religion, science is really nothing but an attempt to get at the right data upon which it will be possible to answer the question and solve, as satisfactorily as our knowledge will allow, the problem of our existence. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, pp.428-429)

In the outer appearance of things man and world are only what we call nature or Prakriti, “a force that operates as the whole law and mechanism of being, creates the world which is the object of our mind and senses.” (*Essays on the Gita*, p.573) What is not known is the fact that the mind and senses are also created by Nature “as a means of relation between the creature and the world he lives in.” (ibid.) In this external view of things man with his soul, mind and body appears to be a product of Nature “differentiated from others by a separation of his body, life and mind and especially by his ego-sense — that subtle mechanism constructed for him that he may confirm and centralise his consciousness of all this strong separateness and difference.” (ibid.) Man’s whole being is driven by Nature’s laws and he cannot function outside of it. Even the so-called freedom that he assigns to his personal will and ability to choose and decide for himself is actually nothing but the will of his ego, which is most strictly a puppet of Nature. “...as is the nature of his ego, so will be the nature of its will and according to that he must act and he can no other.” (ibid., pp.573-574) This is how bound we are and this therefore the root of the whole problem.

“There is, however, something in man’s consciousness which does not fall in with the rigidity of this formula...” (ibid., p.574) As he develops and evolves he begins to feel the existence of an inner reality, separate from his outer nature, untouched and unaffected from the surface turbulent movements of personality and with a semblance of infinite knowledge, peace and power. In this inner view of things it is no longer Nature but Soul or Spirit that dominates. It is Purusha rather than Prakriti that governs. It is the presence of an absolute Person rather than a relative personality. The whole truth is that Nature is creative power of the Soul. Soul is Nature’s basis and upholder. Nature works out and manifests what Soul wills for its delight. Nature and soul are two aspects of the same reality, one inferior but dynamic and creative, the other superior but static and self-contained. The two were separated from and out of the One Supreme Reality for creation and manifestation of the universe. “The Purusha & Prakriti are therefore not only the Witness & the Activity Witnessed, but the Lord & his executive energy. Purusha is Ishwara, Prakriti is His Shakti.” (*Essays Divine and Human*, p.195) The universe is nothing but a play of the two with each other.

Sri Aurobindo says that “The real soul and self of us is hidden from our intelligence by its ignorance of inner things, by a false identification, by an absorption in our outward mechanism of mind, life and body.” (*Essays on the Gita*, p.574) Without knowledge of the real basis of our self we are no more than little crippled creatures circling hopelessly to achieve a very tiny inconsequential part of what seems to us the whole reality. The picture is grossly incomplete without the admittance of the soul. “If the active soul of man can once draw back

from its identification with its natural instruments, if it can see and live in the entire faith of its inner reality, then all is changed to it, life and existence take on another appearance, action a different meaning and character.” (ibid.)

A closer look

In the lower terms of existence it is the personality/nature aspect that dominates but as we realise the inadequacy of this functioning and dissatisfied, decide to move within towards something more potent, more conscious, towards soul or purusha, nature too evolves and begins to assume her true role, that of Shakti, that of which she is a lesser formulation and purusha too grows in the process, from a silent witness self to the mighty master and Lord, Ishwara. The combined working of Ishwara and Shakti in the individual forms the basis of an integral perfection by preparing the grounds, enabling, empowering and upgrading the system of mental man to usher in the next evolutionary principle, the supramental Gnostic consciousness, that which is the ultimate aim of all this terrestrial life.

But this metamorphosis can begin only when we become convinced, either in one part of our being or in all of it, of the first imperative shift, and arrive at the mind soul within, the part in us that steps back and watches uninvolved all this play of the surface. It is to this mind-soul, the part of the inner purusha seated behind the surface mind with the hallmark human capacity to observe silently, that we assign the work of the triple yoga of works, knowledge and devotion. This triple movement of the initial purification and liberation of our mentality, emotion and action, is considered in the Integral Yoga, as the fastest means and basis of the great shift, so that when the higher principle does descend into us for the final transformation, it finds in us a suitable, sufficiently wide, universalised and strong *adhara*. One that is firm and stable in its inner foundations.

Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga psychology offers the shortest possible way to the largest human perfection ever envisaged. The key to man’s problems and man’s maximum potential lies in something beyond his mind and nature — it lies in his soul. From surface to depth, from relative to absolute, from temporary to permanent, from fragmented to united, from chaos to harmony, from becoming to being, from personality to person: This is the imperative shift we are to make before any significant change can take place. Nothing short of it will suffice anymore. This requires an intense personal effort. As Sri Aurobindo says,

The development of the experience in its rapidity, its amplitude, the intensity and power of its results, depends primarily, in the beginning of the path and long after, on the aspiration and personal effort of the sadhaka. The process of Yoga is a turning of the human soul from the egoistic state of consciousness absorbed in the outward appearances and attractions of things to a higher state in which the Transcendent and Universal can pour itself into the individual mould and transform it. The first determining element of the siddhi is, therefore, the intensity of the turning, the force that directs the soul

inward. The power of aspiration of the heart, the force of the will, the concentration of the mind, the perseverance and determination of the applied energy are the measure of that intensity. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p.58)

It is only then, we may say, that the shift from personality to person has been established. The difficulty is always there in first stage of the shift, the stage of the fundamental uprooting of the old formulations and the old tendencies of the personality, one that nature herself had created to achieve the first formed human individuality out of the animal; this movement in the opposite direction, against the gravity of the ego, driven by a new unknown inner force and power, is bound to be shattering. Any orbital change needs huge velocity and huge power; and here we are talking of the greatest orbital shifts of all, that of ego to soul, that of personality to person. Sri Aurobindo tells us that all human effort is an image of the divine *Tapas*, that almighty burning divine will and energy that makes anything possible and that consumes in its fold any opposition whatsoever. The question is to what extent and degree we align ourselves with the divine plan now that we know it. The good news is that times are particularly favourable for those who are ready to take on this journey, ready to synchronise their intention and purpose of life with that of Nature herself, ready to take the first plunge towards the next future of evolution. Everything in the universe will now conspire unanimously to aid the individual in his new goal, the only goal worth having, for it incorporates and fulfils all others.

As we commit ourselves to this goal the need for personal effort reduces and the process naturally turns to autopilot mode in which the individual and divine Will merge substantially for an effective advance.

Why the shift?

“Man is a transitional being”, says Sri Aurobindo (*SABCL*, vol.17, p.7). He is not the final in the evolutionary ladder. Nature cannot rest satisfied with a creature as imperfect as man. She now labours to formulate this new being out of man but without his knowledge and consent. From the inadequate mind principle it is now time to move to the perfection of the supermind principle. Man is the only creature capable of a voluntary participation in his own evolution to the next species. Sri Aurobindo came to tell us that it is now time and the evolutionary intent for man to accelerate his evolution by a conscious and willed self-exceeding. The process of this self-exceeding is the Integral Yoga Psychology.

Man’s passage from the external ego where there is suffering and limitation to the real inner self where there is joy and mastery, is the focus of this shift and is essential not only for his individual perfection but for the perfection of the world too. How long shall we remain ignorant of our divine destiny! In Sri Aurobindo’s magnificent words,

...man’s importance in the world is that he gives to it that development of consciousness in which its transfiguration by a perfect self-discovery becomes possible. To fulfil God in life is man’s manhood. He starts from the animal vitality, but a divine existence is his objective... (*The Life Divine*,

p.36) The liberation of the individual soul is therefore the keynote of the definite divine action; it is the primary divine necessity and the pivot on which all else turns. It is the point of Light in which the intended complete self-manifestation in the many begins to emerge. (ibid., p.40)

If this be the divine game plan would it not be in our best interest to abandon all personal games and join it right away! To remain where we are now, in the ignorant superficiality we know as our self, to continue as part of Nature's Evolution is not only to be content with mediocrity and imperfection, but it is a grave denial and contradiction of the will of evolution. There is growth in the old way of Nature, she leads us ahead all the time in spite of our self, through difficulty and pain, but this growth is retarded and sullied, it is thrust upon us. It can never arrive, as will confirm our personal experience, at anything absolute and perfect. Moreover, it is Nature's secret desire that man should now break away from her and commence his own evolution by coming in contact with his real self, which he can find within and above himself, and become the mighty master he is destined to be. There is a tremendous force at work all around us urging and goading us to make the shift. All personal and world events are pointing in the same direction. Everything seems to resonate the same message. We must be utterly impaired not to see it, grossly inert not to hear it. Every moment calls, every instant beckons.

When the Shift

All life is a preparation towards this pivotal shift. Everything that happens, all experience is a means for growth leading to this momentous turning-point. This is the secret blueprint of life and the reason why things happen the way they do. To assign any other motive or cause to life's occurring is childish. We search different avenues until we are ready for the real thing. Then the call comes. It is loud and clear, unmistakable. It is impossible then to be content with the old standards, the old pulls and pushes, the old ways. Something consents within almost in spite of us. It is then time to work out in the personality what has been decided by the inner person. We are now ready to make the shift.

Nature and ego have brought us this far but can take us no further. It is time now for our soul to take charge and work out the next future. It is by a conscious and rigorous personal effort of mind and life that we must recognise, acknowledge and hand over the reins of our life to the supremacy of the soul. An honest integral consent is all that is needed; the rest shall be made to unfold in spite of us.

Part 2: The uniqueness of the shift

Aim and character

Most past yogas and systems advocate this shift as the necessary first step for any self-development but the final aim has always been an individual liberation from nature and world and a singular, linear, inward or upward union with some abstract and silent divine. In the Integral yoga too it is essential to make the shift

from nature to soul, but not for the sake of personal fulfilment alone, rather for an integral and total perfection of the whole of life and world. Union not only with the silent Brahman but a mighty bringing down of its dynamism and splendour, a radical conversion of the lower into the higher, a tangible realisation of God in everything from the most material to the most abstract, from the most mundane to the most exotic. A horizontal unity with the one in all and then a vertical unity with the one above all. This is the new formula that leaves nothing outside its scope. It is Sri Aurobindo's ruthless synthesis of the largest order and uncompromising harmony of the biggest dimension that characterises this shift. Nothing is left out, no matter how contradictory or how irreconcilable. Every opposition promises a new order, every discord points at a new alignment.

It is this widest worldview that gives the process of this shift a radically different hue. It brings in a never before enthusiasm, optimism, energy, love and delight of life, of world, of god, something that correlates magnificently with newness, modernity, globalisation, power and all that belongs and characterises this new world that is surging today. Contradictions vanish, boundaries and divisions disappear, extremes have no room anymore, everything finds its natural place in this largest scheme of things; all theories and practices, all ways and all views are accepted into a universal embrace; narrowness removed and broadened, all is prepared to be transformed until a new unimaginably luminous and powerful order consumes everything in its ultimate perfection.

God is no more ethereal but real, no more far and silent but near and intimate, no more unreachable but waiting to reach out in every nook and corner, in every gaze and smile, in every word and phrase. It is not we who seek God anymore; it is the Hour when god seeks us. The tables have turned. It is time to prepare ourselves for the carnival of God. Sri Aurobindo confirms most grandiosely what our ancient Vedic seers affirmed.

In other words, if Brahman has entered into form and represented Its being in material substance, it can only be to enjoy self-manifestation in the figures of relative and phenomenal consciousness. Brahman is in this world to represent Itself in the values of Life. Life exists in Brahman in order to discover Brahman in Itself... (*The Life Divine*, p.36)

This is the true role and unique privilege of our human existence... Shall we not be stuck if we spend ourselves doing and knowing everything other than the thing that really matters, that for which life is actually meant.

The uniqueness of this shift lies in the comprehensiveness of this view. It is an integral perfection we seek of life and world through an individual illumination and liberation from nature to an individual illumination and arrival in soul. Sri Aurobindo came to tell that this is not only possible but most awaited and the only way to advance. All we need is a conviction and consent in all our being that this is the thing we want and nothing else.

No heavenly promises, no afterlife rewards, no solemn oaths, God is either here and now in the thick of life or never again. Every single thing that we experience whether internal or external is God concealed. There exists nothing

else. To be able to see, know, love and become this secret Divinity is the trick. It comes from a certain discipline and conviction. Then we are on the roll, unstoppable, we meet God in every moment and in every movement. Life becomes what it is meant to be, a constant ecstatic discovery of the One in the field of the Many. Even pain becomes the touch of God and is met with love and thankfulness until in every single thing we feel only joy and see only His smiling face.

Based on the profoundest universal Truths and interpreted in the widest possible manner Sri Aurobindo's yoga seems very consistent with today's trends. Top of the line and extremely user-friendly! All-inclusive and super adaptive! The fastest, most comprehensive and foolproof operating system ever!

Dynamic, fast, powerful, radical, total, integral, whole, entire, all, universal, life, earth, here, and now, are the keywords of this yoga. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

...a complete fulfilment of our being and consciousness, a complete transformation of our nature — and this implies a complete perfection of life here and not only a return to an eternal perfection elsewhere. This is the object but in the method also there is the same integrality, for the entirety in the object cannot be accomplished without an entirety in the method, a complete turning, opening, self-giving of our being and nature in all its parts, ways, movements to that which we realise... This is the character of the integral Yoga. (*Essays Divine and Human*, p.150)

The inspiration

The Mother in her simple style has given us the formula for this integral change:

We don't want life as it is any longer, ...we don't want falsehood and ignorance any longer, ...we don't want suffering and unconsciousness any longer, ...we do not want disorder and bad will any longer, because Sri Aurobindo has come to tell us: It is not necessary to leave the earth to find the Truth, it is not necessary to leave life to find one's soul, it is not necessary to give up the world to enter into relation with the Divine. The Divine is everywhere, in everything and if he is hidden, it is because we do not take the trouble to discover him. We can simply by a sincere aspiration open a sealed door in us and find... that Something which will change the whole significance of life, reply to all our questions, solve all our problems and lead us to the perfection we aspire for without knowing it, to that Reality alone which can satisfy us and give us lasting joy, equilibrium, strength, life... The starting-point: to want it, truly want it, to need it. The next step: to think, above all, of that... That is the one thing which counts. And then... Something will happen.... Surely something will happen. For each one it will take a different form. (*Questions and Answers*, 1957-58, pp.374-375)

Mother's formula is quite simple. Conviction in the mind, a burning need in the heart and a constant remembering and thinking. The rest will happen by a greater Power. Her assurance, Her sanction is as certain as the rising of the sun.

Composition and structure of our Being

It is important to the efficiency of the shift that we know our being well, its parts, its functions and the laws that govern it. We should know exactly what is happening, how to deal with it and the right attitudes towards every movement that demands our attention.

Our being is a complex amalgam of many different parts. Very broadly there are two divisions in the human being. The outer being, which constitutes the personality (from the Latin *persona*, “mask”), and the inner being, the true Being or the Person who uses the outer mask of the personality. The outer being, made up of the outer mind, vital and physical, is only an instrument and a means of expression for the inner being to use. It is not our real self. However, ordinarily we are identified with the outer being and regard it as our real self. Therefore all our life is an expression of our outer being and not that of the inner being as is meant to be. Herein lies the whole problem. How can life be anything close to perfect when it is driven by the part that was designed to serve, not command?

Here is a brief description of the three parts of the outer being, the mind, the vital and the physical from the writings of A S Dalal (*Looking from Within*, pp. vi-vii)

The physical (being): It is the consciousness in the body which regulates the complex workings of the different bodily organs and physiological systems. Though the mind exhibits a higher form of consciousness and intelligence than that of the body, it cannot but marvel at the wisdom of the body expressed in the various processes which maintain the body in health and heal it in illness or accident. However, physical consciousness, as compared to mental consciousness, is seen to be relatively inert, obscure, narrow or limited, and automatic or mechanical in its functionings. Thus attitudes which are characterised by rigidity, narrowness, conservatism or slowness to change, indifference or boredom, and habitual or routine modes of action and reaction are related to the physical part of our being.

The vital (being): Intermediate between the physical and the mental is the vital, made up of life-energies, sensations (pleasure, pain, etc.), instincts and impulses (anger, fear, lust, etc.), desires, feelings and emotions... The vital consciousness is characterised by likes and dislikes, the search for pleasure and enjoyment, and the avoidance of pain and discomfort, desire to possess and to accumulate... Besides the quest for pleasure these attitudes are characterised by a need for perpetual variety and change, ambitiousness, attachment and repulsion, aggression, fear and impulsiveness.

The mental (being): This is the part of our make-up which has to do with thoughts and ideas, facts and knowledge. Reason and intellect are the most developed expressions of the mental consciousness. In contrast to the vital which is governed by the pleasure principle, the mental is guided by what accords with reason and is deemed to be true and good. Therefore when the mental consciousness is predominant in an individual, the attitudes of the

individual are characterised by a rational outlook and are based on moral and intellectual principles.

In the Sankhya school of Indian philosophy, the outer and the inner divisions of the being are called Prakriti (Nature) and Purusha (Person) respectively. Prakriti functions through the ego and the three *gunas*, *satwa*, *rajas*, *tamas* in the outer personality. Her secret intention is to go beyond these, arrive at the Purusha and become a conscious and perfect instrument of the Purusha. This she hopes to accomplish with our conscious collaboration and not any more through the old law of obscure causality in which the individual is only a puppet with no actual power.

A clear awareness of this division of the outer and the inner is the first prerequisite. Only then can we hope to reconcile the two and consciously start making the shift.

The part that was made to govern, the all-powerful and luminous inner being, lies dormant, inactive, closed, unknown to our active consciousness. It is not difficult to identify the inner being for it seeks to be uncovered all the time, sending intimations and suggestions at every possible opening in the outer being. It is a strange and ill-founded notion from the past that the inner being is difficult to attain to and meant only for the realised one or a few chosen ones. We are all without an exception, chosen and destined to realise the inner being. It is not about some ultimate far-reaching moment of illumination that is the aim but rather the first conviction, the first moment of wow, the first thrills of a first contact, it is what we can do now that matters; it is the now that will open up the next and so forth... no future realisation is the object of this shift, we seek what we can achieve now even if it is only a mental affirmation or the tiny unshaking faith in the heart. The one that can happen now is what we seek.

The inner being consists of an inner personality, the *swadharma* and *swabhava* of our scriptures, comprising our inner mental, inner vital and our inner physical. This inner personality reflects the unique divine possibilities of our true individuality. It is the higher aspects of our external personality. At the centre of our inner being is the inner Person, the Psychic being, the Purusha, the real master and governor of our life and being, under whose luminous action we are ordained to work out the dreams of god here upon Earth, making this aching material life the joyous field of divine perfection. Again, this shift from the outer being to the inner being is not some imaginary human utopia we are talking about, it is as real and practical as anything else, the very purpose of life and the reason why the world still moves ahead in spite of all the disasters, falsehood, ugliness and sorrow that exists. It is the saddest fact of all that this reality of life is not common knowledge, is not the thing we think about all the time, and is not our main preoccupation. How shall we make the shift if we don't even know that life the aim of life of life and not all the other useless things that we live for.

To be liberated from the outer and the lower self, to live in the inner and the higher self, in order to transform the lower into the higher, is the larger aim of

this shift. Here we shall not abandon the outer after having reached the inner; here we shall reach the inner for the love of the outer, for the love of a total union and a total perfection.

Mind, the preferred starting point

When we first pause and step back to relook at our self, when we first withdraw from the surface activities of the nature to go within, we come to the soul behind the mind, the *manomaya purusha*, the inner mental being, the part in us that watches silently without being involved or affected. This is the witness self, the *sakshi* of the scriptures. The shift begins from here. This is the part that can take us within or rather, that will lead itself to the supreme mastery and perfection of the innermost being. This witness self is the first critical interface between nature and soul. Sri Aurobindo points out that we are essentially mental creatures and it is through the ability of the mind to detach itself from the sensory inputs and its ability to observe dispassionately that we shall arrive most naturally and most easily to that which is beyond it. For we want the fastest and broadest perfection possible.

The predominant character and dynamics of this surface mode is the famous “*raag-dwesh*,” fear-desire or pleasant-unpleasant reactive mechanism. We are so compulsively and helplessly tied to this habit that we can never get past it and arrive at the part where there is no reaction, only a creative silence, from where real progress is possible. This is where most of us either lose interest because of repeated failure and frustration or succumb to the pressure. As the witness consciousness gradually becomes more stable and constant in us our positive and negative reactions become milder, less frequent and less insistent. Slowly this act of witnessing begins to assume the power to consent or withdraw its sanction from the instinctive movements and reactions of the outer ego-driven personality. This is the first real victory, the beginnings of the orbital change. This is when the *sakshi* turns to *anumanta*, the giver of sanction.

Once the sanction is withdrawn from this outward tendency to react to everything, once there is even an initial check on the outward flow of the life energies, the *prana*, then there is a real hope, a real possibility of making the inner shift and all our being and its old habitual energies are automatically drawn inwards.

As the power to withdraw sanction increases, so the conviction, joy and sense of freedom. This is the beginning of purification, the first stage of the yoga. This will lead to liberation and eventually to transformation, the unique dimension given to us by Sri Aurobindo in his Integral yoga. The past yogas stopped at liberation. It is the aspect of transformation that gives this shift its vastness and wholeness. Although here we attempt to look more closely at the first and second stages, it is in the light of the third that we shall do so.

The use of concentration

There is by now a strong conviction, a resolute faith and a sure glimpse of the inner reality but the difficulty is the inability to remain within, the inability to

hold the realisation and live constantly in it. Our inward concentration gets distracted, dissipated, dissolved much too easily by the slightest push and pull and we are thrown back almost with vengeance into the surface nature mode with all its old habits and tendencies. And this is the area of our special interest, the first attempts at holding and dwelling in the truths that we have only seen flashes of. Making our inner knowledge a living reality, becoming in all our nature what we know and believe, loosening the knots that tie us down to our old ways, are the biggest difficulties in making the first stable shift. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

It is by thought that we dissipate ourselves in the phenomenal; it is by gathering back of the thought into it, that we must draw ourselves back into the real. Concentration has three powers by which this aim can be affected. By concentration on anything whatsoever we are able to know that thing, to make it deliver up its concealed secrets; we must use this power to know not things, but the one Thing-in-itself. By concentration again the whole will can be gathered up for the acquisition of that which is still ungrasped, still beyond us; this power if it is sufficiently trained, sufficiently single-minded, sincere, sure of itself, faithful to itself alone, absolute in faith, we can use for the acquisition of any object whatsoever; but we ought to use it not for the acquisition of the many objects which the world offers to us, but to grasp spiritually the one object worthy of pursuit which is also the one subject worthy of knowledge. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p.304)

A third process is neither at first to concentrate in a strenuous meditation on the one subject nor in a strenuous concentration of the one object of thought-vision, but first to still the mind altogether. This may be done by various ways; one is to stand back from the mental action altogether not participating in but simply watching it until, tired of its unsanctioned leaping and running, it falls into an increasing and finally an absolute quiet. Another way is to reject the thought-suggestions, to cast them away from the mind whenever they come and firmly hold to the peace of the being, which really and always exists behind the trouble and riot of the mind. When this secret peace is unveiled, a great calm settles on the being and there comes usually with it the perception and experience of the all-pervading silent Brahman, everything else at first seeming to be mere form and eidolon. On the basis of this calm everything else may be built up in the knowledge and experience no longer of the external phenomena of things but of the deeper truth of the divine manifestation. (*ibid.*, pp.309-310)

A deep understanding of this concentration will make sure that even as we swing from nature to soul, from the external personality mode to the inner person mode, we shall not be flustered and disturbed by it. We shall persist in a quiet faith and turn every dissipation and every distraction into a growing perfection of the inner concentration. Sri Aurobindo assures us that once the mind has glimpsed this concentration it can never be the same again, it would have changed forever and nothing can stop it from a rapid advance.

The power of renunciation

“Renunciation is an indispensable instrument of our perfection,” says Sri Aurobindo (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p.311). Renunciation not of life and the objects of life as we are traditionally told but of the great knots of ignorance that tie us down to these objects and make our divine living an impossibility. Desire, attachment and ego are the three massive burdens of our existence that we shall cast out vehemently and forever from our nature and forbid them to resist, retard and come in the way of our inward shift. As Sri Aurobindo says,

...Our renunciation must obviously be an inward renunciation... there is nothing in the world to which we must be attached, not wealth nor poverty, nor joy nor suffering, nor life nor death, nor greatness, nor littleness, nor vice nor virtue, nor friend, nor wife, nor children, nor country, nor our work and mission, nor heaven nor earth, nor all that is within them or beyond them. And this does not mean that there is nothing at all that we shall love, nothing in which we shall take delight; for attachment is egoism is egoism in love and not love itself, desire is limitation and insecurity in a hunger for pleasure and satisfaction and not the seeking after the divine delight in things. A universal love we must have, calm and yet intense beyond the brief vehemence of the most violent passion; a delight in things rooted in a delight in God that does not adhere to their forms but to that which they conceal in themselves and that embraces the universe without being caught in its meshes. (ibid., pp.314-315)

In this freedom lies infinite ecstasy and limitless enjoyment; in this liberation lies our true self, our true life. In this freedom of the spirit we make the shift from personality to person.

Work, action and living

The personal element recedes, and the divine presence becomes the focal point. All work and act is made an offering to the divine. All sense of benefit and gain is offered up to the Divine. Action becomes a swift means to realise the divine perfection in life. First we do this through a remembrance of the Divine at the beginning and at the end of all our activity, then it becomes more constant, like a quiet backdrop of divine memory, and finally there comes a point when the consecration to the divine becomes the natural fabric and substance of our being, making it impossible to live without an active communion with the divine in our thoughts, senses and feelings. There remains then no sense of responsibility and ownership of any kind, no expectation of any kind, no initiation or preference of any kind. A tranquil, alert and happy emptiness replaces all personal movements until the Divine will stir again and leads to the next action. As this is glimpsed and stabilised in the individual his passage from personality to person becomes more complete and effective.

The search for harmony — our one supreme duty

“For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony,” (*The Life Divine*, p.2) is the supreme revelation Sri Aurobindo makes that sums up in one

mighty stroke the essence and solution of the whole problem of pain and existence. Everything that we experience as individuals or as a collectivity is essentially a possibility of future perfection in the guise of an event or happening. Everything without exception comes with the clear intention of achieving a particular harmony of differences, a particular reconciliation of opposites, a certain possibility of oneness amidst the variety of multiples. It is our supreme duty, *kartavya*, to put aside the externality of things, rend ourselves of our superficial personality and seek doggedly this harmony in everything we meet whether positive or negative or even apparently trivial or mundane. This is our noblest and worthiest preoccupation and our fastest way to the glory of a divine life. In the beginning it might be arduous to silence the discord of the ego and find out the harmony in everything but in the end it's a question of conviction and habit. First we may struggle to see only mentally what the situation is here to reconcile but gradually this potential harmony factor in things reveals itself almost before the thing has happened and we gladly surrender to its power and work out actively what it is here to accomplish. We stop looking at things in the mirror of our personal matrix, we detach ourselves from all personal conditioning and all personal preferences, and we do this not out of some heroic stoic personal effort but rather with the simple faith in the power of that universal harmony. Our unceasing eagerness to discover this underlying oneness in things is all that matters, its fruition and completeness is not in our solo capacity. We shall fulfil our duty by an unwavering gaze on the secret harmony in everything. This much at least we owe to our Masters if not anything else.

Relations with the Divine

As we cast away the shackles of personality and move towards the real person, as we get ensnared by the call of the divine flute, we find that our relation with the Divine takes different forms and assumes various *bhavas*. We also realise in the process that personality is only a hindrance in its crude initial ego-driven stages and our liberation from it only a means to remould it into a divine personality bearing the qualities of the divine nature and governed by our true *swabahava* and *swadharmā*. We find ourselves turning and responding to the divine or to that imperative need within to become like the divine in various ways according to our readiness and need. The divine we seek everywhere and in all things is the one who seeks us too, who adores us and who lures us all the time through myriad ways into his vast embrace. It is we who fail to see him often. But when we do begin to find him concealed in all things, when we can't be otherwise, he becomes obvious to our senses, he becomes apparent to our understanding and he becomes a constant to our being and living. Sometimes he presents himself as our master and commander whose will we work out as would a warrior with honour and pride. Sometimes he is the friend and confidant who plays with our humanness and leads us by the hand to greater heights of perfection. Sometimes he becomes the mother who soothes our aching heart, who strokes our weary limbs and whose compassionate embrace is as comforting

as nothing else in the world. At times he is the guru, the wise adviser, the intuitive sage who by his very existence dissolves all our knots and ignorance, smites asunder all our incapacity and works out in us the impossible. He leans sometimes with outstretched hands to deliver us out of the quagmire that entraps us, as a hero or a magician from heaven; we find it hard to lift our hand to place it in his for we cherish the feel of the mud and refuse to look up to him until the mire is neck deep and all we can do is gasp in despair. He pretends to be the enemy too, fierce and ruthless, goading and lashing if that be the need, so his light pierces the darkness we harbour and his opposition enfeebles the pride of our ego. Then at last, when we want nothing but him, he smiles like the lover of our being and we lose ourselves forever in the passionate ecstasy of his love, one with his will, one with his need, one with his breath and one with his creation. The shift becomes most easy and most blissful when we fall in love with the divine.

Surrender — the master key

“Remember and offer,” (*Questions and Answers 1929*, p.23) said the Divine Mother to her children. It is She, the divine Shakti, who works through us, who works out the worlds and who works in spite of us. All power is Her power and all intelligence is her intelligence. To open to her, to call her, to surrender to her is the one solution to all our difficulty. She alone knows what is best for us and she alone can help. She fashions our lives and She lives in us. It is to Her we must offer all our self and all our being. Every step within is a step towards Her. Every victory is Her victory. When we give our difficulty to Her She takes charge of it and turns it into our biggest advantage. A growing surrender to the Shakti is our surest way to the perfection we seek.

The shift — a basic summary and definition

This shift, then, is the conscious and growing recognition of a reality of our being that is the real person, infinitely superior and more capable than the body-mind-life-ego existence that we now call our self, a conscious attempt at connecting with it, and gradually station in it and finally the beginnings of a full mastery and perfection of our life under its control and action. The shift is the imperative prerequisite for the next step in evolution, the thing towards which all life is moving secretly and the only way out from suffering and bondage. This superior reality that we term soul is for all practical purposes within us and is a portion of the almighty above but is dormant and inactive except rarely in most of us. Its aim is to become active through our consent and in life use our nature (body, life, mind) for its action in the world. It presents to us constantly, innumerable ways and means of surfacing and overtly manifesting its potential in our life, through our nature, its secret executrix, that uses pain to achieve this end. But the moment we become willing participants in this plan and acknowledge the existence of soul, we begin to acquire oneness with it and its infinite freedom, knowledge and power, reducing the causal play of nature and thereby the necessity of pain. It is up to us to begin looking at ourselves as a soul

using body, mind and emotion for its fulfilment and perfection in the world. It is up to us how much we recognise, want and align ourselves with the intent of the soul.

To be motivated every instant by the need and conviction of this shift, to decentralise the being from the ego centre and annihilate the present formations in order to reconstruct our self in the new way is the need of the hour and the way to the great shift.

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**A Psychological Approach to
Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*
A chapter by chapter understanding
Chapter VII, Pt.1, Sec. I-III**

Soumitra Basu

I

Life Divine

The Ego and the Dualities

Ego - Metaphysical Necessity

Chapter VII of *The Life Divine* is named 'The Ego and the Dualities'. This is an interesting chapter as the principle which Sri Aurobindo terms as the 'ego' has a unique place in the manifestation. The ego is not held in high esteem in traditional spiritual practice because it cannot judiciously harmonise the different parts of the being. Yet without the ego, individualisation cannot begin. In Integral Yoga Psychology that is based on the Aurobindonian standpoint, the ego has to be replaced by a beyond-ego principle for proper harmonisation of the myriad, discordant elements of the human psyche. It is only then that a process of true individualisation can begin.

However, in this chapter, Sri Aurobindo does not examine the ego from a primarily psychological perspective. Neither is there an attempt to understand it from the conventional ethical or moral poise. Of course, he will later place the ego-principle in its correct psychological perspective and examine whether and how it can undergo a transvaluation. But in the present chapter, he is concerned with the metaphysical necessity of the ego.

In India, traditional spirituality is concerned with the abolition of the ego. Hence, a metaphysical necessity of the ego-principle may sound strange. Sri Aurobindo himself is concerned with replacing the ego by a fourth-dimensional principle. Yet he does not ignore the significant part played by the ego in the cosmic scheme.

Ego -The Metaphysical Perspective

Delinking of Reality – principles

We have seen that 'Reality' which is difficult to be described with words was also experientially perceived as 'Sachchidananda' - a triune of 'EXISTENCE-CONSCIOUSNESS-BLISS'. Now, these three principles - EXISTENCE (SAT), CONSCIOUSNESS (CHIT), ANANDA (BLISS) are not additive. Sachchidananda is not a summation of these three principles, neither can it be viewed in gestalt terms (i.e. it is not a whole that exceeds the sum of its parts).

RATHER, EACH PRINCIPLE REPRESENTS A PARTICULAR POISE OF THE SAME REALITY. EACH PRINCIPLE CONTAINS THE OTHER TWO IN ITS ESSENCE. That is why the Sachchidananda consciousness is referred to as the unitary consciousness.

As long as there is no creation, the unitary consciousness of Sachchidananda remains self-absorbed, self-sufficient and self-fulfilled. The problem arises with the manifestation of the creation. Creation automatically implies the emergence of multiplicity.

To permit the emergence of the multiplicity, the unitary consciousness of Sachchidananda has to change its poise. It loses its unitary nature and the three hitherto intertwined aspects of Reality; Existence, Consciousness and Bliss become gradually delinked from each other.

This phenomenon is marked by three consequences:

(1) Each aspect (Existence; Consciousness; Bliss) of Reality becomes separated, fragmented or diluted and gets to be expressed in multitudinous ways.

(2) Each aspect ultimately has the potential to get expressed in opposite terms too. This is a price that has to be paid for a multiple expression that automatically implies infinite variation. Thus instead of the unitary Sachchidananda consciousness, we have as a culmination of infinite variation, the divisive phenomena of death, entropy, ignorance, falsehood, and suffering.

Every divisive term of each aspect develops into an independent, unique, distinct form that is “separate” from everything else in the universe. At the lower levels of the evolutionary hierarchy, this uniqueness is species-specific (thus each species of plant or animal has its distinct genus-specific identity). This is why biologists study plants and animals in terms of their species’ or class characteristics. The concept of uniqueness is different in the case of human beings. Biologists study the species characteristics of *homo sapiens* as a genus in comparison with other animal species. However the study of human beings as belonging to a species is not sufficient to understand the uniqueness of the individual human being and the diversity among human beings. In human beings, the “uniqueness” is “personality-specific” in case of individuals and “culture-specific” in case of human collectivities. That is why the psychologist studies the individual human personality and the social anthropologist studies cultures and societies. Indeed, the psychologist considers his knowledge as more specific for the individual human being rather than the biologist who studies not the individual human personality but *homo sapiens* as a species and the social anthropologist who studies human beings in the context of group-behaviour.

Emergence of Ego

The transition from the unitary consciousness of Reality to the multiplicity in creation automatically implies that there must be an intervening variable that maintains the multiplicity. If this variable was absent, the multiplicity would cease to exist and creation could not be sustained. Metaphysically, this independent variable is a poise of the ‘SAT’ or ‘Existential’ mode of the

Supreme Reality or unitary consciousness. It is in this poise that Reality is conceived as the SELF or ATMAN. Thus the essence of every form, animate or inanimate, is the same, the difference being only in the realm of the degree and quality of manifestation. In the human being, the Self has more potentiality for a rich and variegated experiential expression.

However, the experiential realisation of the same Self (or unitary essence) in all forms of multiplicity satisfies our metaphysical quest, it does not explain why each form of the multiplicity has an exclusivity that cannot be shared by other forms. If the essence of each form is the same, why do we have the difference between forms? It seems that in creation, the appearance of the multiplicity is accompanied by a sort of forgetting of the unitary essence in each form. In a way this forgetting of the unitary essence in each form was necessary so that each form could grow, albeit selfishly, to its maximum potential. In other words, the divisive nature of every form must be actualised as far as possible or else creation would not be variegated, complex, rich and fulfilling. Naturally, in the process, the unitary essence in each created form has to be forgotten.

We have now a very complex situation. On the one hand the unitary essence in each created form has been forgotten or kept in abeyance so that each form can grow *ad infinitum* in contradistinction to other forms. On the other hand we need to explain how each form carries out its agenda of individualisation if the unitary essence is not active on the surface of things. This is possible by the substitution of the unitary essence by a temporary deformative variable that permits individual variation to proceed to the maximum limit without remembering that the essence of all forms is the same. Variability and multiplicity in creation cannot occur and cannot be sustained unless the unity-factor in the consciousness of creation is temporarily veiled. This temporary variable that deforms the actual truth of the unitary nature of consciousness is known as the ego. There are naturally different poises of the ego on different planes of the manifestation. If there is an ego of the individual form like the individual human being, there is the ‘collective’ ego, the ‘group’ ego, the species-ego.

The place of Ego

Sri Aurobindo explains that the multiplicity is maintained by the ‘EGO’. Each individual form has to maintain its uniqueness, assertiveness, and distinctness. This is possible only if the ego, which is at the centre of each individual form or group-form, gives restricted or limited values to movements and forces instead of universal values. Take the example of human love. Obviously, human love is selfish, possessive, demanding and conditional. It is so because the ego gives these values to love. Once, human love is given universal values, it becomes unselfish, non-demanding, non-possessive and spontaneous. The individual has then succeeded in “universalising” oneself. The ego however cannot per se do this work of universalisation (even if it is involved with so-called unselfish acts); one has to go beyond one’s ego to achieve this status. This is specifically why

mystics, saints and seers have always advocated that the ego needs to be transcended.

In fact, the reason for ego-transcendence is to get back to the unitary consciousness of Sachchidananda - The Origin - The True Reality. For that one need not travel to outer space; one has to discover the forgotten unitary essence that supports each created form. What will one do with the divisive ego once one reconnects with the unitary essence?

There are in fact two ways to reconstruct or reinstate the unitary Sachchidananda consciousness in this world of multiplicity:

(a) GET RID OF THE EGO COMPLETELY. A significant section of Indian spiritual geniuses attempted this path of egolessness. They had the reward of experiencing the Sachchidananda consciousness. This experience was so overwhelming, total and complete that the world of multiplicity became secondary, unimportant, unreal and unworthy. Instead, they preferred a world-shunning asceticism.

(b) REPLACE THE EGO BY A WHOLISTIC PRINCIPLE. This is what Sri Aurobindo advocates. He insists on replacing the ego by a fourth-dimensional, ego-surpassing principle. This principle can universalise the individual and help him to be in touch with the unitary consciousness while yet acting within the multiplicity (Sri Aurobindo will later elaborate this principle which he named as the Psychic Being). In fact, this shift from the ego to the Psychic Being as the integrating centre of the human psyche heralds the beginning of true individualisation. {It will be subsequently explained how individualisation will proceed further when one achieves an experiential contact with the Central Being or *Jivatman* of whom the Psychic Being is a projection.}

However, till the Psychic Being replaces the ego, the latter has to function so that the individuality of the forms is not dissipated. That is why Sri Aurobindo described the individual ego as a

Determinative and Temporarily Deformative Factor:

Determinative – as it has to maintain the uniqueness of the individual form in a world of conflict, competition, chaos and disharmony. It accomplishes this by “a self-limitation of consciousness by a willed ignorance of the rest of its play and its exclusive absorption in one form, one combination of tendencies, one field of the movement of the energies”.⁽¹⁾

Temporary — as it has to be replaced at an optimal point of personal growth by a wholistic principle that can really harmonise the myriad, discordant elements of the human psyche. The ego is too skewed to accomplish this.

Deformative — because it does not reflect the unitary Sachchidananda consciousness. Instead, it reflects the exact opposite of Sachchidananda in earthly existence.

In fact, if the individual ego was not there, conscious individuals could not emerge from “that indeterminate totality general, obscure and formless which we call the subconscious, - *hṛ̥ḍya samudra*, the ocean heart in things of the *Rig Veda*.”

We have the dualities of life and death, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, truth and error, good and evil as the first formations of egoistic consciousness, the natural and inevitable outcome of its attempt to realise unity in an artificial construction of itself exclusive of the total truth, good, life and delight of being in the universe. We have the dissolution of this egoistic construction by the self-opening of the individual to the universe and to God as the means of that supreme fulfillment to which egoistic life is only a prelude even as animal life was only a prelude to the human".⁽²⁾

What do we gain by transcending the ego?

Sri Aurobindo answers "we have the outflowing of the infinite and absolute Existence, Truth, Good and Delight of being on the Many in the world as the divine result towards which the cycles of our evolution move. This is the supreme birth which maternal Nature holds in herself; of this she strives to be delivered".⁽³⁾

The Little Ego

This puppet ego the World-Mother made,
 This little profiteer of Nature's works,
Her trust in his life-tenancy betrayed,
 Makes claim on claim, all debt to her he shirks.
Each movement of our life our ego fills;
 Inwoven in each thread of being's weft,
When most we vaunt our selflessness, it steals
 A sordid part; no corner void is left.
One way lies free, our heart and soul to give,
 Our body and mind to Thee and every cell,
And steeped in Thy world-infinity to live.
 Then lost in light, shall fade the ignoble spell.
Nature, of her rebellion quit, shall be
 A breath of the spirit's vast serenity.⁽⁴⁾

II

Adam and Eve - the Consciousness View

From unity to multiplicity

The Reality that is a triune of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (Sachchidananda) is a UNITY- PRINCIPLE. This principle is self-contained, absolute, beyond space and time and exists regardless of whether the creation subsists or is dissolved.

The very concept of creation implies a manifestation that expresses itself through multiplicity. To express and support this multiplicity, the unitary principle gets dissociated. The three poises of the unitary principle (Existence, Consciousness, Bliss) get DELINKED FROM EACH OTHER. This movement culminates in each poise getting divided and subdivided, albeit endlessly.

Naturally, once initiated, this self-propelled movement of division and subdivision has to go on, till all potentialities, probabilities, possibilities get a chance of being expressed, worked out and fulfilled.

Theoretically, if all possibilities have to be worked out, principles, which appear to have negative connotations, have as equal a chance of getting manifested as principles that appear to be of positive value to the human psyche.

For example, if an accountant of a firm is allowed to develop his accounting skills, he can, per se, also develop skills of manipulation, cheating and dishonesty. If a ruler of a nation is given full freedom of work, he can end up by becoming a merciless dictator.

This is exactly what happens in the play of creation. Originally, the unitary principle manifested in basic modalities, giving rise to

--“Self” as the essence of existence

--Beauty as forms of existence

--Light & Knowledge as essence of consciousness

--Will, Volition as force of consciousness

--Love, Happiness as values of Bliss

--Joy, Ananda, Delight. Peace and Harmony as essence of Bliss

With the multiplicity-principle activated in creation, all these modalities developed also their polar opposites leading to Death, Disharmony, Entropy, Ignorance, Falsehood, Inertia, Pain, Hatred, Suffering, and all these finally sinking into Inconscience.

Thus, the “unitary” Sachchidananda principle gets expressed through a world of dualities.

Sri Aurobindo explains:

THIS IS THE FALL OF MAN TYPIFIED IN THE POETIC PARABLE OF THE HEBREW GENESIS. THAT FALL IS HIS DEVIATION FROM THE FULL AND PURE ACCEPTANCE OF GOD AND HIMSELF, OR RATHER OF GOD IN HIMSELF, INTO A DIVIDING CONSCIOUSNESS WHICH BRINGS WITH IT ALL THE TRAIN OF THE DUALITIES, LIFE AND DEATH, GOOD AND EVIL, JOY AND PAIN, COMPLETENESS AND WANT, THE FRUIT OF A DIVIDED BEING. THIS IS THE FRUIT WHICH ADAM AND EVE, PURUSHA AND PRAKRITI, THE SOUL TEMPTED BY NATURE HAVE EATEN. ⁽⁵⁾

Sri Aurobindo therefore does not examine the parable of Adam and Eve from the standpoint of morality or virtues. He examines it purely from the consciousness perspective and does not draw conclusions from oversimplifications. The fall of Man is the price that has to be paid when the unitary consciousness loosens its cohesiveness in its plunge into the world of multiplicity. Sri Aurobindo is actually more concerned with the technique of redemption.

The redemption

It is agreed in spiritual tradition that the redemption has to be a reconstruction of the unitary principle. One way of doing it is to reject the world of dualities or multiplicity as a falsehood or sin or delusion or Maya while regarding the experiential contact with Sachchidananda as the sole pursuit worth navigating in the realms of consciousness.

But Sri Aurobindo wants to reconstruct the unitary principle in the world of dualities, in the framework of multiplicity, in the matrix of creation. A unity devoid of the multiplicity or a unity that denies the multiplicity is a blank, featureless unity. A unity that includes in its bosom the essence of multiplicity is a vibrant, pulsating, fulfilling, meaningful and creative unity.

Sri Aurobindo answers that the redemption is possible because what we ordinarily consider as the negative attributes have themselves manifested from Sachchidananda:

“If ALL is in truth Sachchidananda, death, suffering, evil, limitation can only be the creations, positive in practical effect, negative in essence, of a distorting consciousness which has fallen from the total and unifying knowledge of itself into some error of division and partial experience....

THE REDEMPTION COMES BY THE RECOVERY OF THE UNIVERSAL IN THE INDIVIDUAL AND OF THE SPIRITUAL TERM IN THE PHYSICAL CONSCIOUSNESS. Then alone the soul in Nature can be allowed to partake of the fruit of the tree of life and be as the Divine and live forever.”⁽⁶⁾

The Life Divine justifies how the discordant elements can be reconciled into the image of the divine Unity. Actually what happens is something more than mere reconciliation, for the discordant elements need to be transfigured into higher terms through a process of transcendence, prior to reconciliation.

“Transcendence transfigures; it does not reconcile, but rather transmutes opposites into something surpassing them that effaces their oppositions.”⁽⁷⁾

The Iron Dictators

I looked for Thee alone, but met my glance
The iron dreadful Four who rule our breath,
Masters of falsehood, Kings of ignorance,
High sovereign Lords of suffering and death.

Whence came these formidable autarchies,
From what inconscient blind Infinity, -
Cold propagandists of a million lies,
Dictators of a world of agony?

Or was it Thou who bor'st the fourfold mask?
Enveloping Thy timeless heart in Time,
Thou hast bound the spirit to its cosmic task,
To find Thee veiled in this tremendous mime.

Thou, only Thou, canst raise the invincible siege,
O Light, O deathless Joy, O rapturous Peace! ⁽⁸⁾

III

Working Through Dualities - the Sensory

The earthly reality is a world of dualities and naturally reflects relativities - happiness and sorrow, knowledge and ignorance, truth and falsehood, good and evil, life and death. In contrast, the Spiritual Reality (called Sachchidananda) has two unique characteristics: (a) It reflects a non-dual 'Unity-Principle'. Existence, Consciousness and Bliss are not additive integers but different poises of the same Reality.

(a) It is a world of superlatives, a world of absolutes - Infinite Existence, Absolute Knowledge and Unconditional Bliss. It is marked by Omnipotence and Omnipresence.

It naturally follows that to create a world of multiplicity, the unity principle loosens its cohesiveness and its different aspects get delinked from each other. The resultant world of multiplicity cannot reflect the unity principle. Its multiplicity asserts itself in such a way that each component of the multiplicity acquires independence, uniqueness, a separative identity, a sort of "individuality". In the case of human beings, this individuality maintains its uniqueness through the instrumentality of the ego. The ego is a principle that tries to strike an optimal balance between the different components that exist within each unique individual. In the manifestation, the ego-centred individuality has lost all memory of the unity-principle of Sachchidananda from which it has been metapsychologically derived in terms of consciousness. This is expected as otherwise, its uniqueness could not develop itself into its fullest potential as a separative entity. If it recovers the true unity-principle, it can immediately lose its separative identity.

Sri Aurobindo is concerned with reconstructing the unity principle in the world of dualities, in the matrix of multiplicity. But he wants to do it in such a way that the multiplicity is not dissolved in the ocean of oneness. He wants to maintain the uniqueness of individual forms while yet establishing the unity-principle that transcends all forms.

It is a challenging option that is worked out in *The Life Divine*.

Perception of Reality – the Sensory Experience

In Chapter VII of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo describes how the ego-centred individuality perceives reality.

In ordinary earthly life, the world of dualities is perceived at two basic experiential levels:

- (a) The level of Sensory Perception
- (b) The level of Reason.

Of course, these perceptions become experiential on being modulated through our ego-centred individuality. As the ego-based experiences do not reflect the non-dual, unitary nature of Reality, they have their inherent limitations. We shall first try to understand the individual sensory experience.

Sensory Perception

Our first contact with the world is through our senses. The moment a newborn emerges from the maternal womb, its sensory system is bombarded from all sides - light, sound, touch, taste and odours. The onslaught is too much and unless the newborn sleeps for long hours, these experiences cannot be assimilated and integrated in his sensory schemata. The baby enjoys the world through the senses. He enjoys the sweetness and warmth of his mother's milk through his senses, he enjoys being rocked and cradled through his senses, and he enjoys being put to sleep by a lullaby through his senses. He learns bowel and bladder control through a series of sensory games. The first game we play with an infant - peep-boo is an intense sensory training - he discovers and rediscovers his mother hid behind the curtain - this instils in him the idea that his mother is permanent. This gives a sense of security and sows the seeds of faith. It also imparts the joy of love. It builds up the sense of adventure.

It is therefore very natural that the perception through the senses establishes a basic and deep impression in the child's psyche. This is so fundamental that even when the child becomes an adult, whatever is conveyed by the senses is usually taken as reliable and full proof.

Limitations of the senses

Spiritual seekers had realised that sensory perception was just one level of experience. There were other levels too. Even Science conforms to this view. The primal perception that the sun moves around the earth is a phenomenon that is pragmatically true while being scientifically false. Even the terms "sunrise" and "sunset" are technically untrue. But they are phenomenally true. We schedule our daylong activities around these two terms and we cannot deny their practical significance.

How do we deal with a phenomenon that is scientifically or rationally false but phenomenally true? WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE ARE MANY LEVELS OF EXPERIENCE AND THE TRUTH-SEEKER HAS TO SIMULTANEOUSLY ACT AT DIFFERENT LEVELS, FOR EACH LEVEL HAS ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE WHOLE.

Take the example of sensory experience vis-à-vis sensual enjoyment. An ordinary person may be so satisfied with sensual enjoyment that fulfils his lust and passion that he may consider the satiation of the senses as the highest pleasure worth pursuing! This is how hedonism prospered. This is also why an entire industry pursuing sensual pleasure dominates the market of consumerism.

A spiritual seeker has a different experience. To him, the senses are not merely meant to fulfil lust. They provide a field and matrix to manifest the

“Divine Bliss”. Or else, unable to tackle the lure of the senses, he may indulge in an ascetic discipline that ignores and deprives the senses.

For an integral seeker of Truth, neither the hedonistic enjoyment of the senses, nor an ascetic impoverishment of the senses can reflect Reality. Rather, he would acknowledge the different levels of experience and venture to experiment whether the Higher Reality that reflects Absolute Bliss can be experienced in a world of dualities. For that, a technology of consciousness has to be worked out.

Surpassing the senses

Indian metaphysical psychology had discovered long back the limitations of the senses. In Sanskrit, the Vedic God ‘Indra’ and the term ‘Indriyas’ used to depict the senses, have the same root of origin. Indra is a great Vedic God and one of his functions is to see that Truth is not distorted by the senses (Indriyas). In His commentary on the *Rig Veda* Verses 1.4, Sri Aurobindo explains:

“The principle which Indra represents is Mind-Power released from the limits and obscurity of the nervous consciousness. It is this enlightened Intelligence which fashions right or perfect forms of thought or of action not deformed by the nervous impulse, not hampered by the falsehoods of sense”.⁽⁹⁾

(The ‘nervous’ consciousness mentioned here is the sensory schemata embedded in the nervous system of the body and not clinical anxiety.)

There are different ways of surpassing the senses:

(a) Harnessing the supra-sensorial levels of experience.

The first of the supra-sensorial levels is REASON, which has already been stabilised in the repertoire of human experience. There are yet other levels of supra-rational levels of experience that surpass Reason and which have been available to mystics, yogis and exceptional individuals. Sri Aurobindo envisages that with a progressive evolution in consciousness, these faculties will be stabilised in a broader way in the human psyche.

(b) We not only have our usual sensory organs but we also have dormant “inner” senses in an “inner” or “subliminal” personality stationed behind our surface being (the surface being is what is studied as personality in psychology). Under exceptional circumstances, we have inklings of these inner senses. Thus during meditation, these inner senses are activated leading to phenomena like visions, hearing church-bells etc. In phenomena like hypnosis, telepathy and clairvoyance, it is the inner senses that are activated. In Sri Aurobindo’s scheme of personal growth, the inner being has to be developed and fused with the surface being.

(c) Our bodily senses can themselves undergo a transformation. Sri Aurobindo describes that the transformed sense will reflect a purer action that cannot be distorted easily; will sub serve a fourth dimensional perspective and will actually be a power of the Spirit. He has developed this concept in

meticulous detail and interested readers can refer to the chapter “The Supramental Sense” in his book -“**The Synthesis of Yoga**”.

Caution

Sri Aurobindo himself is very pragmatic and cautions that a premature surpassing of the senses can lead to a disharmony:

“To enlarge the sense-faculties without the knowledge that would give the old sense-values their right interpretation from the new standpoint might lead to serious disorders and incapacities, might unfit for practical life and for the orderly and disciplined use of the reason.”⁽¹⁰⁾

The Sensuous Mortal

The ordinary human being lives in the meshes of sensual pleasure and sensual suffering. But the mystic and seer aspire that the senses should provide a field for the manifestation of the DIVINE, SACHCHIDANANDA BLISS. In answer to that aspiration, the World Mother consents to give a boon so that the divine ecstasy can manifest in the sensory schemata:

Voice of the sensuous mortal, heart of eternal longing,
Thou who hast lived as in walls, thy soul with thy senses wronging!
But I descend at last. Fickle and terrible, sweet and deceiving,
Poison and nectar one has dispensed to thee, luring thee, leaving.
We two together shall capture the flute and the player relentless.
Son of man, thou hast crowned thy life with the flowers that are scentless,
Chased the delights that wound. But I come and midnight shall sunder.
Lo, I come, and behind me Knowledge descends and with thunder
Filling the spaces Strength, the Angel, bears on his bosom
Joy to thy arms. Thou shalt look on her face like a child’s or a blossom,
Innocent, free as in Eden of old, not afraid of her playing,
When thy desires I have seized and devoured like a lioness preying.
Thou shalt not suffer always nor cry to me lured and forsaken:
I have a snare for his footsteps, I have a chain for him taken.
Come then to Brindavan, soul of the joyous; faster and faster
Follow the dance I shall teach thee with Shyama for slave and for master.
Follow the notes of the flute with a soul aware and exulting;
Trample Delight that submits and crouch to a sweetness insulting.
Then shalt thou know what the dance meant, fathom the song and the singer,
Hear behind thunder its rhymes, touched by lightning thrill to his finger,
Brindavan’s rustle shall understand and Yamuna’s laughter,
Take thy place in the Ras* and thy share of the ecstasy after.⁽¹¹⁾

*The dance-round of Krishna with the cowherdesses in the moonlit groves of Brindavan, type of the dance of Divine Delight with the souls of men liberated in the world of Bliss secret within us.

References:

1. *CWSA* 21-22, p.63
2. *Ibid*, p.64
3. *Ibid*, p.65
4. *CWSA* 02, p.615
5. *CWSA* 21-22, p.56
6. *Ibid*
7. *Ibid*, p.57
8. *CWSA* 02, p.624
9. *CWSA* 15, p.262
10. *CWSA* 21-22, p.58
11. *CWSA* 02, p.491

(to be continued)

The evolving soul, a key concept in Sri Aurobindo's work: Its ramifications for further development of human potential and Indian psychology

Neeltje Huppes

The main title of this presentation is 'the evolving soul, a key concept in Sri Aurobindo's work'. This may cause reactions like, "Isn't the soul eternal, how can it be evolving?" In the endeavour to elucidate this concept of an evolving soul, this paper starts with a short exploration into the concept of evolution.

We all have heard about the Big Bang. Pure materialistic science has been able to explain this physical fact, but not what preceded this phenomenon. We all know about the Darwinian evolution, which registers the development of more and more complicated and increasingly organised living bodies. Chance and survival of the fittest are seen as the main causes in this process. Darwin presents us a physicalistic worldview. Psychologists talk about living beings in terms of matter and consciousness, though they are still quarrelling about the fundamental nature of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo gives us a very coherent vision about what preceded the Big Bang, and a scientific explanation that goes beyond the cleavage between consciousness and matter. He refers to another evolutionary process that is at the basis of all manifestation: the ongoing evolution of consciousness. It seems that in this evolution of consciousness our earth has a special place. Till now scientific research hasn't found in the universe any other planet where human life exists; till now the human being is the highest developed being in the earthly manifestation. It seems human beings, indeed, have been given an important role in furthering this ongoing evolution of consciousness. Later it will be discussed how the evolving soul has an important role in this process.

According to Sri Aurobindo, in conformity with the oldest Indian scriptures, matter was created by the ultimate or supreme consciousness seeking *manifestation*. In order to manifest, supreme or absolute consciousness, starting from the full fluidity of the spirit, created graded planes of being, till it reached the state of manifesting the solid density of matter. Sri Aurobindo calls this the process of Involution. The involution of consciousness is the process in which the Supreme or Absolute *conceals* itself more and more by creating planes of consciousness of increased density, in order to create the density needed for physical manifestation. In each of the planes that were created during the involution, (called typical planes or graded worlds) the absolute or divine consciousness veiled itself increasingly till it was able to produce and manifest the various forms of solid matter. In the solid matter of the stone the ultimate

consciousness is completely veiled in what Sri Aurobindo calls 'an exclusive concentration', in which this absolute consciousness is present in the atom in the movements of a specific number of protons and electrons through which it keeps up that specific form of matter. He continues to explain that in matter the ultimate consciousness is concealed, but the Will of the ultimate consciousness behind this evolutionary process is a gradual unveiling till it reaches a full manifestation of divine life in matter. In other words the evolution or unveiling of consciousness started from the time solid matter manifested.

Perceived from this point of view, Evolution is the process in which the divine consciousness *reveals* itself more and more: here on earth it evolved from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from animal to man. Seen from the perspective of the ongoing evolution of consciousness each of these stages carries a higher level of consciousness, because in each stage the divine has unveiled or revealed itself further, or to say it in another way: is proportionally more present. It is important to realise that the evolution is not the reverse of the involution. The evolution of consciousness takes place in matter and in the process matter changes. This change of matter is not difficult to perceive if we look at the matter of stone (the purely physical plane) and the matter of our body (made up of a combination of the physical, the vital or life plane, and the mental plane).

Sri Aurobindo looks at the earth as a place where a divine life will manifest as the result of this evolution of consciousness in matter. It needs to be emphasised that this way of looking at evolution is different from the Darwinian way. Darwin studied how nature worked to bring forth a more and more organised living body. He observed a part of the physical evolution and explained the progression taking place in living organisms from a materialistic point of view. Sri Aurobindo studied the evolutionary process from a spiritual point of view, starting from before the creation of matter. His vision is that the divine consciousness, in order to manifest itself, created a series of typical planes in which it involved itself increasingly, till it could create the density of matter. This creation of matter, subsequently evolving into living matter, allows for the manifestation of a divine life on earth through the gradual unveiling of consciousness.¹ Therefore evolution or a gradual self-unfolding is the essential movement of the universe and the inherent impulse of all life is towards increased unveiling and self-fulfilment. Thus in Sri Aurobindo's words, "*Consciousness is a reality inherent in existence.*" (Sri Aurobindo, 1991, p.234), because the absolute consciousness created all that exists and is present in all that exists. Since the creation started with the Absolute seeking full manifestation, this unveiling of consciousness takes place through an innate aspiration present in each form of matter, sometimes referred to as "*the secret Will in nature.*"

These two short quotes echo the ancient Indian seers. In India, the science of consciousness, or psychology, started from the inmost experience of the human being. The ancient thinkers of India studied the inner world of consciousness in a

scientific manner. Their findings are the result of centuries of experiment, discovery and testing by experience, continuously refining the tests, outcome and experience, as is done in any scientific endeavour. The Veda and Upanishads have greatly influenced the Indian culture and are often seen as the bedrock of Indian civilisation. If we talk about Indian psychology, we have to study carefully what these scriptures say. Given the fact that so many centuries have passed since this wisdom was recorded in writing, we also have to ask the question if Sri Aurobindo only rephrased this wisdom in terms closer to the mental understanding prevailing now, or, if he added a new dimension to it.

It may be relevant to mention that I am well aware of the existence of various translations and many different, sometimes contradictory commentaries of these ancient texts. It is but natural to base myself on the writings in which I found the deepest resonance and understanding.

The Veda and the Upanishads

The oldest text available to us is the Veda. This text consists of the later recorded illuminations of Truth *seen* or *heard* by the ancient rishis. One of the core concepts of the Veda is the seeking for Truth, a spiritual or inner Truth. *Ritam* is one of the key words of the Veda, "...a truth of ourselves, a truth of things, a truth of the world and of the gods, a truth behind all we are and all that things are." (Sri Aurobindo, 1985, p.9) The psychological process here described is the inner effort that will lead a human being from darkness to light, from a divided being to an integrated being; a process based on the knowledge that there is a (veiled) truth behind the outer appearance of things. In psychological terms, this means that through an inner effort the veils can be lifted and a real self-knowledge and a profounder world-knowledge can be obtained. In the Veda the largest number of hymns is addressed to Agni, the mystic fire. Various functions are ascribed to Agni: it is not just the physical fire, it is also the psychological principle of Will-Force, which is also described as the will in the heart. The whole universe is vibrant with a secret Will-Force (compare Sri Aurobindo's 'innate aspiration'). Agni is also the force of evolution that pushes always forward and is able to break open darker layers of consciousness with the aim to reveal and recover, restore and manifest the light on earth. The process of self-perfection is not just the destruction of darkness but *a recovery and manifestation of the (concealed) Light*. The dynamics of the process are an ascent: the human being invokes a higher perfection, the Supreme, and the answer follows in the form of a descent. If the human being is receptive, the higher power brings about a transference leading to a greater perfection. To achieve this upward transference, one need not leave the world behind; it is known that the rishis themselves lived a complete life.

The core concepts of the Upanishads are closely related to the core concepts of the Veda: *All is Brahman*, and *Soham*, He am I; the One and the Many; *He is within all and He is outside all*. (*Isha Upanishad*) The content of the Upanishads reflects the development of the mind. In many of the treatises, the question of

what is knowledge is taken up, but it is not treated as an abstract intellectual discourse. The Upanishads make a distinction, based on an inner experience of the writer, between just intellectual knowledge and a knowledge that is grasped with the innermost being. More precisely, the Upanishads originate from an integral knowledge — the knowledge that is grasped with the Self, and expressed through the intellect.

During the time the Upanishads were written, mental development was an important part of the human experience, and thus the Upanishads also struggle with the concepts of objective and subjective knowledge. They disclose that though our empirical knowledge is finite, this does not mean that Brahman, the Infinite, is unknowable. The purpose of the Upanishads is to make Brahman truly knowable, and demonstrate at the same time that this knowledge is of a higher type than empirical knowledge. Since the mind, compared to Vedic times, had undergone a significant development, the Upanishads express the spiritual truths less in symbols and images, and more from a philosophical point of view. For this reason the language is nearer to our modern mind than that of the Veda. Yet the Upanishads are not abstract philosophy, but philosophy that is based on a living experience and an inner knowledge that is to be applied in life, that is to be linked with action.

The significance of the post-Vedic period of the Upanishads is that it combined intellect with spirituality, which is a process that arose from the development of the mental man. According to Sri Aurobindo the Upanishads started from the high spiritual data of the Veda and their philosophy and logic were *in service* of explaining the Truth. In India, spiritual experience has always been felt as more true, as a higher authority than the reasoning intelligence; the spiritual truth suffused thought and action (and not the other way around). Here we cannot go in more detail how this dichotomy between spirituality and the reasoning intelligence has come about, especially in the Western world. But the essence is that Indian philosophy has the solution: there need not be a conflict if we take the wide view that the manifestation is made up of graded worlds that are graded levels of consciousness, with each level having its own truth and path to follow, with each manifesting its own level of *becoming*.²

Since Vedic and Upanishadic wisdom is the fruit of centuries of experiment, discovery, and testing by experience, its depth and strength still comes to us when we read it. It is a field of consciousness (*kshetra*) that is still present and can still be contacted. It brings us deeply in contact with the essence of Indian psychology.

Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the ongoing evolution of consciousness

Sri Aurobindo made what he called a Synthesis of Yoga. He started from the deep wisdom of the Veda that states that all existence is shot through with Divine consciousness, that consciousness is involved in matter, and so present in the human being. He calls the Upanishads *the supreme work of the Indian mind* in which the revelation of Truth is not just intellectual but *a spiritual seizing by a*

kind of identification with the object of knowledge. (Sri Aurobindo, 1992, pp.1-3) His major contribution is that he had the vision that the time was ripe for the next stage in the evolution: the possibility of a divine life here on earth.

The fact that a human being is a mental being makes him/her a creature able to observe him/herself. Humans have been granted the gift of self-awareness: in essence this means that they can make choices and, if they want, by conscious effort become one with the Self, the Divine consciousness. There is a great variety in the paths that lead to the Divine, and each path of yoga takes up the endeavour to union in a specific way. Sri Aurobindo's own contribution is to give the scientific background for this urge for oneness. He shows us in unmistakable terms how this supreme consciousness became present in matter — the process of involution — and how, since then, the unveiling or progressive manifestation of the Divine is taking place here on our globe — the process of evolution. Sri Aurobindo has not only given us a scientific explanation of what happened till date, he also articulated a marvellous vision of the future and did an intense sadhana for concretising the possibility of a more harmonious and fulfilled life on earth. He worked for a new development in the ongoing evolution of consciousness, because he *saw* that a higher force than the mental had to come down here on earth, in order to make the full manifestation of a divine life possible. He invoked this higher consciousness in the earth atmosphere and said that this was *a step for which the whole of evolution has been a preparation...* (Sri Aurobindo, 1988, p.1059). He saw that over millions of years the earth and the human instrument had been made ready for receiving this force, and he gave the assurance that the time had come for the first stage of a manifestation here on earth of a divine harmony in a divine perfection. He called this new consciousness 'supra-mental', because it is a force from a typical plane above the mental plane. He explained that for a divine life on earth we need to live from a higher knowledge than the mind is capable of, for the intellect is only noticing a part of the whole; it reasons and divides. In this next stage of the evolution the human mind will not become superfluous, but when plastic enough, our mind will be an instrument for giving expression to this higher knowledge. He refers to this new force also as 'truth-consciousness' because its quality is not distorted by the density needed for creating the mental consciousness or the extreme thickness of matter.

In his major works *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo explained how, through an inner discipline of self-development and self-perfection, human beings can *divinise* all the aspects of human nature. This will take place through a process of transformation. He saw the evolving soul or psychic being as the intermediary and first instrument in the first stage of this transformation. A divine life on earth leads us to the possibility, rather the necessity, of integrating spirituality *in every detail* in our daily life. This development can be summarised with two of his famous phrases: "*All Life is Yoga.*" and "*Yoga is nothing but practical psychology.*"

It means that nothing is excluded and that the time has come to integrate spirituality in all our thoughts, feelings, movements, and actions. We could call this developmental psychology par excellence.

The refusal of life of the ascetics who concentrated on the transcendent divine beyond form; the revolt against gross matter, as the later, medieval, scholars would call it, which dominated Indian spirituality for quite some time — but was not emphasised in the ancient texts — has its place in the evolution of consciousness. Due to this, the psychology of heightening oneself has been worked out in great detail in the Indian tradition. Yet it is important to acknowledge that this is a realisation at the summit of the consciousness while the outer nature remains untouched. Or, to say it in the terminology of Indian psychology, in order to realise the Purusha, Prakriti is left behind and uncared for. It is now time for a reconciliation of matter and spirit. *Soham*, He am I; as the ancient texts told us, can become a living reality and a total experience while living fully in the world.³ We could say that now the time has come to add to the well-developed vertical yoga, a horizontal yoga from the outer nature to the innermost nature of a human being; from the surface consciousness to ever deeper layers of consciousness. (See also endnote 6).

Sri Aurobindo worked continuously to concretise his vision. By calling down in the earthly environment the consciousness of a higher plane than the mental plane, he brought about the first important step for the realization of this divine life. With the supramental consciousness anchored in the earth atmosphere and man being sufficiently developed, we have entered a new stage in the evolution where this higher consciousness will suffuse daily life. According to Sri Aurobindo, evolution is not primarily concentrating anymore on developing new living forms; the prime activity of the evolutionary force is now to *develop new powers of consciousness*. (Sri Aurobindo, 1997, vol.12, p.166).⁴

Further development of the human being

If developing new powers of consciousness is the mandate given to human beings living in the third millennium, how is this to be done? What is the psychological process for this? It can be described as widening, deepening and heightening through self-observation; self-observation will lead to self-awareness, with the possibility to allow the higher powers (*atman*) and the deeper powers (soul and psychic being) to lead the human being to divine or Self-perfection, and allow it to penetrate the society.

...there has been made manifest in Mind its will to develop, to grow in knowledge, to deepen the inner and widen the outer existence, to increase the capacities of the nature. Man has seen that there can be a higher status of consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo, 1988, p.843

...what evolutionary Nature presses for, is an awakening to the knowledge of self, the discovery of self, the manifestation of the self and spirit within us and the release of its self-knowledge, its self-power, its native self-instrumentation. It is, besides, a step for which the whole of evolution has been a preparation...

Sri Aurobindo, 1988, p.1059

The psychic entity

If new processes are to be developed for acquiring ‘new powers of consciousness’, what is the instrumentation for this? The Mother, who was the spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo, has elucidated the role of the psychic being, not only in relation to man, but in relation to all earthly existence.

It is only upon earth that the psychic life begins, and it is just the process by which the Divine has awakened material life to the necessity of rejoining its divine origin. Without the psychic, Matter would never have awakened from its inconscience, it would never have aspired for the life of its origin, the spiritual life.

The Mother, 1972, Vol.4, p.165

The psychic entity is the instrument put forward by the Absolute to awaken and guide us to the *necessity* of coming a full circle, and become divine, even *be* the Divine. The Mother says that without a psychic being, the earth, all matter on earth, including human matter, would not have aspired, would not have urged for a higher life. Sri Aurobindo talks about an “innate aspiration”. One of the beautiful lines of the *Mundaka Upanishad*, where the aspiration is intrinsically transmitted, says, “*He, verily, who knows that Supreme Brahman becomes himself Brahman.*”

A closer look at the psychic being

If the psychic being is so important what then is its role in the process of divinising earthly life? It was already stated that the psychic being is the *intermediary* instrument between the Divine consciousness and the outer consciousness. It should be evident why, until now, this concept has not been in the foreground in the Indian psychology. When we look at the Indian tradition, we find that for centuries its dominant trend was defined by the ascetics, who saw this earth as *maya*, which was felt as a hindrance in reaching oneness with the Transcendent. Through this the balance of spirit and matter as expounded in the Veda was disturbed, and the idea of a progression to a divine perfection here on earth was cast aside. Those wanting to reach perfection concentrated on the *Atman*, on leaving the earthly plane behind, while preparing themselves for a total identification outside the manifested creation. We could call this the ‘up and out’ attitude. It is a process that is related to the *Jivatman* or spirit, which is self-existent above the manifestation. The *Atman* is the instrument for the ascent, it is a vertical process, whereas psychicisation of the surface nature of a human being is related to the soul and is a horizontal process. This implies that ‘spiritual’ and

‘psychic’ are not just the same. The soul (the individual spark of the absolute consciousness within each human being) is hidden deep within a manifested body as a power of the divine consciousness, and psychicism takes place from within starting from the psychic entity. The psychic being gradually develops from a small entity to a full being around the soul, while its action works through the outer nature of mind, life and body. Every time a small part of the surface nature has become fully under the influence this psychic presence, this small entity increases. While spiritualisation comes directly ‘from above’ through a descent of the divine consciousness or force, psychicism comes ‘from deep within’ through the psychic action which is directed by the soul.⁵

The psychic being is related to the soul, but it is not the soul. The soul is our individual elf, each soul is unique yet eternal. The psychic being is the *evolving* soul, which grows around the soul. In other words, the psychic is evolutionary, it goes through a development, it grows. This development starts from a psychic presence or a small entity. This presence is granted to all human beings, it is there in each of us. This entity can develop into an individualised psychic being by its action on our surface nature; changing it from ordinary nature to divine nature. Through self-observation and an aspiration for a life, first influenced, later guided by divine consciousness, a human being can enhance this process. Though the psychic is evolutionary, it is eternal in the sense that its action comes directly from the soul. The psychic entity, which develops around the soul, stays with the soul after the death of the body and takes birth again together with the soul. In this way the psychic develops from birth to birth from an entity to a full being.

The soul and the psychic being are not exactly the same thing, although in essence they are the same. The soul is the divine spark that dwells at the centre of each being; it is identical with its Divine Origin; it is the divine in man. The psychic being is formed progressively around this divine centre, the soul, in the course of innumerable lives in the terrestrial evolution, until the time comes when the psychic being fully formed and wholly awakened, becomes the conscious sheath of the soul around which it is formed. And thus identified with the Divine, it becomes His perfect instrument in the world.

The Mother, 1972, vol. 16, p. 247

How psychic development takes place

We heard that the psychic being is the intermediary between the divine consciousness and the outer consciousness. One could say the psychic is the representative of the soul, which, in order to make its presence manifest, has to work through the imperfection of the outer nature. It is the builder of a new inner life. Its work is to slowly make our mind, our heart and our body listen to it, and manifest it in our thoughts, feelings, movements and actions. When, for example, a little part of our affective domain is fully open and acting in full oneness with our soul or individualised Self, it means that that part has recovered its (divine)

essence. Each time a part of the outer nature is psychised, the psychic has grown a little. It is the aspiration of the psychic presence that makes us yearn for a divine presence in the heart; for true wisdom or true knowledge in the mind, for a conscious body, etc. When the psychic has developed into an individual being it can freely use our human instruments, (mind, heart and body). This process of psychisation goes very slowly if it is left to itself and only dependent on the innate aspiration present in matter, but we human beings have the possibility to co-operate actively, and accelerate this process. Because we have been given a mind we can witness what we are doing, we can observe ourselves consciously and obtain knowledge about who we are. Self-observation is a journey, starting from the outer nature, into the inner and innermost worlds. Self-observation can lead to constant self-awareness. This gives us the power of distinction for a conscious choice for a greater self-perfection in our outer nature, by calling in the soul force.⁶

The psychic being builds the inner life that can manifest the Divine consciousness in the outer nature. Sri Aurobindo gives us beautiful descriptions of what the inner life will look like when our outer instrument is fully psychised. For instance, at present the emotional mind is subjected to be *a hurtling field of joy and grief, love and hatred, wrath, fear, struggle, aspiration, disgust, likes, dislikes, ...* but the real function of the emotional mind is *to mirror the pure love and joy of the soul, and a luminous reaching out to unity with our fellow-creatures*. The real function of the thought-mind is *to observe, understand, judge with dispassionate delight in knowledge and open itself to [higher] messages and illuminations playing upon all that it observes and upon all that is yet hidden from it but must progressively be revealed...* (Sri Aurobindo, 1973, p.336)

Why is the psychic still so latent? We have already pointed out that when one is only interested in union with the transcendent divine, there is no direct need for psychic development which is a horizontal movement concerned with an upward transference of our daily life. There are two other reasons why the psychic is so latent and why it asks effort from us to come into contact with it and help it grow. The first reason is that the psychic itself is evolutionary. We have heard two terms: psychic entity and psychic being. All of us have the psychic presence in us, but because the psychic action is to slowly transmute the outer nature, it starts as a presence and is in the beginning hardly noticed, and so it needs our active consent and conscious effort to discover the psychic element in us, call it in and make the psychic presence grow. The second reason has its base in atavism related to our outer nature. Due to the evolutionary process, the dominating qualities of the (outer) instrument we use for interacting with the world are at present *tamas, rajas, and sattva*. Each of the parts of our outer being is still under the influence of the *law* of the various planes from which our body, our vital being, and our mind originate (see the process of gradual veiling of the supreme consciousness by creating typical planes, called involution of

consciousness). It will take time and sustained endeavour if we want our instrument fully at the service of the divine consciousness, and, through the action of the psychic being, allow the divine consciousness to play fully through these parts. According to Sri Aurobindo, psychicisation is for most human beings a process that comes about over many lives. Yet, a psychic influence can harmonise and enlighten our life long before the completely evolved psychic being has manifested deep within us.

When you have established contact with your psychic being, it is, in effect, definitive. But before this contact is established, you can, in certain circumstances, consciously receive the psychic influence which always produces an illumination in the being and has more or less lasting effects.

The Mother, 1972, vol.16, p.248

How do we recognise the psychic? Sri Aurobindo mentions that the kernel of the psychic nature is *sweetness and light*. This sweetness and light goes together with a quiet strength. It carries a strength that is able to break down all oppositions. Indeed, a developed psychic being generates an unfaltering strength full of sweetness! An indication of an active psychic entity on the mental level is that contact with it points the way to truth, and automatically distinguishes what is true from what is false. The psychic also demands truth in the vital nature and distinguishes the qualitative difference between joy and pleasure. It creates true generosity, which means generosity that does not expect any returns. This is the same for psychic love; this is love that is fully giving, without any expectations; in Sri Aurobindo's words, the psychic insists *on love winged upwards and not tied to the stake of egoistic craving...* (Sri Aurobindo, 1973, p.146). The psychic gives a steadfast inner confidence that is able to bear the shocks of life without being swept off one's feet.

There are many beautiful descriptions of the psychic presence in Sri Aurobindo's writings, but unfortunately, within the limited space available we cannot linger on this any longer. Neither is it possible to mention some of the techniques that stimulate and support psychic development. (see endnote nr.7)

Ramifications for further development of human potential and Indian psychology

At present, we live in a materialistic society and psychological ill health may quite often have as one of its causes the neglect of soul related experiences. Western psychology, which still dominates psychology in India, has mainly dealt with processes concerning only the surface nature. Be it mild or strong signs of disintegration, if psychologists offer only treatment in the outer layers of the human nature, they deprive a client of the best possible solution. A psychology that does not offer the possibility to touch upon the deepest and highest layers of the human being misses the opportunity to bring about true stability and true well-being, for it does not answer the inmost need of man, whereas many clients, during some stage in their treatment, would find fulfilment in discovering answers for their problems when helped to contact a greater depth. It is the

greatness of Indian psychology that it includes the whole range of the human being: the deep individual Self or inmost being, the true being, the inner nature and the outer nature, and it includes also a psychology based on concrete experiences related to the Atman. From the beginning Indian psychology integrated matter and spirit, for it understood that all that exists in this universe is in essence a manifestation of the Supreme. It understood the relation of the One and the Many, of being and becoming, and realised that there are so many paths and so many ways of becoming; so many different stages and grades of development. Though Western psychology has also developed techniques for psychological well-being, there is no doubt that Indian psychology offers a much wider range of reliable methods of enquiry and practical techniques, since it includes the deeper soul/psychic and higher spiritual realities.

Education at present is suffering under a strict uniformity, and on top of this engages itself mainly with the development of a *part* of the human mind, whereas the Indian culture from the beginning had a many sided and graded provision for self-finding and self-development of the inner and the outer instrument of a human being. It understood that humans are marvellously complex and that the process for self-finding and self-development has a variety of paths. This inbuilt variety and tolerance based on profound psychological insight helped in creating the opulence and vibrancy of which so many foreign travellers to India have spoken. What a difference it would make for the individual as well as for the nation when concepts of Indian psychology would be implemented in the educational process. This is not a plea for going back to the *gurukul*, the concepts can be implemented in an educational setting that is in harmony with the developments of our time. As educational psychologists it may be good to ask such questions as how much we can help students to live their lives with meaning. On the basis of this truth we have to look for new content and new teaching-learning procedures that foster outer *and* inner *and* innermost development of students. We have to offer pluriformity in schools and classrooms, so that students can choose in how broad a range, how great a depth or height they want to develop. One of the factors explaining the lack of motivation in students, of which teachers so often complain, may be that in our present educational system students can construe a self-image only with reference to their success in the material world. Education has to a large extent been turned into a race for the highest marks leading to the highest salary in the job market. Yet, many children know from within that they have other qualities that matter, but know that questions related to the inner worlds are neglected, and push the feeling of hollowness to the background by excessive consumerism, encouraged so bluntly by the media.

Sri Aurobindo's psychology adds to the Indian tradition the theory that the earth is a place where a divine life will manifest. Human beings are still evolving and man can exceed himself and participate actively in the new phase that has started in this ongoing evolution, leading to a divine life on earth. He explains

that the evolving soul or psychic being has an important function in this new development. He foresees new possibilities of the human instrument, and he developed techniques for the further development of human potential. In the previous pages we have shown some of the deepest and highest horizons of mankind. Sri Aurobindo's vision will have relevance for years to come. May psychologists recognise it and give it its rightful place, and so doing, be instrumental in furthering the so much needed development of humankind.

Endnotes

¹ Nature laboured for innumerable millions of years to create a material universe of flaming suns and systems; for a lesser but still interminable series of millions she stooped to make this earth a habitable planet. For all that incalculable time she was or seemed busy only with the evolution of Matter; life and mind were kept secret in an apparent non-existence. But the time came when life could manifest, a vibration in the metal, a growing and seeking, a drawing in and a feeling outward in the plant, an instinctive force and sense, a nexus of joy and pain and hunger and emotion and fear and struggle in the animal, — a first organised consciousness, the beginning of the long-planned miracle. Thenceforward she was busy no more exclusively with matter for its own sake, but most with palpitant plasmic matter useful for the expression of life; the evolution of life was now her one intent purpose. And slowly too mind manifested in life, an intensely feeling, a crude thinking and planning vital mind in the animal, but in man the full organisation and apparatus, the developing if yet imperfect mental being, the Manu, the thinking, devising, aspiring, already self-conscious creature. And from that time onward the growth of mind rather than any radical change of life became her shining preoccupation, her wonderful wager. Body appeared to evolve no more; life itself evolved little or only so much in its cycles as would serve to express Mind heightening and widening itself in the living body; an unseen internal evolution was now Nature's great passion and purpose. — Sri Aurobindo, 1997, vol. 12, p. 175

² The gradations of consciousness are universal states not dependent on the outlook of the subjective personality; rather the outlook of the subjective personality is determined by the grade of consciousness in which it is organised according to its typical nature or its evolutionary stage. — Sri Aurobindo, 1991, p.235

³ Sri Aurobindo knew that a full realisation needs all three: the transcendent, the cosmic and the individual realisation of the Divine; (realisation meaning a complete oneness).

⁴ In *Essays Divine and Human* Sri Aurobindo gives a few beautiful descriptions of the process of the evolution of consciousness. (see endnote 1) In the same book he states with certitude that *New living forms may no longer be appearing freely, but this is because it is not, or at least it is not primarily, new living forms that the Force of evolution is now busied with evolving, but new powers of consciousness.* — Sri Aurobindo, 1997, vol.12, p.166

In his major work *The Life Divine* he writes —

In the previous stages of the evolution Nature's first care and effort had to be directed towards a change in the physical organisation, for only so could there be a change of consciousness; this was a necessity imposed by the insufficiency of the force of consciousness already in formation to effect a change in the body. But in man a reversal is possible, indeed inevitable; for it is through his consciousness,

through its transmutation and no longer through a new bodily organism as a first instrumentation that the evolution can and must be effected. —Sri Aurobindo, 1988, p.843-4

⁵ We all are familiar with the image of the lotus coming out of the mud. But if this mud is meant to become divine, it is not only that the mud cannot be forgotten but that the mud has to start shining! The time has come for the full realisation of “*All is Brahman*” and “*Soham, He am I*” proclaimed by the ancient seers. This is our ultimate destiny, and the psychic being has an important role in the process that will lead to this fulfilment. Concentration on a full horizontal realisation does not imply that now the vertical process can be forgotten. In the end, the horizontal as well as the vertical process is needed for a full realisation. We humans have the stages of the evolution in us. The parts and planes of our being are manifestations of these stages, for instance, our body belongs to the plane of matter; our mind belongs to the mental plane. We saw how during the process of involution the different planes of consciousness were created. Sri Aurobindo talks about these planes as the graded worlds, each of them having its own level of consciousness with its own laws. After the involution, the evolution progresses through the manifestation from plane to plane, and in this process the level of embodied consciousness becomes higher because more of the divine consciousness is unveiled. In this way we can talk about a vertical map of the being, a (vertical) ladder of consciousness which links the inconscient, which is fully unconscious, to the Atman, fully Divine.

Here is a horizontal map of our being, which can be visualised as a sphere with concentric layers from the outer surface to the inmost core.

Horizontal map of our being			
Outer being	Inner being	True being	Inmost being or central being
<input type="checkbox"/> Physical <input type="checkbox"/> Vital <input type="checkbox"/> Mental	<input type="checkbox"/> Inner physical <input type="checkbox"/> Inner vital <input type="checkbox"/> Inner mental	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical purusha <input type="checkbox"/> Vital purusha <input type="checkbox"/> Mental purusha	Soul/psychic being; atman
Within one life instrument interacting with world without atavism	Influence from true being and outer being	Directly open to knowledge from above	<input type="checkbox"/> Psychic being goes through birth/death; <input type="checkbox"/> Evolves from entity to full Being; <input type="checkbox"/> Atman is eternal, presides without getting involved
Each human being is endowed with these different levels and forms of consciousness. During the day we shift our centre of identification very often, for example from our surface nature to our inner nature and back. Many people leave parts of this map unexplored and do not live their full potential.			

⁶ In the limited space available it is not possible to give an overview of the details of some of the techniques of this process of active co-operation. See for an overview Part 1 in Huppes, N. (2001). *Psychic Education, a Workbook*. New Delhi: SAES

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One Mind, Two Doors – Part 2

Subjectivity and Objectivity in the Philosophies of Sri Aurobindo and Mou Zongsan

Richard Hartz

The Two-Tier Mind

Mou Zongsan, as we have seen, says of Chinese culture that it has “taken the subjective approach, and has opened the subjective door” (Mou 2019: 467–68). With this image, he is evidently alluding to a phrase he frequently cites, “one mind opens two doors” (*yī xīn kāi èr mén* 一心開二門), derived from a commentary on a sixth-century Chinese Buddhist text, *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*. In its original context, Mou explains, “one mind” refers here to the “True and Ever-Abiding Mind” of certain schools of Buddhism; the two doors are the “door of True Suchness” and the “door of arising and cessation” (323).⁴ In his hands, however, this formula sheds the sectarianism of its Buddhist origins and acquires a larger relevance.⁵ It becomes “a universal, commonly shared paradigm which can be applied to the three doctrines of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, and can even subsume Kant’s system” (330).

In Mou’s comparative interpretation, “Kant’s distinction of noumena and phenomena is strictly speaking one mind opening two doors. But Kant... cannot fully open the two doors” (Mou 2019: 113). To remedy this deficiency, Mou believes, Kant needs help from the East – just as, for other reasons, the East can also use some help from Kant. Opening the noumenal door would enable us to know “things in themselves”; otherwise we are confined to the realm of appearances. We can have this kind of knowledge only by means of what Kant calls “intellectual intuition” (*intellektuelle Anschauung*), as opposed to the “sensible intuition” by which we experience phenomena. But Kant denies intellectual intuition to human beings, reserving it for a hypothetical God. As Mou puts it:

According to Kant’s philosophy, “free will,” “soul,” and “God,” while having reality in practical reason, are still “postulates,” which cannot be reached by our knowledge. Their reality belongs to practice and not to theoretical knowledge. For we do not have intuition of these ideas, making it impossible for these ideas to “present themselves.” Kant’s problem lay in the fact that although he stressed man’s practical reason, he did not affirm that man possessed intellectual intuition. (Mou 2019:331)

By refusing to admit our capacity for intellectual intuition, Kant imposes what Mou regards as an unnecessary and unacceptable limitation on our human

potential, contrary to the age-long Chinese aspiration and endeavour toward sagehood.⁶ The recognition of our ability to cultivate such a faculty is for him a central feature of Chinese philosophy and culture, on which its distinctive contributions to world civilisation depend.

The “two-tier mind” framework summed up in the expression “one mind opens two doors” is the key to Mou Zongsan’s synthesis of Chinese systems of thought as well as to his critical engagement with Western philosophy. Serina Chan observes:

Mou thinks that the “two-tier mind” paradigm is of crucial importance because it provides the transcendental basis for cultivating the divinity present in every human being. Divinity refers to the innate potential of every human being to become a sage (in the context of Confucianism), a Buddha (in the context of Buddhism), or a divine being (in the context of Daoism). The paradigm also brings out what Mou sees as an important theme underlying the three main traditions of Chinese thought – the unity of the transcendent (the objective heaven) and the immanent (the subjective true mind of human beings). This theme represents, in his opinion, the most fundamental difference between Chinese culture and Western culture. (Chan 2003:138)

While such ideas distinguish Chinese thought-traditions from mainstream Western thought, at the same time they show affinities between the philosophies and cultures of China and India. These can be explained only partially by the Indian origins of Buddhism. In China, the phrase “one mind opens two doors” was coined by Buddhists, but the epistemological position it represents can be traced to pre-Buddhist times. In India, a similar “epistemology of enlightenment” underlies a wide range of philosophies and disciplines, including some more ancient than Buddhism.⁷

Intuition and Things in Themselves

Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy explores the complementary relationship, succinctly enunciated in the *Isha Upanishad*,⁸ between *vidyā*, “the Knowledge of the Oneness,” and *avidyā*, “the Ignorance,” defined as “the relative and multiple consciousness.” Both are necessary for the fullness of our existence, since “even Unity has to make its account with Multiplicity” (Sri Aurobindo 2005:39). Normally, however, we live exclusively in *avidyā*. In this state, the mind using its tools of analysis and synthesis “discovers the phenomenon, but misses the reality; it knows things as objects but knows nothing about things in themselves. Reality is beyond its grasp, it is only sure about the appearance” (Sri Aurobindo 1997a:234). Yet the mind’s “power for ignorance” is not the whole story:

Mind has a power also for truth; it opens its thought-chamber to Vidya as well as to Avidya, and if its starting-point is Ignorance, if its passage is through crooked ways of error, still its goal is always Knowledge.... Even if it is only images or representations or abstract expressions of truth that it can show us, still these are in their own manner truth-reflections or truth-

formations, and the realities of which they are forms are present in their more concrete truth in some deeper depth or on some higher level of power of our consciousness. (Sri Aurobindo 2005:514)

It is by turning our sight inward that we have the best chance of coming into direct contact with these deeper realities, for “in the phenomenon of self-awareness or behind it, we get sometimes a glimpse of... something that we vaguely perceive or imagine that we are... beyond all change and formation and action”:

Here is the one door in us that sometimes swings open upon the splendour of a truth beyond and, before it shuts again, allows a ray to touch us, – a luminous intimation which, if we have the strength and firmness, we may hold to in our faith and make a starting-point for another play of consciousness than that of the sense-mind, for the play of Intuition. (Sri Aurobindo 2005:73)

This is evidently the “door” which, in Mou Zongsan’s account of Western philosophy, Kant stumbled upon but was unable to open fully. Sri Aurobindo, unlike his Chinese contemporary, hardly ever mentions Kant by name. We learn from an autobiographical note that in his student days in England he had attempted unsuccessfully to read a translation of Kant and never tried again.⁹ Philosophy, in any case, does not seem to have interested him much at the time. By his own account, what little he knew about it – with a few exceptions such as Plato, some of whose dialogues he read in Greek and appreciated as literature – was only what he had “picked up desultorily” in his general reading (Sri Aurobindo 2004a:522, 2006:112). But given the breadth of his reading and his ability to put it to creative use in his own thinking, it would be a mistake to underestimate what he could have absorbed in this manner. Later in India, when after a few years of intensive spiritual practice the “latent” philosopher in him “burst out like a volcano” (Sri Aurobindo 2011:63), we often find him engaged in a dialogue with post-Kantian Western thought. His references to European thinkers are rarely explicit, except in the case of Nietzsche (and, in antiquity, Heraclitus). But Kantian allusions are sometimes unmistakable, as when he writes:

The pure Reason... looking in its own colourless and austere light at Time and Space points out that these two are categories of our consciousness, conditions under which we arrange our perception of phenomenon. When we look at existence in itself, Time and Space disappear.¹⁰ (Sri Aurobindo 2005:81)

Sri Aurobindo’s assessment of the limitations of pure reason substantially agrees with Kant’s, despite differences in terminology. “Every concept,” he points out, “is incomplete for us and to a part of our nature almost unreal until it becomes an experience” (Sri Aurobindo 2005:67). For Kant, likewise, “thoughts without content are empty.” Thus, Kant continues, it is “necessary to make the mind’s concepts sensible (i.e., to add an object to them in intuition)” (Kant 1998:193-94). Sri Aurobindo agrees, but with a different understanding of

intuition. The faculty that gives immediate representations of things is limited by Kant to “sensible intuition,” which presents only appearances. Sri Aurobindo – like Mou Zongsan – affirms what Kant denies, namely, our capacity for another kind of intuition which has direct access to things in themselves.

Sri Aurobindo’s analysis of our ordinary cognition has similarities to Kant’s. We start with raw sense evidence from which “if that were the whole machinery, we could know little or nothing or only achieve a great blur of confusion.”¹¹ Through a series of intermediate steps involving a “sense-mind intuition” and an “intuition of the perceptive mind,” we arrive at an “intuitional interpretative construction of the object” on which reason can work (Sri Aurobindo 2005:547-48). Kant also supposes that the apprehension of objects with which we begin would, by itself, “only give us an indeterminate intuition of a multiplicity of ‘items’ in space and time” (Pinkard 2002:28). For Kant, however, once we have gone through the steps required to unify this sensory multiplicity and impose on it a regularity that allows us to make judgments about it, we know all that we can know. For Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, this rather clumsy and inconclusive process represents only an initial stage in our growth out of an original ignorance. The key to the door of a truer knowledge is the emergence, not of an infrarational, but of a suprarational intuition.

Overcoming Otherness

The intuition that opens a door upon things in themselves is identified by Mou Zongsan with the “enlightenment of the Subject.” He was worried that this faculty might disappear from Chinese culture if the subjective door is closed by the Westernisation of thought in the name of science and modernity:

An objectified Subject is no longer the Subject but an object.... Once objectified, the significance of the Subject is lost.... When the Subject is objectified, the enlightenment of the Subject turns into the discursive understanding we obtain in our scientific pursuits.... Therefore in order to preserve this enlightenment, we must re-establish the Subject as the Subject. In other words, we must treat humans as humans, not as objects or things. As humans, the Subject can be preserved, and the enlightenment issued from the Subject can truly shine. This true enlightenment issued from the Subject is what Wang Yangming called *liangzhi*. (Mou 2015b: 30–31)

Liángzhī (良知), literally “good knowing,” has been variously translated. Wing-tsit Chan’s rendering, “innate knowledge of the good” (Chan 1969: 661), balances its cognitive and ethical implications. The term is central to the teaching of the influential Neo-Confucian master, Wang Yangming (1472-1529), though he did not invent it. From a comparative perspective, Mou connects *liángzhī* with Kant’s practical reason. It involves an “illumination,” however, for which Kant recognises no equivalent:

He [Kant] could, through practical reason, bring out the subject, and treat the person as person. Thus Kant always said you must treat the person as end,

not as means. To treat the person as end is to restore the person as the subject; only then can illumination present itself. Hence at this juncture Kant did not talk about theoretical reason but instead wanted to talk about practical reason. In Chinese terms, this practical reason is none other than liangzhi. (Mou 2019: 28)

The nature of the illumination of liángzhī is clarified in a passage in Mou Zongsan's *Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy*:

Perfect and direct apprehension does not manifest itself within the relation between a subject and an object, and does not have a determinate “thing” as its object; in this way, the intuiting subject becomes aware that it is itself in turn not limited by any particular thing.... It has transcended the relational form of subject and object and has absorbed the oppositional characteristics of subjectivity and objectivity.... Therefore, in knowing everything, knowledge in perfect apprehension really “knows” nothing at all. Nevertheless, within the complete clarity of direct apprehension all things are fully illuminated. (Van den Stock 2016: 318)

Knowledge that “has transcended the relational form of subject and object” is what Sri Aurobindo calls “knowledge by identity.” It is from this “cognitive method” that, in his epistemology, the possibility of any knowledge whatsoever ultimately derives (Sri Aurobindo 2005:543-44). But knowledge by identity manifests most directly in the faculty for which he ordinarily reserves the word “intuition.” In this sense, his understanding of intuition can be compared with that of Henri Bergson, who in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* distinguishes between “two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing”:

The first implies that we move round the object; the second that we enter into it. The first depends on the point of view at which we are placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves. The second neither depends on a point of view nor relies on any symbol. The first kind of knowledge may be said to stop at the relative; the second, in those cases where it is possible, to attain the absolute. (Bergson 1912:1)¹²

In the Indian tradition, we find knowledge by identity described as far back as the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (4.5.15,7):

Where there is duality, there other sees other, other hears, touches, thinks of, knows other. But when one sees all as the Self, by what shall one know it? it is by the Self that one knows all this that is.... All betrays him who sees all elsewhere than in the Self; for all this that is is the Brahman, all beings and all this that is are this Self. (Sri Aurobindo 2005:543)¹³

The possibility of a knowledge that does not “betray” us depends, therefore, on whether a practical way can be found to overcome the sense of duality that seems to be built into our consciousness. For this purpose, the Yoga of Knowledge (*jñānayoga*) resorts to a heightening of the power of concentration:

“By concentration on anything whatsoever we are able to know that thing, to make it deliver up its concealed secrets; we must use this power to know not things, but the one Thing-in-itself” (Sri Aurobindo 1999:318).

Inner Sagehood and Outer Kingliness

Supposing we are able, by Yogic concentration or other means, to open the door that admits us to the noumenal realm, how will this affect our relationship to the realm of phenomena? An answer that has often been given is that if we seriously want to enter into a higher reality and live in that consciousness, we must close the door as far as possible on the appearances of this world. Plotinus's "flight of the alone to the Alone" (Louth 1999: 51) represents an ideal of individual spiritual salvation or liberation which has counterparts in many venerable traditions, Western as well as Eastern.

But there are other ways of seeing the relationship between *vidyā* and *avidyā*, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, the One and the Many. The *Isha Upanishad* warns pointedly against pursuing *vidyā* to the exclusion of *avidyā*: "Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone" (Sri Aurobindo 2003:8). In the latter case, Sri Aurobindo comments, we risk becoming "as men blinded by a light so that we can no longer see the field which that light illumines" (Sri Aurobindo 2005:40). But the true and integral knowledge, as the Upanishad insists, is to know "That [brahman] as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance" (Sri Aurobindo 2003:8).

The "ideal of the Vedic sages," Sri Aurobindo observes, was "Swarajya and Samrajya... rule of our inner being and mastery of our environment and circumstances" (Sri Aurobindo 1998b:533). Through a progressive self-mastery, we overcome the hold of the separative ignorance (*avidyā*) on our own nature and consciousness and grow into the knowledge of oneness (*vidyā*). This individual mastery and enlightenment can then be extended to a transformative action and influence on all around us, assisting others in their growth towards a similar condition. Differently stated, "those who live most powerfully in themselves, can also... most successfully help the world and enrich it out of their own being." It follows that the one "who most finds and lives from the inner self, can most embrace the universal and become one with it; the Swarat, independent, self-possessed and self-ruler, can most be the Samrat, possessor and shaper of the world in which he lives, can most too grow one with all in the Atman [universal Self]" (Sri Aurobindo 2004b:49). This was "the double aim proposed to itself by the positive Yoga of the ancients" (Sri Aurobindo 2005:19).

Chinese culture arrived at an analogous conception of a double aim of our spiritual fulfilment. This was summed up in the often cited formulation, "inner sageliness – outer kingliness." As Jason Clower (Mou 2014: 103n34) points out, the phrase derives originally from the Daoist Zhuangzi, which speaks of "the way of being inwardly a sage and outwardly a king" (*nèishèng wàiwáng zhī dào* 內聖外王之道). The idea was later taken up by the Neo-Confucians to express their view of the right relation between inner self-cultivation and external action. In the twentieth century, when the institutions associated with kingship itself had

disappeared from China, the formula of “inner sageliness – outer kingliness” was revived and reinterpreted by the New Confucians. Under the changed circumstances of the age, they saw the potential of modernisation itself, in conjunction with the renovation of Confucian ethical-spiritual idealism, “as a process of extending ‘sageliness within’ to ‘kingliness without’ ” (Yao 2000:269).

While a balance between subjective “sageliness” and objective “kingliness” had been theoretically recognised in the Confucian tradition since ancient times, Mou Zongsan regarded even “Song-Ming Confucianism” (i.e., the Neo-Confucianism of the eleventh to early seventeenth centuries) as for practical purposes “only a preliminary synthesis slanted toward inner sageliness” (Mou 2014:179). For the further development of Chinese civilisation, he envisioned a “great synthesis” which must first of all “tap into the main artery of the millennia-long life of Chinese culture.” At the same time, the allegedly one-sided emphasis on the subjective at the expense of the objective must be corrected with the help of “a merging with Western cultural tradition” (80). The objective side of this synthesis, as Angle points out, was translated in Mou’s thinking into “the need for Confucianism to develop a new political philosophy and political practice – what he called a ‘*xin wai wang*,’ literally ‘new outer kingship,’ which can more loosely be rendered as ‘new politics’ – that would better enable the realisation of ‘inner sagehood (*nei sheng*)’” (Angle 2012:10).

Towards a Republic of Sages

Both Sri Aurobindo and Mou Zongsan made substantial contributions to political philosophy, whose inclusion in discussions of political theory could enhance the claims of this field to global relevance. A comparative study of this aspect of their thought would be beyond the scope of this essay.¹⁴ But what is striking in both cases is the manner in which these thinkers provide fundamentally Eastern philosophical rationales for political concepts, such as democracy, that are usually linked to ideologies and institutions of Western civilisation in ways that can hinder their acceptance elsewhere. Thus their work could be used to facilitate the emergence of a global consensus on norms transcending cultural boundaries.¹⁵

The ultimate purpose of politics, from the standpoint of Asian philosophies of self-cultivation, would be to create objective conditions favourable to a type of subjective realisation that can be summed up in the word “sagehood.” The figure of the sage has been central, in various forms, to the cultures of both China and India. The sages of the past lived mostly in hierarchical societies with aristocratic or monarchical political institutions. But in China, the notion that “the people filling the street are all sages” – or at least have a potential for sagehood – is attributed to Wang Yangming, indicating an incipient democratisation of the Confucian ideal in pre-modern times (Angle 2009:19). In India, likewise, so influential a text as the *Bhagavad Gita* (9.32) declares the highest spiritual state to be accessible to all.

The key innovation of modern Asian thought in this connection lies in drawing the logical conclusion that political arrangements can and should be designed specifically to enable and encourage the aims and methods of universal self-cultivation which Eastern traditions have long recognised in principle. What is new is the clear perception that growth cannot be passive and that therefore “the never-ending process of striving for sagehood,” as Stephen Angle puts it, “requires a participatory politics” (Angle 2009: 210). This conception of sagehood does not point towards a withdrawal into introspective contemplation, but indicates a dynamic state “in which one perceives and responds to all opportunities to fulfil the nascent, life-affirming harmony of the universe” (Angle 2012: 65). Thus the mantra of “inner sageliness – outer kingliness” might be realised in a way and on a scale that was never possible under past conditions. By self-cultivation all could grow towards sagehood, while by political participation each would be, in a sense, a king.

Asian cultures have been assimilating for some time the influences that inundated them from the West when Europe was at the height of its power. Arguing against exaggerated fears of Westernisation, Sri Aurobindo spoke of India’s need to deal creatively “with great effective ideas, such as are the ideas, in the external field of life, of social and political liberty, equality, democracy.” What is essential in these ideas should, he felt, be accepted and assimilated

“not because they are modern or European, which is in itself no recommendation, but because they are human, because they present fruitful viewpoints to the spirit, because they are things of the greatest importance in the future development of the life of man” (Sri Aurobindo 2004b:47).

Asia, too, has its “great effective ideas,” such as the ideal of sagehood and related concepts pertaining to a larger view of human possibilities. These could play a role in humanity’s future at least as fruitful as the complementary ideas contributed by the West. Though connected more obviously with our inner life than with our outer existence, the “intensional” truths to which we can gain access by opening the subjective door could be the keys to the possibility of an integral transformation of our world. One might expect to see them recovered and newly applied in Asia first and foremost, but they recommend themselves to the consideration of thoughtful human beings everywhere. For those who wish to explore these ideas in depth, the works of Sri Aurobindo and Mou Zongsan are indispensable resources.

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Notes

⁴Although when he speaks of Chinese culture opening the “subjective door,” Mou presumably has in mind the Buddhist image of the two doors to which he repeatedly refers, the subjective door cannot be identified precisely with the “door of True Suchness” or its counterparts in other systems. The opening of the subjective door could perhaps be seen as a condition for the possibility of opening a further door through which we can pass from appearances to things in themselves.

⁵Mou Zongsan had the highest respect for the work of Buddhist philosophers, though he disagreed with their conclusions on certain fundamental points. Clower (2010) shows in detail how Mou made extensive use of the Buddhist branch of the Chinese philosophical tradition in constructing the framework for his New Confucianism.

⁶Mihaela Fisticoc has tried to reconcile the positions of Kant and Mou Zongsan on the issue of our capacity for intellectual intuition. Using the term “intuitive understanding” [*intuitiver Verstand*] which Kant adopts in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to designate the faculty he reserves for God, she points out that the discursive understanding possessed by human beings, in Kant’s view, “imitates an intuitive one.... While Kant does indeed claim that human beings have only a discursive understanding, he also characterises such a discursive understanding as attempting to approximate an intuitive one” (Fisticoc 585–86).

⁷Using the word “enlightenment” in the sense of *bodhi* in Buddhism and its equivalents in other systems, Richard King contrasts the “epistemologies of enlightenment” found in several Asian traditions with typically Western “epistemologies of limitation” which “restrict the potential of human beings to achieve some form of unmediated awareness.” Modern versions of the latter, especially as represented by “the Kantian position and its post-Enlightenment successors,” reflect according to him “the sociocultural and political changes that have occurred in the West since the Enlightenment and thus remain peculiarly Eurocentric in orientation” (King 1999:178–79,182).

⁸Sri Aurobindo's monumental philosophical treatise, *The Life Divine*, grew out of a series of unfinished commentaries – also entitled “*The Life Divine*” – on the eighteen verses of the **Isha Upanishad** (Sri Aurobindo 2003:361–590).

⁹Mou Zongsan himself, who in later life translated all three of Kant's *Critiques* into Chinese (from English), admitted that as a student when he “read Plato and Aristotle, or Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, instead of affinity and connection there was a barrier, a gap, which my mind couldn't yet overcome. With Kant and Hegel the gap seemed wider still” (Mou 2015a: 58).

¹⁰Sri Aurobindo's sentence can be compared with Kant's statement that “if we remove our own subject or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, then all the constitution, all relations of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves would disappear” (Kant 1998: 168).

¹¹It is not unlikely that Sri Aurobindo, who had read William James's *Principles of Psychology* (Sri Aurobindo 2004a:526), is alluding with the phrase “great blur of confusion” to a well-known sentence in that book: “The baby, assailed by eyes, ears, nose, skin, and entrails at once, feels it all as one great blooming, buzzing confusion” (James 1890: 488).

¹²A paraphrase of the first and last sentences of this quotation from Bergson is found among fragmentary jottings in a notebook used by Sri Aurobindo around 1942, after his major philosophical writings had been published (Sri Aurobindo 1997a:257).

¹³In the context of another Asian tradition, Muhammad Iqbal writes of the “Ultimate Self” that to it “the not-self does not present itself as a confronting ‘other’, or else it would have to be, like our finite self, in spatial relation with the confronting ‘other’” (Iqbal 2013:45). Like Sri Aurobindo, Iqbal stresses the need to develop intuition as well as intellect:

“Nor is there any reason to suppose that thought and intuition are essentially opposed to each other. They spring up from the same root and complement each other. The one grasps Reality piecemeal, the other grasps it in its wholeness. The one fixes its gaze on the eternal, the other on the temporal aspect of Reality.... Both are in need of each other for mutual rejuvenation. Both seek visions of the same Reality which reveals itself to them in accordance with their function in life. In fact, intuition, as Bergson rightly says, is only a higher kind of intellect” (2).

¹⁴See Hartz (2021) for an exploration of Sri Aurobindo's political philosophy which refers to Mou Zongsan and New Confucianism in the sections on “Democracy and Asian Values” and “Participation, Growth and Harmony” (40-43).

¹⁵In *Doing Philosophy Comparatively*, Tim Connolly discusses four main approaches to comparative philosophy. One of these is the “consensus approach,” whose “goal is to establish a set of norms shared by multiple traditions while at the same time allowing for diversity of acceptable philosophical foundations for these norms.” The aim “is to achieve a more stable global society, one in which incommensurable philosophical foundations are no barrier to agreement on the essentials of human conduct” (Connolly 2015:178).

(concluded)

The Fourfold Order of Knowledge in Sri Aurobindo's Epistemology

Martha Orton

Sri Aurobindo's conceptualisation of knowledge differs significantly from what is ordinarily meant by the term. This becomes evident when we consider that he emphasises that knowledge in its truest and highest form is spiritual knowledge. This includes an immense span of spiritual growth and realisation progressing through various levels of consciousness ascending to the supramental realisation. Sri Aurobindo's view of knowledge is also exceptionally broad, for we have seen that he regards ignorance as merely partial or incomplete knowledge. Sri Aurobindo explains that the manner and means, and especially the level of consciousness, by which human beings access knowledge determine the kinds of knowledge we acquire. In broad terms, knowledge derived from the surface mind is partial and limited, while that derived from the inner reality of the self is true knowledge. Sri Aurobindo further clarifies this by defining four categories of knowledge. Through examining these, one can better grasp not only the nature of knowledge, but also the nature and limitations associated with the various levels of knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo sets the context for understanding his detailed conceptualisation of knowledge and lays out the categories in the following statement:

Our surface cognition, our limited and restricted mental way of looking at our self, at our inner movements and at the world outside us and its objects and happenings, is so constituted that it derives in different degrees from a fourfold order of knowledge. The original and fundamental way of knowing, native to the occult self in things, is a knowledge by identity; the second, derivative, is a knowledge by direct contact associated at its roots with a secret knowledge by identity or starting from it, but actually separated from its source and therefore powerful but incomplete in its cognition; the third is a knowledge by separation from the object of observation, but still with a direct contact as its support or even a partial identity; the fourth is a completely separative knowledge which relies on a machinery of indirect contact, a knowledge by acquisition which is yet, without being conscious of it, a rendering or bringing up of the contents of a pre-existent inner awareness and knowledge. A knowledge by identity, a knowledge by intimate direct contact, a knowledge by separative direct contact, a wholly separative knowledge by indirect contact are the four cognitive methods of Nature.¹

These categories can be seen as expressive of Sri Aurobindo's view of true knowledge as the realisation of knowledge in oneness, since its highest form, knowledge by identity, represents a union with that which is known, a direct and complete intimacy of identification. From this point onwards, some degree of distance is introduced, where there is direct contact with that which is known, but the knower does not actually identify with it. Then separation comes in, though there is direct contact and possibly some degree of identity. Finally the separation between the knower and that which is to be known is definite, the sense of separation having increased and become complete, as there is only indirect contact.

One sees that knowledge moves from the closeness of identity at one end of the spectrum to the distance of separation without direct contact at the other, reinforcing the understanding that true knowledge is attained in oneness, union with that which is to be known, and that separation connotes ignorance. This also relates to the assertion of the Vedas, as explained by Sri Aurobindo, that the reality of existence is the oneness of Sachchidananda and that the realisation of union in Sachchidananda is the goal of existence. For if true knowledge is achieved through identification with that which is to be known, it follows that humanity's goal in seeking knowledge is the return to the oneness of existence, the realisation of Sachchidananda.

In explaining the four categories of knowledge, Sri Aurobindo begins with describing knowledge in its truest and highest form. Then, with each step away from identity, away from union of the knower and the known, he describes the decline in knowledge as it moves further to ignorance or partial knowledge.

Knowledge by Identity

Sri Aurobindo helps us understand knowledge by identity by first explaining how human beings experience it in the surface mind. He writes:

The first way of knowing in its purest form is illustrated in the surface mind only by our direct awareness of our own essential existence: it is a knowledge empty of any other content than the pure fact of self and being; of nothing else in the world has our surface mind the same kind of awareness. But in the knowledge of the structure and movements of our subjective consciousness some element of awareness by identity does enter; for we can project ourselves with a certain identification into these movements.²

He also describes human beings as being able to have a conscious subjective awareness of identification, as in the instance of strong emotions which seem to take over the being, giving the following examples:

“...an uprush of wrath which swallows us up so that for the moment our whole consciousness seems to be a wave of anger: other passions, love, grief, joy have the same power to seize and occupy us; thought also absorbs and occupies, we lose sight of the thinker and become the thought and the thinking.”³

From these examples one can understand that it is quite common for human beings to have the experience of knowledge by identity in the surface mind and also to grasp the fullness and completeness which characterises this form of knowledge, even though our experience of it may have come in short bursts and not be experienced over extended periods of time. We can also begin to project the differences between this kind of experience and other mental awareness and consider the significance of the difference. This is especially meaningful when we begin to contrast the completeness of knowledge by identity with the other categories.

Most importantly, however, knowledge by identity has a role beyond its action in the surface mind and embodies a oneness of the knower with the known which consequently has great spiritual significance. It is knowledge by identity that enables the universalisation of the self in the experience and attainment of the cosmic consciousness and, ultimately, the realisation of the truth-consciousness.

Knowledge by Intimate Direct Contact

Knowledge by intimate direct contact occurs in a slight movement away from knowledge by identity, as some subjective observation occurs in the awareness of identity and then moves away from full identification. Sri Aurobindo explains the movement which occurs as follows:

But very ordinarily there is a double movement; a part of ourselves becomes the thought or the passion, another part of us either accompanies it with a certain adherence or follows it closely and knows it by an intimate direct contact which falls short of identification or entire self-oblivion in the movement.

This identification is possible, and also this simultaneous separation and partial identification, because these things are becomings of our being, determinations of our mind stuff and mind energy, of our life stuff and life energy; but, since they are only a small part of us, we are not bound to be identified and occupied, — we can detach ourselves, separate the being from its temporary becoming, observe it, control it, sanction or prevent its manifestation: we can, in this way, by an inner detachment, a mental or spiritual separateness, partially or even fundamentally liberate ourselves from the control of mind nature or vital nature over the being and assume the position of the witness, knower and ruler. Thus we have a double knowledge of the subjective movement: there is an intimate knowledge, by identity, of its stuff and its force of action, more intimate than we could have by any entirely separative and objective knowledge such as we get of things outside us, things that are to us altogether not-self; there is at the same time a knowledge by detached observation, detached but with a power of direct contact, which frees us from engrossment by the Nature-energy and enables us to relate the movement to the rest of our own existence and world existence.⁴

From this statement, we can derive a sense of how knowledge by intimate direct contact comes to be and how it also relates to our functioning in life. As Sri Aurobindo explains, referring to it as "double knowledge," it constitutes a powerful level of knowledge, potentially both of oneself and of the exterior manifestation, and a sufficient degree of detachment for human beings to free themselves from subjection to the mind or vital. The detachment allows the assumption of the witness poise, with the freedom which this implies, offering opportunity for freer and truer expression of the self within. These virtues of knowledge by intimate direct contact are necessarily regarded in contrast to the lower forms of knowledge which follow and, as will be seen further in discussing the spiritual aspects of knowledge by identity, they are subordinate to its higher capacities.

Knowledge by Separative Direct Contact

In describing the workings of our cognition, Sri Aurobindo explains that separative knowledge is dependent on knowledge by identity and knowledge by direct contact and that the three come together in "our subjective experience."⁵

This occurs when, in negotiating the aspects and demands of our divided consciousness, of mind, vital and spirit, we experience some degree of identification with our self, thoughts and emotion and some degree of detachment and observation of them. We also consequently experience some acquiescence to the movements of the mind, vital and spirit, as well as some degree of modulation of their movements, as a result of our detachment and observation. In the course of these processes, Sri Aurobindo concludes that,

"in our subjective experience, we have a field of the action of consciousness in which three movements of cognition can meet together, a certain kind of knowledge by identity, a knowledge by direct contact and, dependent upon them, separative knowledge."⁶

He also states that: "In thought separation of the thinker and the thinking is more difficult."⁷ Nevertheless human beings have the capacity to step back from their thinking and observe its process. Sri Aurobindo states:

But whatever the kind of identification, it is to be noted that the knowledge of our internal movements is of a double nature, separation and direct contact: for even when we detach ourselves, this close contact is maintained; our knowledge is always based on a direct touch, on a cognition by direct awareness carrying in it a certain element of identity. The more separative attitude is ordinarily the method of our reason in observing and knowing our inner movements; the more intimate is the method of our dynamic part of mind associating itself with our sensations, feelings and desires: but in this association too the thinking mind can intervene and exercise a separative dissociated observation and control over both the dynamic self-associating part of mind and the vital or physical movement. All the observable movements of our physical being also are known and controlled by us in

both these ways, the separative and the intimate; we feel the body and what it is doing intimately as part of us, but the mind is separate from it and can exercise a detached control over its movements. This gives to our normal knowledge of our subjective being and nature, incomplete and largely superficial though it still is, yet, so far as it goes, a certain intimacy, immediacy and directness.⁸

Hence we have knowledge by separative direct contact. It is without identification, but characterised by a level of intimacy which derives from the component of direct contact, though this is also modulated by the separative nature of observation of the cognition or movement involved. It is this knowledge which can play an effective part in one's developing an understanding of one's character or personality and which can, as a result, enhance the development of one's life in the world leading to an increased sense of personal mastery. More significantly, however, it also enables personal reflection which can lead or open the way to further spiritual development.

Separative Knowledge by Indirect Contact

In the final step away from identification, we arrive at separative knowledge by indirect contact, a knowledge without intimacy or directness, that which constitutes our usual knowledge of the external world. Sri Aurobindo describes this as follows:

"In the cognition of external things, our knowledge has an entirely separative basis; its whole machinery and process are of the nature of an indirect perception."⁹

He explains that we experience this kind of knowledge in relating to that which is external to ourselves because we do not identify with it, neither with other human beings nor with objects, and also because we do not have direct contact with that which is outside ourselves. Instead we perceive and encounter the external world through our senses:

The only seemingly direct contact with them [external objects or other human beings] or direct evidence we have of them is through the senses; sight, hearing, touch seem to initiate some kind of direct intimacy with the object of knowledge: but this is not so really, not a real directness, a real intimacy, for what we get by our sense is not the inner or intimate touch of the thing itself, but an image of it or a vibration or nerve message in ourselves through which we have to learn to know it.¹⁰

One can conclude, as Sri Aurobindo asserts, that this is a relatively poor means of knowledge indeed. In the final step away from knowledge by identity, in the separation into discrete beings and objects, we have come to the fullest intrusion of ignorance into knowledge. However, to some extent we are saved from the inadequacy and confusion which would necessarily seem to accompany such a limited knowledge by the innate intuition in human consciousness. Sri Aurobindo describes this:

But there intervenes a sense-mind intuition which seizes the suggestion of the image or vibration and equates it with the object, a vital intuition which seizes the energy or figure of power of the object through another kind of vibration created by the sense contact, and an intuition of the perceptive mind which at once forms a right idea of the object from all this evidence. Whatever is deficient in the interpretation of the image thus constructed is filled up by the intervention of the reason or the total understanding intelligence.¹¹

Through this explanation, one can see how other capacities for knowledge — intuition, reason, intellect — are put to use to compensate for the inadequacy of the sense-mind and fill the gaps which occur when there is no identification, intimacy or direct contact. Through these combined efforts and capacities, human beings have what we generally consider to be a functional knowledge of the world external to ourselves. Nevertheless Sri Aurobindo notes that the validity of this knowledge is questionable since the initial perception may not be accurate. He also states:

”Man has had perforce to develop his reason in order to make up for the deficiencies of his sense instrumentation, the fallibility of his physical mind’s perceptions and the paucity of its interpretation of its data.”¹²

Therefore we see, reinforced to our understanding, the importance of the development of the mind and its power of reason. The mind, with its intellect and reason, are the instruments which human beings must rely on and develop in order to make the most of the lowest form of knowledge, which is where we begin the journey in the ordinary consciousness. Understandably, since it is so necessary to our existence and coping in the world, it is the rational and intellectual approach to knowledge which we generally consider to be knowledge itself.

View of Human Knowledge and Its Problems

From considering the four categories of knowledge as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, we develop both a more complete grasp of the capacities of the surface mind and a more complete understanding of its limitations and constraints. Sri Aurobindo summarises these in the following statement on the state of human knowledge:

Our world-knowledge is therefore a difficult structure made up of the imperfect documentation of the sense-image, an intuitional interpretation of it by perceptive mind, life-mind and sense-mind, and a supplementary filling up, correction, addition of supplementary knowledge, co-ordination, by the reason. Even so our knowledge of the world we live in is narrow and imperfect, our interpretations of its significances doubtful: imagination, speculation, reflection, impartial weighing and reasoning, inference, measurement, testing, a further correction and amplification of sense evidence by Science, — all this apparatus had to be called in to complete the

incompleteness. After all that the result still remains a half-certain, half-dubious accumulation of acquired indirect knowledge, a mass of significant images and ideative representations, abstract thought-counters, hypotheses, theories, generalisations, but also with all that a mass of doubts and a never-ending debate and inquiry. Power has come with knowledge, but our imperfection of knowledge leaves us without any idea of the true use of the power, even of the aim towards which our utilisation of knowledge and power should be turned and made effective. This is worsened by the imperfection of our self-knowledge which, such as it is, meager and pitifully insufficient, is of our surface only, of our apparent phenomenal self and nature and not of our true self and the true meaning of our existence. Self-knowledge and self-mastery are wanting in the user, wisdom and right will in his use of world-power and world-knowledge.¹³

While this description of the partial and ignorance-ridden nature of ordinary human knowledge summarises its difficulties, it also alludes to the significance of the overall problem of human knowledge in stating that the inherent inadequacy of our knowledge leaves us with no true understanding of how to use the power which comes with knowledge. Therefore, even the partial knowledge to which we lay claim cannot give us the mastery in life in the world that human beings seek, for we do not truly know the world in which we live or how to direct the use of our capacities. The problem is even worse, because we do not truly know ourselves, but only our superficial existence. Furthermore, we do not generally know why we exist or what we need to do to find the fulfilment of our being. This state of affairs is the result of the separative action of the ego, which has led to the ignorance in which we live. Consequently human beings experience life in a superficial state of perception and partial knowledge, mixed with ignorance, with separative knowledge by indirect contact constituting the majority of our knowledge of our lives and world.

Motivation and the Deeper Knowledge

From considering this state of affairs, one can understand that human beings can be motivated to progress beyond such a state, spurred on by the very inadequacy and incompleteness of such a condition. For if we accept the oneness of existence and the reality of Sachchidananda as the truth of existence, and also the aim of life as the return of the manifestation to its original unity in Sachchidananda, then human consciousness can be seen as necessarily motivated to bridge the gap of separation, of ignorance. Sri Aurobindo describes this deep inner impulsion as part of the reality of existence:

First, we affirm an Absolute as the origin and support and secret Reality of all things. The Absolute Reality is indefinable and ineffable by mental thought and mental language.... But at the same time there is a spiritual consciousness, a spiritual knowledge, a knowledge by identity which can seize the Reality in its fundamental aspects and its manifested powers and figures.¹⁴

He also explains how the emergence and fulfilment of spiritual knowledge in a return to oneness is the evolutionary urge:

But the multiplicity permits of a phenomenal division of consciousness, an effectual Ignorance in which the Many, the individuals, cease to become aware of the eternal self-existent Oneness and are oblivious of the oneness of the cosmic Self in which and by which they live, move and have their being. But, by force of the secret Unity, the soul in becoming is urged by its own unseen reality and by the occult pressure of evolutionary Nature to come out of this state of Ignorance and recover eventually the knowledge of the one Divine Being and its oneness with it and at the same time to recover its spiritual unity with all individual beings and the whole universe.¹⁵

Sri Aurobindo explains that we can do this through the attainment of true knowledge, the integral spiritual knowledge of the reality of existence and that the path to this knowledge begins with going within, into the inner being, seeking knowledge of the true inner self. He writes:

Our self-ignorance and our world-ignorance can only grow towards integral self-knowledge and integral world-knowledge in proportion as our limited ego and its half-blind consciousness open to a greater inner existence and consciousness and a true self-being and become aware too of the not-self outside it also as self, — on one side a Nature constituent of our own nature, on the other an Existence which is a boundless continuation of our own self-being.¹⁶

In considering the oneness described in this statement, we see that this deep inner knowledge consists of the knowledge of all as oneself and oneself as part of all and therefore is knowledge by identity. In fact, the state which Sri Aurobindo describes includes the realisation of the cosmic consciousness, which is in its very nature a knowledge by identity with the universal existence.

The Spiritual Discovery of Knowledge by Identity

From understanding the oneness and unity inherent in knowledge by identity, one can both recognise its true spiritual nature and grasp that knowledge by identity is the purest form of knowledge. Sri Aurobindo describes what is required to make the necessary discovery:

Our being has to break the walls of ego-consciousness which it has created, it has to extend itself beyond its body and inhabit the body of the universe. In place of its knowledge by indirect contact, or in addition to it, it must arrive at a knowledge by direct contact and proceed to a knowledge by identity. Its limited finite of self has to become a boundless finite and an infinite.¹⁷

It is through going within and living in the inner reality of the self that we begin. When this has been accomplished, then we can move further in our knowledge to what Sri Aurobindo terms "the cosmic self-finding."¹⁸ The discovery of the inner self is essential to knowledge and to mastery in life since, as Sri Aurobindo states:

"All that we are on the outside is indeed conditioned by what is within, occult, in our inner depths and recesses.... It is then the knowledge of this inner initiating self coupled with the accurate perception of the outer instrumental self and the part played by both of them in our building that we have to discover."¹⁹

This challenge of discovering our true self and understanding its interaction with our exterior self is complicated by the fragmentation and separate demands of the various parts of our being, with the mind and vital each seeking to affirm their forms of egoism. Sri Aurobindo explains that we thus are subjected to "an organised self-deception" in addition to the initial "organised self-ignorance," further reinforcing the need to go within to find true knowledge and reality.²⁰ He explains that humanity has great resources available in the inner being of each individual:

"...a larger mental being is there within us, a larger inner vital being, even a larger subtle-physical being other than our surface body-consciousness."²¹

Through exploring our inner reality and identifying with it, we can discover the origins of our thoughts, emotions, and motives.

Through this knowledge of our inner self we can reconcile the conflicts of the surface being and live more truly, effectively and meaningfully according to the illumination which comes from the inner being. It is in this endeavor that knowledge by identity reveals its greater power and truth, as Sri Aurobindo explains:

Knowledge by identity, on the surface a vague inherent sense of our self-existence and a partial identification with our inner movements, can here deepen and enlarge itself from that indistinct essential perception and limited sensation to a clear and direct intrinsic awareness of the whole entity within: we can enter into possession of our whole conscious mental being and life being and arrive at a close intimacy of direct penetrating and enveloping contact with the total movements of our mental and vital energy.... But also there is or can be along with this intimacy of knowledge a detached observation of the actions of the nature by the Purusha and a great possibility, through this double status of knowledge, of a complete control and understanding.²²

Therefore we can see that through going within and discovering the inner being through knowledge by identity, not only is a greater, deeper, truer knowledge the result, but also, through the development of the witness consciousness, one has greater mastery of oneself and all the parts of the being. From this understanding, we can see that self-knowledge is central to knowledge and to mastery in life in the truest sense and how knowledge by identity is meaningful and effective to these ends.

Knowledge and the Subliminal Being

While we have considered that the surface mind is limited in its ability to access

direct knowledge, the subliminal being is not so limited. Sri Aurobindo describes its knowledge as

"a knowledge by the direct contact of consciousness with its object or of consciousness with other consciousness; but in the end we discover that this power is an outcome of a secret knowledge by identity, a translation of it into a separative awareness of things."²³

Sri Aurobindo describes this direct knowledge of the subliminal consciousness and contrasts it with the experience of the surface mind as follows:

For consciousness is one in the subject and the object, and in the contact of existence with existence this identity brings to light or awakens in the self the dormant knowledge of this other self outside it. But while this pre-existent knowledge comes up in the surface mind as a knowledge acquired, it arises in the subliminal as a thing seen, caught from within, remembered as it were, or, when it is fully intuitive, self-evident to the inner awareness; or it is taken in from the object contacted but with an immediate response as to something intimately recognisable. In the surface consciousness knowledge represents itself as a truth seen from outside, thrown on us from the object, or as a response to its touch on the sense, a perceptive reproduction of its objective actuality. Our surface mind is obliged to give to itself this account of its knowledge, because the wall between itself and the outside world is pierced by the gates of sense and it can catch through these gates the surface of outward objects though not what is within them, but there is no such ready-made opening between itself and its own inner being: since it is unable to see what is within its deeper self or observe the process of the knowledge coming from within, it has no choice but to accept what it does see, the external object, as the cause of its knowledge.²⁴

This description explains why mental knowledge appears to us to be objective, though, as Sri Aurobindo explains, it is not:

In fact, it is a hidden deeper response to the contact, a response coming from within that throws up from there an inner knowledge of the object, the object being itself part of our larger self; but owing to the double veil, the veil between our inner self and our ignorant surface self and the veil between that surface self and the object contacted, it is only an imperfect figure or representation of the inner knowledge that is formed on the surface.²⁵

While pointing out the limitations of the surface cognition, this explanation also reinforces understanding of the innateness of knowledge within existence and of the oneness of existence. We see that the action of the subliminal is effective in revealing the underlying oneness. Sri Aurobindo explains that it enables the realisation of the cosmic consciousness, as

"the subliminal inner being breaks its boundaries of individuality and, carrying our surface mind with it, enters into the cosmic consciousness."²⁶

With this realisation, which is based on knowledge by identity, the being becomes universalised and knows itself to be part of all and all to be part of itself. This describes the very essence of knowledge by identity:

But the cosmic consciousness of things is founded upon knowledge by identity; for the universal Spirit knows itself as the Self of all, knows all as itself and in itself, knows all nature as part of its nature. It is one with all that it contains and knows it by that identity and by a containing nearness; for there is at the same time an identity and an exceeding, and, while from the point of view of the identification there is a oneness and complete knowledge, so from the point of view of the exceeding there is an inclusion and a penetration, an enveloping cognition of each thing and all things, a penetrating sense and vision of each thing and all things. For the cosmic Spirit inhabits each and all, but is more than all.... Here then is a large universal identity containing smaller identities; for whatever separative cognition exists in or enters into the cosmic consciousness must stand on this double identity and does not contradict it.²⁷

Sri Aurobindo describes all individuals as receiving and responding to the cosmic forces that are active in the universe, whether the surface mind becomes aware of this or not, for the inner being experiences these directly and then communicates its response, usually veiled, to the surface being. Even living in the cosmic consciousness, the individual form of being continues to be an instrument for expression of the cosmic forces. Sri Aurobindo writes:

"But although the knowledge is then more complete, the dynamisation of this knowledge can only be partial; for while a fundamental or static unification with the cosmic self is possible, the active dynamic unification with cosmic Nature must be incomplete."²⁸

Through the continuing individualisation of the being as a dynamic instrument, the knowledge is not yet complete. Therefore, knowledge in the subliminal being, while much larger and truer than that of the surface mind, is still not the fulfillment of knowledge that we seek. As Sri Aurobindo states:

"In the subliminal, therefore, even enlarged into the cosmic consciousness, we get a greater knowledge but not the complete and original knowledge."²⁹

Towards the Highest Knowledge

To find what we truly seek, we must go even further, Sri Aurobindo explains: "The superior superconscient ranges are based upon the spiritual consciousness free and luminous, and it is there that we can trace the original power of knowledge and perceive the origin and difference of the two distinct orders, knowledge by identity and separative knowledge."³⁰ The core of the highest knowledge is described by Sri Aurobindo as follows:

"At the base of all spiritual knowledge is this consciousness of identity and by identity, which knows or is simply aware of all as itself."³¹

This is the intrinsic knowledge in which the knower and that which is known

are one. This perspective is a direct expression of the Vedic view of the reality of Brahman, which, as we have seen, Sri Aurobindo supports. In writing of spiritual knowledge and consciousness, he states:

"In the supreme timeless Existence, as far as we know it by reflection in spiritual experience, existence and consciousness are one."³²

Sri Aurobindo indicates the depth and fullness of this reality as follows:

But there is another status of spiritual awareness which seems to us to be a development from this state and power of pure self-consciousness, perhaps even a first departure, but is in fact normal and intimate to it; for the awareness by identity is always the very stuff of all the Spirit's self-knowledge, but it admits within itself, without changing or modifying its own eternal nature, a subordinate and simultaneous awareness by inclusion and by indwelling. The Being, the Self-existent sees all existences in its one existence; it contains them all and knows them as being of its being, consciousness of its consciousness, power of its power, bliss of its bliss; it is at the same time, necessarily, the Self in them and knows all in them by its pervadingly indwelling selfness: but still all this awareness exists intrinsically, self-evidently, automatically, without the need of any act, regard or operation of knowledge; for knowledge here is not an act, but a state pure, perpetual and inherent.³³

From this intrinsic knowledge, both of and by identity, emerges the beginning of knowledge as we consciously experience it. Sri Aurobindo explains:

This regard belongs to or brings in another status of the supreme spiritual consciousness, a status in which knowledge as we know it begins; there is a state of consciousness and in it, intimate to it there is an act of knowing: the Spirit regards itself, it becomes the knower and the known, in a way the subject and object, — or rather the subject-object in one, — of its own knowledge.³⁴

In this state of knowledge by identity,

"when the subject draws a little back from itself as object, then certain tertiary powers of spiritual knowledge, of knowledge by identity, take their first origin."³⁵

These tertiary powers of spiritual knowledge consist of an intimate and pervasive spiritual vision resulting from a complete unity of the knower with the known. There is a comprehensive and penetrating consciousness and delight in the union. These powers contribute to a blissful sense of oneness, both with that which is known and with all existence, and bring all the joy of higher spiritual awareness.

How Separation Occurs

Separative knowledge occurs as a result of a movement away from knowledge by identity. Sri Aurobindo writes:

"A separative knowledge arises when the sense of differentiation overpowers the sense of identity; the self still cognises its identity with the object but pushes to its extreme the play of intimate separateness."³⁶

This occurs in a progression in which knowledge by identity remains to some extent, but is gradually overwhelmed by a sense of separateness and "then so replaced by knowledge through interchange and contact that it figures as a secondary awareness."³⁷

Sri Aurobindo describes the final result:

"Finally, identity disappears behind the veil and there is the play of being with other beings, consciousness with other consciousness: an underlying identity is still there, but it is not experienced; its place is taken by a direct seizing and penetrating contact, intermingling, interchange."³⁸

Thus we have knowledge by direct contact, which is characterised by an intimate knowledge of that which is known, but is not the full knowledge of identity. Sri Aurobindo states:

"This is a diminished consciousness, but it retains some power of the original knowledge curtailed by division, by the loss of its primal and essential completeness, operating by division, effecting closeness but not oneness."³⁹

This level of knowledge is "normal to our inner being but foreign or only imperfectly known to our surface nature."⁴⁰ It is then the principal awareness which pertains in the subliminal being. It is through this knowledge of the subliminal being therefore that we find our means of accessing the higher levels of consciousness inaccessible to the surface consciousness.

As separation of the Self from the object of knowledge increases, the final step into the ignorance occurs with the complete separation of the knower from the known:

"Ignorance becomes complete with the entire separation of being from being: the direct contact of consciousness with consciousness is then entirely veiled or heavily overlaid, even though it still goes on within our subliminal parts, just as there is also, though wholly concealed and not directly operative, the underlying secret identity and oneness."⁴¹

In this state the multiplicity of existence appears completely separate in its many parts and we are left with the use of our senses and the responses of our minds as the means of bridging the gap, resulting in indirect knowledge in this state of separateness.

Bridging the Gap

Sri Aurobindo explains how human beings function in the state of separateness and indirect knowledge, having to rely on information provided by the senses and the mind's processing of these:

"To these means is added a reason, intelligence and intuition which seize on the communications thus indirectly brought to them, put all in order and

utilise their data to get as much knowledge and mastery and possession of the not-self or as much partial unity with it as the original division allows to the separated being.”⁴²

Implicit in this statement is the power of the impulsion for knowledge and for mastery in life, sought by the mind with compelling urgency. We may also consider that the separation of being from being and the resultant ignorance adds impetus to this impulsion. We may surmise that deep within each being is an inherent awareness, which seeks fulfilment in union and knowledge. More apparently, however, we know from observation of human experience how the flawed and incomplete knowledge on which most of daily life is based leads to considerable frustration and suffering, due to its errors, misunderstandings, conflicts, and problems coping with the material world. This alone, in its obvious presentation to the surface consciousness, would seem enough to drive the impulsion for knowledge and for mastery in life.

In the context of Sri Aurobindo’s conceptualisation of the evolution of consciousness, the impulsion for knowledge and for mastery in life can be regarded as contained within it, as part of the progression away from the inconscient, which he states is “an inverse reproduction of the supreme superconscience.”⁴³ Sri Aurobindo explains that consciousness is emerging from the inconscience towards the superconscience, and that this movement includes even the consciousness involved and apparently immobile in matter. Where life occurs, there is opportunity for consciousness to emerge, to contact and interact with that which is outside itself and to grow through this action. Sri Aurobindo explains:

“It is by the growing amount of contacts that it can receive and respond to and by the growing amount of contacts that it can put out from itself or impose in order to satisfy its needs and impulsions that the being of living matter develops its consciousness, grows from inconscience or subconsciousness into a limited separative knowledge.”⁴⁴

He further describes a progression of consciousness which consists of growth through the various stages or kinds of knowledge which he has outlined:

First, there emerges a crude or veiled sense which develops into precise sensations aided by a vital instinct or concealed intuition; then a life-mind perception manifests and at its back an obscure consciousness-sight and feeling of things; emotion vibrates out and seeks an interchange with others; last arises to the surface conception, thought, reason comprehending and apprehending the object, combining its data of knowledge. But all are incomplete, still maimed by the separative ignorance and the first obscuring inconscience; all are dependent on the outward means, not empowered to act in their own right: consciousness cannot act directly on consciousness; there is a constructive envelopment and penetration of things by the mind consciousness, but not a real possession; there is no knowledge by identity.

Only when the subliminal is able to force upon the frontal mind and sense some of its secret activities pure and untranslated into the ordinary forms of mental intelligence, does a rudimentary action of the deeper methods lift itself to the surface; but such emergences are still an exception, they strike across the normality of our acquired and learned knowledge with a savour of the abnormal and the supernormal. It is only by an opening to our inner being or an entry into it that a direct intimate awareness can be added to the outer indirect awareness. It is only by our awakening to our inmost soul or superconscient self that there can be a beginning of the spiritual knowledge with identity as its basis, its constituent power, its intrinsic substance.⁴⁵

Sri Aurobindo, therefore, in his conceptualisation of the fourfold order of knowledge explains not only the status of our present knowledge, but also the process by which we have arrived at this present state. In addition he lays out for us the prospect of our destination, where the journey in the search for knowledge will take us, and explains the means by which we need to proceed, through opening to the inner being and discovery of the knowledge within.

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1. *SABCL*, vol. 18 (*The Life Divine*), 524-525.
2. *Ibid.*, 525.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 525-526.
5. *Ibid.*, 526.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 527.
9. *Ibid.*, 528.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, 529.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *SABCL*, vol. 19 (*The Life Divine*), 658.
15. *Ibid.*, 660-661.
16. *SABCL*, vol. 18 (*The Life Divine*), 531.
17. *Ibid.*, 531-532.
18. *Ibid.*, 532.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, 533.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 534-535.
23. *Ibid.*, 540.
24. *Ibid.*

25. Ibid., 541.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 542-543.
28. Ibid., 543.
29. Ibid., 544.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 546.
32. Ibid., 544.
33. Ibid., 545-546.
34. Ibid., 546.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 547.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., 548.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 549.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., 550.
44. Ibid., 551.
45. Ibid., 552.

Hinduism and the Future of Inter-Religious Harmony in India

An Aurobindonian Perspective

Part 2

Beloo Mehra

III

With a consideration to all that has been said so far, let us now take another look at the opening statement and explore the implications of Hinduism, or the Sanatana Dharma, to be more accurate, completely integrating within itself Islam and Christianity (provided they had tolerated the process) for the present and future of inter-religious harmony in India.

When understood generously, we recognise that this statement does not mean that as a result of Hinduism integrating Islam and Christianity within its fold there wouldn't be any separate existence of these religions. It only implies that the literalist or fundamentalist factions of Islam and Christianity could also become more tolerant and Indianised by going through an assimilation process led by the more inclusive and non-dogmatic nature of Hinduism. Inclusiveness of a religion, however, implies a two-way flow of ideas. Therefore, as a result of this integration process, Hinduism too would become richer because of its assimilation with Islam and Christianity. This is an important point to be remembered because certainly no single religion has the monopoly over truth, just as no single viewpoint has an exclusive claim over truth.

Let us now go a bit deeper to see if Sri Aurobindo means something more when he says that Hinduism would have or could have taken religions like Islam and Christianity within itself. To do so it is also important to consider this assimilation process that is being spoken of here, and also what is meant when we say that Hinduism is an inclusive religion. In order to remain inclusive, Hinduism should have the capacity to integrate the spiritual realisations, truths, and experiences revealed within the fold of other religious traditions, otherwise it is not inclusive at all. Going by historical record, we can see that what we now know as Hinduism has taken in elements from various traditions — Vedic, Upanishadic, Buddhist, Jain, Tantric, Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Sikh — all of these and many others have been integrated into what has now become Hinduism, with the diversity of traditions and practices making for its richness and pluralism. But it is important to emphasise that for Sri Aurobindo, Hinduism is not any particular belief or practice but essentially an inner experience that is available to all humans. It is this experience-based Hinduism that might become,

as he says in an essay published in *Karmayogin* on June 19, 1909, the “basis of the future world-religion” (*CWSA*, vol.8, p.26).

“God gives Himself to His whole creation; no one religion holds the monopoly of His Grace” (The Mother, *CWM*, vol.15, p.27).

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother remind us that each religion is only a partial expression of the Truth and they all, in their own unique ways, have helped the mankind in its progressive march. To quote from Sri Aurobindo:

“Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and height of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection; Christianity gave him some vision of divine love and charity; Buddhism has shown him a noble way to be wiser, gentler, purer; Judaism and Islam how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God; Hinduism has opened to him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities. A great thing would be done if all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other; but intellectual dogma and cult egoism stand in the way.” (*CWSA*, vol.13, p.211)

Because each religion brought to mankind some important aspect of the Truth, the future of humanity requires that these religions embrace and “cast themselves into each other.” This is the kind of integration or assimilation process that Sri Aurobindo is speaking of in the statement we have been discussing.

A few more insights from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother will help us gain further clarity on this topic, especially about the future of religion itself (and thereby the future of inter-religious harmony). While speaking of the role of religion in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Sri Aurobindo once said that there will be “no place for rigid orthodoxy, whether Hindu, Mahomedan or Christian in the future. Those who cling to it, lose hold of life and go under — as has been shown by the fate of the Hindus in India and of the orthodox Mahomedan countries all over the world.” (Letter dated 23 February 1932, published in the *Bulletin*, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education 52, February 2000, p.80). This helps us see that for Sri Aurobindo religion is useful as long as it doesn’t turn into a rigid orthodoxy — no matter what religion it is. If present multi-religious India has to fulfil her mission of being a spiritual guru of the world, she has to move beyond the rigid orthodox religiosity to a more inclusive and wide-embracing spirituality (whether it is religion-based spirituality or religion-less spirituality). We must also remember that the true spirituality thrives on diversity and shuns uniformity. In order to keep a healthy, pluralistic society we need healthy dialogue and acceptance of different religious truths and beliefs. These ideas are also echoed in the following words of the Mother (*CWM*, vol.15, pp.27-29):

“Instead of excluding each other, religions ought to complete each other.

The spiritual spirit is not contrary to a religious feeling of adoration, devotion and consecration. But what is wrong in the religions is the fixity of

the mind clinging to one formula as an exclusive truth. One must always remember that formulas are only a mental expression of the truth and that this truth can always be expressed in many other ways. (6 December 1964)

All religions are partial approximations of the one sole Truth that is far above them.” (April 1969)

But is there a future beyond religion? Perhaps the true harmony between religions is only possible when we can boldly envision and work towards creating a world without religion, but a world steeped in true spirituality. But before proceeding further it is important to understand the difference between the two. Sri Aurobindo makes an important distinction between two aspects of religion – religion as spirituality, and as religionism. Rejecting religionism or sectarianism in religion and ardently advocating spirituality he writes:

“It is true in a sense that religion should be the dominant thing in life, its light and law, but religion as it should be and is in its inner nature, its fundamental law of being, a seeking after God, the cult of spirituality, the opening of the deepest life of the soul to the indwelling Godhead, the eternal Omnipresence. On the other hand, religion when it identifies itself only with a creed, a cult, a Church, a system of ceremonial forms, may well become a retarding force and there may therefore arise a necessity for the human spirit to reject its control over the varied activities of life.” (*CWSA*, vol.25, p.177)

The failure to make this distinction between true spiritual core of religion and its external shell of religionism is at the root of a lot of confused debate on issues concerning religious divide, both in India and elsewhere. But “religionism has not been the only perversion of true religion” (Nadkarni, 1996). In an essay titled, Hindu-Muslim Unity in Sri Aurobindo’s light, he very clearly explains the other perversion that Sri Aurobindo has also warned us of in the chapter titled, Religion as the Law of Life in his book, *The Human Cycle*. Nadkarni writes:

“This perversion sets in when religion tends to mean, as it has often done, something different and remote from earthly life, leading to ascetic renunciation. The spirituality of which Sri Aurobindo has been the most articulate spokesman in our time respects the freedom of the human soul, because it is fulfilled by freedom; and the deepest meaning of freedom is the power to expand and grow towards perfection by the law of one’s own nature. True spirituality gives freedom to philosophy and science, to man’s seeking for political and social perfection and to all his other powers and terrestrial aspirations. Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo exemplify best the spirit of liberalism which has created out of the medieval Hinduism a vibrant, modern Hinduism, more than willing to reaffirm what is basic to the Hindu faith - respect for all religions.” (pp.6-7)

This sets the stage right for our further analysis. In an essay Sri Aurobindo wrote for the June 19, 1909 issue of *Karmayogin* he gives us a glimpse of where the world is moving in term of its religious or spiritual destiny. He writes:

“The world moves through an indispensable interregnum of free thought and materialism to a new synthesis of religious thought and experience, a new religious world-life free from intolerance, yet full of faith and fervour, accepting all forms of religion because it has an unshakable faith in the One. The religion which embraces Science and faith, Theism, Christianity, Mahomedanism and Buddhism and yet is none of these, is that to which the World-Spirit moves. In our own [referring to the true spirit of Sanatan Dharma], which is the most sceptical and the most believing of all, the most sceptical because it has questioned and experimented the most, the most believing because it has the deepest experience and the most varied and positive spiritual knowledge, — that wider Hinduism which is not a dogma or combination of dogmas but a law of life, which is not a social framework but the spirit of a past and future social evolution, which rejects nothing but insists on testing and experiencing everything and when tested and experienced turning it to the soul’s uses, in this Hinduism we find the basis of the future world-religion. This sanatana dharma has many scriptures, Veda, Vedanta, Gita, Upanishad, Darshana, Purana, Tantra, nor could it reject the Bible or the Koran; but its real, most authoritative scripture is in the heart in which the Eternal has His dwelling. It is in our inner spiritual experiences that we shall find the proof and source of the world’s Scriptures, the law of knowledge, love and conduct, the basis and inspiration of Karmayoga.” (*CWSA*, vol.8, p.26)

We see that on one level, Sri Aurobindo tells us that the future world-spirit is moving in the direction of a syncretic and inclusive eternal way (Sanatana Dharma) which takes in its fold the spiritual essence from all present world religions. And on another level, the more we understand and appreciate Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s vision of the future we find that they compel us to envision with them a world beyond religion, a world where the inner seeking, the spiritual seeking is the basis for human unity. This is abundantly clear in the following words of the Mother (*CWM*, vol. 15, pp.29-30):

“Religions are based on creeds which are spiritual experiences brought down to a level where they become more easy to grasp, but at the cost of their integral purity and truth.

The time of religions is over.

We have entered the age of universal spirituality, of spiritual experience in its initial purity. [...]

Religious teaching belongs to the past and halts progress.

Spiritual teaching is the teaching of the future — it illumines the consciousness and prepares it for future realisation.

Spiritual teaching is above religions and strives towards a global Truth.

It teaches us to enter into direct relation with the Divine.”

So essentially it comes down to each one of us to see which of these truths sits better with what we feel inside us – whether the world-spirit is moving

towards a synthetic world-religion or to an age beyond religion. There is no right or wrong answer here because each answer will be an expression of a partial truth. The true Truth will be beyond any of these expressions. But in the answer that we discover for ourselves is hidden the seed of the future we envision for India, especially regarding the co-existence of diverse religions and faiths in India. In this answer also lies the beginning of the individual responsibility we give to ourselves, each one of us, regardless of our religious backgrounds or spiritual leanings, who is concerned with the present and future of inter-religious harmony in India.

At the very minimum, this answer helps us come face to face with the truth that we must move beyond the straitjacketed debate between the so-called secularist and religio-chauvinist arguments, and begin to look for deeper understanding of the core of the issue. Only through a deeper understanding of the problem can we envision a more sustainable and lasting solution.

Regardless of what the ultra-rationalists among Indian intelligentsia might say, India will never give up her deeply embedded religio-spiritual character. But if India has to fulfil her mission of being a spiritual guru of the world, she must raise herself above all sentiments and ideologies that smell of narrow chauvinism, no matter which religion they come from. And she must aspire for the Truth of the golden bright noon of the future which Sri Aurobindo sums up rather well in these words:

“The Truth of the Divine which is the spiritual reality behind all religions and the descent of the supramental which is not known to any religion are the sole things which will be the foundation of the work of the future.” (Undated letter, published in the *Bulletin*, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education 53, February 2001, p.72)

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Endnotes

ⁱ In a thorough analysis of caste and its relation to Hinduism Nadkarni (2003) concludes: ...the emergence as well as survival of the caste system had nothing to do with Hinduism as a religion. The caste system was purely a social phenomenon, very much in the mundane sphere. It is *aihika* sphere (mundane), and not *paramarthika* or *adhyatmika* (spiritual). Being in *aihika* sphere, rules of conduct and custom are liable to change from time to time, and not eternally fixed, as Hindu texts themselves concede. The support to it given by *dharmashastras* including *Manusmṛiti* could be only a result of the social significance and role of the caste system of the time, and not the cause of it. *Dharmashastras* reflected what is already there in the society. They also approved rejection of it like when *Manusmṛiti* (IV 176) indicated clearly that any dharmic rule could be rejected if it led to people's unhappiness and indignation. There can be no ground for fear that *dharmashastras* would give a new lease of life to the caste system inspite of its being redundant and irrelevant in the modern age. Most of the verses in *dharmashastras* have themselves become irrelevant, at least those parts supporting caste system. On the other hand, the collapse of the caste system would also pose no threat to the continuation and survival of Hinduism. Hinduism has been thriving with renewed vigour thanks to such leaders as Satya Sai Baba, Mata Amritanandamayi and Sri Sri Ravishankar, and institutions like Ramakrishna Mission, Brahmakumaris and ISKON on an entirely non-caste basis. This is because caste is not intrinsic to basic principles and tenets of Hinduism as enshrined in Hindu canon. Hinduism itself has fought and is still fighting against casteism in a significant way. If caste system were intrinsic to Hinduism, Shri Narayana Guru and Mata Amritanandamayi would not have worked within the framework of Hinduism. (pp.4792-4793)

(concluded)

Ego and the Fear of Transcendence

Madhumita Dutta

The idea of transcendence lands us in a fundamental philosophical dilemma which includes both the fear of, and desire for it. There is the Self which desires to be liberated and return to its source, to Oneness. And there is the body, the ego-sense which does want its death or dissolution. So, here we grapple with two ideas - transcendence and the bar to transcendence. Ego is the obstacle here and our identification with the ego, which creates the fear of letting go of it. Transcendence is not any simple or single philosophical idea. It has complex connotations. Sri Aurobindo says in *The Life Divine* that 'transcendence transfigures', it 'effaces oppositions' by transmuting opposites. It may also be regarded as a kind of recollection, and so there is the Self's desire to reunite with the divine.

Man is bound to self-ignorance because his ego-sense makes him regard his individuality as exclusively separate and self-existent. That is the limitation of the mind and leads to the fear of losing one's individuality. Yet, realising and returning to the 'infinite and eternal wholeness' is man's 'greatest need and want'. We want union, wholeness, but resist the means by which we may attain it.

As Sri Aurobindo says:

In man a dim disturbing somewhat lives;
It knows but turns away from divine Light
Preferring the dark ignorance of the fall. (*Savitri*, 4.2.366)

Man prefers his darkness, his ignorance because he is terrified of transcendence as this means death of the separate self, the isolated ego. And because the death of this exclusive subject seems so terrifying, so undesirable, no real transcendence is achieved, the dividing line between the subject and object is not dissolved. There is a thin veil between the self and the Supreme, but even then one cannot put aside the veil. The desire for transcendence is accompanied by the fear of losing what we identify as 'mine' or 'I'. And we cling on to our ego, denying all else. The ego becomes the obstacle. What is ego? Sri Aurobindo says, ego is 'a determinative and temporarily deformative factor', and its very nature is a 'self-limitation of consciousness'. Even this is a very complex issue and we face another paradox here. Ego is not only self-limitation, not only the cause of dualities, but ego is also one essential condition for existence. Very succinctly the Mother has put this forth:

"Ego is that which helps us to individualise ourselves and that which prevents us from becoming divine. ... Without ego, as the world is organised

now, there would be no individual, and with the ego the world cannot become divine.” (*Bulletin of SAICE*, vol.xii, no.1, p.69)

Ego acts as a support for our individual existence in the cosmic play. By getting rid of the ego we get rid of our individual separative existence, and that is what is commonly felt as the fear of death; and also the gradual dissolving of the ego reveals the true Self within us. But, it is indeed difficult to get rid of the attachment and identification with the individual body, that is, the sense of the ‘physical ego’ and establish the ‘true centre of consciousness’ in us. So, though ego is necessary at a certain stage of evolution, for anyone desiring true transcendence, it becomes a real obstacle. It is the problem of Atman *telos* vs. Atman restraint, as K. Wilbur puts it. We are afraid of death, we are afraid of accepting death; we believe in the safety and security of the material form, of the body. As Sri Aurobindo says:

Nay, let me work within my mortal bounds,
Not live beyond life nor think beyond the mind;
Our smallness saves us from the Infinite. (*Savitri*, 7.4.520)

We enjoy the comfort of material existence and gratify our worldly desires by means of food, wealth, power etc. These are only ‘symbolic substitutes’. We substitute ‘ego for Atman’. To realise the Atman, to go to a newer, higher stage, we have to leave behind the old stage in a way, and surrender the ego. We have to separate ourselves from the ego-sense, and this is what is called the ‘separation anxiety’ - the anxiety of dying to the egoist self. This is very fearful and takes immense yogic practice perhaps to achieve the transcendence. As Sri Ramakrishna had said, it is only in the state of *samadhi* that the ego can be dissolved. Evidently, only a few advanced *sadhakas* have been able to dissolve the ‘I-sense’ through *samadhi*. For the common man the fear of death remains and the ego never disappears altogether:

Hard is it to persuade earth-nature’s change;
Mortality bears ill the eternal’s touch: (*Savitri*, 1.1.7)

Fear of death, that is the Void, Nothingness, *Sunyata* is the fear of *Thanatos*. It is dreadful - the angst and terror of death. And man has little power to fight and conquer it. It is an existential terror and we have almost no strength left to endure further. The fear of death inspires the fearful thought of being dissolved, shattered, of losing the body. Thus, the fear of death recoils as ‘the fear of life’. We begin to be afraid of life as it must lead to the portals of death only. And that blunts and freezes our desire for reunion with the Source, with God. It is difficult to get rid of the ‘separation anxiety’, of discarding the ego. Sri Aurobindo says it is a subjection to something that is ‘Not-Self’, and carries the sense of being devoured and destroyed. As he says in *Savitri*:

But human mind clings to its ignorance
And to its littleness the human heart
And to its right to grief the earthly life. (7.4.516)

According to existentialists, the meaning of life is wishing for life, and it is a strange fact that we wish for eternal life instead of wishing to transcend the ego-barrier. We seek happiness in this separate, individual existence, we like to feel self-sufficient and attempt to 'remain a separate subject'. This is our idea of freedom. We have limited and trapped the Vast, The Universal Self in the ego-sense, and so there is the division, leading to the fear of separation and reunion both. This is our 'imperfect individualised personality'. This sense of division, this separation anxiety builds up into a global anxiety of Death, and we hardly know how to deal with it. As Sri Aurobindo has rightly said:

This world is in love with its own ignorance,

Its darkness turns away from the saviour light, (*Savitri*, 6.4.448)

The solution to this huge existential crisis lies perhaps in getting rid of the ego, in an 'unsparing effacement of the ego', as Sri Aurobindo says. We have to disengage the self from the ego and transcend it and integrate it with the higher status of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo tells us that we have to renounce not altogether the ego, but its false standpoint; we have to rediscover the values of egoistic life and transform them. Besides, ego has done much to advance evolution, and we have reached that point in evolution where we may now abandon the ego, or our false ego-sense, and make way for superconsciousness. For, when we transcend our personal, limited, exclusive individuality, we are overpowered by that which is superconscious to us. There has to be a total and true submission to the Transcendent Self, and any sense of 'I', 'mine', or I as 'doer' has to be given up. This submission and surrender to the Universal Mother must be a 'glad acceptance', a 'radical deliverance', and not only a 'resigned acquiescence'. In fact, the aim of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, as he himself says, is the 'entire removal of this separative ego-sense'. Ego is limitation, ego is smallness, it is scission of the Whole, it is division of the One. And the fulfilment, happiness and perfection of the human being cannot be in the ego-idea but only in the higher, larger, Transcendent Self. We must recover our pre-Fall, egoless, euphoric state of being by merging the ego into the universal 'I', or dissolving it in Impersonality. The gap between the impersonal and the personal must be bridged. There has been a Fall - from the highest knowledge, from unifying consciousness, resulting in the creation of a 'distorting consciousness', Sri Aurobindo says. To redeem and recover that paradisaical state, we have to discover our true self which shall help us to be released from the ego-sense. Attachment to the body and repulsion to death have also to be overcome. Sri Aurobindo says that 'fear of death and the aversion to bodily cessation are the stigma left by his animal origin on the human being. That brand must be utterly effaced'. We 'hug our limits' to feel safe and secure. But we have to let go of whatever clinging, residual animality we have and progress higher and upwards in consciousness. The progressive ascension of the mind to higher planes comes by yogic practice and when we realise the fact of existence of these planes. And it is true that evolution has been possible because of the continual and progressive death of the

lower structures and emergence of higher and better ones. And K. Wilbur says, this emergence is driven by the Atman-telos. *Agape* has to replace *Eros*. And this is possible when we unite with the Divine and see the Divine in all. Then there is no 'other', and therefore no fear.

To transcend the present conditions of physical life is a first condition of divine living. Man's dream of God and heaven is really 'a dream of his own perfection'. We can attain this perfection by the transcendence of limitations, ego and ignorance. And as we deliver ourselves from the limitations of the ego, proportionately we enter and become part of a wider and larger existence and a greater soul state. Then, in place of the limited individuality with all its pain and grief, there shall be infinite peace and bliss. Thus, we retain our fear of transcendence only till we discover the bliss of transcendence. And when we get rid of the fear and the ego, then:

"All that is left of the personal soul is a hymn of peace and freedom and bliss vibrating somewhere in the Eternal." (*Synthesis of Yoga*, 349)

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Future of Scientific Study in the Light of Indian Spirituality

Sreerangan Siddharthan

The so-called sciences which deal with the mind and men (psychology, etc.) are so much dependent on physical science that they cannot go beyond narrow limits. If science is to turn her face towards the Divine, it must be a new science not yet developed which deals directly with forces of the life-world and of Mind and so arrives at what is beyond mind; but present-day science cannot do that.
—Sri Aurobindo¹

Present-day Science:

The Narrow Limits of Physical Science: The fundamental assumption of physical science pertains to the primacy of matter. This assumption has a major lacuna. It imprisons itself in the grossness of the obvious. In consequence, it does not take into account realities of greater subtlety; thus on the one hand, it is forced to deny the independent reality of consciousness, life and mind; and on the other hand the reality of even matter of subtler nature belonging to the inner and the inmost levels of being get ignored. It is a historical fact that modern science has had its origin in the realisation that the obvious does not necessarily reveal the whole truth; this simple realisation had led to what could correctly be described as a struggle against the suzerainty of the obvious. It was in this struggle that Bruno had to lay down his life² and Galileo had to suffer persecution. All the achievements of modern science are nothing but an elaborate footnote to this struggle. Yet it is an irony perpetrated by Time that the successful struggle against the obvious now finds itself caught in the net of the obvious. The axiomatic method which consists of reducing a proposition through logical steps to a final proposition that is self-evident is an exercise in obviousness. Unless a piece of information gets connected with what is already known it will not be accepted as knowledge. Hence, the nature of knowledge, as it has often been remarked, is to proceed from the known to the unknown. This is the fundamental reason that makes the scope of physical sciences narrow. Recent research shows that there are “...reliable empirical evidence for human potentials or abilities beyond those that are mediated by conventional sensorimotor processes or conventional energetic and informational exchanges. Variations of these same abilities are frequently described within many, if not all, of the various spiritual and wisdom traditions.”³ But these will not be accepted as authentic facts as these will fail to come up to the standards set by physical science.

Physics in fact is the master science; the mood and methodology of the rest of the scientific disciplines are set by physics. In the early 16th century when Nicholas Copernicus toppled the then officially accepted geocentric cosmology based on Ptolemy and the Bible and suggested the heliocentric view, the ground was set for the advent of modern science. And it got firmly established with the contributions of Sir Isaac Newton in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. In Newton's view the universe is made up of solid objects interacting in accordance with the laws of Newtonian mechanics. Modern atomic theory of the 19th century was nothing but an extension of the Newtonian physics into the realm of the extremely small. Newtonian physics proved to be so hugely successful in both theory and practice that it came to be considered as the ultimate approach in understanding natural phenomena. But in early 19th century itself, natural phenomena that could not be explained from the Newtonian perspective were discovered.

The electromagnetic phenomena discovered by Michael Faraday (1791-1867) and Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879) made it impossible to uphold the solid particle concept of Newton and led to the concept of energy field where field is defined as a condition in space with a potential for producing force. The picture of the universe as made up of particles interacting with one another had to give way to another picture of a universe filled with diverse fields that interact with one another and generate forces of diverse kind. Action at a distance through energy fields has broadened our concept of reality. The sway of Newtonian physics invariably necessitated the invalidating of all experiences that had to do with action at a distance. For example, Newtonian physics rules out the possibility of a mother knowing that her child is in trouble when that child is far away from her in space and has no means of communication known to science. Yet such knowing is common with at least some if not most mothers. Invalidating a phenomenon for want of an explanation is not science but scientism.

But scientism rules supreme when it comes to psychic phenomena. How this is exemplified by the experiences of a scientific investigator who also happened to be a *sanyasin* has been detailed in the autobiography⁴ of Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, the first and the last director of Psychic Research Institute, that had functioned in the early sixties of the last century, in association with the Department of Neurophysiology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. Though Yati could organise the demonstration of extraordinary powers of several yogis under the most stringent of conditions to rule out fraud, he had failed to convince the scientists of the genuineness of the supernormal yogic feats. Such was the narrowness of outlook of the scientific community with which he was associated that he had to resign from the post of the director of Psychic Research Institute in sheer exasperation. The time was not yet ripe then for psychic research. For the scientists' outlook was not yet free from the mechanistic outlook of Newtonian physics.

Paradigm Shift

Einstein's special theory of relativity had proved in 1905 the inadequacy of Newtonian physics, but its implications for scientific thought in general had been rather unclear at that early date. Thanks to Fritjof Capra's *The Turning Point*,⁵ it is known to most inquirers these days that a paradigm shift has taken place in physics, and that this shift has significant implications for psychic research. If Newtonian physics had no scope for explaining action at a distance, and if its notions of absolute space and absolute time ruled out the possibilities of psychic phenomena, the new physics whose discoveries were such that there was an air of mystique about them seemed to admit the possibility of that which seemed to defy natural laws. The limitations of Newtonian physics had made it clear that there are realms beyond the known, and that unless we are very careful, the known could easily block the discovery of what is not yet discovered.

The Systems View of Life: In the Newtonian worldview there is no awareness of the essential interdependence of all phenomena. The systems view remedies this lacuna by giving due recognition to the essential interrelatedness among the material, the biological, the psychological, the social and the cultural phenomena. Where the mechanistic view creates the gravest problems for human welfare is not in physics but in health care. No doubt there are machine-like parts and operations in human body, so a mechanistic approach may be justified for dealing with problems coming from such parts and operations. But the human body as a whole is not a machine but an organism. In the evolutionary development, life had found it advantageous to have mechanistic parts and operations to further its objectives, and biological mechanisms were developed on higher principles of organisation. Hence the approach to health care must be a balanced one that gives due importance to both the mechanistic aspects and the organismic aspects of health and disease.

By system is meant an integrated whole made up of parts; but though made up of parts, its properties cannot be reduced to the properties of the parts all put together. Therefore in the systems view, the emphasis is not on basic building-blocks but on basic principles of organisation. Relationship is of paramount importance in the systems view, and the relationship is one of mutually interdependent interaction among the various parts. The specific structures arise from the interdependent interactions among the parts. Therefore the systemic properties cannot be discovered through dissection and analysis.

A system is not a rigid structure. On the contrary it is dynamic; that is to say, it is stable though flexible. This dynamism is achieved in a system by unifying opposites through oscillation. If one is to understand the dynamics of a system one has to resort to process thinking. Understanding of a rigid structure is possible through understanding the consecutively stacked up building-blocks, but when it comes to the task of understanding a system, one has to reckon with the ongoing interdependent interactions that create and sustain the system. This is a task altogether different from that of dissecting a structure to the fundamental

building-blocks and discovering the manner in which the building-blocks are stacked up to form a structure.

If we are not to unwittingly fall back and assume the mechanistic outlook, we ought to have a clear grasp of the differences between a machine and an organism. These differences may be summarised thus:

- *Constructed x Grow(n)*: It is obvious that machines just do not grow out from the earth or the sky; they are constructed—it means an intelligence that is not a part of the machine does the construction. It is equally obvious that organisms are not constructed but they grow. How they grow is not at all obvious; in fact it is an inscrutable mystery. It could well be that there is an intelligence hidden in them, and it is the workings of that intelligence that make an organism grow. If that is the case it would be more appropriate to say that organisms just do not grow but are grown. For the hidden intelligence points to something beyond that is responsible for the growth of the organism.
- *Linear Causal Chain x Feedback Loop*: A linear chain of cause and effect is what makes a machine tick. If it malfunctions or breaks down, a troubleshooter could trace the primary reason to a single point. In the case of organisms, the thing is not that simple. Organisms function on the basis of cyclical patterns of information flow setting up a feedback loop which involves a constant give and take between the organism and the environment. So when the organism malfunctions, no tracing back to a single cause is possible. Multiple factors will be involved, and each one will have a mutually reinforcing and amplifying influence on all the rest of the factors. Obviously this has very significant implications for health care—be that of the body or of the mind.
- *Rigid x Dynamic*: The functioning of machines is governed by rigid mechanical structures. There is no scope for any flexibility there. Contrasted with that rigidity, what the organisms exhibit is dynamism. In dynamism there is flexibility, but that flexibility does not become one with instability—dynamism is flexibility with stability. This is what lends adaptability to the organism.
- *Fixed x Self-regulating*: The adaptability of the organism comes from its capacity for self-regulation. No machine, except those working on cybernetic principles, for example, the guided missile, has the capacity for self-regulation. Even if the machine has a built-in self-regulatory ability, it is a programmed one or a pre-determined one. An organism may come up with a creative solution, but a machine, even if it has the backing of the smartest computer in the world, is bound to be fixed in its responses.
- *No Autonomy x Relative Autonomy*: Because of the fixed nature of machines, they have no freedom or autonomy. Of course, no one expects them to be or wants them to be free. They are mere instruments in the hands of human beings. But the condition of no organism is even distantly similar

to that of a machine, for organisms being dynamic and self-regulating have relative autonomy. The expression ‘relative autonomy’ is used by way of acknowledging the fact that organisms are shaped by environmental influences, and hence their autonomy is not absolute. These considerations have direct implications for the questions of human freedom and artificial intelligence both.

• *Isolated Structure x Lives in Relationship*: A machine is an isolated structure; if given the required energy it will do what it is designed to do. As it is an isolated structure, it works on the basis of the second Law of thermodynamics; things proceed from order to Disorder—the energy input progressively exhausts itself. Whereas an organism is capable of taking from the environment what it needs and thereby increase the order of the organism. This process known as metabolism involves a high degree of non-equilibrium which is indispensable for self-organisation. While isolated structures dissipate energy in what is known as entropy, an organism by living in relationship renews itself. But in spite of self-repair no organism can live on indefinitely; they all succumb to the deterioration and exhaustion brought about by aging. In order to overcome this, organisms have a way of super repair—reproduction that perpetuates their existence. The mechanistic outlook will invariably overlook these differences, and reduce the organism to the level of a machine. To such an outlook, the higher capacities of the highest organism that is man would appear as mere figments of the imagination. The mechanistic outlook had for long stymied scientific explorations of the realm of the psychic phenomena. This cannot continue for long. The developments in quantum physics have brought science to the verge of mystical spirituality. In this connection it is worth noting that Sri Aurobindo had foreseen the inevitability of a confluence of the physical and the psychic sciences:

“Neither the laws nor the possibilities of physical Nature can be entirely known unless we know also the laws and possibilities of supraphysical Nature;”⁶

A thorough knowledge of the physical can be had only on a clear comprehension of the psychic. This is so because the physical is only the gross superficial layer of reality. The gross does not explain itself; having come from the subtle, a thorough understanding of the gross naturally necessitates a clear comprehension of the subtle.

“Therefore the development of new and the recovery of old mental and psychic sciences have to follow upon the perfection of our physical knowledge, and that new era is already beginning to open upon us,”⁷ declares Sri Aurobindo.

The Human Energy Field

The truth of the above declaration is best illustrated by Barbara Ann Brennan’s *Hands of Light*.⁸ This work by a former scientist associated with NASA is a

training manual that details how the human energy field could be utilised for the purpose of healing physical and mental maladies. Spiritual healing involves rebalancing the energy field that exists around the body. This field, popularly called the aura, not only surrounds the body but also interpenetrates it. This energy field has much to do with both health and disease.

In order to become a healer one has to have the ability to perceive the energy field and its qualitative and quantitative differences. Unless a person develops new sensitivities, perception of the aura with its specific features shall remain in the realm of the impossible for him. The materialistic prejudices confine a person within the province of the gross, the obvious and the commonsensical, and thereby desensitise him and make him blind when it comes to the perception of the subtle. Hence one must be open-minded and free of prejudices if one is to develop such new sensitivities. A critical understanding of the limitations of Newtonian physics will be of immense value in overcoming materialistic prejudices that stand in the way of admitting the possibility of extraordinary cognition and communication. If one is to develop new sensitivities, one must have belief in extraordinary powers. But that belief is not belief for the sake of belief as with most religious believers; but belief is upheld, as with hypothesis in science, to make inquiry possible. Once the reality of the aura is accepted as a hypothesis, several steps could be taken for developing new sensitivities and abilities. By sensitivity is meant the power of seeing things that are not seen ordinarily. By abilities is meant the ability to diagnose and the ability to heal.

The Future Science

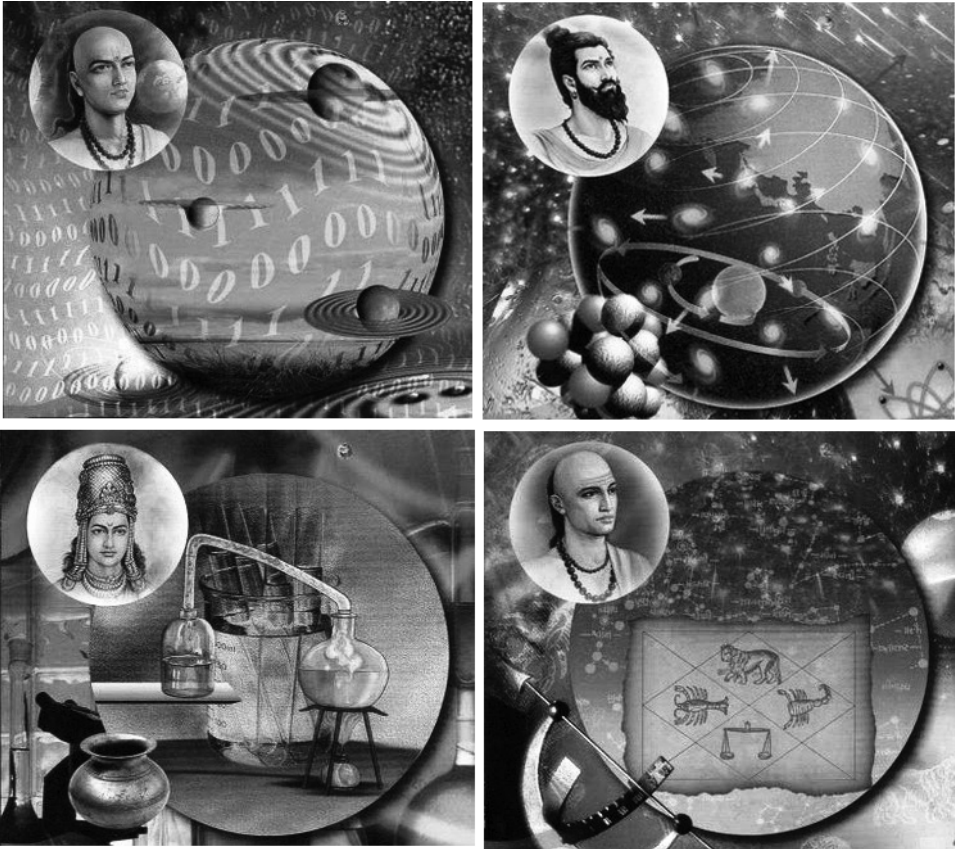
From the perspective of Indian spirituality the human power of cognition is limitless.⁹ But in actuality it is severely limited; the limitation comes from ourselves - definitions that petrify as our self-image; and this image is moulded, chiselled out, filed, sandpapered and buffed by various formative forces. The biological matter is given a specific shape by the cultural mould. Early childhood experiences¹⁰ do the chiselling, the domestic condition continues with its filing, conventional education does a polishing job similar to the one done by sandpapering, and professional exposure might do a further polishing job of buffing to the self-image to lend it a kind of sheen. But the self-image is not the self. The self is Divine in nature. What we have at present in the world is the science of the self-image. The future science will be the science of the real self. Now that the Newtonian outlook, though not of course his physics, has become outdated, and physics and mysticism have come closer than ever before, the stage is set for daring inquiries into the realm of the psyche.

For many decades, extra-sensory perception had been a subject of serious inquiry both in the USSR and the United States of America; the motivation for the inquiry had not been scientific curiosity but military interest. However, the methodology used was scientific, which means the results obtained deserve serious attention. In the USA, the Air Force had a department to inquire into the possibilities of remote viewing, that is to say, seeing what is happening at a

specified space and time without any ordinary means of communication. There is a book¹¹ on the experiments conducted by no lesser a person than the person who had been the director of the department for twenty years. The findings he reports are really astounding.

There appears to be different ways of knowing—sensual, rational and trans-rational. Science has been using only the first two of them, namely, sensual and rational means. There are trans-rational ways of knowing, and all of them are experiential in nature. The experience might occur spontaneously, or else after prolonged practice of meditation. In the *Annals of Science* one can read of rare instances of extraordinary dream experiences (rather than rational-conceptual methods, the acme of which is represented by mathematics) leading on to scientific discoveries.

“The intellectual understanding is only the lower buddhi; there is another and a higher buddhi which is not intelligence but vision, is not understanding but rather an over-standing in knowledge, and does not seek knowledge and attain it in subjection to the data it observes but possesses already the truth and brings it out in the terms of a revelatory and intuitional thought.”¹²



The science of the future will be one that is based more on experiential knowing than on the other two ways of knowing. In other words, the future science will be a child of spiritual intelligence. The scientific means of nurturing spirituality is meditation that empowers a person to discern the self from the not-self. Sri Sankaracharya had called this power of discernment *atma-anatma-vivekam*. In fact there is a very small composition by the Acharya entitled just that. As Frances Vaughan has pointed out rightly “Spiritual intelligence can be developed by a variety of practices for training attention, transforming emotions, and cultivating ethical behaviour. These practices are *not the exclusive property of any single religious tradition*¹³ or spiritual teaching.”¹⁴ But where from these practices originated is another question, and from the pointed attention given to meditation and witnessing in the Indian tradition it could well be the case that India is the land of its origin. This surmise is strengthened by the fact that Sri Aurobindo credits *Bhagavad-Gita* for introducing the concept of witnessing.

The one and constant refrain of Indian spirituality has been the unity beyond the seeming plurality. Psychic researchers in the West have done much striving to discover a medium like the electromagnetic radiation to account for the phenomena of telepathy, clairvoyance, remote viewing etc. In this it is evident that they were being guided by the examples of various means of communication based on electromagnetic radiation. But they have not so far succeeded in discovering any known form of radiation, and this failure forces them to postulate some other form of radiation not yet known to us. But this search for a black cat in a dark room which is not there is mercifully coming to an end thanks to the discovery of holographic phenomenon that underscores the essential unity of all.

In a hologram a lens-less photograph of a thing is recorded on a plate. When a laser beam is flashed onto that plate, the photographed object will appear in a three dimensional image. But the strangest fact is that every bit of a hologram is capable of reproducing the entire image.¹⁵ This has given rise to what is now called the holographic view of the universe. The holographic view means every bit is the whole. When Sri Sankara had declared the same truth in his famous aphorism “*jivobrahmaivana aparah*”¹⁶ at least ten centuries back, that declaration was nothing more than a mystical declaration of a great visionary to his followers and simple raving mad to his critics; hence the truth of it was unknowable to one group and highly suspect to the other. But now, that a bit contains the whole is a scientific fact. If that is the case, extra-sensory perception is nothing but the bit, that is to say, the false separate self tuning into its real Self. Just as no radiation of electromagnetic waves is needed for accessing a temporarily lost memory from the subconscious mind, this tuning-in involves no carrier waves and no medium. When I, sitting in Kerala, communicate without any material apparatus with Katriona Crawford in London, I am only reaching out to my own part, and she is only reaching out to her own part.

The physics of the present day is capable of demystifying much by going beyond the Newtonian worldview in a big way. Quantum physics pictures the

universe as a dynamic web of energy patterns in which the observer is inextricably linked with the observed. If the worldview is that of isolated objects made up of elementary particles, ESP would be problematic. Whereas if reality is a whole having no real separateness, what is required is the overcoming of the false sense of separateness; hence the need to “Blend in with the surroundings.”¹⁷ The seemingly separate things in the universe came from One, and That One, referred to as “*tat*” in the Indian spiritual tradition is the only reality. When the physicist Dr. David Bohm calls That One the “implicate enfolded order,”¹⁸ he is not saying anything materially different from what Sri Aurobindo meant when he wrote:

“The highest and real truth of existence is the one spirit, the supreme Soul, Purushottama, and it is the power of being of this Spirit which manifests itself in all that we experience as universe.”¹⁹

The world of manifoldness is, according to Bohm, ‘the explicate unfolded order.’ In this order called the cosmos— the opposite of chaos or disorder—

“Parts are seen to be in immediate connection, in which their dynamical relationships depend in an irreducible way on the state of the whole system... Thus one is led to a new notion of unbroken wholeness which denies the classical idea of analysability of the world into separately and independently existent parts.”²⁰

However, it is of the nature of mind to dream up plurality where in truth there is only the One.

Hence in *The Mandukya Karika* this mental proclivity is pointed out as the only cause of the appearance of the world of plurality:

“As the mind itself appears as the different objects and persons in the dream state, in the waking state also the mind appears as the different objects and persons.”²¹

The present-day science is heavily dependent on the mind, and we mistakenly think that knowledge can be had only through the mind. But in fact, the knowledge of the true can be attained only when the mind ceases to be. In Indian spirituality the true is that which remains after the cessation of the functioning of the mind. This is not a theoretical concept to be treated as a subject for philosophical debate, but a hypothesis meant to be experimented with, to search and realise. The methodology for this search consists in stopping the mind from forming ideas so that mind as we ordinarily know comes to an end. Gowdapada Acharya says that

“when there is no idea to form separate from the Atman, feelings of duality becomes impossible.”²²

The existing science is the progeny of duality; the Science of the future would be based on the knowledge of Oneness. Such a Science is not likely to need any laboratory with all its paraphernalia. Its sole lab, workshop and factory would be consciousness.

Conclusion

The search for truth has to proceed at first from belief, technically called ‘*Sravana*,’ to logical working out, called ‘*manana*,’ and finally reach the truth through doing away with the mind that creates divisions where in truth there exists none. The method for that doing away is known as ‘*nididhyasana*.’ This threefold step is considered as pertaining to the search for the realisation of the Ultimate. But the Science of the future is going to be the ultimate science; and it too has to adopt the methodology of *nididhyasana*. Quantum physics is still clinging on to the *manana* stage, but a time will come when it will have to go over to the next stage, namely *nididhyasana*. This is vouchsafed by what is happening in the area of psychology. Though neuropsychology is being used to perpetuate the reductionism that is so dear to the thinkers of materialistic persuasions, the emerging field of transpersonal psychology is showing the way for the science of the future. As pointed out by Sri Aurobindo, the science of the future shall be one that

“deals directly with forces of the life-world and of Mind and so arrives at what is beyond mind.”²³

The future scientific study will necessarily be in the nature of explorations beyond the mind.

...the future is mightier than the past and evolution proceeds relentlessly in its course trampling to pieces all that it no longer needs. Sri Aurobindo (*CWSA* vol.1, p.435)

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¹ *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, p.205.

² On 17-02-1600 he was burnt at the stake.

³ Braud, W. (1998). “Complementary Ways of Knowing, Being, and Expression,” *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, Braud, W., and Anderson, R. (Eds.) Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA., p.39.

⁴ *Yaticharitam* (2003). Malayala Patdana Gaveshana Kendram, Thrissur, Kerala, pp. 466-495.

⁵ Published by Flamingo Press, London, 1983.

⁶ *The Human Cycle*, *CWSA*, vol. 25, 1998, p.78.

⁷ *Ibid*.

⁸ Published by Bantam Books; New York, 1988.

⁹ Sri Sankara would say that in the absence of ‘seer-seen discernment’ the seer limits himself to the seen, and then the knowledge too is limited; but when the seer clearly distinguishes himself from the seen, his cognition becomes spiritual and hence limitless. This is dealt with by Sankara in his works like *Drik-Drishya-Vivekam*, *Atmanatma Vivekam* and *Viveka Chudamani*.

¹⁰ *The Script Theory of Transactional Analysis* gives a cogent explanation of the impact of the early childhood experiences of a person in forming his script which the person tends to act out and fulfil.

¹¹ Graff, D. (1998). *Tracks in the Psychic Wilderness*; Element Books Ltd., Rockport, MA.

¹²Sri Aurobindo (1999). *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, vol. 23, p.311.

¹³Emphasis added.

¹⁴Vaughan, F. (2003) What is Spiritual Intelligence? *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, vol. 42, No.2. Spring 2002, 16-33, Sage Publications.

¹⁵Dr. Dennis Gabor was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1971 for his discovery of the holographic phenomenon.

¹⁶The individual soul (*jivo*) is none other than (*naaparah*) the Ultimate (*Brahman*).

¹⁷A consciousness that is thoughtless and expanded is not egocentric, so it can blend in with everything in its surroundings. The experience of unity with the surroundings will engender a new sense of security and courage; and the fear-filled alertness to detect threats to the organism will give way to a new sensitivity to see what cannot be seen ordinarily.

¹⁸Bohm, D. (1981) *The Implicate Order*; Routledge & Kegan Paul; London.

¹⁹*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, vol. 24, p.754.

²⁰Brennan, B. *Hands of Light*; Bantam Books, New York, p. 25

²¹*The Mandukya Karika* of Gowdapada Acharya: Chapter III, verse 29.

²²*Ibid.* verse 32.

²³*Ibid.* p.205;

(Reproduced with due thanks and acknowledgement from *New Race*, Feb-Apr 2010, Issues. 1&2, pp. 62-72)

Sri Aurobindo's Language: An Expression of "the real or spiritual"

Oeendriila Guha

Macaulay's Minute of 1835, an extension of the systematised Eurocentric theoretical practices, enforced English as the official language of India, thereby checking the use of the various indigenous dialects and vernaculars across the Indian subcontinent which were ecologically-conscious. It sought to homogenise and "tyrannise and subsume the East into the dominant West". (S. Murali 93) English was the surest way to achieve social and political mobility in the subcontinent. To protest, many writers continued to write in their vernaculars but to no avail. English garnered enough publicity to build up a chain of colonial policies, disrupting the traditional way of Indian life.

In such a colonial-minded setting, Sri Aurobindo was born and raised. It was in Baroda, on touching his native soil in 1893, that he learnt Sanskrit and his mother tongue, Bengali. He realised that to reach masses and to awaken them to the ideal of independence, he had to inspire their beings with fierce love and respect for their country, her flora and fauna. English did not do justice to these feelings; Sanskrit and the vernaculars did. At the same time, he recognised the importance of using English to challenge the British government and its policies, thereby establishing himself in the midst of a diverse community. But Sri Aurobindo used English differently.

Sri Aurobindo, aware of language as a cultural artifact, considered it as a medium of expressing experiences or insights of the individual consciousness. Language, as an extension of the individual consciousness, can be appropriated as a tool to shape the collective consciousness, thereby, fulfilling the greatest role of shaping an ideology, a lifestyle. Sri Aurobindo's English is anti-hierarchical as it is largely influenced by the environmentally friendly Sanskrit language which framed the Vedanta thought.

According to Sri Aurobindo, Sanskrit does not suffer from "singularity of meaning" because every vowel and consonant has a number of primary roots, out of which secondary roots were developed by the addition of other consonants. All words were formed from these roots, simple words by the addition again of pure or mixed vowel and consonant terminations with or without modification of the root and more complex words by the principle of composition. (CWSA, 16:476)

Sanskrit validates four levels of being/consciousness: *para* (prior to manifestation), *pashyanti* (after manifestation/ sound and sense take shape), *madhyama* (selective sound), and *vaikhari* (external form). Therefore, it has

captured the fundamental sounds of humanity and is the *para-vak*, or the Supreme Word. Mantric in quality, Sanskrit sings in high praise of the pulsation of a Consciousness in every species on earth. Sri Aurobindo calls it “the language of the *Satyayuga* based on the true and perfect relation of *vak* and *artha*.” (*CWSA*, 16:476)

Sri Aurobindo’s English, garnered favourably with the essentialist metaphysic of the Vedas, Upanishads and the Sanskrit vocabulary which is “the outcome of a culture that founds itself on a metaphysic of cosmic unity and harmony” (S. Murali, 162), impresses the native and non-native speakers with his artistic activity, and universality of spirit, thereby underwriting the Judeo-Christian God as “one masculine potentate as creator, conceived under a metaphysic of power, dominance and subjugation.” (S. Murali, 164) His English is not one of power-discourse between God, humanity and nature.

Sri Aurobindo says that language or speech can express two elements: “the outward or instrumental and the real or spiritual”. (*CWSA*, 26:18) The outward element is merely a medium through which “the real or spiritual” element is expressed. Language expresses “the real or spiritual”, it has the inherent quality to capture the soul of the subject at deliberation. Therefore, it is neither arbitrary nor stable but is constantly changing by defying boundaries that have been allocated to it, and writers have the creative license to expand this boundary. To him, words, which are “physical sounds”, have a purpose beyond this external use; it possesses an inherent “suggestive turn, aptness and vividness and richness and beauty” (*CWSA*, 26:272) to manifest the “home of Truth, *sadanad rtasya*” which is “the inherent divinity of the manifestation”. (Orton, 288) He calls this creative force and truth in language “Nature-Force” which the ancient Vedic thinkers identified as “*Vak*, the goddess of creative Speech”. (*CWSA*, 26:289) It is a given that such a language must be “a profound enlightening idea and creative interpretation of the world and Nature and all that man is and does and thinks and dreams” (*CWSA*, 26:275), and by its very definition necessarily invalidates transcendence-immanence and humanity-nature dualisms.

The Future Poetry, which records Sri Aurobindo’s critical genius, analyses this role of language, poetic language in particular, thus charting out “its evolution from the objective to the subjective approach and from the subjective to the spiritual.” (Gokak, 112) It also observes an English language that must unite the ideal and the form and celebrate the soul of humanity and nature. Sri Aurobindo, who employs such English in his writings, effectively reverses transcendence-immanence and humanity-nature dualisms. His nature images and symbols celebrate a symbiosis of God, the natural world and humanity.

His language, which is a combination of English and Sanskrit, naturally defies the hierarchical infliction of English by subtly incorporating the environmental ethics of an ecologically-sensitive Sanskrit language. For instance, Sri Aurobindo uses the word “Vishnu” in the poem, “In the Moonlight”, to indicate the Divine’s part in maintaining balance in the universe

or “enring the earth”. Lord Vishnu is the immortal Will who “In Asia like a dove immaculate/ He lurks deep-brooding in the hearts of men.” (*CWSA*, 2:239) He is revered as the “preserver” because he “wars for the world and its ultimate years”. (*CWSA*, 2:202) He thus symbolises “Heaven’s claim upon the toiling earth” as one worthy of immortality. (*CWSA*, 2:244) This idea is singularly Indian and ecologically-insightful. Lord Vishnu has no counterpart in the Western tradition. S. Murali notes, “Ecological wisdom is as old as the oldest religious traditions in the world.” (171) So, Sri Aurobindo says that Europe is delusional because she

Knows not, nor any of her schools

Who scorn the higher thought for dreams of fools;

Riches and joy and power meanwhile are gained. (*CWSA*, 2: 239)

Similarly, everything is the Brahman because all existence is divine delight or ananda, as elucidated in the poem, “Shiva”, in the lines:

On the white summit of eternity

A single Soul of bare infinities,

Guarded he keeps... His mystic loneliness of nude ecstasy.

But, touched by an immense delight to be,

He looks across unending depths and sees...

Life springs in her and Mind is born; her face

She lifts to Him who is Herself, until

The Spirit leaps into the Spirit’s embrace. (*CWSA*, 2:609)

“A single Soul of bare infinities” is Lord Shiva who is beyond the cosmic play. He participates in the universal/ cosmic creative process out of “an immense delight to be” (*CWSA*, 2: 609). Lord Shiva has no counterpart in the Western tradition since the Judeo-Christian tradition maintains that creation rose out of chaos and darkness. The concept of a God who punishes his creation is missing in Hindu religion because a God cannot punish the same creation which he created out of an “immense delight to be”. (*CWSA*, 2:609) Thus, Sri Aurobindo speaks of a God who affirms “on Nature’s soil His sovereign rights”. (*CWSA*, 2:613)

By raising his consciousness above superficial reasoning, Sri Aurobindo fine-tunes the English language with the help of the ecologically-nuanced concepts of Indian thought. Thus, his English reverberates with ecological wisdom, reinforcing the divinity of nature. Sri Aurobindo liberates the English language from the clutches of a discriminatory ‘logos’ that maintains nature is inferior to humanity because it does not adhere to a language that ascribes primary position to human speech and human values. (Manes, 24) Such a language is not free of logocentric politics and cannot be ecologically humble.

On other hand, a non-verbal language makes itself heard through “silence, and solitude and learning how to listen”. (Kheel, 63) Sri Aurobindo hears this non-verbal language of nature in “silence, and solitude” by incorporating the Sanskrit vocabulary, such as Brahman, Purusha, Ishwara, Maya, Prakriti, Shakti, Dharma, Karma, and others into the English language in order to retain their

spirit and essence, thereby expressing his 'Hindu' experiences in a foreign language which least recognises the 'Hindu' experience of universal unity and harmony. He is one of the earliest authors to set this trend, thereby influencing Mulk Raj Anand and his generation to use vernaculars in their English writings. Anand used Hindi; Sri Aurobindo infused the logo-centric English with the ecologically-humbled linguistic of Sanskrit. But merely using the vernacular in English to give it a native colour and smell (Indianised English) is not enough. The writer must not use it merely as a literary tool, and the speaker must not solely use it as a tool of random communication. Instead, language must be an apparatus to measure the level of consciousness of a writer or speaker. So, if a speaker were to sexualise a language, it is a sign of him externalising his ego, thereby, working the language as a tool of vulgarity and oppression. Therefore, the speaker must affect an inward change in his consciousness to speak a language which has the capacity to decode any superficial dualities and embrace them not as opposites but the same. Based on this logic, it can be assumed that the interpreters of the Bible, constrained by an overtly moral religion, born of a divisive mind (reason as the finest medium of experiencing God in Christianity), penned down a scripture replete with fear of God: shame of humanity, and despair of nature.

Savitri: a Legend and a Symbol is the poetry of tomorrow, and its language is the language of tomorrow. The Mother called it "the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo's vision". This modern-day epic comprises almost twenty-four thousand lines: the longest in the history of the English language. It is mantric in its quality to invoke the Divine Consciousness to manifest in matter and nature and transform all life as into a Divine Truth. The very first line of *Savitri*, "It was the hour before the Gods awake" (*CWSA*, 33:1) is mantric as it points out not an event which happened once in history but "to one that constantly and repeatedly happens". It is a truth which took a religio-mythic turn as "a part of India's temple life for millennia: the daily awakening of the Gods." (Shraddhavan, 13-14) This line proves that Gods reside in nature as her manifold powers and expressions and help to perpetuate "the harmonious functions by which the universe moves on its progressive path." (Shraddhavan, 14) Thus, Sri Aurobindo invokes Usas, the Goddess of Dawn and Light, to bring upon a new day and enlighten his being and speech and in matter's grey breast kindle the immortal Light which is why he titled the very first chapter of *Savitri: a Legend and a Symbol* as "The Symbol Dawn".

Sri Aurobindo was aware of the difficulty of using a foreign tongue replete with indigenous similes, metaphors, images and symbols which are Vedic in proportion in their rendering of supraphysical planes of beings and consciousnesses. Yet he outbraves the challenge, thereby, transforming the hierarchal English language to reflect the occult and mystic truth of word or language as revelation or *vak*. Sri Aurobindo hails *Savitri* as the bearer of a new

language, the Chit-Tapas behind transforming the very material or nature of the pre-Aurobindonian English language into a mantra of tomorrow in the lines:

O living power of the incarnate Word,
All that the Spirit has dreamed thou canst create:
Thou art the force by which I made the worlds,
Thou art my vision and my will and voice. (*CWSA*, 34:693)

Dante's Beatrice, who represents beatific love, is limited in her capacity to make Dante love her only for one lifetime. Milton's Satan is only capable of making the readers feel remorse and anger at a fate which is unconquerable. The kind of supramental experiences that Savitri undergoes by conquering Death and recognising that immanence and transcendence are one and the same makes her realise that conquering one's ego and affecting an integral change in one's inner and outer nature is not only explicit in its detailed descriptions but incomparable in its depth of seeking and realising the Divine in "the worlds". Sri Aurobindo's Savitri must be lauded for her spiritual prowess for taking upon herself the sorrows of the world and affecting change in matter which has been repeatedly shunned for its incapacity to mould and respond.

Sri Aurobindo says that Savitri's "thoughts and actions" are "graved in Nature's book". (*CWSA*, 33:19) This is the reason why Shradhdhavan observes that they have "a long-lasting evolutionary significance and effect". (120) She also says that to the realised, nature reveals herself as a "divine Presence, a Godhead". To conclude, *Savitri: a Legend and a Symbol* is "the incarnate Word" which manifests the collective transformation of humanity and matter into a measureless reality of the Delight to be. Thus, Sri Aurobindo's magnum opus effectively dissolves any dualisms, be it of transcendence and immanence or God, humanity and nature.

Hailing from the East, his roots entrenched deep into Indian philosophy, Sri Aurobindo bridges the Western ontological gap between transcendence and immanence and God, humanity and nature. In the words of S. Murali, Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy, founded on the tenets of the Vedanta thought, bases itself on the mindset of the erstwhile Indians and seeks to inculcate in them a practice to venerate nature. His vision "is grounded in a distinctly non-Eurocentric tradition, and any approach to his work has to take into account this factor." (S. Murali, 100)

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