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New Race

Blessings

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# NEW RACE

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From the editor's desk...

*The Word has power, wrote Sri Aurobindo. It is the potent word, the word impregnated with force that can bring a significant change in one's consciousness. Such a potent word is called "mantra". The importance of mantra lies in the fact that it acts as a walking stick for the one who wants to do sadhana and proceed faster. While Sri Aurobindo purposely did not give any mantra for the transformation of the body, the Mother devised one for herself. Om Namō Bhagvate, resonated through her "cells". The account of this we find in the collection – Mother's Agenda. Elaborating the impact and the formation of Mantra, Prof. V Madhusudan Reddy's article explains the root of the mantra and its importance in everyday life and yoga sadhana.*

*Next section of articles which specifically focuses on the works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo brings forth the aspect of their being Avatar and some remembrances of the time spent with them. Their work is also deeply connected to the spiritual destiny of India. Swami Vivekananda envisions something similar to that of Sri Aurobindo. He tells us about the strength we the people of India have. This leads us to understand the "The Future of Religion". Today when every religion is trying to survive by every means, is there is actually any need for religion? Or do we need to go beyond religion? The answer has been elaborated in the article.*

*The last section focuses on the use of pain and suffering in the life of human beings, its importance as portrayed in Savitri and the explanation that Sri Aurobindo, the Mahayogi, the seer-poet has given us. This article links to the next essay by Dilip Kumar Roy – "Sri Aurobindo, the Seer Poet". We get to read Sri Aurobindo's poetic genius in this record. We learn better by comparing. Sri Aurobindo's poem, "Nightingale" when compared with Keats' poem with the same title may bring an awe to the reader of Sri Aurobindo's approach and treatment of the subject, it is for the reader to enjoy the two great poets and the analysis of their poetry.*

*Through these lanes of mantra, religion and poetry we reach to an account by Dr. Ananda Reddy, who along with his group was as if descended back to Pondicherry because of the infinite Grace that protected them. We have here a poignant account of his return from the Ganges after witnessing the "tandav" of Lord Shiva there.*

*In this special issue we have tried to bring ourselves closer to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in the way of understanding their work and writings. We hope that our readers enjoy our selections and grow closer to them.*

**SHRUTI BIDWAIKAR**

# THE MANTRA

*The Mother*



**September 16, 1958**

*(Mother spoke about mantras that have come to her)*

But what is going to come now? I constantly hear the Sanskrit mantra:

*Om Namō Bhagavateh\**

It is there, all around me; it takes hold of all the cells and at once they spring forth in an ascension. And Narada's mantra, too:

*Narayana, Narayana ...*

(it is actually a Command which means: now you shall do as I wish), but it doesn't come from the heart. What will it be?

It will simply spring forth in a flash, all of a sudden, and it will be very powerful. Only power can do something. Love vanishes like water running through sand: people remain beatific ... and nothing moves! No, power is needed - like Shiva, stirring, churning ...

When I have this mantra, instead of saying hello, good-bye, I shall say that. When I say hello, good-bye, it means 'Hello: the Presence is here, the Light is here.' 'Good-bye: I am not going away, I am staying here.'

But when I have this mantra, I believe something will happen.

(silence)

For the moment, of all the formulas or mantras, the one that acts most directly on this body, that seizes all the cells and immediately does this (*vibrating motion*) is the Sanskrit mantra: *Om Namō Bhagavateh*.

As soon as I sit for meditation, as soon as I have a quiet minute to concentrate, it always begins with this mantra, and there is a response in the body, in the cells of the body: they all start vibrating.

The first syllable of *Namō* is pronounced with a short 'a,' as in *nahmo*. The final word is pronounced *Bha-gah-va-teh*.

This is how it happened: Y had just returned, and he brought back a trunk full of things which he then proceeded to show me, and his excitement made tight, tight little waves in the atmosphere, making my head ache; it made ... anyway, it was unpleasant. When I left, just after that had happened, I sat down and went like this (*gesture of sweeping out*) to make it stop, and immediately the mantra began.

It rose up from here (*Mother indicates the solar plexus*), like this: *Om Namō Bhagavateh Om Namō Bhagavateh Om Namō Bhagavateh*. It was formidable. For the entire quarter of an hour that the meditation lasted, everything was filled with Light! In the deeper tones it was of golden bronze (at the throat level it was almost red) and in the higher tones it was a kind of opaline white light: *Om Namō Bhagavateh, Om Namō Bhagavateh, Om Namō Bhagavateh*.

The other day (I was in my bathroom upstairs), it came; it took hold of the entire body. It rose up in the same way, and all the cells were trembling. And with such a power! So I stopped everything, all movement, and I let the thing grow. The vibration went on expanding, ever widening, as the sound itself was expanding, expanding, and all the cells of the body were seized with an intensity of aspiration ... as if the entire body were swelling - it became overwhelming. I felt that it would all burst.

I understood those who withdraw from everything to live that totally. And it has such a transformative power! I felt that if it continued, something would happen, something like a change in the equilibrium of the body's cells.

Unfortunately, I was unable to continue, because ... I don't have the time; it was just before the balcony darshan and I was going to be late. Something told me, 'That is for people who have nothing to do.' Then I said, 'I belong to my work,' and I slowly withdrew. I put on the brakes, and the action was cut

short. But what remains is that whenever I repeat this mantra ... everything starts vibrating.

So each one must find something that acts on himself, individually. I am only speaking of the action on the physical plane, because mentally, vitally, in all the inner parts of the being, the aspiration is always, always spontaneous. I am referring only to the physical plane.

The physical seems to be more open to something that is repetitious - for example, the music we play on Sundays, which has three series of combined mantras. The first is that of Chandi, addressed to the universal Mother:

*Ya devi sarvabhuteshu matrirupena sansthita  
Ya devi sarvabhuteshu shaktirupena sansthita  
Ya devi sarvabhuteshu shantirupena sansthita  
Namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namah*

The second is addressed to Sri Aurobindo (and I believe they have put my name at the end). It incorporates the mantra I was speaking of:

*Om namo namah shrimirambikayai  
Om namo bhagavateh shriaravindaya  
Om namo namah shrimirambikayai.*

And the third is addressed to Sri Aurobindo: 'Thou art my refuge.'

*Shriaravindah sharanam mama.*

Each time this music is played, it produces exactly the same effect upon the body. It is strange, as if all the cells were dilating, with a feeling that the body is growing larger ... It becomes all dilated, as if swollen with light - with force, a lot of force. And this music seems to form spirals, like luminous ribbons of incense smoke, white (not transparent, literally white) and they rise up and up. I always see the same thing; it begins in the form of a vase, then swells like an amphora and converges higher up to blossom forth like a flower.

So for these mantras, everything depends upon what you want to do with them. I am in favor of a short mantra, especially if you want to make both numerous and spontaneous repetitions - one or two words, three at most. Because you must be able to use them in all cases, when an accident is about to happen, for example. It has to spring up without thinking, without calling; it should issue forth from the being spontaneously, like a reflex, exactly like a reflex. Then the mantra has its full force.

For me, on the days when I have no special preoccupations or difficulties (days I could call normal, when I am normal), everything I do, all the movements

of this body, all, all the words I utter, all the gestures I make, are accompanied and upheld by or lined, as it were, with this mantra:

*Om Namō Bhagavateh... Om Namō Bhagavateh ...all, all the time, all the time, all the time.*

That is the normal state. It creates an atmosphere of an intensity almost more material than the subtle physical; it's like ... almost like the phosphorescent radiations from a medium. And it has a great action, a very great action: it can prevent an accident. And it accompanies you all the time, all the time.

But it is up to you to know what you want to do with it.

*To sustain the aspiration - to remember. We so easily lapse into forgetfulness. To create a kind of automatism.*

You have no mantras that have come to you, that give you a more living feeling? ... Are their mantras long?

*Yes, they are long. And he' has not given me any mantra of the Mother, so ... They exist, but he has not given me any ... I don't know, they don't have much effect on me. It is something very mental.*

That's why it should spring forth from you.

*(silence)*

This one, this mantra, *Om Namō Bhagavateh*, came to me after some time, for I felt ... well, I saw that I needed to have a mantra of my own, that is, a mantra consonant with what this body has to do in the world. And it was just then that it came. It was truly an answer to a need that had made itself felt. So if you feel the need - not there, not in your head, but here (*Mother points to the center of her heart*), it will come. One day, either you will hear the words, or they will spring forth from your heart ... And when that happens, you must hold onto it.

\*\*\*

*Savitri  
is a Mantra  
for the transformation  
of the world*

*The Mother*

# THE NATURE AND POWER OF MANTRA AND BIJA MANTRAS

V. Madhusudan Reddy

## (I)

The Absolute is not an abstract reality; it is a dynamic spiritual Truth. Even the subtlest and most luminous intellect can only reach an abstraction of the Truth and not the true Truth itself. To express what is spiritually living and intuitively real we need an equally living and fully symbolic language. "The mystery of things", observes Sri Aurobindo, "is the true truth of things; the intellectual presentation is only truth in representation in abstract symbols..."<sup>1</sup> The words we use are minted by mind, are manufactured in the mental workshop and are capable of expressing only a partial truth, a pragmatic truth. Human speech is grounded in the language of normal reason which itself is founded in a separative, divisive consciousness formed by a limited phenomenal experience. Only a language of symbols and spiritual values of speech will be capable of expressing, however inadequately, the truth, the warmth and the power of a higher experience.

In the hands of the Vedic Rishis, language is not only heightened but transfigured into the sheer power of revelatory truth born from the Spirit itself. The *mantras* are magical products of a mystical transportation, of a spiritual inspiration, of a deeper truth and vision.

The Vedic *mantras* are self-born out of the depths of Reality realised by the Rishis and carry in them their own vision, conviction, power and knowledge. They express themselves revealingly in the luminous substance of a spiritual perception and experience without any dependence upon sensual or mental aids. They are inspired utterances that bear the very stamp and intention of the Infinite and the Eternal; they constitute an inner speech and fulfil the secret purpose of Spirit in the context of earth's evolution by opening windows into the domain of the most High and the Luminous — the Kingdom of the Truth, the Right and the Vast, *Satyam Rtam Brhat*. It is the Knowledge, the Light and the Force from above that find a free expression in the *mantras*. They embody a very special vibration from above. The Vedic *mantra* "is a word of power and light that comes from the Overmind inspiration or from some very high plane of intuition."<sup>2</sup> Its language conveys infinitely more than what the surface sense of the words indicate. Its rhythm "is born out of the Infinite and disappears into it,"<sup>3</sup> and means much more than the language, and apart from communicating the phenomenal content, imparts the warmth, the power and the luminosity of the original consciousness which is behind and higher than the physical, vital and mental planes. The *mantra* coming from above seizes the lower and lifts it into some infinite profundity. It may not transmute the lower permanently but certainly elevates it. The *mantra* receives this power

from the rhythmic sound that embodies its inner meaning. It is the highest inspiration, an inspiration from the overmental and intuitive planes that brings the *mantra*. As the *mantra* is the sound-expression of a supreme experience, it is by repeating it that one can arrive at the experience. The word-expression produces the necessary vibrations which prepare the mind to realise any higher Idea in the supra-physical. Repetition of the name of the Supreme, or *mantra japa*, creates the corresponding vibrations which in their turn prepare the way for the realisation of the Supreme or the corresponding *mantra shakti*. This truth is expressed in the Biblical saying: "God said 'Let there be Light', and there was Light." This is the power of creation by the Word. The Vedic *mantras* being sound-transcriptions of the realisations of the Rishis, are capable of becoming vehicles of realisation for other seekers. The *mantra* is an inner truth expressed in a supremely self-effective language, as it is the highest and 'intensest revealing form of poetic thought and expression'. In Sri Aurobindo, *mantra* gets its most authentic and effective definition: it is "an inspired and revealed seeing and visioned thinking, attended by a realisation... of some inmost truth of God and self and man and Nature and cosmos and life and thing and thought and experience and deed. It was a thinking that came on the wings of a great soul-rhythm, *chandas*."<sup>4</sup> In this case, seeing and hearing are inseparable being unified in a single spell of realisation. "The Mantra is born through the heart and shaped or massed by the thinking mind into a chariot of that godhead of the Eternal of whom the truth seen is a face or a form."<sup>5</sup> The truth realised always precedes or accompanies in the Rishi the expression of this inner seeing or hearing which is the Mantra. And in the receptive hearer, too, these three, namely, the hearing of the rhythmic Word, the mind's possession of the inmost spirit of it, and the sight of the Godhead come together. Mantra, therefore, is "the voice of the inmost Truth and is couched in the highest power of the very rhythm and speech of that truth."<sup>6</sup> The Vedic Rishis saw the secret truth of things, heard it expressed in rhythmic vibrations cast up by the sacred Fire of aspiration within them, and voiced it with a power revelatory of that truth. "The Mantra, in other words," as Sri Aurobindo observes, "is a direct and most heightened, an intensest and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things and with its truth and with the divine soul-forms of it, the Godheads which are born from the living Truth. Or, let us say, it is a supreme rhythmic language which seizes hold upon all that is finite and brings into each the light and voice of its own infinite."<sup>7</sup> Mantra is not a poetic expression of a philosophic truth; it is 'the rhythmic revelation or intuition arising out of the soul's sight of God and Nature and the world' and the inner truth of things that is hidden to the physical eye. It is the most effective expression of a vision, an intimate knowledge and an experience of the working and the truth of the forces behind life. It is surcharged with a spiritual significance, it is a mystic formula, a sacred syllable. It is a psychophysical means, a sound-body, an acoustic instrument



for the divine manifestation (even as the many *devas* are) as well as a support for our spiritual growth and experience. It is through the *mantra* that the Divine manifests his infinite splendour to the seeker, and through it again the seeker increasingly gets to know the Divine.

## (II)

Words are in no sense dead goods, but organic growths of sound with certain seed-sounds as their hidden core. It is out of these seed-sounds that primitive root-words develop which proliferate further giving rise to successive generations of related word-descendants. This process of language evolution is natural and governed by definite psychological laws. According to Sri Aurobindo, "In their beginnings language-sounds... were rather the vocal equivalents of certain general sensations and emotion-values. It was the nerves and not the intellect which created speech."<sup>8</sup> Language-sounds initially did not express ideas; they were originally "vital ejections full of a vague sense-potentiality" and have only later "evolved into fixed symbols of precise intellectual significances."<sup>9</sup>

Word, to begin with, were not fixed to any precise ideas. Each word had a quality of its own and was capable of many applications, observes Sri Aurobindo, and therefore shared its results with other related sounds which gave birth to several word-families. Beginning from such a communal life that words gradually acquired an individual and specialised life of their own and came to be subjected to the life of the ideas they represent. In the early stages of development of languages words were more like packets of living force than of ideas or meanings. It was sound that determined sense. In their later stages they became vehicles of thought relegating sound to a secondary position. In the past the word was a living entity, had a wealth of force of its own, a signification, a value, and capable of a great number of senses. Whereas in the present context, to use Sri Aurobindo's terminology, words are 'mere coins of verbal currency' divested of their original sense and expressiveness, and limited to not more than one to two senses. They have meanings acquired through a long convention of usage without any relation to the truth of the objects. The Vedic Rishis had access to the manifold power and wealth of words and used them freely and symbolically to communicate their sublime experiences. Looking ceaselessly upward into realms of supernal light and leaping into kingdoms of cosmic consciousness, the Vedic Rishis gained the self-found knowledge that reveals itself in the great *mantras*.

The Vedic word is the living sound-body of the seer's vision of Truth whose support and substance is a subtle conscious force. On the other hand, human speech is a chain of mere physical sounds with a nervous origin, but gradually refined and made sensitive by growing intelligence and as such appeals only to the conceiving and phenomenal intelligence. The word of the Veda sees and

expresses in its body to the awakened intelligence 'the spiritual and living actuality of idea and object'. Words in their inmost psychological depths are constituted of a conscious power — the superconscient Nature-Force — that raises its material out of the subconscious and renders it increasingly conscious in its operations, eventually making it expressive of the Spirit. "It is this Force, this Shakti", Sri Aurobindo elucidates, "to which the old Vedic thinkers gave the name of *Vak*, the goddess of creative Speech, and the Tantric psychists supposed that this Power acts in us through different subtle nervous centres on higher and higher levels of its force and that thus the word has a graduation of its expressive powers of truth and vision."<sup>10</sup> There are, therefore, 'different degrees of the force of speech, each separately characteristic and distinguishable'. One of these grades according to the Tantric classification is *Pashyanti vak*, 'the seeing word'. This 'seeing speech' too, classifies Sri Aurobindo, has "different grades of its power of vision and expression of vision,"<sup>11</sup> ranging from a vivid force of presentation and living appeal to a flaming, penetrating and dynamic vision and expression of the superconscient.

Although, according to Tantra, speech comes from the throat centre, there are several other centres with which it is associated depending upon the many levels of consciousness where we dwell and think from. *Pashyanti Vak* is obviously that speech which is charged with the vision of the supreme Truth. The Tantriks locate the many forms of speech in the different *cakras*, each form bearing the stamp of the power peculiar to that centre. For the Tantriks, the throat centre is the externalising physical mind and the heart is the emotional mind which can be connected with the psychic, and through it the higher consciousness. The *sahasradala padma*, the thousand-petalled lotus, is above the head; it not only spiritualises the mind but acts as a receiving station for the many intuitions from above as well as from the Overmind. The supramental, as it is not yet organised in the body, uses the *sahasradala padma* for its entry into the human phenomenon. The centre at the crown is part of this seventh centre and links the individual with the Infinite Consciousness above. The *ajna cakra*, in the forehead between the eyebrows, is the one which establishes the communication between the higher consciousness on the one hand and the inner and outer mind on the other. Its opening is the beginning of the yogic consciousness; it is the centre of the inner vision and the inner will. The *Muladhara cakra* is the centre and seat of the physical consciousness proper.

Human speech, as we have discovered, is only "the presentation of a presentation, the mental figure of an object which is itself only a figure of the sole Reality, Brahman."<sup>12</sup> It has no doubt the power to create, but can create only mental images which are merely the adaptive formations of earlier mental images. It is believed that the Vedic Rishis were capable of recreating the *devas* in themselves by appropriate *mantras* and integrating them with their being. It is in this way that they gained control over the forces of the physical universe. The ancient view that the world is a psycho-physical phenomenon, and not merely a material reality, gains credence from this very special efficacy of the

*mantra* to influence the physical world. The force of prayer or worship as well as the rewards of the magic rites of the Atharva-veda are founded upon this power of the *mantra*.

Yoga implies a double awakening — awakening both to the inner self as well as the higher self. Higher life is followed by the two movements which are complementary: a) the inner being awakens and comes to the front and controls and guides the outer consciousness, and b) there is the plunge of the seeker into the inner planes. This results in the experience, as it were, of a strong, yet a quiet spiritual *asana*. This inner posture leads the *sadhak* to the realisation of the Supreme. He then becomes a channel of the spiritual energy, light and force in their self-formulation. Charged with the spiritual force and formulated in the spiritual substance of the Supreme, *mantra* then carries with it the power of self-effectuation of the Spirit.

## BIJA-MANTRAS

Paramashiva is the witness counterpart of *Shabdabrahman*. The latter has two aspects — the sound aspect and the spiritual aspect. *Shabdabrahman* is the composite form of Brahmanhood and acoustics. It is the cause of manifest sound, meaning and *mantra* the manifest and differentiated word. It is the consciousness in all beings. When Paramashiva, the Infinite Self, is transformed into finite beings, the first expression is that of sound which is charged with divine effulgence. Sound is primarily a psychic wave. It is the first and subtlest ideational expression of the Supreme. This is *Shabdabrahman*. The Supreme Shakti divides itself into *bindu*, *nada*, and *bija*. *Bindu* is of the nature of Shiva, *bija* is of the nature of Shakti and *nada* or *sabda* represents the mutual relation of the two — Shiva Shakti, and is the first expression of creation.

The whole universe is constituted of sound-vibrations which are in turn the many vibrations of a supreme Idea — the Real Idea. These numberless vibrations are divided into fifty categories and are represented by the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. The fifty letters which control the fifty categories of sound are the embodiments of fifty gross sound and are the acoustic roots of the world of manifestation. This division is based on the intuitive realisation of the Tantric seers. The Tantric deity Bhadrakali, the supreme creative matrix of the universe, is depicted as wearing a garland of fifty beads of human skulls — each skull representing a letter. The fifty letters are the fifty basic vibrations of the cosmos. Each letter, according to the Tantra, represents a *bijamantra* or the acoustic root of a psychic condition, each a packet of a special vibration, each a creative ideation, and has an occult colour of its own, symbolic of a world of ontology, of a dimension of Reality.

*Pranidhana*, or the process of incantation of *mantra*, produces the kind of acoustic vibration that establishes oneness with cosmic ideation. It helps the seeker to attune his individual existence with the universal. There is again

another view which holds that the fifty letters represent fifty forms, fifty worlds and an equal number of presiding deities. The *bija mantras*, the basic sound-nuclei of individual and universal planes of consciousness, are capable of recreating these planes at the will of the Tantrik *mantra upasaksa*. Meditation on different letters' and their presiding deities is of great mystical significance and brings sublimation of lower energies as each letter represents a psychic connotation.

It is also believed that the divine nectar secreting from *sahasrara* takes different forms of letters in the six different *cakras*. These are *muladhara*, *svadhisthana*, *manipura*, *anahata*, *visudha*, and *ajna*. Meditation on these, with their petals and presiding deities brings about absolute control over the senses and desires. There is differing opinion in regard to the colour of various letters. According to one classification the vowels are smoky, from *ka* to *ta* the consonants are pinkish, from *da* to *pha* they are yellow, the five *bas* are light reddish, the *las* of golden colour, and the letters *ha* and *ksha* are of the colour of lightning. The vowels represent the Unmanifest, or the Causal Brahman, and belong to the Shiva form and are called *bijas*. The consonants represent the Manifest, or Effect Brahman, and are termed *yonis* because they are productive letters. The first letter of the vowel *a* and the acoustic root of creation is represented by a vertical line, whereas *ka*, the first letter of the consonants, is symbolically represented by a horizontal line. When both are combined, which signifies the integration of Causal Brahman and the Effect Brahman, they represent the form of a cross which subsequently takes the form of the *ka* in Devanagiri script. When Causal Brahman is overpowered by the will to create, it becomes Effect Brahman, which is permeated by the Supreme. According to Tantra, the different parts of the human body are represented by different letters, the human body itself represents the universe in miniature.

## Reference

1. Sri Aurobindo, Cent. Vol. 18, p. 357.
2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, p. 369.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 370.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 200., 6. *Ibid.*, 7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, p. 48.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
10. *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, p. 270.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 271.
12. *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, p. 169.

(**Courtesy:** V. Madhusudan Reddy, *The Vedic Vision*, Institute of Human Study, 1991, Hyderabad)

# THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SRI AUROBINDO'S & THE MOTHER'S WORK

*The Mother*

**December 20, 1972**

Do you have anything to ask?

*I had a question about Sri Aurobindo. I was wondering what stage he had reached when he left - what stage in the transformation? For instance, what difference is there between the work you are doing now and what he was doing at the time?*

He had accumulated a great deal of supramental force in his body, and as soon as he left he.... He was on his bed, you see, and I was standing beside him, and all the supramental force that was in him passed quite concretely from his body into mine - so concretely that I thought it was visible. I could feel the friction of the passage. It was extraordinary - extraordinary! It was an extraordinary experience. It went on for a long, long time like this (*gesture of the Force passing into Mother's body*). I was standing beside his bed, and it passed into me.

Almost physical - it was a physical sensation. It lasted a long time.

That's all I know.

*But what I want to understand is at what stage he was in the inner work - for example, cleansing the subconscious and all that? What difference is there between the work he had done at the time and where you have reached now, if you will? I mean, is the subconscious less subconscious or ... ?*

Oh, yes! Certainly, certainly!

But that is the mental way of looking at things, you see - I don't have it anymore.

Yes, Mother.

(*silence*)

*Perhaps the difference lies in the general or collective intensity of that Power, that Force?*

There is a difference in the POWER of the action.

He himself - he himself has a greater action, a greater power or action now than when he was in his body. Besides, that's why he left - because it had to be done that way.

It's very tangible, you know. His action has become very tangible. Of course, it isn't something mental at all. It is from another region. But it isn't ethereal or - it's tangible. I could almost say material.

*I've often wondered about the right inner movement needed to go into that other region. There are basically two possible movements: a movement inwards in the direction of the soul, as it were, and a movement of annihilation of the individuality, in which you are in a sort of impersonal vastness.*

Both are needed.

Both ?

Yes.

*When in your heart and thought you will make no difference  
between Sri Aurobindo and me,*

*when to think of Sri Aurobindo will be to think of me and  
to think of me will mean to think of Sri Aurobindo inevitably,*

*when to see one will mean inevitably to see the other, like  
one and the same Person, — then you will know that you begin  
to be open to the supramental force and consciousness.*

***Collected Works of the Mother, Vol. 13, p. 32***

*There he beheld in their mighty union's poise  
The figure of the deathless Two-in-One,  
A single being in two bodies clasped,  
A diarchy of two united souls,  
Seated absorbed in deep creative joy;  
Their trance of bliss sustained the mobile world.*

***Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, Vol. 28, p. 295***

# THE METAMORPHOSES OF AN AVATAR

*Georges Van Vrekhem*

As Sri Aurobindo remarked later in his life, he realized the Supramental or Truth-consciousness<sup>1</sup> in his mind around 1919, and in his vital in 1921: this was the reason he gave for stopping writing the periodical, the *Arya*. In 1926, the Overmind<sup>2</sup> or Krishna consciousness descended into his body, something which the Mother described as very important for the Creation, and immediately afterwards Sri Aurobindo retired into his room for reasons connected with his yoga. The task ahead was the supramental transformation of the physical, the divinization of matter and of the body, the mutation of animal man into the supramental being. In this, he was joined by the Mother who, after 1920, fully shared his work and realizations.

We find glimpses of Sri Aurobindo's unimaginable efforts to transform the physical in various letters. Some time in 1935, for example, he writes jokingly to Nirodbaran, his disciple, about his getting hold of 'the tail of the supramental': "Now I have got the hand of the whole hanged thing - like a very Einstein I have got the mathematical formula of the whole affair (unintelligible as in his case to anybody but myself) and am working it out figure by figure." But the resistance of the occult forces opposing the work increased in equal measure to his progress. In 1939, he fell and broke his thigh. And then the Second World War erupted and required his and the Mother's constant attention and intervention, and this state of affairs continued even after the war ended because of the seriousness of the global situation.

It was at this point that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother saw the necessity of a conscious confrontation with Death. A factor in their considerations must certainly have been the age of their bodies and the enormous task still ahead of them. "We cannot both remain upon earth, one of us must go."

Thus, for practical reasons unknown to us but connected with the Work, one of them had to go and work 'behind the veil', probably to hasten the result of the Work, certainly because Death and everything related to it could only be transformed by confronting it with the full avataric consciousness [an avatar is, according to Sri Aurobindo's definition, "The Divine manifest in human appearance"- eds]. This is what Sri Aurobindo has done. Far from being a failure, this was a conscious, super-conscious yogic Act: as the Mother said shortly after his passing away, "He was not compelled to leave his body, he chose to do so for reasons so sublime that they are beyond the reach of human mentality."

## **The work continues**

In fact, the work had never been interrupted. For, as the Mother recalled later, after the doctors had declared that Sri Aurobindo had left his body, she

came several times and stood at his feet, and all the supramental force he had accumulated in his body poured into hers, so concretely that she felt it enter through the pores. "As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he has called the Mind of Light got realized in me." The Supermind had descended long ago, into the mind and even into the vital: it was working in the physical also but indirectly, through those intermediaries. The question was about the action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind received the supramental light: the physical mind was the instrument for direct action upon the most material. This physical mind receiving the Supramental light Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light.

Sri Aurobindo had written about the Mind of Light in 1950 in his last prose writings, later published under the title *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*. In those same articles he had also written for the first time about the need for the appearance of intermediary beings between man and the superman. The Mother would call these intermediary beings *surhommes* (often incorrectly translated as 'supermen') and define them as human beings conceived in the normal biological human way but having acquired a supramental consciousness. The supramental species, on the other hand, would originate in a yet unknown, occult way. In October 1958 she talked again about the *surhomme* and said: "There will certainly be a considerable quantity of partial realizations ... There will be a considerable number of essays, more or less fruitful or more or less unfruitful, before arriving at something that will resemble the superman..."

The first task she tackled after Sri Aurobindo's passing was the full realization of that intermediary being of the *surhomme*. For while she had received the *surhomme* consciousness - the Mind of Light - from Sri Aurobindo, she had to work out its implications in her body. In the following years, we find indeed several confirmations of the progress of her work in the cells. In April 1951 she talks about surrender: "This now has become the very movement of the consciousness of the cells." In the same month, she publishes in the *Bulletin* her "Experiences of the Consciousness of the Body", followed by "New Experiences of the Consciousness of the Body". The last series ends as follows: "In this intensity the aspiration grows formidable, and in answer to it Thy Presence becomes evident in the cells themselves, giving the body the appearance of a multicoloured kaleidoscope in which innumerable luminous particles in constant motion are sovereignly reorganized by an invisible and all-powerful Hand." In 1954 the work of the Mother in the cells of her body clearly had reached a sort of climax. In November she noted that, "The cells of the body understand what the transformation will be... The cells of the body open themselves to receive the Force."

Then came a crucial event in the evolution of consciousness on earth. Sri Aurobindo's conscious entrance into Death and the unrelenting effort of the



Mother in the years thereafter meant that the Manifestation of the Supramental Consciousness in the earth atmosphere could take place only six years later. It was the 29th February 1956: "This evening the Divine Presence, concrete and material, was there present amongst you", wrote the Mother later. "It had a form of living gold, bigger than the universe, and I was facing a huge and massive golden door which separated the world from the Divine. As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement of consciousness, that 'the time has come', and lifting with both hands a mighty golden hammer I struck one blow, one single blow on the door and the door was shattered to pieces. Then the supramental Light and Force and Consciousness rushed down upon earth in an uninterrupted flow."

The fundamental endeavour of the Avatar was fulfilled. In his communications with others, Sri Aurobindo always refused to look beyond the manifestation of the Supermind upon the Earth, for it made no sense to try to give an idea of the supramental to mental beings. The Mother herself wondered if her work in her present manifestation was completed. "Now that the Supramental is there ... is it that the mission of this form is ended?"

Now, of course, we know that it was not, for the Mother went on working in her body until 1973. And this suggests, in the light of the later realizations of the Mother described in many conversations, that the Avatar, in his/her love for humanity, has probably gone much farther than initially might have been intended. For even though the Supramental had been established in the earth-atmosphere, the realization of a new species of supramental beings might still have taken thousands of years. Yet, because the Mother went on fighting, suffering and realizing after 1956, the new species may manifest, she indicated, after something like 300 years, and the transitional being, the *surhomme*, may already be present on earth. For, as she noted in May 1957, "Now, at this moment, that state (of the *surhomme*) can be realized on earth by those who are ready to receive the supramental Force that is manifesting."

"It is a new world that is born, born, born", she said in one of her most lyrical talks to the youthful audience at the Ashram Playground, "It is not the old one that is transforming itself, it is a new world that is born. And we are now fully in the transitional period in which the old one still persists in an all-powerful way and entirely dominates the ordinary consciousness, while the new one is penetrating still very modestly, unnoticed - so much unnoticed that on the surface it does not upset much for the time being, and that even to the consciousness of most people it remains as yet imperceptible. But it is active all the same, it is growing, till the moment that it will be strong enough to impose itself visibly... This is a beginning, a universal beginning. Consequently, it is an absolutely unexpected and unforeseeable adventurer ... It is a new creation, entirely new, with everything it brings that is unforeseen, with risks and insecurities - a true adventure of which the aim is sure victory but of which the road is unknown and has to be cleared in unexplored terrain..."

In October 1957, she added, "For those who use nothing but their physical eyes, the victory will be apparent only when it is total, that is to say, physical... But this does not mean that it is not already won in principle."

Then came the time that she too, like Sri Aurobindo, had to withdraw from outer contacts for the sake of physical transformation. This happened in December 1958 as the consequences of a serious physical crisis. During the following fifteen years, the transformation of the Mother's body is an enormously rich, varied, multifaceted, spellbinding and sometimes baffling process. Fortunately, from that time onwards her work is much better documented, thanks to the recordings of the Mother's conversations with Satprem which are published as the thirteen volumes of *Mother's Agenda*.

## The Cornerstones of the Mother's Yoga

It is important to remember when reading these conversations that the Mother's unique experiences and realizations were the continuation of the path of the Integral Yoga, hewn out in the 'virgin forest': by Sri Aurobindo and herself. The pillars on which she continued to base her efforts were total surrender to the Divine, an absolute sincerity, a perfect equality, and the underlying principle of everything: the divine Unity.

We find her surrender on practically every page of the *Agenda* in what might be considered as her fundamental mantra: "*Ce que Tu veux!*" ("What Thou wants!"). It was her central attitude of unconditional openness, acquiescence, availability for the new creation, and her fundamental act in the long years of her ordeal. Of sincerity she had said: "Sincerity is the safeguard, it is the protection, it is the guide, and finally it is the transforming power. Essentially, it means that all parts of the embodied being are gathered and in direct contact with the core of the embodiment: the psychic being." "The very first necessity for spiritual perfections is a perfect equality", wrote Sri Aurobindo in *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Equality is not the same as indifference: it is an active attitude based on the acceptance of the world, of all things manifested, all events, all experiences, for they can only come from the one, there being nothing else. Not only was equality so precious during the invasions in her body of the Golden Light or the red-golden Fire, it was also indispensable in the midst of the incessant swarms of vibrations surrounding her and rushing through her, the tiniest pulse of which she was fully conscious of. The fourth fundamental feature of that yoga was the underlying principle of everything, the divine unity. All is one, all is one single Being. Unity is the basis, Unity is the stuff of experience; Unity is the aim of the supramental transformation.

Another important factor in the understanding of that terrible and glorious transformational yoga of the Mother is the 'positional duality' in which she was existing. "There is the Mother who is carrying on the *sadhana* and the Divine

Mother, both being one but in different poises", Sri Aurobindo had written in a letter many years before. The Mother as a body in transformation did not know what was awaiting her the next moment or at the end of her adventure, but her soul, her higher consciousness (supramentalized and therefore divine) and her inner being as the Great Mother knew everything.

But what exactly was the goal of this transformation? What would be the qualities of a transformed body? A divine body, as Sri Aurobindo described it, will be activated by a divine consciousness, a unity-consciousness. It will be able to be present in several places at the same time, and to alter its shape at will; being divine, it will be immortal; it will not be subject to illnesses, accidents or fatigue. Its substance will consist of light-stuff and be fully responsive to the variations of the central divine will in all their functions. That apparently impossible effort of a transition from the evolutionary phase represented by us, animal man, into the divine superman was Mother's work. Her body was the battlefield on which the forces of an established world fought for their survival against the forces of a future world.

## A New Body

And so, thanks to the published conversations in the *Agenda*, we get some idea of the astonishing ordeals that the Mother was subject to in her last years. Often they seemed to be cyclic, a new transformatory phase announcing itself, the crisis developing its full force. And then the Mother recovering from it, recuperating, assimilating what had been gained - and time and again wondering about the miraculous way in which the strength of the transforming forces was 'closed by the Lord'. Now it was this body function or organ on which the transformative process was focused, now it was another. And the function or organ that had been allowed some rest for some time was suddenly taken up again for the transformative work.

Then came the day, in 1959, when for the first time she had the physical experience of the supramental world. At first she thought that her body, which at that moment became like the heart of the sun, would not be able to stand the fire and the pressure... but again, the forces were closed just up to the limit. And there, for the first time since 1950, she met Sri Aurobindo in his supramental body in the subtle physical where she said he has his home. This subtle physical, she explained, is a gradation of the supramental. "It is a world which is more concrete than the physical world." She was surprised to find that the supramental world was not far from the physical world and that it was waiting, fully developed, to manifest itself in matter.

From then on she moved, in the beginning rather abruptly, between these two worlds. Parts of her physical being belonged to both - a strange way of existing. Then in 1962 she underwent one of the great crises of her *sadhana*.

Outwardly, she seemed on the verge of death, so much that her entourage started preparing for the fateful event. "I am no more in my body, I have left it to the Lord to take care of, to decide if it is to have the Supramental or not ... If the purpose for which this body is alive is to be fulfilled, that is to say the first steps taken towards the Supramental transformation, then it will continue today... If the body is incapable of bearing the fight, if it has to be dissolved, then humanity will pass through a critical time..." But a couple of days later came the proclamation of the victory bulletin.

"Suddenly in the night I woke with the full awareness of what we could call the Yoga of the World. The Supreme Love was manifesting through big pulsations, and each pulsation was bringing the world farther in its manifestation... And there was the certitude that what is to be done is done and that the Supramental Manifestation is realized... The certitude that what is to be done is done."

The Victory was won in principle, but the Mother took up her body again to hasten the coming of the supramental world order. For the cells and the matter of which the body consists can only be changed if its foundations are changed or eliminated, and those foundations are the Subconscient and the limitless Inconscient. This, essentially, is the reason that no spiritual method has dared to take up the transformation of matter.

Now, in this new phase of her *sadhana*, the Mother would plunge into the horror of the Subconscient in order to transform it. Her struggles, her suffering are there in her *Agenda* for all to read. "I was all the suffering of the world, all at the same time." "One could say that, the whole time, I was nothing but one cry..." The ups and downs were becoming ever higher and deeper. And on top of all that she continued doing her daily tasks, running a community of about two thousand people, most of who had no idea about what was going on within her.

The question which preoccupied the Mother was how a supramentalized body would manifest. Finally, she had sufficient indications. A supramental body would first manifest in the subtle-physical. When matter as we know it will be transformed - one of the tasks of the *surhommes* - the supramentalized body will be taken up by a mature, fully realized soul and will manifest on earth without the need for human parents.

In the Mother there was now a lot of transformed, supramentalized, divinized matter. "The cells are conscious", she said simply, not all the cells but a sufficient number to begin forming what she termed "an independent conscious entity ... capable of being conscious of Matter as well as conscious of the Supramental." And so we begin to hear about signs of a new body in her body. As early as 1961, the Mother had talked about a greater being in her body. "It was as if it could hardly fit into it: it exceeded its limits. And it had such a compact power that it was almost annoying." "I am not very sure that

I do not already physically exist in a true body", she said in August 1963. And in April 1969: "During the night, the body is tall and active, it does things. It is the subtle body that is doing things. That is active, that has an existence that is fully conscious. And it is different from this [the Mother touches the skin of her hands]." And then in March 1972: "For the first time, early in the morning, I have seen myself, my body. I do not know whether it is the supramental body or - how to say it - a transitional body." Later she will confirm that it was a supramental body. "But I had a completely new body, in the sense that it was asexual, it was neither woman nor man... Really a harmonious form. So, this is the first time... I was like that, I had become like that."

Considering all this, it is evident that the Mother had realized a transformed body in what she called 'the subtle physical'. One could call it the prototype, or the archetype of the future realization. That was the stage the Work of the Avatar had reached. Not only was the Supramental manifested in the earth-consciousness, the prototype of the new, divine body had been realized as well.

The Mother put off her gross material body on 17 November 1973. Can one call this 'death'? She existed, and therefore exists, in a subtle-physical body more 'concrete' than gross matter. What she has put off, and what rests there in that simple tomb in the courtyard of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, is what she called 'the residue', the untransformable part of her human body, one could metaphorically say "the outer shell". For her body too had been born from a human father and mother, and remained therefore in its gross material elements indelibly marked as animal-human.

"There is what we might call the inner consciousness of the cells which is fully, fully conscious, but there is something that remains like this" - like a crust on the surface, untransformable - "It will only be the untransformable residue that... that really will be death", she explained.

The butterfly had been formed and existed in the butterfly-world, the shrunken remains of the caterpillar had been shed. We still have caterpillar eyes and cannot perceive the colourful light butterfly - unless we become to some degree butterfly-like ourselves. Who knows what goes on during that miraculous event, the pupation of a caterpillar into a butterfly? Science still has no idea. In the case of the complete Avatar called Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, we have got some indications from the source itself. Putting those indications like the pieces of a puzzle together, the whole process looks to our mind coherent, understandable and positive. But in matters of spirituality, the ultimate proof is always the personal, subjective experience - a subjective experience that may be guided by an inner tuning to the invisible realities which attract our soul.

And Auroville? Auroville, the Mother said, will be 'the cradle of the superman'. Here, as elsewhere in the world, the preparation of matter for the supramental manifestation will take place through what the Mother described

as 'apprentice-supermen', all those "...who make an effort to surpass materially ordinary nature, all those who try to realize materially the profound experience that has put them into contact with the divine Truth, all those who, instead of turning their attention to the Hereafter or Above, try to realize physically, externally, the change of consciousness which they have realized inside themselves."

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**Kalki Avatar**

# REMINISCENCES OF SRI AUROBINDO

Gabriel Monod-Herzen

Dear Friends,

Amita told me the other day that since I had had the good fortune to see Sri Aurobindo and since this is the Centenary Year of his birth I could try to relate something of that encounter. Then I thought of applying "Free Progress" to the occasion: that is, I asked several among you to tell me what you would like me to speak about. In this way I collected six different questions which will be the basis of my talk; it is not I therefore who have chosen the topics.

To begin with, how did I meet Sri Aurobindo?

There are several ways to meet a person; it can be as I am meeting you now, personally; or else one can meet a person through his works. Well, it so happened that I met Sri Aurobindo without realising how.

One day in Paris a very good lady-friend who was interested in India and who had been there and, knowing I was also interested, spoke to me of a young Indian who had just arrived in Paris to study science: would I like to introduce him to people and allow him to work with me at the University? Naturally I said "Yes". He was a charming young man born not far from Madras, whose name was Ramaya Naidu. We both gave our Physics examinations at the Sorbonne at the same time. He was actually from Pondicherry. He invited me to his house and there introduced me to a big, magnificent man named Paul Richard whose wife, I was told, had remained in Pondicherry and would stay there for the rest of her life. Though I was greatly surprised I did not doubt for a second that this was the Mother. Some time later the lady who had introduced Ramaya to me said, "You know that a journal was brought out in Pondicherry in French called the *Arya*." Then she lent me all the numbers she had. I was fired with this literature, and not long ago I found the Notes I had made while reading *The Secret of the Veda*. I never doubted what Sri Aurobindo was to be for me later. I had completely forgotten that reading, which was my first contact with him.

Many, many years passed. When I came to Pondicherry during the period that I was Professor in Afghanistan it was in order to spend my vacation with my mother who lived here since she could not bear the altitude of Kabul because of her health. The first time I came down, lady whom many of you know, Suvrata (Madame Yvonne Robert Gaebele) said to us, "You know, there are two absolutely extraordinary people in our town, and I must introduce you to them." She took us to the Darshan of November 24, 1935. That was the first time I saw Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

I see on this paper that the questioner would like to know what my first impression was. It is very difficult to say in a definitive manner what it was. When I saw Sri Aurobindo seated next to the Mother I had a feeling of

certitude, of stability — an impression I had received often before on seeing a huge mountain ... At the first glance I had the surety that what I had so long searched for, the solution of my problems, was there. I did not know why, there was no logic in it; but it was an absolute certitude which has never since changed. At that time I did not know any of his works; I began studying them from that period on: that is, 1935-36.

One used to see the Mother pretty frequently then. I was very friendly with Pavitra<sup>1</sup> and in order to see him without bothering anyone I used to go and have breakfast with him in the room he occupied above the Atelier. Later it became a big office. I had the opportunity of seeing the Mother there, who often needed to see Pavitra. She had the look of a kind, gentle, affectionate grandmother. She would come in her dressing gown, with her grey hair pulled back: it was extraordinarily comforting because one felt to what extent she was human, direct, and one could tell her anything, ask her anything. Naturally one avoided questioning her at that moment, but in other interviews I was able to ask for explanations on Sri Aurobindo's works that I was then getting acquainted with.

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I have also been asked what side of Sri Aurobindo's work appealed to me most. There are two attitudes in him which I most admire: the first is that he does not reject anything or anyone. There is a place for all opinions, even those which he does not accept, in his work. He has come to find that particle of truth that exists in everything because without it that opinion itself could not exist. One never feels a prisoner of ideas when one reads him. One never says, "This is a falsehood," or else "That person is wrong"; one says, "Here is an incomplete idea." Being a physicist, I was deeply struck because I had always been greatly impressed by the fact that the long succession of scientists did not contradict one another, as say those who have not studied science themselves. In fact they complement one another. Take, for example, the ancient Greek thinkers, or those of the Middle Ages, who had very different ideas from ours. Granting what they knew, one cannot say they were mistaken. They had a certain form of thought which, in relation to us and our present knowledge, is incomplete. Sri Aurobindo has maintained this attitude throughout his writings; this gives us the possibility to appreciate all forms of thought, even those apparently in opposition to ours. As a man of science, this is what originally impressed me and taught me so much. I said to myself, "Finally I have found someone who does not demand that I reject certain things in order to carry me towards others, someone who leaves me absolutely free to choose. Naturally, he also leaves me with the responsibility of choice."

This was the second question. The third was: Sri Aurobindo's cheerful disposition. When I learned from various disciples that he was humourous and used to smile and laugh readily, I said to myself, "Here is someone in whom I can have confidence, because a philosophy that makes one sad cannot be a wise one."



I had the good fortune of meeting four or five persons who had really practised Yoga throughout their lives, who had totally consecrated themselves to it. They were all happy, good-humoured. I knew Sri Ramana Maharishi at Tirruvanamalai. He used to smile readily in spite of his bad health and pain. I knew Sri Krishnaprem (Ronald Nixon): he was very cheerful and had maintained his British humour intact. I knew his Guru, Srimati Chakravarti: she was equally cheerful. An anecdote confirmed for me Sri Aurobindo's humour. I was acquainted with the Chief of the French Police here, and I asked him to search through his files to see if he could find something concerning the Ashram in its early days. He came back later very intrigued and said to me, "Just imagine what I have discovered! I can't give you the files but I can tell you that I found a police report which began by saying, 'I, secret agent' — this way everybody knew it, didn't they? — 'being stationed at the corner of rue de la Marine near a room where Sri Aurobindo and his friends had gathered, heard him laugh loudly: which goes to prove that these people are not very serious.'" Hearing this, I said to myself, "This time I have found the right thing!" Sri Aurobindo was always like that. Purani once told me that a disciple had been very much preoccupied with the idea that in the future we would become Supermen. Not us, perhaps, but later on there would be a humanity higher than the present one on all levels. And so this disciple wanted to know if, given the proper conditions of reincarnation, he would become a Superman or a Superwoman. And he asked how his physical appearance would be. And naturally he wanted to know if he would be handsome. His anxiety was so great that he thought of speaking to Sri Aurobindo about it and asking him what he would look like. Sri Aurobindo very seriously told him: "Have you thought of one thing? You know that the Superman will be able to capture the energies of Nature in order to maintain his vitality. Therefore he need not eat. If he does not need to eat, he will not need teeth. Do you think that will be very pretty?"

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The next question is: "What has been in my opinion, Sri Aurobindo's special contribution to our knowledge, which distinguishes him from other teachers?" I had often asked myself the same question, because I had a passion for his works.

I wanted to write a book in French on Sri Aurobindo, and I had many opportunities because Sri Aurobindo was still here at that time. He agreed with my project and each time I wrote a chapter I would give it to Nirod, who would then read it to Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aurobindo would send it back with his comments. I am going to make a confession because we are talking here freely. Whenever there was a question which baffled me, I would imagine a solution and write it down, as if I was certain about it; and very often Sri Aurobindo would send me word: "No, it's not like that. These are the facts." And so I had the guidance I wanted, because if I had asked him directly, I knew that very probably he would have sent a message as follows: "It's unimportant." He knew

quite well that this was a little game on my part and he accepted it, because he was not able to let any errors go by, even those of little importance. And he did this with absolute precision, and I give you the following two examples.

Generally one makes the distinction between the literary mind and the scientific. Sri Aurobindo is the perfect proof of the artificial and inexact character of that distinction. Here is a purely literary man, with the knowledge of ancient Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and four modern European languages, who certainly respected science but never practised it; yet he had the scientific spirit. Here is the first example.

During the war Sri Aurobindo would have the English communique read out to him every day. I know this because when I would go for breakfast with Pavitra it was the time for military news. The receiving room was at Pavitra's, who was then in charge of conveying the news to Sri Aurobindo. One day Purani went to Sri Aurobindo in the afternoon and, referring to military matters, said, "It's terrible to think that yesterday again the German submarines sank 65,000 tons of Allied shipping." Sri Aurobindo said, "No, 67,500." He did not want any approximations.

Now for my second example. While I was writing my book I related how Sri Aurobindo began publishing the *Karmayogin* at Calcutta again after coming out of prison; and how in the newspaper once, he suddenly (as I wrote) "received the order to go to Chandernagore," The next morning I was sent a little piece of paper where the word "recut" which I had used was crossed out by Sri Aurobindo and in its place "percut" was written. Well, one really has to know French in order to make a correction like that. Sri Aurobindo had a literary mind but of a perfect precision. It is a good point to keep in view: when you read him, say to yourselves that each word has been chosen and no other can be put in its place.

Here then is a primary original characteristic of Sri Aurobindo's teaching: his openness to all opinions, his capacity to understand them and then to inject a new element.

I believe it was the corrections he made in my book that showed me just how rare it is to meet a teacher who is so completely attached to the Truth as to be able to see it everywhere, even under a mass of errors. And this not only in dealing with current theory but also in contemplating the unfolding of time.

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

This is another profoundly original aspect of Sri Aurobindo: to show the new and at the same time inevitable character, according to the Divine Will, of the transformation he announces and to indicate that everything which had preceded it was in effect a preparation.

I wish to emphasise this point: that which Sri Aurobindo announces and describes is not a theory which pleases him or which is to him personal; it is a truth he has experienced. One cannot help remarking once again that this is precisely the scientific attitude, and Sri Aurobindo knew this, since he himself said that his room was his laboratory. There he tried everything, verified it before offering it to us. I think you all understand how his teaching was, and still is today, the inspiration behind my work as a physicist.

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We have here another question: his relationship with his disciples. I was not able to observe this directly since I did not have the good fortune to see Sri Aurobindo except at Darshan. But I had an indirect relationship with him through my books. And I have already given you an example of the care with which he attended to it. When it was finished, Nirod came to announce that Sri Aurobindo had asked him to tell me, "It can be published. No important errors remain."

Another thing that I was able to confirm with him—and I have seen the same in the Mother—is that neither he nor the Mother is indulgent. They understand all the failings of the disciples but are not weak in dealing with them, not at all! When there is a mistake, they see it and speak of it. But they speak of it with a smile, and when it is not a serious matter they add, "If you insist, try, you will see, you will have the experience." This always inspired absolute faith in the sense that I had the impression of seeing someone who possessed the Truth but who, at the same time, was closer to me than my own self, and to whom consequently I could say everything, someone who could understand all. I could even hope to understand what was being said to me, because it was said in such a familiar way: no big words, nothing extraordinary, no difficult vocabulary. Take the Mother's *Conversations*. With what precision of language and thought she manages to deal with the highest subjects without ever using complicated words! It is truly an example. The reader has the feeling of finding everything very simple, even that which he has not understood at all.

Before arriving at any conclusions I must speak to you about a final, rather delicate question—without answering it—because it has been posed to Sri Aurobindo himself on a number of occasions and he has not answered. It is: "Why has Sri Aurobindo not spoken of his own Sadhana, since everybody would like some information on the subject?" I once asked Pavitra the reason for this reticence. Pavitra answered, "The reason is extremely simple. Sri Aurobindo used to say, 'I don't eat this, or I don't eat that; I use this type of soap or that

toothbrush, I meditate at such and such an hour. Everybody will do the same thing.' And that is precisely what Sri Aurobindo does not want, because it is not by copying him that we can become him. It is up to the disciple to choose not only his hours for meditation but even the smallest necessities of life. It is up to him to acquire the proper attitude which will permit him to utilise his daily routine for spiritual progress."

It is said that ready-made clothes never fit as well as those made to order. Well, it is the same thing regarding spiritual life but with much vaster consequences. If one imitates someone even though it be his Master, one is not what he could be and what he should be in all sincerity. Sri Aurobindo wanted to allow each of his disciples to discover the truth of himself. One can verify this in his letters. What is extraordinary is their varied forms. One feels therein the respect he had for that which was unique in each disciple. He used to answer apparently insignificant questions, without forgetting to add a little remark, brief but just necessary, and this without ever stressing errors.

There is only one really important case where he spoke of himself, in a very revealing manner. A disciple wrote to him, saying that what Sri Aurobindo had done was marvellous, admirable, but that surely he had come to this life with a past that was helping him, that he was, as one commonly says, well-equipped. To the disciple the proof was that when Sri Aurobindo wanted mental silence he obtained it and, what is unique, in three days he had been able to reach the state of Nirvana. Sri Aurobindo answered:

"... You write as if I never had a doubt or any difficulty. I have had worse than any human mind can think of. It is not because I have ignored difficulties, but because I have seen them more clearly, experienced them on a larger scale than anyone living now or before me that, having faced and measured them, I am sure of the results of my work."

This statement—from a letter of December, 1933 (*Second Series*, p. 72)—seems extremely important to me, because it affirms at once Sri Aurobindo's understanding of our difficulties and the possibility to overcome them, of which he was a living example.

At the time that I saw this letter *The Life Divine* had just appeared in two volumes. My mother and I had read them with passionate interest, such passion that meeting the Mother one morning at Pavitra's I said to her, "Mother, this is the fourth time I am reading the first volume..." To which she answered, "That's very good, but it would be good if you read the second also That's what I did. And I thoroughly enjoyed it. The impression I had, reading *The Life Divine*, was not at all that of receiving what is ordinarily called a lesson in philosophy, but that of listening to a traveller who had discovered a new land. He climbed a hill first, then a mountain and he described the panorama, first in one direction: in spirit he made me see its different aspects, from night to morning, under the stars, in daytime, with sun and clouds, I saw the seasons following each other...

Then he turned in another direction to reveal another aspect; finally, I thought I knew this new land, knew how I would be able to live there.

And naturally the strong impression made me desire and then will to go to that country myself, made me desire to leave, to walk towards him.... And it is perhaps for this reason that I am here today with you.

But don't imagine that I was very far! My position—and I feel that there are many in the same situation—is a bit like a traveller who leaves for the United States (for example), having read very well a guide-book of the country. He disembarks and begins the stretch from New York to Washington. He notes the perfect concordance between what he sees and what the guide-book has taught him and he concludes that the book probably speaks the truth about the rest of the country. But this remaining portion is immense. I therefore took Sri Aurobindo's book as a guide and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as teachers. I forced myself to apply what I was learning to my daily work, that of a physicist in his laboratory, of a professor before hundreds of students: I always found precise and true indications.

Particularly in my laboratory where I had the opportunity for many years to advise researchers who were preparing their theses. Naturally they knew nothing of Sri Aurobindo and I did not speak to them of him; also I had to continually make an adaptation of his thought which was a marvellous job for me since I confirmed each day how the new vision of the world that Sri Aurobindo gives us was rich and true in its practical application.

This is applicable to students and professors of all ages. You know that in the case that interests us at present this application is "Free Progress". Thanks to you, I begin to know its beauty and difficulty, and above all to become that which is lacking, so as to conform better to the original inspiration. But I must tell you that after having spoken in France with young people and with those not so young, I found, especially among the former, a good majority who understand that that is the direction necessary in order to come close to the realisation of an ideal which is the essence of our lives.

I would like you to find in this testimony a further reason to make the Birth Centenary year, according to the wishes of the Mother, for all a *very good year*.

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*If I had to write for the general reader I could not have written Savitri at all. It is in fact for myself that I have written it and for those who can lend themselves to the subject matter, images, technique of mystic poetry.*

**Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, Vol. 29, pp. 315-16**

## ON INDIA'S FUTURE

*Swami Vivekananda*

Formerly I thought as every Hindu thinks, ... that this is the *Punya Bhumi*, the land of Karma . Today I stand here and say, with the conviction of truth, that it is so. If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed *Punya Bhumi*, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for Karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all, the land of introspection and of spirituality—it is India. Hence have started the founders of religions from the most ancient times, deluging the earth again and again with the pure and perennial waters of spiritual truth. Hence have proceeded the tidal waves of philosophy that have covered the earth. East or West, North or South, and hence again must start the wave which is going to spiritualise the material civilisation of the world. Here is the life-giving water with which must be quenched the burning fire of materialism which is burning the core of the hearts of millions in other lands. Believe me, my friends, this is going to be.

So much I have seen, and so far those of you who are students of the history of races are already aware of this fact. The debt which the world owes to our Motherland is immense. Taking country with country, there is not one race on this earth to which the world owes so much as to the patient Hindu, the mild Hindu... "The mild Hindu" sometimes is used as an expression of reproach; but if ever a reproach concealed a wonderful truth, it is in the term, "the mild Hindu", who has always been the blessed child of God. Civilisations have arisen in other parts of the world. In ancient times and in modern times, great ideas have emanated from strong and great races. In ancient and in modern times, wonderful ideas have been carried forward from one race to another. In ancient and in modern times, seeds of great truth and power have been cast abroad by the advancing tides of national life; but mark you, my friends, it has been always with the blast of war trumpets and with the march of embattled cohorts. Each idea had to be soaked in a deluge of blood. Each idea had to wade through the blood of millions of our fellow-beings. Each word of power had to be followed by the groans of millions, by the wails of orphans, by the tears of widows. This, in the main, other nations have taught; but India has for thousands of years peacefully existed. Here activity prevailed when even Greece did not exist, when Rome was not thought of, when the very fathers of the modern Europeans lived in the forests and painted themselves blue. Even earlier, when history has not record, and tradition dares not peer into the gloom of that intense past, even from then until now, ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it and

peace before it. We of all nations of the world, have never been a conquering race, and that blessing is on our head, and therefore we live...

It was India's Karma, her fate, to be conquered, and in her turn, to conquer her conqueror. She has already done so with her Mohammedan victors; Educated Mohammedans are Sufis, scarcely to be distinguished from Hindus. Hindu thought has permeated their civilisation; they assumed the position of learners. The great Akbar, the Mogul Emperor, was practically a Hindu. And England will be conquered in her turn. Today she has the sword, but it is worse than useless in the world of ideas. You know that Schopenhauer said of Indian thought. He foretold that its influence would be as momentous in Europe, when it became well known, the revival of Greek and Latin culture after the Dark Ages.

"And India is to be the great conqueror of the future? Yes she does not send out many missionaries to preach her ideas. I presume she will wait until the world comes to her feet?"

(Swami Vivekananda, Vol. III, V)



# THE FUTURE OF RELIGION: TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM OF RELIGION FOR A GLOBALISING WORLD

*M.S. Srinivasan*

When we look at contemporary religious scene we find two contradictory trends. On the one hand a strong and brutal resurgence of religious fundamentalism; on the other hand, in the more enlightened minds, a seeking for a more universal spirituality beyond the church, dogma and the priesthood of organised religion. We have to admit that religion in its outer form has been a factor of division and conflict, war and strife. But in its inner essence, religion is or can be a powerful and uniting force which can steer humanity towards a deeper and lasting unity and provide a firm spiritual foundation for a globalising world. But to transform religion into such a uniting force we need a new paradigm of religion based on its spiritual source. This paper is an attempt to arrive at such a uniting paradigm of religion based on an integral spiritual vision of life. The article examines the main causes behind the failure of organised religions and presents a spiritual paradigm based on a path of inner transformation of religion.

## **The Follies of Religion**

History of human civilisation is replete with the crimes and follies committed by organised religions: its bloody religious wars, the horrors of its persecutions, its hatred for science and philosophy, its scorn for those belonging to other religions, the tyranny of its priest craft, the oppressive rigidity of its social customs, and in our modern age, religious fundamentalism of all kinds. Many noble souls like Joan of Arc fell victim to religious persecution. A great scientist like Giordano Bruno was burnt alive in the stake in the name of religion. The words of Christ that "Letter Killeth" literally come alive with the red letter of blood in the **history** of organised religions. Curiously, Swami Vivekannada, one of the greatest exponents of religion in our modern age, was so strung by the evils of organised religion, that he went to the extent of saying:

If you want to be religious, enter not the gate of any organised religion. They do a hundred times more evil than good, because they stop the growth of each one's individual development. Study everything, keep your own seat firm. If you take my advice, do not put your neck into the trap. The moment they try to put their noose on you, get your neck out and go somewhere else. As the bee culling honey from many flowers remain free, not bound by any flower; be not bound. Enter not the door of any organised religions.



Religion is only between you and your God and no third person must come between you. Think what these organised religions have done! What Napoleon was more terrible than those religious persecutions? If you and I organise we begin to hate every person! It is better not to love, by loving only means hating others. That is no love that is hell.<sup>1</sup>

## The Structure of a Religion

What is the reason for this miserable failure of organised religion? To answer this question, we must have a clear understanding of the structure of a religion. Any religion can be viewed as a collective organism with a physical, vital, mental and spiritual body. The innermost core of every religion is a spiritual intuition or revelation or experience revealed to a prophet or a sage or many such religious leaders. The other important part of this inner core is the spiritual discipline and practice for inner realisation of the spiritual ideal. This is the spiritual core of a religious organism. Then comes the mental body of religion made of its philosophy or theology; the next outer layer is the vital body of religion made of its mythology, ceremony and rituals and the social customs; and finally the outermost shell or the physical body made of the church, mosque and the temple and the priest. The organised religion belongs to the most physical and vital body of a religion. What we mean by organised religion is some concept of God revealed in a scripture and institutionalised in the Church, plus some mythology, ceremony, rituals and priesthood which claims to mediate between God and Man, asserting that its path or the prophet as the only way to God, and without any vivifying spiritual experience, knowledge, practice or presence which is the real soul of a religion.

All these four dimensions of religions are needed for an integral spiritual life. But the soul and life of a religion are its inner spiritual core. All the other three outer layers of religion derive their life from this inner dimension.

## The Great Fall

A religion can live and do its spiritual work only when this spiritual core is kept living, active and progressive with a constant stream of spiritual aspiration, practice, experiences and realisation. When this inner core of religion becomes stagnant then the religion begins to die. The main problem with most of the organised religions is that they have strayed away from their life-giving spiritual source and what remains is a skeleton of dogma and rituals. The major mistake of organised religions is that they ignored in practice, while professing in words, the warning of Christ "The Spirit saveth, letter killeth". These religions instead of relying on the "Spirit that saveth" have clung to the "Letter that killeth".

And when the Spirit withdraws, the Ego, cult-ego, takes over—the mental ego with its rigid and inflexible dogmas and the vital ego with its urge to dominate, possess and rule. So the history of organised religions has become mostly a part of the political history of humanity, rather than its spiritual history, with the mental and vital ego trying to conquer the world in the name of God!

This brings us to the question why or how such a degeneration comes about. It happens to all human institutions, a process of disintegration or entropy which pulls everything into the mud. In religion, the story runs somewhat on the following line. A great spiritual teacher arrives spreading Light all around. The Light radiating from the teacher spiritually elevates or liberates a few of his close disciples, awakens a spiritual aspiration in a few more and initiates a more or less widespread religious, moral and intellectual awakening in the community. The great Master establishes a spiritual idea in the collective consciousness of humanity. And one day the Master leaves his body and soon after begins the Fall. The teaching spreads more and more into the masses, but at the same time the great and luminous thoughts of the Master pass into ignorant and darkened minds, and in the process gets diluted, distorted and betrayed by the ego, desire, passions, prejudices and superstitions of the lower nature of the followers. Finally when the “teaching”, twisted, and bruised in the torture chambers of ego and desire, emerges, it is a dark opposite of the original thought - masking itself with the divine Name. What remains is the great Name, the Buddha, Christ, Krishna, Nanak, Mohammad, the legends and the temples built around them. As Sri Aurobindo describes the process in splendid muse:

*A glory of lightnings traversing the earth-scene,  
Their sun-thoughts fading, darkened by ignorant minds,  
Their work betrayed, their good to evil turned,  
The cross their payment for the crown they gave,  
Only they leave behind a splendid Name.  
A lire has come and touched men's heart and gone;  
A few have caught flame and risen to greater life.<sup>2</sup>*

### **Worm in the Rose**

So the canker, the worm in the rose, is the cult-ego. And the most pernicious form of this Ego in religion is the dogmatic assertion that my path or the prophet is the only way to God or heaven and all others who follow other paths belong to the Devil and are condemned to eternal hell. It is this ignorant assertion which is the source of all fanaticism and fundamentalism in religion and has made religion into an instrument of division and hatred among people. All other aspects of religion like scriptures, mythology, ceremony, rituals, symbols

can remain in the future, because they are necessary aids in the progressive spiritual evolution of the soul. But this dogmatic and exclusive assertion is a phantom of the past and has no place in the future. Some orthodox sections of the society may cling to these phantoms and they may rise aggressively to the surface as it is happening at present, in the form of fundamentalist terrorism. But they are allowed to rise in order to be eliminated. This is one of the methods of Nature for getting rid of things of the past which are harmful or no longer helpful to the future evolution of humanity. So we need not be too disturbed by the growing menace of fundamentalism and religious terrorism. They are allowed to rise in order to be thrown out. If the warrior-energies of nations, instead of fighting amongst themselves, join together to fight the menace, then it can be defeated.

### **The Inner Remedy**

But inflicting a military defeat on the forces of fundamentalism is only a temporary solution to the problem. The permanent solution to the problem lies in an inner moral, psychological and spiritual regeneration of religion. The outer reformation through reason or social renovation is helpful but not enough. There has to be an inner regeneration of the mind and soul of religion.

There are three possible approaches: first is the psychological approach or in other words, application of psychology to the religious and spiritual development of the individual; second is to revive the spiritual core of each religion and reinvent or reshape the other outer dimensions in the light of this recovered spiritual intuition and experience; third is a spiritual religion of humanity.

### **The Psychology of Religion**

The psychological approach is one of the unique positive features of eastern religions. While most of the Semitic religions are based on belief and dogma, eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism evolved their disciplines based on deep psychological insights into human nature. The main principles of eastern spiritual psychology are:

- a) Self-knowledge and self-mastery are the basis of spiritual development.
- b) There is perfect equality only at the spiritual level but not at the psychological level. In the psychological level, human beings differ widely in their nature, temperament, capacities and development. Every seeker should be given some understanding of the highest spiritual ideal. But for practical discipline, each seeker has to be taken as he is in his present condition of development, provided with an ideal and

discipline which are in harmony with his present nature, capacities, temperament and in this way slowly and gradually, step by step, raised to the highest ideal.

- c) An ideal religious system must be able to engage the whole being of human and all the parts of their inner and outer being - physical, emotional, intellectual, dynamic, ethical, aesthetic and spiritual. There must be a symbolic physical activity for expressing the inner adoration in an aesthetic gesture and a physical discipline for maintaining sound health; a beautiful symbol or interesting stories for the emotional being; an idea for the mind to hold on; an ethical discipline for moral development of the individual; a psychological and spiritual discipline for the spiritual development of the inner being, and for the realisation or manifestation of the inner divinity in man.
- d) Similarly, an ideal religion should have a path or a discipline for the spiritual development of every type of seeker - the physical person who lives predominantly in his bodily consciousness, the emotional person who lives in his heart and feelings, vital person who lives in his dynamic life-force and will, the intellectual who lives in his thinking mind and the more inwardly advanced yogi or the mystic type who is capable of going within in deep meditation.

These are universal psychological principles which are valid for all times, not only for religion but for human development as a whole. They are also some of the principles of Indian Yoga. We believe that the religious and spiritual discipline of the future has to be based on the principles of Yoga.

But in religion, psychology is only a means towards spirituality or spiritual experience.

## **Rediscovering the Inner Core of Religion**

This brings us to the second approach which is to revive the original experience which gave birth to the religion and rediscovering the inner discipline for arriving at these experiences.

This approach is helpful in taking another step forward but not enough for a total spiritual regeneration of religion. For Spirit and Nature are never static but always progressive. Nature in evolution always moves forward towards new, deeper, higher or larger ideals and experiences. Here comes a major defect in the spirit of religions: its conservative spirit which asserts all the truths of religion or life or man or God are revealed once for all, for all eternity, in a single scripture and no further progress or revelations are possible. But the Spirit is not only a static eternity beyond time but also a dynamic and progressive Force, manifesting its timeless and infinite potentialities in unending time. This

progressive revelation of the Infinite is an unending process. As Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter to a disciple with a touch of humour:

Truly, this shocked reverence for the past is a wonderful and fearful thing! After all, the Divine is infinite and the unrolling of the Truth may be an infinite process ... not a thing in a nutshell cracked and its contents exhausted once for all by the first seer or sage, while the others must religiously crack the same nutshell all over again, each tremblingly fearful not to give the lie to 'past' seers and sages.<sup>3</sup>

Swami Vivekananda also said something similar in one of his lectures:

Is God's book closed? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran and all other sacred books are but so many pages and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutations to all the prophets of the past, great ones of the present and to all that are to come in the future.<sup>4</sup>

So no scripture of the past, present or future however luminous and profound it may be, can contain the entire truth of the Spirit. No revelation or written word can entirely express the Infinite. In fact each scripture or spiritual teaching or revelation expresses only that much of the truth of the spirit which the humanity of the age, epoch or the civilisation can understand and assimilate. As the human consciousness progresses in its course of evolution, new vistas of the Spirit are revealed to the illumined vision of yogis, seers and sages giving birth to new religions, scriptures, philosophies and teachings. This process will go on until a day may come in the future when outer intermediaries like scriptures and prophets will no longer be needed because humanity as a whole will be ready to receive the direct guidance of the Spirit from within. And until then, religions, to remain alive and relevant for the future, have to break away from the prison of their conservative attitudes and keep their mind, heart and soul open to new revelations of the Spirit.

## **Towards a Spiritual Religion of Humanity**

The third approach which can perhaps lead to a lasting spiritual transformation of religion is a path of universal spiritual humanism. There are two things which are needed for the spirit of religion to recover its highest truth and prevent it from falling again into division and darkness. First is an Idea or Ideal sufficiently universal and non-dogmatic to prevent the formation of cult-ego and its assertion "my path, my prophet, my God is the only way to heaven".

Second is an inner and outer discipline for making the idea concrete and real for the consciousness and life of the whole mankind.

First is the Idea or the Ideal. As we are insisting constantly in our discussions, in religion merely an idea is not enough. But a narrow idea leads to a narrow experience or a narrow interpretation of the inner experience. There should be a broad and universal idea, acceptable not only to the religious mind but also to the modern secular mentality. We have in our modern age, the ideal of secular humanism based on the triple values of French revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity. The strong point of modern humanism is its emphasis on the unity and equality of the whole humanity. This is a futuristic conception because the future destiny of the collective evolution of humanity lies not in the "liberty" of the individual and the communal ego but in the inner and outer realisation of the fraternity of the whole humanity. In fact, this ideal of fraternity is also one of the essential messages of all religions. A brotherhood of all souls in the City of God is one of the common themes of all religions.

But the main defect of modern humanism is that it is an intellectual and political creed trying to realise an idea or sentiment in the external life by organising the needs and interests of conflicting individual and communal egos, without making any attempt to make the idea real and living to the inner being of the masses. The defect of religious fraternity is that, in most of the religions, it is a sectarian brotherhood in which non-believers are not only excluded but also predestined to hell! But the true brotherhood which can unite humanity is not this phoney sectarian brotherhood but a universal inner brotherhood which includes all humanity. Only a progressive inner moral, psychological and spiritual evolution of humanity leading towards the realisation of its own inner spiritual fraternity can bring about the ultimate millennium dreamt of by the religious and secular thought of humanity. So this ideal of inner Fraternity is the key-factor which can perhaps embrace and synthesise the secular and religious aspirations of humanity and give it a unified direction to a single goal. Sri Aurobindo envisages this new Ideal of the future in a spiritual religion of Humanity:

A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. A religion of humanity means the growing realisation that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one; that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and the human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring

about a kingdom of this divine Spirit upon earth. By its growth within us oneness with our fellow-men will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of co-operation, but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life. There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be the realisation by the race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded.<sup>5</sup>

We may include in this spiritual unity, the ideal of modern ecology, unity of man with Nature. But here also, like the humanistic ideal, the ecological ideal has to be spiritualised. In the spiritual vision, Nature is not only physical but also psychological and spiritual. Nature is the creative force of the Divine Unity and the source of all physical, psychological and spiritual energies in our own being and the universe. Our human nature is part of universal Nature. Not only our physical being is part of the physical energies of Nature but our psychological and spiritual energies are part of the corresponding energies in universal Nature. So in this spiritual vision, ecology means unity and harmony with Nature at all levels of our being - physical, psychological and spiritual. When we integrate the spiritual vision of human unity with the spiritual vision of the unity of Man and Nature, we have the Religion of Oneness, Oneness of all existence in the divine unity of the Spirit.

But we have arrived only at the mental form of the Ideal of oneness and not yet at its spiritual core. For the aim of spiritual religion of oneness is not to establish the spiritual ideals of unity in the thought and life of the human mass. This may be a part of the work but only a part. If it stops here it will end in (the same way as modern humanism or ecology, an intellectual, scientific or political creed with a marginal or considerable impact on the thought and life of humanity but not a radical transformation of human consciousness. For this higher transformation, the ideal of oneness has to become a concrete psychological and spiritual fact to the inner experience of humanity, like for example, in the same way we feel our own body concretely as part of our own self. To do this, first of all we must know what precisely is the psychological and spiritual nature of this unity. We give here below the personal experiences of great seers of the modern age which may give some understanding of the inner nature of the unity-consciousness:

On that first day, while I was in that state and more conscious of the thing around me, I had the first most extraordinary experience. There was a man mending the road; that man was myself; the pickaxe he held was myself; the very stone he was breaking was a part of me; the tender blade of grass was my very being and the tree beside the man was myself. I almost could feel and think like the road mender, and I could feel the wind passing through the tree and the little ant on the blade of grass I could feel. The

birds, the dust and the very noise were a part of me. Just then there was a car passing by at some distance; I was the driver, the engine and the tyres; as the car went further away from me, I was going away from myself. I was in everything or rather everything was in me; inanimate and animate, the mountain, the worm and all breathing things.<sup>6</sup>

So the essence of the experience is the complete disappearance of the ego or the separate 'I' and the sense of otherness, leading to the consciousness of an all-inclusive Oneness in which all creation is felt as a part of our own self. To generalise and establish this experience, and not just the idea, in the consciousness of humanity will be the aim and mission of a spiritual religion.

## **The Culture of Oneness**

But the most important part of the work of a spiritual religion of the future is to discover the path which will lead the individual and collective consciousness of humanity to the Oneness-experience. We will discuss briefly here the basic principles of the path.

The first step is to unify our own individual being. Only like can perceive the like. To feel and perceive the unity and harmony that governs life and world we have to unify and harmonise the various parts of our own being our body, life, mind and soul and feel harmonious and whole within us. So integration of our body, life and mind around the spiritual centre of our being is the first step in the path towards unity.

The second principle of the path is that unity is not something to be created. It exists as an eternal fact in the spiritual dimension of our own being. We have to become conscious of this eternal fact of life which is within us. So the second step is to create a system of education and culture by which each individual can become conscious of the truth of unity either by entering into the spiritual depth of his being through a discipline of active introversion or allow the unity-consciousness in the depth to invade and possess his external being through a discipline of passive, silent and receptive openness or a dynamic surrender. The educational challenge here is to make the ideal of oneness compelling and attractive to all the parts and faculties of our being, thought, feeling, will, emotions, sensations and the dynamic vital force so that it leads to a concentration of the whole being on the idea. The ideal of education is to help each individual to find his own path towards oneness. Here, we have to apply all the psychological principles of Yoga, which we have discussed earlier.

We must remember here that there is not a single experience of oneness or a single path to it. There are many paths each leading to a unique experience. It can be experienced as the unity of our own impersonal and universal Self through a path of knowledge. Or else it can be experienced as the unity and universality of an impersonal divine Love or that of an all-beautiful and all-



loving divine Person through a path of love, devotion or surrender. It can also be experienced as the unity and universality of an impersonal or personal divine creative Force and Wisdom through a path of works and action. By a synthesis of all these paths we can experience the integral fullness of the Divine Unity and Oneness in all its aspects.

The third principle of a oneness-culture will be renunciation of ego. For ego is the source of division and conflict in human consciousness and the main obstacle to the perception of unity. So a clear experiential understanding of the structure of human ego and a progressive dismantling of the ego from the inner being and the outer life of man will be an important and integral part of the education and discipline of a oneness-culture.

This inner discipline and education of the individual has to be supported by a collective environment which actively promotes, encourages and rewards every activity which leads to or helps in the understanding and expression of oneness and the values of oneness like unity, mutuality, harmony, sharing, and self-giving. In oilier words, the present competitive culture has to be replaced by a partnering culture in which every individual and the collectivity make a sincere and creative effort to link himself or herself with other individuals and collectivities in a mutually complementing harmony.

Finally, the ideals, principles and values of oneness must move not only the thought and feeling of people but also the action and decision-levers of the society leading to a massive mobilisation of the economic, material and human resources for building oneness in the inner being and outer life of humanity and in the planet as a whole. This requires some broad guidelines for decision making. Here is one from Mazzini:

Love humanity, ask yourself whenever you do an action in the sphere of your country or your family, if what I am doing were done by all and for all would it advantage or injure humanity. And if your conscience answers it would injure humanity desist, desist even if it seems to you that an immediate advantage for your country or your family would ensure from your action. Be apostles of this faith, apostles of the brotherhood of nations and of the unity of the human race.<sup>7</sup>

We may spiritualise this aphorism of Mazzini in the light of our integral vision of oneness and restate it in the following lines:

Love and know the Spirit and Self in all which is the ultimate ground, depth and source, the indwelling divinity and the sustaining unity of man and universal Nature. Enter deep within your own being and find your deepest and true self in which you become spiritually one with all humanity, all Nature and all existence in the essence of your being. Live in conscious communion with this higher Self and for its cosmic purpose in humanity.

Whenever you have to do an action or take a decision in the sphere of your family, community, organisation, nation or humanity or Nature ask your spiritual self if what I am doing is done by all will it lead to the awakening, realisation and manifestation of divine oneness in humanity? And if your spiritual intuition answers in the affirmative then do it. But if the indication of your spiritual self is negative desist, desist even if it seems to your reason, social sense, ethical conscience, or humanistic sentiment that it will lead to some immediate short-term advantage to your family, community, nation or humanity. Be the apostles of this faith, apostles of the oneness of all existence.

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(Courtesy: *Sraddha*, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2013)

*There is very little argument in my philosophy—the elaborate metaphysical reasoning full of abstract words with which the metaphysician tries to establish his conclusions is not there. What is there is a harmonizing of the different parts of a many-sided is not by force of logical argument that it is done, but by a clear vision of the relations and sequences of the knowledge.*

Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, p. 66

# THE INEVITABILITY OF PAIN IN HUMAN EVOLUTION: AN INTERPRETATION IN THE LIGHT OF SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI

Charan Singh

*Providence is not only that which saves me from the shipwreck in which everybody else has foundered. Providence is also that which, while all others are saved, snatches away my last plank of safety and drowns me in the solitary ocean. (The Supramental Manifestation, p.356)*

Life on this earth revolves around the texture of pleasure and pain, success and failure and gain and loss. As man is the most conscious as well as creative species of the planet, naturally he is the best witness of these changing dynamics of life. By his very nature man is fond of 'the best' of everything; he is perennially in the pursuit of perfection. Despite his instinctive attachment with the positive superlatives in the world, man has been greatly benefitted by the unwelcome gifts of pain and privation! Indeed, it is pain that has brought out the best from the heart and head of man. Pain has been the best teacher, guide, friend and philosopher of man—in life and in death. Man is yet to understand the mystery of existence and the fundamental divine truth that 'There is a purpose in each stumble and fall' (*Savitri* p. 658). Pain has played great role in the upward and evolutionary journey of human consciousness on the path of self-discovery. It is a proven fact that pain and grief pull down the portals of ego and ignorance in the life of man and draw closer to the reality of his being. Every disillusionment with the world leads man closer to the Divine and towards the cosmic mystery of the eternal Maker. The ordinary gains, crowns and laurels are of no use to man in the true world of God as they are valueless ciphers in the judgment of the divine. Indeed it is not 'gain' but pain that reminds us of the Beyond and leads us towards our true life and purpose. Understandably that pain is not pain which makes us familiar with the grace of the Divine and helps start new revelations in life. To quote Sri Aurobindo in this regard:

Pain and grief are Nature's reminder to the soul that the pleasure it enjoys is only a feeble hint of the real delight of existence. In each pain and torture of our being is the secret of a flame of rapture compared with which our greatest pleasure are only as dim flickerings. It is this secret which forms the attraction for the soul of the great ordeals, sufferings and fierce experiences of life which the nervous mind in us shuns and abhors. (*The Supramental Manifestation* p. 356)

Greater the pain, greater the spiritual reward. Just like a weeping child forgets all complaints and displeasures with his mother by the very moment of meeting her, similarly a seeker blissfully forgets all his pains at the very moment of God's advent in life.

To overcome pain, it is necessary to shed the undue attachment with pleasure for man is made not for wandering upon the seashore of nothingness but to delve deeper into the sea of self perfection where "Life's borders crumble and join infinity" (*Savitri* p. 168). Sri Aurobindo has used pain as a great transformative tool in his revelatory poem *Savitri*, a legend and a symbol. Indeed pain is at the very heart of the epic and, in some respects, its leitmotif. In the poem a whole canto named 'The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain' is dedicated to the philosophical understanding of pain and its relevance in the life of man. The poem begins with the eventful day of Satyavan's death which is a necessity in the cosmic order of happenings as it is to bring about something remarkable that "Satyavan *must die*" (p. 10). The death of Satyavan is an invaluable opportunity for material world as he is 'Man's representative in the house of God' (*Savitri* p. 666). The poem further moves and together moves the plot of pain. King Aswapati of Madra has everything but an issue, so the king undergoes arduous *tapasya* to achieve the boon of a son and, mystically, gets the boon for a daughter from goddess Gayatri, the goddess of truth and light. Life is equally painful for king Dyumatsena and his entire family. A blind and banished king of Shalwa, he lives with family members in forest hermitages and performs *tapasya* with other saints, without any hankering for the "emerald delight" (*Savitri* p. 403) of olden days. Satyavan, his only son, gets the training of life amid the "high peopled loneliness of spirit" (p. 403) and the "frankness of the primal earth" (p. 403). When one moves further in the poem, one comes to know that barring the "...brief felicitous hour" (p. 391) the marital life of Satyavan and Savitri soon falls into the gloom of death and dejection. On the fated day, boldly defending the witty rapiers of Death, Savitri represented the pains and possibilities of earth in her most scintillating and enlightening debate with Death. She knew that life on earth would be a vain and meaningless existence without Satyavan, the embodiment of truth consciousness. Therefore Savitri is grappling with Death not for her "...happy body's bliss" (p. 633) but for a great and "...sacred charge" (p. 633) of transformation of the material earth into a visible garden house of Truth, Beauty, Delight, Spirit and Life. The individual pain of Savitri is, in reality, the collective pain of humanity, a thirst of man for purity and perfection. And in order to materialize the highest possibilities of life, it is necessary that man undergoes the yoke of pain and directly feels that there can be no crown without cross. On the material as well as the spiritual path, it is safer to have the experience of crawling and crumbling before one learns "to walk" in a majestic gait. The seer poet of *Savitri* clearly stipulates that "None can reach heaven who has not passed through hell" (p. 227). Only a creative experience of interminable pain could redeem man from the false world of ego and ignorance and carve out an image of Superman out of man.

On the material precipice of existence, there is hardly any better pain-killer than pain itself! Explaining the inevitability of pain in the evolution of man, Sri Aurobindo writes:

*Pain is the hammer of the gods to break  
A dead resistance in the mortal's heart,  
His slow inertia as of living stone.  
If the heart were not forced to want and weep,  
His soul would have lain down content, at ease,  
And never thought to exceed the human start  
And never learned to climb towards the Sun. (Savitri, p. 443)*

Deeply and madly in love of his ego, ignorance and imperfection, man hardly dares cross the crisscross of his comfort zone and almost lies content with his self created confinements. He loves his limitations and madly craves for the lures of lower nature. But as man is God's possibility on earth, the Maker cannot rest on the slow progress of his noblest creation therefore, He applies the *bhramastra* of pain which destroys the mansions of ego world in the consciousness of man and liberates him for good. Pain is unavoidable and inevitable for the awakening of man's true divine potentialities as well as his freedom from the snare of lower attractions and attachments of animal world. Sri Aurobindo further elaborates the abiding necessity of pain in Savitri:

*The spirit is doomed to pain till man is free.  
There is a clamour of battle, a tramp, a march:  
A cry arises like a moaning sea,  
A desperate laughter under the blows of death,  
A doom of blood and sweat and toil and tears.  
Men die that man may live and God be born.  
An awful Silence watches tragic Time.  
Pain is the hand of Nature sculpturing men  
To greatness: an inspired labour chisels  
With heavenly cruelty an unwilling mould. (p. 444)*

The egoistic mind of man creates problems at every step of his spiritual progress. As a matter of fact, the ego and ignorance of man are the only enemies of his spiritual journey. To detach man from worldly attractions, Nature working as a representative of God uses pain as weapon and as an effective remedy. In all circumstances of life, God's will always acts for the betterment of man and, though at first pain is always inconvenient for man yet, eventually, it becomes a boon and blessing for him. Given the insolence of the 'unwilling mould' (man) it is necessary for the Divine to act 'with heavenly cruelty'.

Interestingly, pain and creativity have a deep and abiding interrelationship; the most creative artists, writers and thinkers are those who have undergone the greatest of pains and privations. For example, *Gitanjali*, the best known poetic work of Ravindranath Tagore, sprang out from the heart of the great poet after immense personal pain: the Nobel Laureate suffered the pain of the death of

five family members at regular interval from 1901 to 1910. The life of our Guru, Sri Aurobindo, is also a classic example of the sublimation and transformation of individual pain into cosmic pain. As a true *sthitpragya* of the *Bhagavada Gita*, Sri Aurobindo successfully fought the battle of life on both fronts: material and spiritual. With a godlike patience and spectacular perseverance, he underwent all personal pain and challenges. Moreover, Himalayan as he was in his vision and character, he tried to find out a universal panacea for all the pains of ailing mankind. His interest and involvement in the world affairs like the World War II and the freedom movement of India are classic examples of his divine solicitousness for the crying humanity. As for the *mahayogi's* personal difficulties, he himself admitted that he suffered pains of the greatest possible measure, which are unimaginable to a common man, and turned them into living opportunities:

I have had worse than any human mind can think of. It is not because I have ignored difficulties, but because I have seen them more clearly, experienced them on a larger scale than anyone living now or before me that, having faced and measured them, I am sure of the results of my work. (*Letters on Yoga*, Vol. III p. 1638)

In the spiritual history of man there has been not a single *yogi* or *avatar* who dreamt of bringing the kingdom of God upon earth for the complete and collective salvation of man, except Sri Aurobindo. All works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are but authentic explication and living records of man's higher possibilities. Man will have to surmount and sublimate pain in order to realize the all-encompassing contours of existence. As the only conscious and judicious creature of Nature, man can't—and shouldn't—forget that there is no pain more severe and hurting as the pain of Divine's absence in life. Every material pain can be happily tolerated for the sake of self-evolution and transformation. The Hindu philosophy of *tapasya* or spiritual self-culture is nothing but willful acceptance of pains and challenges for the grace of the Divine. As a true divine follower and *yogi* of this aspect of the Indian spiritual tradition Sri Aurobindo lived and departed for the sake of the speedy advent of supramental transformation of earth consciousness. His love for ailing humanity proves by the fact that he worked upon and completed *Savitri* despite endless attack of the hostile forces. By giving *Savitri*, 'the *mantra* for the transformation of the world' as The Mother calls it, he has given the world everything—life, love, beauty, truth and delight as well as the supreme creative *ananda* of self-revelation. Like Jesus Christ he too immensely suffered in order to redeem the world though his sacrifice and suffering took place on an altogether different plane of existence, therefore, it is not surprising that Sri Aurobindo's sacrifice has not been given the place it so justifiably deserves. Unmindful of the world's apathy, the *mahayogi* believes that the saviour must personally realize the intensity and ferocity of pain, only then will his work be effective in the cosmic order. He insightfully writes in *Savitri*:

*The day-bringer must walk in darkest night.  
 He who would save the world must share its pain  
 If he knows not grief, how shall he find grief's cure...?  
 He who would save the world must be one with the world,  
 All suffering things contain in his heart's space  
 And bear the grief and joy of all that lives. (p. 537)*

Without any tangible experience of pain, one cannot understand the acuteness of it, not even the saviour or redeemer of earth. Understandably, the greatest of sages, prophets and heroes of mankind are those who suffered the deepest of pain! Pain seems to be the yardstick of man for judging the greatness of a *vibhuti*; people judge the height of a great personality by the intensity of his suffering for the world and accord to him their respect accordingly. There is a glorious instance from the life of Merry Curie, the great physicist and Nobel Laureate for two times. She had a deep personal pain that she couldn't do anything to save her mother's life that died of tuberculosis before her helpless eyes. The intensity of this pain propelled her to invent radiology and to establish the Radium Institute, devoted to search remedy for tuberculosis, an incurable disease in her age.

Also, on the spiritual plane, each shock and stumbling becomes a stepping stone or "...a needed pace" (*Savitri*, p. 625) for deeper self enquiry and spiritual introspection. Even the painless condition of evolved consciousness could be achieved only through pain! To quote the words of the Mother:

Pain brings us back to a deeper truth by obliging us to concentrate in order to be able to bear it, be able to face the thing that crushes us. It is in pain that one most easily finds the true strength again, when one is strong. It is in pain that one most easily finds the true faith again, the faith in something which is above and beyond all pain. (CWM, Vol. 9, p. 41)

Savitri, the protagonist of the epic transforms her individual pain into the pain of collective humanity. There will be no spiritual blossoming and efflorescence upon earth without Satyavan, the manifestation higher truth. "Earth cannot flower if lonely I return" (p. 637), Savitri tells of Death while revealing the cosmic necessity of hers and Satyavan's divine reunion. The unavoidable death of Satyavan is a unique opportunity for Savitri and, in broader sense, for the whole earth. By *tapasya*, Life and Love could be snatched back from the jaws of Death. Savitri is an exclamation of the seer-poet that the hope of eternal life and beauty can be materialized here on earth and man is basically made not for sighing or suffering but for living, laughing and loving. Man should evolve his inner creative intuitive faculties in order to make him more efficient in judging the chances of growth at the heart of apparent difficulties. The Mother further enlightens us about the attitude that should be kept in times of suffering and loss:

If something extremely painful happens to you, never try to deaden yourself...Go right to the heart of pain and there you will find the light, the truth, the strength and the joy which are hidden behind this pain...In this way every event in life, great or small, can be an opportunity for progress.  
(*On Education* p. 75)

The above statement of the Mother underscores the value of pain in the evolution of human consciousness. However, she makes it clear that though there should not be a 'seeking' for pain or suffering nevertheless, when pain comes the inner spirit of inspiration in it should be grasped and used as a potent means for self transformation. It is only in the higher state of consciousness in which man realizes that "He makes our fall a means for greater rise" (*Savitri*, p. 34) and "Pain is the touch of our Mother teaching us how to bear and grow in rapture" (*Essays Divine and Human*, p. 433). Unless man realizes that "Even pain and grief are garbs of world delight" (*Savitri*, p. 454), pain will be necessary for his spiritual transformation. And there is no better affirmation of this truth than Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* which is a journey from dawn to greater dawn, from pain to perfection. Just as "...God's long nights are justified by dawn" (*Savitri*, p. 601) similarly, all pain in the life of man are justified by the spiritual reward in the form of God's blossoming in the sufferer's life. Only then could man realize the inevitability of pain in the evolution of his consciousness. To conclude with the lines of *Savitri*:

*A marvellous form responded to her gaze  
Whose sweetness justified life's blindest pain;  
All Nature's struggle was its easy price,  
The universe and its agony seemed worth while.* (p. 679)

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## SRI AUROBINDO, THE SEER-POET

*Dilip Kumar Roy*

To be utterly sure of the evidence of Sri Aurobindo's greatness, I have often of late cross-questioned myself thus: "What was the storm-sweep that uprooted you from your native soil of poetry and music, laughter and popularity, to be flung at his feet in eager self-surrender more than four decades ago?" It is not a question easy to answer because, to quote Nivedita, our deepest convictions often enough spring from data which can convince no one but ourselves. I can only say that in his presence I felt myself gripped by a silent wonder and intense longing to lay my utter self at his feet and lie cradled in his indefinable Grace. As to why I came to feel such a longing, I would humbly offer a simile, to wit, that as a planet is unable to fulfill itself directly by merging its restless star-dusts in the sun, so it sleeplessly revolves around its parent orb waiting its final hour of deliverance. As for me, I often told myself, Sri Aurobindo *was* the sun around which my soul revolved, though in its own orbit traced by its distinct personality. This is not a mere metaphor stemming from a devotee's effusion, for the light in him was not only resplendent like the sun's—whose fire called to the spark of my personality—but also a magnetic pull of love which weaned me irrevocably from my lesser loves. One may contend that all this, boiled down, is little more than a sentimental enthusiasm or, shall I say, a flood which bursts the banks of sober appraisalment.

The charge may well be valid. My only defense is that do what I would, after having glimpsed what I had in Sri Aurobindo, I could not possibly write with a critical restraint about him, not only because the Everestian height of his soul's attainments baffled me, but also because to marvel at the incredible outflowering of his intellectual and mystic personality was a rapture that silenced all my questionings. But a truce to ecstasy. Let me now essay to sum him up as objectively as I can within the limited compass at my disposal.

Why does Sri Aurobindo impress us moderns? Having discussed this question with many a friend in the ashram (with visitors as well as disciples), I found that most people were impressed—even overawed—by his marvelous capacity for living a lonely life in an ivory tower for an indefinite number of years. But many is the time I wrote to him that his genius for immuring himself within the four walls of a room had appeared to me as a limitation to be overcome rather than a feat to be panegyricized. Most of my solemn friends were shocked, but not Sri Aurobindo, who possessed an infinite power of understanding and ability to see things from his appraiser's point of view. It was this great trait of his character that endeared him most to me—a trait that amounted almost to a genius for tolerance and imaginative insight. I have always been, personally, somewhat downright and impatient by nature without being, I hope, dogmatic

and intolerant, so that I admired his charity and infinite patience all the more. I was moved when once he wrote to me dismissing my denunciation of a friend of mine who got drunk now and then. "Human beings are much less deliberate and responsible for their acts," he wrote, "than the moralists, novelists and dramatists make them. I look rather to see what forces drove him than what the man himself may have seemed by inference to have intended or purposed. Our inferences are often wrong and even when they are right touch only the surface of the matter."

Yes, that was Sri Aurobindo all over, for only he with his experiential knowledge of cosmic and extra-cosmic forces (overt and occult) could bring to bear the sum total of his knowledge of the goings-on behind the "surface" to get at the real Truth as against the apparent. In the other words, it was because he had outgrown the commonly accepted criteria of judgment that he could, by rights, ask the common judge to pause and recognize his own intrinsically human limitations.

*Impenetrable, a mystery recondite  
Is the vast plan of which are a part;  
Its harmonies are discords to our view,  
Because we know not the great themes they serve. (Savitri II, V)*

He was worthy of admiration because he could persevere, in the face of seemingly insuperable obstacles, till he won the clue to the divine harmonies which subserved the "inscrutable work of cosmic agencies"; as also because his restless heart of love saw that

*All we have done is ever still to do;  
All breaks and all renews and is the same (Ibid, III, IV)*

—but, above all, because his indomitable spirit dared (as he once wrote me):

*To brings down some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace into earth-consciousness. I see it above and know what it is—I fell it gleaming down on my consciousness from above and I am seeking to make it possible for it to take up the whole being into its own native power, instead of the nature of man continuing to remain in half-light, half-darkness. I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final cause of the earth-evolution... It is a question between the Divine and myself—whether it is the Divine Will or not, whether I am sent to bring that down or open the way for its descent or at least make it more possible or not. Let all men jeer at me if they will or all hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption—I go on till I conquer or perish. This is the spirit in which I seek the Supermind, no hunting for greatness for myself or others.*

The mighty seers in all climes have said with one voice that at the summit of consciousness knowledge is seen to be indistinguishable from love. Nevertheless, it cannot be gainsaid that on the lower plateaus of consciousness, knowledge and love manifest themselves in distinctly different lilt and rhythms. So we would be better advised to “suspend judgment” until—to paraphrase the epigram of Sri Krishnaprem—we grow to love knowledge more and know more of love. For then, our hearts tell us, we shall be able to achieve the great vision which enabled Sri Aurobindo to see God not merely as Love but—as the *Bhagavat* also has put it—as a “Servant of Love”:

*Thou who pervadest all the worlds below  
Yet sitst above:  
Master of all who work and rule and know  
Servant of Love:*

And the vision that made him realize God as a vast Creator seeking humble birth in the lowest of the low is as moving as it is convincing:

*Thou who disdainest not the worm to be  
Nor even the clod:  
Therefore we know in that humility  
That thou art God.*

Before I met Sri Aurobindo I had, indeed, admired him as a great sage, but I could never get rid of the irrepressible regret that he remained too remote to be sought as a practical guide or help except perhaps in the way a finger post is—to be consulted rather than loved or be loved by in return. In effect, he was—to such as we—more like a lighthouse than a boat. But when I came to know him better I envisioned in him a loving pilot who could address even me as *a friend and a son* and be intimately interested in my fulfillment and salvation. Yes, knowledge is all right, but the heart hungers, first and last, for love and understanding sympathy.

But then, slowly, I came to realize something more: I saw that to know him more was to love him more. That is why I thirsted to know him more as, indeed, I wanted to know Sri Ramana Maharshi more. I can recall how immensely relieved I was when the latter told me in reply to my pointed question as to whether he set as much store by love as by knowledge: “How could I pit the one against the other, since *bhakti* is *jnanamata*,” that is, love is the mother of knowledge. I bowed to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi for having paid this tribute to love, even as I bowed to Sri Aurobindo for having endeared God to us as the “Servant of Love.”

In the Vedas I read long ago: “*Brahmavit Brahmaiva Bhavati*— “one who knows God becomes God.” I freely confess that I do not know precisely what

this imports. For if it means that he becomes omnipotent or omniscient like God and transcends overnight his human limitations (as is claimed by some fanatics), then it is obviously unacceptable to such as we who cannot equate fanaticism with true faith and wisdom. But if it means that such a man acts from an exalted consciousness which fills us with an ineffable sweetness, lights our path in darkness and goads us to seek one-pointedly and to love selflessly the God of Truth and Love, then surely there can be little objection, since we can testify from personal experience that they do carry us toward the beckoning God, even as wings carry us toward the purer heights. But the wings are not identical with the sky—any more than the sages are with God. For God, to be absolute, must be infallible and emancipated from finite limitations, and no sage, however great of stature, can claim to be utterly beyond the pale of error or of human limitations. This is not to say that he should not be worshipped. On the contrary, no sage can be truly appreciated for what he is till we have offered him our hearts' homage. For only then can he help us with his light in the fullest measure and make us grow in knowledge, tolerance and love, till we come to realize what we have got to realise. More explicitly, while we must, of set purpose, be loyal to his essential guidance, we must not, if we are to stay true to ourselves, follow him blindly, echoing whatever he says. We can—and, indeed, often should—suspend our judgment if and when our hearts cannot fully accept all that he says, but we should not, for that reason, feel obligated to subscribe to what we find unacceptable till we have experiential verified it. Apropos, Guru Nanak said something which, as an admonition, can hardly be improved upon: "You may, indeed, say that such and such a statement you *believe* to be true because your guru says it, but you have no right to assert that it *is* true unless and until you have seen or known it to be true." This, at any rate, is how I myself have come to cherish gurus, to wit, as reliable pathfinders in life's pilgrimage to Truth, to be venerated seeingly but not idolized fanatically. And among such heroic spirits who are intermittently sent to us from on high to relieve our global gloom, Sri Aurobindo certainly stands in a class by himself, not only because of his profound knowledge of human nature and encyclopedic grasp of racial cultures, but also because of his marvelous power of expression both in prose and verse. I stress these three aspects of his personality knowing full well that by themselves they do not mark someone as a spiritual personality. But about his spiritual greatness I need hardly add anything to the tribute I have paid him already and fairly exhaustively.<sup>1</sup> So I will only say that he gleamed always for those who knew him a little intimately as one of the brightest beacons in the dark and stormy waters of life, a lighthouse that created faith in the shipwreck of rational hope. It is this faith which made him write to me once: "To me the ultimate value of a man is to be measured not by what he says, nor even by what he does, but by what he *becomes*."

And he *became* a seer of seers who was thrilled by what he had *seen*, which in its turn made him into what he became: a prophet of the incredible future that is waiting for Man in the next phase of his evolution:

*Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,  
The days become a happy pilgrim march ...  
A few shall see what none yet understands;  
God shall grow up while wise men talk and sleep;  
For man shall not know the coming till its hour  
And belief shall be not till the work is done. (Savitri I, IV)*

Even those who have seen him only once have known something, were it even a fraction, of the rapturous discovery that impelled him to write:

*A deathbound littleness is not all we are:  
Immortal our forgotten vastnesses  
Await discovery in our summit selves. (Savitri I, IV)*

But even those who have never seen or known him have been left the supreme legacy of his mighty vision and message, the last fruit of a *tapasya* (mystic self-discipline) which counted no cost to attain what few even dare to contemplate:

*The Supermind shall claim the world for Light  
And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart  
And place Light's crown on Nature's lifted head  
And found Light's reign on her unshaking base ...  
Thus shall the earth open to divinity  
And common natures feel the wide uplift,  
Illumine common acts with the Spirit's Ray  
And meet the Deity in common things. (Savitri XI, I)*

I must pause here, even at the risk of ending on a note of anticlimax, to speculate a little about how Sri Aurobindo is likely to be estimated by posterity. It will be impressed, I feel, not merely because he was a great poet and a great yogi, but also because he was a paradox, to wit, an earthling who yet transcended the downpull of the earth while loving and blessing it as no earth-enamored poet had ever loved and blessed her.<sup>2</sup> For in him the paradox was resolved—so will men feel—precisely because he fully believed in the ever-deepening significance of earth-life and what it connoted. This he explained to me in a brief but supremely suggestive letter in answer to my “realistic doubt” as to the possibility of such an inglorious, disharmonious and creaturely thing as our earth being redeemed overnight by a glorious supramental apocalypse:

*All the nonevolutionary worlds are worlds limited to their own harmony like the life heavens.<sup>3</sup> The earth, on the other hand, is an evolutionary world—not at all glorious or harmonious even as a material world (except in certain appearances) but rather most sorrowful, disharmonious, imperfect.*

*Yet in that imperfection is the urge toward a higher and many-sided perfection. It contains the last finite which yet yearns to the Supreme Infinite; it is not satisfied by the sense-joys precisely because in the conditions of the earth it is able to see their limitations. God is pent in the mire—mire is not glorious, so there is no claim to glory or beauty here—but the very fact imposes a necessity to break through that prison to a consciousness which is ever rising toward the heights.*

In other words, in Sri Aurobindo's vision is harmonized the last incompatibility, blended the irreconcilable antinomy between matter and spirit. Not that the ancient seers had missed the supreme clue: their deep intuition, too, had laughed at the misleading *maya* of the phenomenal reality and posited: "*Yadeveha tadamutrd*"—"Whatever is there is here as well." But the trouble is that the tyranny of the physical-rational mind has come today to be so universally idolized that such a mystic vision, being beyond its comprehension, is scoffed at by the modern mind as too cryptic to be taken seriously, if not as too good to be true. That is why Sri Aurobindo is likely to be looked upon by posterity as the new Messiah of this postscientific age—a true Messiah because even when he met the challenge of reason with reason, he could asseverate, with the authority of his vision which no mental reason could command:

*This world was not built with random bricks of chance,  
A blind God is not destiny's architect:  
A conscious power has drawn the plan of life,  
There is a meaning in each curve and line. (Savitri, VI, II)*

Which meaning must warrant that even death or defeat is not the tragedy it seems, because:

*Arisen from the tragic crash of life,  
Arisen from the body's torture and death,  
The spirit rises mightier by defeat.  
Its Godlike wings grow wider with each fall,  
Its splendid failures sum to victory.*

Looking at the world from below—from our plane of the mind and senses—we may be inclined to entertain doubts about our human failures culminating in divine victory, but Sri Aurobindo looked on cosmic evolution from above and so viewed something breathtaking because he saw God himself, descended into the world, slowly but victoriously surmounting obstacles through the miracle manifestation of His Divine Power—"through Nature's contraries"<sup>4</sup>—

and limned what he had visioned with poetry that came down like a torrent of gleaming gold:

*Our imperfection towards perfection toils,  
The body is the chrysalis of a soul:  
The infinite holds the finite in its arms,  
Time travels towards revealed eternity...  
In all we feel his presence and his power.  
A blaze of his sovereign glory is the sun,  
A glory is the gold and glimmering moon.  
A glory is his dream of purple sky.  
A march of his greatness are the wheeling stars.  
His laughter of beauty breaks out in green trees,  
His moments of beauty triumph in a flower;  
The blue sea's chant, the rivulet's wandering voice  
Are murmurs falling from the Eternal's harp.  
The world is God fulfilled in outwardness.  
His ways challenge our reason and our sense;  
By blind brute movements of an ignorant Force,  
By means we slight as small, obscure or base  
A greatness founded upon little things,  
He has built a world in the unknowing Void.  
His forms he has massed from infinitesimal dust:  
His marvels are built from insignificant things.  
If mind is crippled, life untaught and crude,  
If brutal masks are there and evil acts,  
They are incidents of his vast and varied plot,  
His great and dangerous drama's needed steps. (Savitri X, III)*

And the glorious denouement *will* come because the "architect of immortality" cannot possibly fail as the omnipotent leader of human destiny has been urging us onward sleeplessly to fulfill man with the crown of Supramental consciousness on the glorious heights where:

*The Spirit shall look out through Matter's gaze  
And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's Face.*

To end with my humble tribute to his superhuman greatness on the occasion of his centenary celebration (1972):

*Knowing thee once, do we not know the Truth,  
However fragmentary? For though we may*

*Still fail to glimpse thy New Dawn which can soothe  
Our famished eyes with His unsullied Day,*

*Yet once thou mak'st our half-lit consciousness  
Reverberate thy fire-thrilled melody,  
Will not its rapture lead us to His Grace  
Resolving our discord with thy harmony?*

*When in the labyrinthine thrall of Fate  
We grope for a Ray, 'tis thy love's benison  
Heals dusk with its moon-song inviolate  
Our dark-enamoured moods, alas, disown!*

*Outsoaring our science-fostered strife and din  
Thou wing'st the blue — no dragons make thee quail.  
Thou hast attained what only the elect could win:  
A summit view no clouds can countervail.*

*Thou hast won through at the long journey's end,  
To the Sun-elixir that quells the hordes of Night.  
Who once have seen thy Face have known, O Friend:  
Tis not a myth that Love is one with Light.*

- Dilip

## Reference

1. In my *Yogi Sri Krishnaprem, Sri Aurobindo Came to Me, Among the Great and Yugarshi Sri Aurobindo*.
2. Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls;/Earth is the heroic spirit's battle-field,/The forge where the Arch-mason shapes his works (*Savitri XI, I*)
3. Sri Aurobindo uses the term to mean the higher worlds of gods and radiant beings, which exist side by side with our world.
4. Our destiny is written in double terms Through Nature's contraries we draw near God (*Savitri VI, I*)



# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF NIGHTINGALE IN THE SELECT POEMS OF JOHN KEATS AND SRI AUROBINDO

Oeendrilla Guha

For ages, poets and philosophers have pondered over the very nature and relation of life and death and have come up with numerous interpretations. Keats and Sri Aurobindo also have their personal philosophies regarding the concepts of life and death. The poems considered of the two poets are "Ode to a Nightingale" and "The Nightingale: An impression" (from the collection *Immortal Poems of the English Language*, for this paper abbreviated as *IPEL*) as the subject matter is similar, in the sense that both deal with the same bird, the nightingale. They allow a comparative study. Both the poems deal with the concepts of life and death, light and darkness, creation and annihilation. Keats accepts death, Sri Aurobindo does not accept death as the ultimate reality and aim of human existence. In order to reiterate their beliefs, poems by Milton and Henry Vaughan have been considered.

Before proceeding with the poems, it is profitable to look into some of the concepts the poems work out, for example that of life and death. What is life? To most people it is nothing but hardship, a curse, a torture, whatever name one may give it. Life is a process through birth and growth to death. It is assumed that death alone releases man from life. This is what life and death are to most individuals. The former is the progenitor of pains, desires and the latter is the deliverer from sorrows and unfulfilled wishes.

Keats observes life and death in the same light by the time he writes "Ode to a Nightingale" in the year 1819. In the year 1818, he wrote the poem "When I Have Fears That I May Cease To Be" where he voices his fear of dying before he is able to do justice to his poetic talent: he wishes to live. In a year's time, he realises the futility to fight fate and his nearing death. Within two years he dies. This is the life of Keats and many others who, in the very youth of life want to live it their way but merely die realising that life is no bed of roses! Thus is formed the philosophy of Keats on life and death: his philosophy is his life of twenty six years. (1795-1821)

Sri Aurobindo on the other hand, hails life and death as mediums to reach the Divine. Life is the field to perfect oneself till one is ready to make of it "life divine". Death is the process of recycling the body, till it is made perfect to die no more. Thus, both the poets assert their philosophies, which are contradictory.

"Ode to a Nightingale", written by John Keats, entertains an urgency to escape. To some extent this craving to be extinguished can be attributed to his early demise, which is the result of him taking care of his diseased younger brother Tom, a victim of the then fatal disease, tuberculosis, which inadvertently led him to his untimely death, falling a prey to the same disease.

“Ode To A Nightingale” commences with the poet describing himself in pain. He aches to the extent to consider drinking hemlock and opium to paralyse his senses from feeling the pain. The lines run as:

*My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:...* (IPEL, 322)

Hemlock, as in the case of Socrates (469 BC – 399 BC), the Greek philosopher, proved fatal. The American poet and critic, Edgar Allan Poe’s act of taking unlimited doses of opium, nearly killed him one time. Poets and essayists such as Coleridge and De Quincy were avid consumers of opium, which some say seemed to have dulled their creativity.

In Greek mythology, Lethe is the river of forgetfulness that runs in Hades or hell. Thus, hemlock and opium offer the consumer the instant forgetfulness found in hell or in death. Keats expresses his desire to consume hemlock in order to die, to reach the land of obliviousness.

In contrast to Keats’ misery, the nightingale is portrayed as happy, singing in the wood:

*Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thine happiness, -  
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,  
In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green and shadows numberless,  
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.* (IPEL, 322)

Thus, in the very first stanza two moods are drawn in relation to the poet and the nightingale who represent sadness and happiness, winter and summer, death and life, hell and heaven.

Keats continues in the same vein in the third stanza. After considering a permanent relief through hemlock and opium, he thinks of drinking to oblivion! He reinforces his determination to escape the worldly pains, worries through these lines: “O, for a draught of vintage!... That I might drink, and leave the world unseen, And with thee fade away into the forest dim:” (IPEL, 322) as he is unable to bear

*The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;...* (IPEL, 322)

Much like the Buddha, who finds his solution to the earthly problems in Nirvana, Keats finds his relief in poetry: the former is spiritual and the latter poetical. Thus, it is in the spiritual that the Buddha finds a non-physical relief and Keats forgets everything that is mortal, fallible, bound to the law of time in poetry or “the viewless wings of Poesy.” (IPEL, 323)

He is thus able to lose himself in the music of the bird with the help of poetry, which means that he escapes his present by willingly identifying himself with the very nature of poetry. Keats’ concept of “negative capability” theorises the author annihilating his own self in his created subjects, in his case, poetry. Poetry is the medium to waste himself into the music of the nightingale. He writes:

*...For many a time I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!... (IPEL, 323)*

The poet’s mood, the night and the music herald loss and the end.

The music of the nightingale offers Keats no actual relief; it is merely easing a death otherwise painful. It is in poetry, listening to the music that he wants to leave the world unnoticed, in the dark of the night. Keats is certain that he cannot cheat death; he merely wants to impress upon death that he is not going to die in pain but in utter poetic intoxication! Thus, the poet is pessimistic as he sees no hope to escape the law of Time despite him acknowledging the music of the bird as eternal and so the bird itself. Much before Keats, Milton, a 17<sup>th</sup> century British poet, growing blind towards the end of his life, expressed his frustration in the sonnet, “On His Blindness”.

*When I consider how my light is spent  
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,  
And that one talent which is death to hide  
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest he returning chide,  
“Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?”  
I fondly ask... (IPEL, 106)*

The octave depicts the aging Milton’s incapacity of fighting fate or God, which reflects the human weakness to fight destiny. Men and women are merely puppets, attached to strings pulled by the Divine, the master puppeteer. He asks

God "Doth God exact day labour, light denied?" (IPEL, 106) and blames Him for reducing him to such a state where he can do nothing but "stand and wait." (IPEL, 107) Thus, Milton and Keats observe the same spiritual turmoil within themselves, that of the incapability to fight fate.

In the sestet, Milton embraces fate as the Will of God and stops opposing it:

*But Patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need  
Either man's work or his own gifts: 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. (IPEL, 106)*

But Keats does no such thing. The poem ends with him contemplating death: "Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well/ As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf" (IPEL, 324) even though Keats immortalises the bird by hailing its music as well as himself through poetry. Here lies the difference between Milton and Keats: the former acknowledges his fate as the law of his God, the latter does not. The former is content, the latter miserable with his fate.

In contrast to Keats, Sri Aurobindo hails the same bird, the nightingale, as "an impression" of life and opportunities but both are similar in their description of the singing bird which is not seen but heard. Keats offers the usual description of the bird singing in the trees: "That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees, In some melodious plot, Of beechen green,..." (IPEL, 322) In "The Nightingale: An Impression", Sri Aurobindo, much like Keats, observes the bird as "Hark in the trees the low-voiced nightingale..." (SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 31)

But here onwards, Sri Aurobindo changes his line of thought: to him the call of the bird is "jubilant", whereas to Keats it is "plaintive". Further on, to Sri Aurobindo the bird's "jubilant cry...in the hushed night" sounds "voluble And various as sweet water wavering by..." (SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 31) Water represents movement, change, clarity. The bird thus symbolises moving forward and so it does not suggest the poet to end his life as death cuts short the moving forward movement, therefore life itself. Besides, water cannot inebriate the drinker like "a draught of vintage". (IPEL, 322) So, in a single word, Sri Aurobindo impresses upon the reader his philosophy of rejection of death.

The association of the cry of the nightingale to "Siren of the night" (SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 31) indicates a call of life saving urgency, for example, the siren of an ambulance announces the necessity of saving an ill or a dying patient. The bird is portrayed as the deliverer from darkness and death. Thus, the music of the nightingale wakes one from sleep or ignorance unlike the Keatsian one which is a "high requiem" or a dirge. The Aurobindonian nightingale merely

sings “amid the fitful rye”, at no point can the reader relate the nightingale to inspiring one to drink though rye is used to make intoxicating drinks. The singing bird is also hailed as “Astarte’s eremite”. Astarte or Aphrodite is the Greek goddess of fertility. She represents creation, Nature or Prakriti. Eremite is a hermit. Therefore, the nightingale is the worshipper of Astarte. The closest Keats goes to praise the nightingale is by addressing its music immortal. Sri Aurobindo exalts it as the bearer of the Divine word.

The difference in Keats and Sri Aurobindo is obvious. The former, as explained previously, chooses death to avoid the earthly dilemmas. Death is an escape. The earthly dilemmas are nothing but unfulfilled desires, which result in pain. Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge despite God forbidding them and so, are banished from paradise to earth as a punishment. This instance proves that earth is a hell, where humanity sweats and toils to repent its past sins. It is only death that liberates and according to the proportion of the good one has done on earth, one is sent to hell or to heaven. Henry Vaughan advocates this belief:

*Before I taught my tongue to wound  
My conscience with a sinful sound...,  
But ah! my soul with too much stay  
Is drunk, and staggers in the way!  
Some men a forward motion love,  
But I by backward steps would move;  
And when this dust falls to the urn,  
In that state I came, return. (IPEL, 148)*

The song of the nightingale, acting as a drug, annuls Keats’ unfulfilled desires and he is able to die peacefully to finally reach the gates of heaven.

The Hindu philosophy and spiritual tradition also observe desire as the root of all evil, which ultimately ends in death but it does not consider that desiring is sinning. Instead it merely observes it as a deferment. Sri Aurobindo maintains the call of the bird as an awakening to life because for him life is not an unfulfilled dream but a laboratory to perfect humanity. He explains:

Form and matter can be valid only as shape and substance of manifestation for the incorporeal and immaterial. They are in their nature an act of divine consciousness, in their aim the representation of a status of the Spirit. 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. Therefore 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 and its activities, but a divine existence is his objective. (SABCL, Vol. 18, p. 36)

What Sri Aurobindo implies is that form and matter inhabit the Divine despite their apparent show of Inconscience, *tamas*. If the Divine did not do so, it would be limiting the very nature of the Divine. The purpose of evolution is to bring to the forefront the Divine in form and in matter. Man, materializing in form and matter, must realise the Divine in form and matter, which means that he must transform himself to live a divine life on earth, which reiterates that he must finally transform his body to become immortal.

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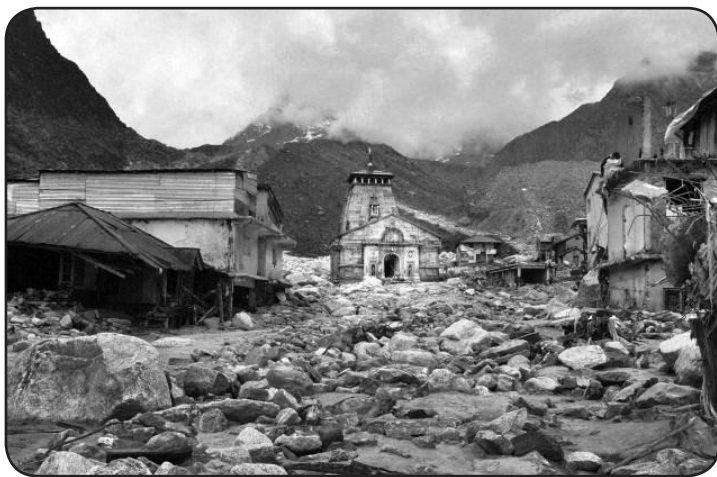
## THE NIGHTINGALE : AN IMPRESSION

*Hark in the trees the low-voiced nightingale  
Has slain the silence with a jubilant cry;  
How clear in the hushed night, yet voluble  
And various as sweet water wavering by,  
That murmurs in a channel small  
Beneath a low grey wall,  
Then sings amid the fitful rye.  
O sweet grave Siren of the night,  
Astarte's eremite,  
Thou feedest every leaf with solemn glee,  
Lo, the night-winds sigh happier, being chid by thee.*

**Sri Aurobindo**

## GRACE-LIFTED AT KEDARNATH!

Ananda Reddy



*Kedarnath Temple after the destruction on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013*

Death and destruction were stalking us—we hardly knew about it! The danger of death by the falling rocks was what we were worried about as we drove madly towards *devabhoomi* Rishikesh!

I had held a workshop at Nainital, at Bara Pathar, for a whole week on the topic, 'Death and Rebirth'. A successful workshop, a lovely stay at this abode perched on a mountain top prepared us to take up our package tour of the three Dhams with Shubh Yatra.

The six of us—Deepshikha, Ela, Aloka, Bokul, Gauranga and myself—reached Haridwar on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June. We bathed in the beauty of Sri Aurobindo Yoga Mandir, prayed at the Relics Centre and then with all the confidence of the Mother's grace and protection, drove to Rishikesh on 10<sup>th</sup> June. A whole day drive took us to Uttarkashi...

Our hotel, Devansh at Uttarkashi, was bordering the Ganges, known as Bhagirathi at this juncture. All of us felt elated and fortunate to be in the lap of Ganges—vast and beautiful, full of strength and peace, like the image of Mahakali herself. Less we knew that six days later, the same Ganges, so full of peace and beauty, would show us its *Rudraroop!*

We were looking forward to the dawn of 11<sup>th</sup>, for that was the day when we would be going to Gangotri, our very first dhaam! The long drive—which had become an endless drive because of the never-ending traffic jams, did not drench our enthusiasm when we reached Gangotri. We lost no time in stepping into the cold waters of the Ganges. Image of Ma Ganga descending on Shiva's

locks came up in my mind as I or reverentially took the water and put it on my head! People around us were literally dipping in the waters—young and old, and even babies! It was a sight quite unforgettable—did these devotees not feel the cold of the icy waters? What protected them? Was it not their faith which shielded them?

Like all other pilgrims, we too joined the queue and had the darshan of Ma Ganga in the imposing temple that stood against the magnificent grandeur of the Himalayas!

Happiness, satisfaction, devotion filled our heart as we drove back to spend the second night in the lap of Ganges at Uttarkashi, in the same hotel Devansh!

Our third day was comparatively a long one—driving on the mountain road which took us through secret curves of valleys and forests, peaks of bare rock dotted with snow, while continuously we were following the meandering flow of the Ganges. Peace and patience were what we experienced on this day which ended in Hotel Bhagirathi at Guptakshi.

Our car driver, Pandeyji informed us that in the morning hours of that day, a large landslide had blocked and destroyed a long portion of the road to Gangotri and many pilgrims were stranded on either ends of the landslide. We thanked our stars that we had just escaped what could have been a disaster... We had not yet imagined of the catastrophe that awaited us at Kedarnath...

We reached Gaurikund, on the 13<sup>th</sup>, by early morning. From there we had to trek or horse ride fourteen kilometers to the Kedarnath temple—that was the challenge in front of us. Mentally we were prepared for this arduous steep climb. Ela chose wisely to go on the horse right from the beginning. Bokul, Gauranga and Aloka trusted their physical capability and decided to trek the steep climb. Deepshikha too started trekking but after a heroic effort for 2.5 km she had to give up and get on a horse-back. I too accompanied her on a second horse and our climb to Kedarnath took at least four hours. The trekkers took nine and half hours by the time they reached our hotel Punjab Sindh Awas.

Trekking from Gaurikund to the Kedarnath temple is in itself a miracle, I felt. On a narrow road of twelve feet or so, there were horses mounting up or going down; *palkiwalas* were heaving young and old passengers while another row of *palkiwalas* were almost running down the steep and slippery cobbled and at places cemented road; the basket carriers silently trudged up and down for their day's earnings. There was absolute chaos on the road, which had a rocky mountain on one side and a perilous steep drop on the other. And yet, what was unbelievable was the joy, the devotion, the satisfaction, the quiet-enjoyment on the faces of the devotees. It was as if it was their life's mission and neither the pouring rain, nor the dangers of the path, neither "the wind and the weather beating round" them could deter them. It is as if they were in the heart of their hearts responding to Sri Aurobindo's invitation: "Who will come with me? Who will climb with me?... Stark must he be and kinsman to



danger..." They were mostly hooked to the consciousness of what lay behind their chanting of the mantra, "Om Namah Shivaya" and no danger and doubt caught their mind.

The night, the dark night without any electricity supply, was very cold indeed. But we tucked ourselves in the very warm blankets after a sumptuous meal of bread and chapatti which we carried in good quantities. The continuous pre-monsoon could not dampen us because we were in high-spirits, looking forward to the darshan the next morning.

It rained the whole night. But the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> dawned with no signs of any danger or destruction that was being prepared in the clouds and the mountain peaks. The night rain had ceased giving us a pleasant two hours wait in the one and half kilometer queue to go inside the temple.

When we stepped in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple, noise and jostle and chaos broke out! Yet, I was feeling quiet, peaceful and *shantimaya* in spite of all the pandemonium around. I was searching with my eyes, Lord Shiva's statue or a Lingam. But lo! and behold! There was only a huge ghee-smear rock, in the shape of the hump of Nandi! It was believed to be *swayambhu*! I could not believe my eyes at what I was seeing! Is this the 'murthy', the 'idol', the 'rock', the 'image of Shiva' that lakhs of devotees have been worshipping for thousands of years—I asked myself?

Devotees in those earlier centuries had walked for months, daring the dangerous forests and the landslides and the inclement weather to have the darshan of Bholenath in Kedarnath! Is this my India, my spiritual and eternal India of which I had read so much in Sri Aurobindo? I had the darshan, mentally, of my true motherland and somewhere I felt a soul-satisfaction. I felt blessed that I had seen the "inner" aspect of my country and that I am born in this ancient country of countless Rishis and yogis!

The rains resumed just when we returned to our hotel. The road right in front of the temple, strewn with gift-shops, puja-offering shops and eateries was vibrant with devotion, swirling with colour and joy, content with the peace of "having come to the Lord's feet"! The rains which began to be threatening, never gave us the least hint of the oncoming pralaya...

We spent the evening going around the small town—places of worship and tourism. Our second dham was over, and we were ready to drive towards Gupatakshi on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> June. Torrential rains hammered us throughout the night and in the morning it halted for a brief while—may be to give us a glimpse of the majesty and beauty of the snow-covered mountain range just behind the Kedarnath temple. We thanked Lord Bholenath for giving us this *drishya*, their vision that was almost like a parting gift to all of us around the temple! Perhaps, that was the last touch of Shiva's grace... before he would begin his *tandav*...

All six of us came down the 14 km of the trek on horse-back—a four and half hour descent from Kedarnath to Gaurikund. The horses were sure-footed as if knew every stone and step and were guided by their instinct while we were tense and afraid. After some misadventures on the road, we reached Gaurikund, walked through the “mad” crowd which knew not that anyone staying back that night would never see the light of day again in their lives!

Long and uncomfortable drives had become part of our mental calculations by now. The never-ending vehicular jams on the single road, the indisciplined and selfish drivers—came to be accepted by now as “part” of the journey. We returned to the same hotel, Bhagirati at Guptakashi. Had a warm bath, a good dinner and slept off peacefully. We could not imagine that the *shiva tandav* had would begin the next night at Kedarnath and the sleeping pilgrims would “sleep” forever in tombs of mud and slush!

On the morning of 16<sup>th</sup> we drove towards Badrinath, quite unaware that death and destruction were just behind us by a few hours! Unexpectedly, we were stopped on the road by army personnel at Gauchar and asked either to wait indefinitely, until the landslides and the rain-battered roads/bridges to Badrinath were repaired, or to return to Rishikesh! We had the very first taste of the danger camouflaged on our journey! Our driver got the information of the cloud-burst at Kedarnath and also the flood that had washed away umpteen number of cars and buses near Sitapur where we too had parked on the previous day! [We thought it was wiser to return to Rishikesh and not take chances.]

As all the cars heading for Badrinath were returning to Rishikesh, there were miles of cars and buses on the road—driving with the simple focus of returning home safely. But the whole region was already under the terror of the *tandava*,—there began relentless landslides, blocking long lengths of road; the hammering rains had given vent to the fury of the water falls which cut up the road mercilessly, endangering road traffic.

We had all lost hunger, forgot thirst and were silently thinking of the Mother, praying to Her ardently for our protection. Mobile calls from our family members gave us some glimpses of the massive tragedy that had engulfed huge areas of Nature and cities, swallowing up men and women, animals, trees, and towns. In spite of it, all this trickling information, we were worried about the road in front of us, the road to our own safety. We began to see on the powerful waves of the furious Ganges, remnants of house tops, furniture, gas-cylinders, wooden logs, trees etc. We could get some vague idea of the calamity behind us!

We were planning to drive to Srinagar (in Uttarakhand) and halt for the night of 16<sup>th</sup> June. As we drove with prayers in our hearts and fear in our minds, we reached Srinagar late at night! Alas! We were again turned away by the police who said that Srinagar was under ten feet of water, the roads were

damaged, the bridges broken... We were asked to divert to Kirtinagar—a few kilometers away. But with the pounding rains... the road that was less a road but only a stretch of potholes... the hydro-electric dam sites... we were not sure where we were heading to... if we will reach safely. Low visibility of the road around midnight added to our tension.

At last, the guiding grace took us to a safe road in the small town of Kirtinagar. We halted a while in somebody's shop, planning to sleep in the shop. People were buying from the small shops all they could lay their hands on—biscuits, bread, rusk, drinks, water... for no one knew where they would get their next meal!

After a while we drove to a bigger hotel and parked our vehicle in the parking space and slept in the car. No hotel rooms were available anywhere... Seven of us slept in the closed car—we could not keep our car windows open because of the torrential rain! We sweated and puffed but there was no other go! Sitting inside the van we were at least protected from rain and the dangerous landslides on the roads!

Next morning on the 17<sup>th</sup>, we headed towards Rishikesh hoping the drive would be uneventful and safe! But our hopes belied us—we faced constant landslides and had to halt for hours together. In one of our halts, we came to know that a car some hundred meters away from us had been smashed by a huge boulder that came down a landslide, and the driver was crushed to death. Another van had been pushed into the river Ganges by the rocks of the landslides! Every step was strewn with danger, unexpected landslides and the driver was struck with uncertainty and fear of the road. He requested us to keep a constant watch on the falling boulders, tress, mud and warn him in advance, if possible.

But the greatest surprise came when we had just had our lunch at Kaudilya. We were informed that the Ganges had flooded a huge stretch of the road at Biyasi, a few kilometers away from Kaudilya. We were stranded for three days at least! It was not panic that had gripped us, but it was dire disappointment and gloom that overtook. We appealed to Her—the only thing we could do...

We preferred to wait at the closest spot near the flooded road, so that when the Ganges recedes after three days, we would have a better chance to cross the road! But, by the time we reached Biyasi, there were already hundreds of cars...all waiting for the Ganges waters to give us back our road!

We parked for the night and spent the second night in the car—hot, stuffy, hardly space to stretch our legs although it was Innova van, the best one could have for such long yatra! Mentally, we were preparing ourselves to sleep, to stay, to eat, to drink on the road, surrounded by landslides, drenched in rain, waiting for the grace of Gangamayya...

But, we had unexpectedly, the grace of Anandamayi! The Mother's grace seems to have acted powerfully, and the Ganges receded—ten feet of water receded overnight leaving the road free—though eaten up in long stretches! Hopes revived, smiles lit up everyone's faces—life was beating in rhythms of joy! The intervention was timely, for, on the next day there was hardly any food left in the *dhabas* on the road, hardly any drinking water—we had to collect rain water for our use. We thanked the Mother in our hearts, waited for the road to be repaired and by about 11 am, we could cross the dangerous but the newly made road, one by one.

We resumed our drive to Rishikesh—we were not sure if and when we would reach. Nothing could be planned anymore. We were all in the grip of uncertainty and danger. We came to know that even Rishikesh and Haridwar were partly submerged by the angry waters of the Ganges. We were informed that many bridges were closed in those two towns and hence... could we at all make it?

We drove stealthily, avoided the huge boulders on the way, praying that nothing more should stop us on our road.

And nothing further barred our way. We reached Rishikesh by mid-day. Mr. Naveen, the owner of Shubhyatra was happy to see us—alive! Some of the pilgrims for whom he had arranged the Kedarnath/Badrinath trip had not returned nor were their whereabouts known! "*Bhagavan ka shukra hai ki aap vapis aye ho!*" blurted Naveen!

Another stroke of grace came upon us when the trains from Haridwar to New Delhi, hitherto cancelled, were resumed that night! On the early hours of 19<sup>th</sup> we boarded the train that took us to Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch—our haven of safety and grace!

We had realised what the Mother had once written to a disciple:

"The compassion seeks to relieve the suffering of all, whether they deserve it or not.

"The Grace does not recognise the right of suffering to exist and abolish it"  
(CWM, Vol. 16, p. 346)

This truth of Grace went deep within us, especially when we saw the TV, on the 19<sup>th</sup> evening, the extent of *pralaya* that had taken place at Kedarnath and Badrinath, and all around in Uttarakhand. One day more at Kedarnath, we would have been embedded in the 10 feet mud-slush; one day earlier, we would have been drowned at Badrinath; a few hours earlier, we would have... I don't know how much to analyse or rationalize. I am convinced that She has given all of us a "Rebirth" in order to live and work for Her.... *Merci beaucoup, Douce Mere, pour ta Grace infini!*